

**ALUTA CONTINUA: *THE STORY*  
*OF NIGERIAN STUDENT*  
*MOVEMENT 1982 TO 1992***

***EDITED BY***  
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## **DEDICATION**

We dedicate this book to the memories of Jonas Awodi, Bamidele Aturu, Chima Ubani, Bala Muhammed, Farida Mustapha, Akintunde Ojo, Anslem Akele, Emma Ezeazu, Tom Adambara, Chris Abashi and our other cadres whom memory has failed us to remember. And to the remaining of us who live in disappointment of a failed dream called Nigeria.



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## GLOSSARY

AAIYF:	African and Anti-Imperialist Youth Front
ACAREF:	Academic Reform
ABU:	Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria
ACJ:	Association of Campus Journalists
ALPS:	Alliance of Progressive Students
ANC:	African National Congress
APC:	All Progressives Congress
APS:	Alliance for Progressive Students
ASUU:	Academic Staff Union of Universities
AU:	African Union
BBS:	Bendel Broadcasting Service
BUK:	Bayero University, Kano
CAC:	Cultural Awareness Club
CAPP:	Community Action for Popular Participation
CD:	Campaign for Democracy
CDHR:	Committee for the Defence of Human Rights
CIA:	Central Intelligence Agency
CLO:	Civil Liberties Organisation
CM:	Christian Movement
CRP:	Constitutional Rights Projects
CSTWUN:	Civil Service Technical Workers Union of Nigeria
CWC:	Central Working Committee
DFRI:	Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure
DSS:	Department of State Service
ECOMOG:	ECOWAS Monitoring Group
ECOWAS:	Economic Community of West African States
ETF:	Education Tax Fund
FUTO:	Federal University of Technology, Owerri
GFSA:	Gani Fawehinmi Solidarity Association
IDG:	Ife Democratic Group
IMF:	International Monetary Fund
IPOB:	Indigenous People of Biafra
LDS:	League of Democratic Students
LM:	Labour Militant
LOPS:	League of Patriotic Students
M31M:	May 31st.Movement

MAAS:	Movement for the Advancement of African Society
MAMSER:	Mass Mobilisation for Social and Economic Recovery
MNA:	Movement for National Awareness
MOPS:	Movement of Progressives
MPLA:	People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola
MPN:	Movement for Progressive Nigeria
MSJ:	Movement for Social Justice
MSS:	Muslim Student Society
MYM:	Marxist Youth Movement
NAACP:	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NANS:	National Association of Nigerian Students
NATO:	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NAUT:	Nigerian Association of University Teachers
NAYM:	New Age Youth Movement
NBA:	Nigerian Bar Association
NCF:	National Consultative Forum
NEPU:	Northern Elements Progressive Union
NHRC:	Nigerian Human Rights Commission
NIIA:	Nigerian Institute of International Affairs
NLC:	Nigerian Labour Congress
NMA:	Nigeria Medical Association
NPN:	National Party of Nigeria
NRC:	National Republican Congress
NSM:	Nigerian Student Movement
NSO:	Nigerian Security Organisation
NTA:	Nigerian Television Authority
NUCJ:	National Union of Campus Journalists
NUJ:	Nigeria Union of Journalist
NUNS:	National Union of Nigerian Students
NUUS:	National Union of Nigerian Students
OAU:	Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife
OAU:	Organization of African Unity
OZO:	Operations Zero Options
OSUA:	Ondo State University, Ado-Ekiti (now Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti)
OSUSU:	Ondo State University Students Union
PAYCO:	Pan African Youth Congress
PDP:	People's Democratic Party

PRP:	People's Redemption Party
PSM:	Progressive Student Movement
PYMN:	Patriotic Youth Movement of Nigeria
PYW:	Patriotic Youth Movement
SAM:	Senior Advocate of the Masses
SAP:	Structural Adjustment Program
SCAP:	Society for Current Affairs and Progress
SCF:	Students' Consultative Forum
SCON:	Socialist Congress of Nigeria
SDP:	Social Democratic Party
SEC:	Students Electoral Commission
SEPT:	Students Elections Petition Tribunal
SNCC:	Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
SPWFY:	Socialist Party of Workers, Farmers and Youth
SRV:	Socialist Revolutionary Vanguard
SSS:	State Security Service
SUG:	Student Union Government
SUM:	Students Union Movement
SURC:	Students Union Revival Committee
SWAPO:	South West Africa People's Organisation
SYM:	Socialist Youth Movement
TETFUND:	Tertiary Education Trust Fund
UI:	University of Ibadan
UNIBEN:	University of Benin
UNICAL:	University of Calabar
UNILAG:	Universities of Lagos
UNIJOS:	University of Jos
UNN:	University of Nigeria Nsukka
UPN:	Unity Party of Nigeria
USSR:	Union of Socialist Soviet Republics
WASU:	West African Students' Union
WB:	World Bank
WHO:	World Health Organization
WIN:	Women In Nigeria
YUSSA:	Youth Solidarity on South Africa
YUSSAN:	Youth Solidarity on South Africa in Nigeria

## INTRODUCTION

*“We cannot ask the people who programmed us into oblivion to program us out of it. Education has one honourable purpose, one alone, everything else is nonsense - that is to train the student to be a respectful and a responsible handler of power. People do not train you on how to take their power away from them, when they hold the power by controlling you. To expect this of other people is a contradiction in terms, freedom is something you do not wish upon, you do not dream upon. Freedom is something you take with your own hands. When people dictate the content of your education, they are dictating what goes into your mind, and when they dictate that, they are going to dictate your action. And though you might lie about it, so long as you are in this position, you are some form of a slave. Free yourself from it and do not expect others to do it for you. We stop begging at the doors of people who reduced us to beggars.”*

From the above position by Henrik E. Clarke, it is definitive of the mediatory capacity of education as the incubator for power. In the process of educational socialization, the tertiary institutions seem to be the mediative centre of such acquisition of the skill of power navigation. The educational centre, particularly the tertiary level is the breeding ground, in modern times of power acquisitions and power dissenters. It is here that students begin to internalize their ideological understanding and interpretation of power relationship within the larger society.

How much deep the students, as players within the educational system understand power and its tributaries are tied to their reading of history and its manifestations. How the history of nations have manifested, both in the short and long run cannot be disassociated with the contestation for beliefs within academic settings, particularly the tertiary institutions. For instance, the history of the black struggle from slavery to reconstruction and the pan-Africanist surge, the role of student, whether returning to the mother-continent, or remaining within the diaspora has been extremely deep to be discounted. It is such that for instance, we can look at the role of National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and Student Nonviolent

Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to see a trajectory of student activists who upon leaving the universities became active in those organizations. A good example is Dr. Martin Luther King Jnr. and James Foreman who were members of the SNCC, but later became leaders in the black movement of the 50's, tailing into the 60's. Nelson Mandela, Fidel Castro all had their roots in the student's movement. It is settled history that 80% of the invading cadres of the Moncada Barracks Cuba in 1953 were predominantly students from the University of Havana.

The period under review in this work, had a memory advantage, this is because running from the late 60's into the 70's, there was a strong anti-imperialist movement from the student movements challenging imperialism on the fronts of the Vietnam war, the anti-white minority rule movement in southern Africa, and the Kwangju massacre in 1980 in South Korea which kept the South Korean military in perpetual conflict with the students throughout the 80's. It is in the shadow of this world crisis that the military came back to power in 1983 in Nigeria. From this period, it became a decade of serial conflicts between the Nigerian students and the Federal Military Government of Nigeria. There were derivable inspirations, externally speaking and enormous internal contradictions that presented veritable tools necessary to challenge the establishment in Nigeria.

In the period of the 80s there was a restiveness of dissatisfaction with the state of Nigeria. The federal government of Nigeria was showing signs at the defunding of education at the tertiary level on the ground that; *tertiary education was a privilege and not a right*. This was in contrast to the idea that; *education is a right and not privilege* by National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS). It is not as if the defunding of education was an idea original to the federal government but it was an idea pumped into their brain to the point of drunken dizziness by the twin institutions of World Bank and International Monetary Fund. As the World Bank argued long ago:

***“This report analyzes the lessons of experience to show how developing countries can achieve the goals of greater efficiency, quality, and equity in higher education. It documents the depth of the crisis affecting higher***

*education systems throughout the developing world, notwithstanding variations in the size, diversity. Public/private split, and funding levels which characterize the sector in different countries. A review of country experience suggests four key directions for reform:*

- *Encouraging greater differentiation of institutions. including the development of private institutions*
- *Providing incentives for public institutions to diversify sources of funding. including cost-sharing with students, and linking government funding closely to performance*
- *Redefining the role of government in higher education*
- *Introducing policies explicitly designed to give priority to quality and equity objectives.*

*Reform requirements and political and economic conditions vary considerably across regions, and there is no single blueprint appropriate for every country. While the four key directions given above constitute broad areas for reform, the pace of implementing reforms and the relative importance of various options will obviously depend on specific country circumstances such as the level of income and the degree of education development (for example, primary and secondary level coverage, and the existence of private institutions). This book draws lessons from a wide range of country experiences in order to inform the process of policy analysis and policy choice in developing countries intent upon improving the equity, efficiency, and quality of their higher education systems.*

*In no country will achieving these reforms be easy. The predominant pattern of public higher education in the developing world principally benefits the most affluent households, who are also the most powerful politically. The children of the well-off are heavily subsidized by the rest of society to attend public universities, reinforcing their economic and social advantage. Experience demonstrates that breaking this pattern is essential, and also that the political difficulty of doing so should not be underestimated. In countries with fragile systems of governance, students with grievances-and*

***there will be grievances if subsidies and privileges are reduced-can represent a threat to political stability. Governments therefore necessarily tread warily in introducing reforms that affect the most powerful households and those with the potential to destabilize political regimes.”***

The core arguments being made by the World Bank for defunding public higher institutions were that the public funding of higher institution

- Has led to underfunding of basic primary and secondary learning education and associated learning centres.
- There is a deterioration in terms of quality of the content and research element of university education as a result of funding difficulty arising from stretch of public resources to cater for various aspects of public developments, such that public higher institutions may have witnessed increase in numbers of admission and graduations, but that increase has not led to quality developments in public higher education.
- And that public higher education has privileged the children of the middle class to the detriment of the children of the poor.

These arguments on the surface may make a lot of sense, but it is disingenuous and typical of World Bank solutions which fail to take into consideration the variables that may be responsible for the stretch of the resources in terms of provision of resources for public education. In the first place, the report failed to take into consideration the fact that government of developing countries, in this case Nigeria most times set their priorities wrong, and deploy state resources to those wrong priorities. For example, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), the trade union for university lecturers in Nigeria has in the past 15 to 20 years been on incessant workers strike to the extent that the Nigerian populace has become strike dizzy. A core issue in the issue of strike of recent has been the negotiation of the provision of the sum of ₦220 billion only as revitalization funds for the purposes of addressing the issues of infrastructural decay in the Nigerian university system, and by extension the issue of research. The argument of successive governments and the current one is that they do not have such resources to address the issues being raised

by ASUU. But in a twist of fate and sheer lack of empathy for the plight of citizens with respect to public education, the government of Bola Ahmed Tinubu went and purchased a presidential jet for the sum of ₦150 billion only. If education was of priority to the government, the said sum would have been invested in the issue of revitalizing public higher education. It is sheer stupidity and for motive less altruistic to invest such sum in a wasteable assets.

Secondly, the World Bank position failed to address the issue of corruption with respect to the management of public funds in Nigeria. Even if the loan was obtained as the World Bank suggested for basic primary education, if such loans are not tied to specific public projects as it is typical of the Chinese and the Islamic loans, there is the possibility that such money would be stolen. This fact, the World Bank itself can attest to as it recently published a report titled; “**Sanctions System Annual Report for 2024**” as reported Business Day Newspaper of 17th November, 2024 where it said; “the loan granted to Nigeria has been stolen.” What it shows is that the problem of funding is not the main problem but that corruption is part of the inhibiting factors or the major factor in the funding of the Nigerian public higher education. The further failure of the report is the assumption of private funding of public higher institutions in Nigeria. It is possible the World Bank assumes that the rich in Nigeria will have a moral contrition like their other counterparts in developed countries who have stolen enough and keeps stealing and will give up part of what they have stolen for public good. Such foundations or corporate organizations endow shares in public and private universities for purposes of funding of research and developments. By this way, public higher institutions are funded without stretching government responsibilities for provision of funds where necessary. But the reverse is the case here because government and private individuals here are in love with hedonism. This is to the point that beauty pageants or reality shows are financed by individual and corporate firms who cannot finance a book club, not to talk of funding a university project. The only time there was an intervention fund for public higher institutions in Nigeria was as a result of the combined effort of ASUU and NANS for the creation of Education Tax Fund (ETF) from which the organization known as Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND) was established. No matter the abuses that have crept into TETFUND, it did show that it is not necessary

for government to defund investments in public higher institutions, but seek alternatives in creating a humane revenue generating system that taxed the rich to fund public good like education.

The World Bank may point to success of a good number of private higher learning institutions in Nigeria and thump their chest that their position of privatizing higher learning institution is correct. This thinking is erroneous because 80% of higher private learning institutions in Nigeria were founded by faith based organizations; a few were founded by banking owners. What is common to these two groups is the fact that there is a backchannel of flow of money. This inflow either comes from resources sourced from members of such faith based organizations, government contracts provided by men of power, or depositors funds in such banks that belong to the bank executives. The genesis of this capital for the establishment of those higher learning institutions is not difficult to see. To then suggest the private model as suggested by the World Bank may also lead to poor quality in terms of graduate outputs. Education is not just the mere reproduction of capacity as an end product, programmed to fit into a work environment like a robot, but the job of education is to create a whole man with empathy for society. For instance, the faith based higher learning institutions have rules that are in serious conflict with the notion of a university. A university in simple term is a serious centre for academic contestation, and not otherwise. A look at a good number of faith based higher learning institutions in Nigeria shows that the curricular of most of them are devoid of Marxist philosophy and Marxist interpretation of history.

Nigeria is undergoing a serious crisis of educational underdevelopment. One of such policies was the hidden result of the advisory by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank for the cessation of over-funding of universities by the federal government of Nigeria. This particular policy advice has produced a philosophical basis for the idea that the university education was not necessary for everybody within the Nigerian space. Outside the illogic of this argument, the further problematic of it was that it neglected the fundamental fact that the Nigerian educational space since independence had not met its benchmark of the UNESCO standard in terms of a graduate

per person. To buttress this, in a publication by The Guardian newspaper in February 2020, the executive secretary of the National Universities Commission, Prof. Abubakar Rasheed said; **“we have a total population enrollment of slightly over 2 million in the entire university system, which spells a very serious problem; it is almost a crisis. A population of 200 million people with a total university enrollment of just 2 million translates into 1% of the population currently in the university.”** In addition is the fact that the mere fact that the university produces a graduate does not mean that such graduate is not some form of labour output, capable of being sold locally or internationally. The demand of labour as we have seen with doctors and nurses produced in Nigeria who are in high demand in some foreign countries shows that the university system is not even producing enough to serve the internal market in Nigeria, but is being forced to deplete such labour force in service of international capital. The Punch Newspaper of 20th October, 2022 reported that statistics shows that there is a ratio of 1 doctor per 10,000 patients in Nigeria as stated by the Nigeria Medical Association (NMA). In the same report is also the fact that there are 24,000 doctors that are licensed in Nigeria. Meanwhile the World Health Organization (WHO) requirement is a mix of 23 doctors, nurses and midwives per 10,000 patients if you are to meet essential health delivery. The effect is that there are few doctors and other professionals servicing various sectors of the Nigerian economy. The further problem is that it is only on exceptional circumstance that such recruits earn as much as their foreign counterparts with similar education. They are cheap labours, glorified in foreign countries because of the simple reason that matched against the local economy they were coming from, earning a stronger currencies mask the fact of their exploitation as labourers. They only seemed to be better off if we employ the Malcolm X’s analogy of the house *nigga* against the field *nigga*, because the closeness of the house *nigga* to the master gives him or her false sense of comfort against the field *nigga* under the sun.

It is the dominant contention that the struggle of this period was revolutionary in nature. This is because the struggles of this period posed the question; Anti-Imperialism and Neo-Colonial Capitalist Structure of the Nigerian State. Though there is a contending position that what was considered revolutionary of this period were deficit of theories, but if anything, an advocacy methodology.

There are scholars within the Nigerian intellectual space that are beholden to this idea, the paradigm they used to arrive at this may be difficult to understand, but it is our belief that this position is not correct. That a revolutionary process exhaust itself does not mean that it is a *huff puff process* that can be labeled an advocacy venture. For instance, there was a time in the history of the United States of America that the Black Panther Party dominated its underground process of political narrative. It withered, but its free breakfast program and health program were surreptitiously borrowed by the American establishment to start off what in today's time is called OBAMACARE. Secondly, in the time that is subject of review, the Nigerian ruling class and the military did not see the Student Union Movement in Nigeria as a mere advocacy group, because in whatever program that it tried to put in place, it was wary of what would be the reaction of the Nigeria Student Movement. The student movement for instance in its critique of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) of the Ibrahim B. Babangida's regime produced an alternative position to Babangida's regime on SAP. This programme is considered to be imperially imposed by Western economic powers, and they also proposed a National Economic based on socialism as alternative to Babangida's SAP. These economic positions were not reformist in nature, but were alternative socialist economic thoughts. Further example, at the 1985 foreign policy summit of the Babangida regime, the National Association of Nigerian Students had a foreign policy document prepared through the Patriotic Youth Movement of Nigeria (PYMN) that countered the dominant position prepared by Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi, who was the then External Affairs Minister under the Babangida regime. Even the Babangida's regime as it tottered on did not see the Nigerian Student's Movement then as an advocacy group, he thought of it as a group capable of overthrowing his leadership. This is to the extent that during the anti-SAP demonstration of 1989, it was the belief of the military in Nigeria as in the broadcast of the then Military Governor of Bendel State; Brigadier Tunde Ogbebia to the effect that the city of Benin was witnessing an *urban insurrection*. Even President Ibrahim B. Babangida echoed the same sentiments when the anti-SAP demonstration berthed in Lagos in a space of one week. Beyond this is the fact that the campus cells were run based on an ideological belief system that their focus were not on reforms of the existing order, but the creation and execution of a revolution. Whether the objective

of a revolution was achieved is entirely a different argument. This can't be resolved by labelling the Student's Movement of the period under review as an advocacy group. Even Olusegun Obasanjo justified the Ali Must Go repression from the fear that dictatorial regimes were tumbling from student actions across the world.

The question of power acquisition and retention are processes that navigate between hills and valleys. How power is lost and won is a subject of historical transitions. To understand this point may not be achieved by the examination of a single historical account as contained in this work. Where possible, we have to look at the cadences and difficult transitions which a movement like the Nigerian Student Movement of the period under review underwent. They were wishes and dreams to borrow from Henrik Clarke above. How those wishes and dreams were navigated, we would find snippets of same in this book, but we may not find everything. Beyond these theoretical framings, we shall also by way of our introduction look at those human factors prevalent in the writing of the work of this nature.

There is a beauty that abounds at most Lagos metropolis. This is especially if you are someone that enjoys the sight and world of books, I must say that I belong to that category, and I have found this joy in most of the *bend-down* bookshops (BDB) at those bustling bus stops. This is because sometimes, you may find a book from your favourite author begging you to pick it up. It was in one of those moments at Ojuelegba bus stop that I found the book; **By Any Means Necessary: The Making of Malcolm X** by African-American movie director, Spike Lee. I have watched the movie; Malcolm X when it was released in the early 90s. But the book, **By Any Means Necessary: The Making of Malcolm X** tells the story of the joys and challenges of the production of the movie; Malcolm X.

My introduction is not going to dwell in such details as the book referenced above, but perhaps to highlight the challenges of doing a book project in Nigeria. Starting such a book project with a cast of contributors who in the end we may not be too sure of what will be in their mind as at the time of having a conversation with them to do such a book project. Sometimes it is

not fair to proceed from the negative, but to proceed from the positive side of an event. In this instance, we shall ask the simple question, what was the driving force behind this book project? It is my contention that we are children of history, and if we are children of history, then we must take steps to record history. This is especially for a generation that cannot say that its members are getting young, and in actual fact, it is a generation that can bear witness that it has buried a small number of its members. There is only one direction the remaining members of that generation would go, which is to meet the fate of those who had gone, this must be said, no matter how fearful the prospect of such fate may look like. For instance, where is Emma Ezeazu, Bala Mohammed, Jonas Awodi, Chima Ubani, Charles Ofili, Bamidele Aturu and others? Beyond the physical death, we all must admit that we are atrophying in our capacity to hold on to those ideas that drove the narrative of the period that formed the essence of this book.

The beauty of history is that it keeps a record for those who may come tomorrow, or those who have come and want to know what happened in the past. History is a canvass, no matter how blurry the canvass, it may not be able to capture all that is in the mind of the artist, but whatever is captured can be extrapolated into new forms and interpretations. It provides platform for the interrogations of history in the immediate and the future to come.

We have essentially limited ourselves to the period of 1982 to 1992. This in our opinion is to stick to Frantz Fanon's admonition that; *every generation out of relative obscurity must discover its mission, fulfils it, or betrays it*. Even if we have chosen a period, it must also be conceded that no period in history stands alone, because history is about conceptions and outcomes. This book project, in interpreting the present under consideration, also reflected the past and projected into the future as well because the truth of history is that the past guides us into the present and the future. This is not to neglect the fact that history caters to antagonistic interests.

If the contributors to this book were artists, they have all drawn in the canvass, experiences spanning locations and ideas from various centres. The book has been subdivided into three parts. The major part of the work focused

on recollection of former students who were cadres of the movements of campuses that were considered in this work. The idea was not to look at student unions, but to see how student unions were developed and were run by young cadres belonging to left wing groups in the Nigerian tertiary institutions during the period under consideration. If you understand the articulation and organization of ideas by these groups, you will be able to understand implicitly why Nigeria is a failed state, because what these groups have done is to show that conception and organization of ideas are not mass projects, but a project of an articulate and dedicated leadership. As a takeoff, there was no way these ideas could be conceived and executed if there were no driving force for the execution of those ideas. It is in this regard that the first part of this project, as a foundation proceeded to tell in brief the story of the Patriotic Youth Movement of Nigeria (PYMN) and in its tail that of the National Association of Nigeria Students (NANS). In some sense the two were like Siamese twins that drove the narrative of the student movement in the 80s and early 90s.

The second part of this book is a potpourri of various student movements from about 12 to 14 campuses across Nigeria. There is a way the story told so far were representational of campuses that were not covered in this book. Some campuses were not covered, not because of our own making, but because of the factors we encountered in the writing of this book. Let us also admit that there was no way that we were going to cover all the campuses, taking into consideration both human and material resources. Writing in an environment like this, we must admit takes its toll in many forms. In any case every story exists on some level of interconnectedness.

The third part of this book dealt with those issues, though seemingly not in tandem with the book, but constitutes a major source of the success or failure of the period being considered by this book. For instance, on the surface, we shouted; *Aluta Continua* on daily basis in the streets, but there were times when the streets could not provide salvation for cadres and the courts became their saving grace. If not the merging of resistant efforts between the students of the University of Maiduguri and Chief Gani Fawehinmi, there would be no Aliyu Garuba vs. University of Maiduguri, which has become the benchmark in the Nigerian legal system with respect to the rights of students wherever

there is question of infringement of such rights. Chief Fawhinmi in his more than 40 years of legal practice before his death used the umbrella of the law to advocate for the rights of the ordinary man in the streets of Nigeria. We have devoted a chapter to examine and pay tribute to the impact he made with others with respect to the rights of cadres in the Nigerian Student Movement. The last part of this book titled; *Picking the Snails*, signposted the coming of the cloud before the downpour. There were those little nibbles of lack of fidelity to those things that we did, that won us applause in the mind of the ordinary people in the street, and assured them that Nigeria was heading in the right direction. Not because of those who governed them, but the belief that there was going to be a transformation of the Nigerian society as a result of the knowledge possessed by a group of young men and women that had the passion and courage to understand the existing dynamics of their historical moments, and the requisite momentum to chart a new course.

Writing this book posed its own challenges as we earlier mentioned. The challenges were such that some on the surface looked incomprehensible, but they were problems that called for deeper reflection on the principle of fidelity with respect to comradeship. Our saving grace being able to publish this book was that we did not disclose the names of the original contributors that were penciled down to contribute chapters to this book. There were many comrades that gave us 100% of their words that they would contribute to the book chapters, but for short of words, developed an attitude that could be categorized as nothing but indecent. Some didn't even have the decency to tell us that they were pulling out from contributing, but rather embarked on a dribbling rigmarole that left us in wonder what their motives were. We don't have problem with those who called back to decline contributing chapters to the book. For instance, there were some comrades who gave their words that they would contribute, but when they were called via the phone, they would ask their secretaries to pick the calls as they were not available. Also they did not have the decency to call back when they became available. Some asked; why did you commence the project when you have no fund, or is it a case of one of those moments of your *whimsical insanity*? To those in that category, our reply has always been that it was not a case of 'spontaneous insanity', but an old-school habit that historical work like this needed the donation of

intellectual energy and in line with the old school practice of walking the cause before the coming of the philosophy of Non-Government-Organizations (NGOs). In the time spoken of, a comrade did not need to enter a campus unless he had money in his pockets. All a comrade needed to do was his password which was; I am a member of the movement in school 'A' or 'B', and nothing else, and the host comrades would share their last *grain of wheat* with the visiting comrade. On this point, I remember a comrade visiting us in University of Benin from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. We gave him our bed and food, even when we had very little, and he shared that little with us. Meanwhile the said comrade was hiding his N1 coin, unfortunately for him; he went to the hostel toilet to answer nature's call. The comrade came back feeling uncomfortable like a python that swallowed a cave buffalo, and we wanted to find out what was his problem, and in extreme difficulty, he confessed that his money had fallen into the toilet and was unable to retrieve it. We were scandalized that here was a comrade we had fed with our own little money, and had at some point asked him whether he had anything to contribute, and he said no. That little he was hiding, the toilet of University of Benin, Benin City swallowed it.

Another challenge was that we didn't take into account that writing is a tedious process, and many cadres did not train their mind to the act of writing, especially when there are no pecuniary or work related incentives for that purpose. We forgot the advice of Amos Oz that the writer is a broken being. This is because writing is physically and mentally demanding, and the writer is left in tatters at the end. This book presented that challenge where we did not take into consideration the writing frailties of some of the contributors to the book. It was such that we were forced to in some of the chapters, to adopt the interview process, and had them later rewritten to take the shape of written essays. Some we have to leave in the interview format. The interesting thing was that we found this model as an acceptable way of writing across the world, except Nigeria. We would rather for pecuniary reasons ghostwrite, and the new author will not be able to defend what has been written on his/her behalf instead of the pretending writer to fish out the ghost writer from the shadows and let the two share the pages of the written work. A good example of this type of writing is the Autobiography of Malcolm X with the assistance

of Alex Hailey. From the prologue of the book, it was clear that without the assistance of Alex Hailey, the Autobiography of Malcolm X would not have been written. Based on our experience, we would kindly recommend this model to a good number of our comrades who are in desire of writing their biographies.

Despite the challenges faced in the course of writing this book, the here now is the fact that the book will find its way to many persons bookshelves. And we do not also expect that the critics will not come out to challenge some of the assumptions and conclusions reached by various contributors to this book, but our kind words is our insistence that our ideas are rather seen and debated than being swallowed in the cocoon of our minds without being expressed. The job of the writer is to state his/her positions or beliefs and leave the critics with the counter narratives, as William Blake said; there is no progress without contrariness.

# PART 1



## CHAPTER ONE

### THE PYMN AND THE NIGERIAN STUDENT MOVEMENT – ONYEISI CHIEMEKE

There is a stark reality staring everyone who occupies any space within the Nigerian polity today. The reality has engendered a forlorn hope for some miracle to happen and relieve the boredom of hopelessness that hover everywhere like the cloud. It is such that the commonest appeal we hear by way of refrain is the disconsolation of a statement that; *God will help us*. The desperate sense of surrender is informed, that despite the fact that Nigerians are very violent in words, to borrow from Frantz Fanon, they are the worst form of pacifists when it comes to action. And the reason is simple they do not have the modicum of organizational capacity, but like joyful choristers, loves to make noise on all available media strata. This is further worsened by the very fact that they do not have an organizing group to hang their hopes on. It is a rudderless journey of belief that someday there will be fire to sweep away the evil ones. But it is in reality wishful thinking as there is nothing on ground to dismantle the mountain like the *foolish old man* in the Chinese fable.

This is where there is a departure between the current hopeless situation and the past under consideration. Central to the success of the Nigerian student movement was the Patriotic Youth Movement of Nigeria (PYMN). It was an organization of young left-wing cadres, embedded in different left cells in most Nigeria tertiary institutions. We can sketch the history of the PYMN as; the PYMN was a coalition of progressive students' movement in universities, polytechnics and some colleges of education across the country. As the name implied, this tertiary institution based progressive movement was largely made up of people who were in the socialist movements and also had Africanist and international credentials. They were the brain, as it were; behind local student activism. They were the ones who would challenge local campus politics that was based on religion or ethnicity or retrogressive ideas.

They were focused on what was progressive, national and international as per what was generally good for us as a nation. After the ban on the

National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS) in 1978 following the nationwide protest by the Segun Okeowo leadership, it was the Patriotic Youth Movement of Nigeria through its members across the respective campuses that decided that there should be a new alternative body. They came up with the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS). The PYMN sought to keep the student movements united because at the formative period, there were those who wanted association of only university students but the PYMN through its cells in various campuses decided that what was needed, was an umbrella organization involving students in all the tertiary institutions, whether universities, polytechnics or colleges of education.

One of the first fights that the PYMN fought was to ensure that the state, the Nigerian government as it were, did not break the ranks of the student movement by compartmentalizing them into university students association, polytechnic students association and college of education students association or even specialized tertiary institutions like colleges of agriculture and others. As in truth they tried to do that.

The early campus movements in the PYMN were the Progressive Student Movement (PSM) in the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Alliance for Progressive Students (ALPS) at the University of Ife (Obafemi Awolowo University), Movement for the Advancement of African Society (MAAS) at the University of Jos and the Socialist Youth Movement (SYM) at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Movement for National Awareness (MNA) at the University of Lagos and so on. These were some of the organizations that came together to form the PYMN. The Movement at The Polytechnic Ibadan led by Laoye Sanda was also active in the formation of the PYMN.

The PYMN was an underground organization that kept itself away from the eye of the state. The government through what was the then National Security Organization, and transformed to State Security Service (SSS) and now Department of State Service (DSS) was permanently on the look out to break the back of NANS. The only way to save the NANS from such intrigues by the state was to keep the PYMN out from the optical gaze of

the state. To have done otherwise would have exposed what organization was behind the coherence of NANS, and that was like giving them on a platter of gold of the stronghold they were trying to unearth.

In its efforts at coherent revolutionary work, the PYMN as an organization did extend its tentacles beyond NANS to other mass organizations it felt were or would be relevant in its quest to bring about a better Nigeria. This was whether it was in the student movement, women movement or even in the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. So it was this organization that was in the forefront of forming organizations like the Youth Solidarity on Southern Africa in Nigeria and so on. It also played an active role in organizations like Women In Nigeria (WIN), which had membership of not just women but also those who believed that women suffer as a result of their gender and as a result of the social class they belong. The Patriotic Youth Movement was also unashamedly a socialist organization. It believed in the socialist transformation of Nigeria.

It is interesting to say that like in all socialist organizations, different tendencies were always in contest and example was the ALPS at University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife (OAU). ALPS was in the forefront of the tendency that was christened the Trotskytes; (i.e. those who followed the idea of Leon Trotsky's permanent revolution (Trotsky was a Russian revolutionary), while a number of organizations in the northern part of the country were Leninist, (i.e. those who believed in workers vanguard that rode to building socialist revolutions in the country). As research shows each time the PYMN members met, there used to be huge contestation and argument on the various perspectives of how the Nigerian revolution or a particular student struggle should be pursued. It must be said that the Polytechnic Ibadan was part of University of Ibadan within the umbrella of Trotskyte's tendency.

At such meetings, members would have a very robust argument over issues of tactics and strategies but what was wonderful was that at the end of the day, everyone will always come to agreement, unlike what is happening now on campuses without the PYMN as an umbrella. Each meetings always

come to an agreement on the way forward and which would then be taken to the Senate of NANS and other organs of NANS and made sure that the student leaders who constituted the NANS Senate debated and come to decisions on issues that has been articulated in the PYMN previous meeting and ensured that they moved ahead to implement them.

To buttress the point above, the Labour Militant as stated by Onyeisi Chiemeké in the book; *June 12 Election: Campaign for Democracy and the Implosion of the Nigerian Left* “... saw the PYMN as being ideologically Stalinist. To give credit to this, the Trotskyite group contended for spaces in NANS leadership but never really won. They won with Lanre Arogundade and their second boldest challenge ever posed for leadership of NANS was at the 1990 NANS convention at University of Benin, Benin City. But Adeola Soetan who was their candidate lost to Mahmud Abdul.”

By the late 80's towards the early 90's, the Labour Militant withdrew from the PYMN, the reason for the withdrawal by the Labour Militant argued Olaseni Ajai was because of:

*“...there was the need for the LM to have its own independent banner upon which it would put its own programme out to the movement. If it could win over others, don't forget the Trotskyite movement won over some movements. If it could win over the entire PYMN, there would be no problem, but it did not. So there was that need to have its own expression, its media, its own organization, its own rank, its own apparatus. It was that distinction that was sharpened by 1990/91 NANS Convention after Opeyemi Bamidele. – If it were to be now, we would look at all these things and approach same more scientifically.”*

**See Olaseni Ajai's narrative on the Students' Movement at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State**

How much the withdrawal of the Labour Militant affected the PYMN may not have been determined in their immediate withdrawal, but it is very much possible to conjecture that in the long run, their withdrawal may not

have affected the PYMN directly, but did affect NANS. This was because it looked as if the unfinished business of the NANS Convention of 1990 at Benin-City was carried to the NANS Convention of 1994 at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State where a tendency, clearly not of the left of the Student Movement took over the leadership of NANS by means of violence, with the subtle and active support of the Labour Militant tendency. In rendering this support, the Labour Militant claimed that it was an effort to rescue NANS from the hands of Stalinist bureaucrats hiding behind the PYMN.

The PYMN and NANS had a huge battle against the Buhari military administration because the Buhari's regime did much damage in trying to commercialize education in Nigeria. It was during the regime in 1984 that over 10,000 catering staff of Nigerian universities were sacked and this made students to start cooking for themselves. Prior to this time, students used to eat in students dining halls provided by the universities and meals were very affordable but all of these changed when Buhari's military regime tried to commercialise education. So the NANS was pre-occupied at this point in time, fighting to stop the commercialization of the education.

The PYMN had its defining moments, and also had its challenges at each point in time. For instance, the Nigerian Security Organisation (NSO) tried severally to burst NANS Senate meetings and in the process, it had a number of casualties, people were detained. An example was in 1984 where at this particular NANS Senate meeting which was holding at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria main campus when Yau Yar' Adua was President of NANS, police mobilized, tear-gassed everybody and took over the campus. That was one of the challenging moments. Also, in 1986 following the ABU protest against poor feeding in the campus and subsequent students protest led by Mathias Yohanna who was the Chairman of the Caretaker Committee of the Students Union, the ABU authority invited the police and the police in the process killed a minimum of four students.

The ABU killing led to a nationwide protest which was organized by NANS under the active guidance of the PYMN. This was again, one instance

where the different tendencies within the PYMN had different approaches to what should be done. This was when Ezeazu was President of NANS and Labaran Maku was President of the University of Jos Students Union and also the Public Relations Officer of NANS. The meeting was at University of Nigeria, Nsukka, where Chima Ubani was the President of the Student Union. As reported at the said PYMN meeting, people like Femi Ahmed, a prominent underground leader of the student movement and of the PYMN had argued that they would go and occupy the campuses. Femi Ahmed was arguing along the line of Michel Foucault's theory of liberation and the political developments that happened in Latin America such as the rise of the *Sandinistas*. The said meeting lasted throughout the night.

In the course of the meeting, time was spent to dismantle the argument dismissing the proposition for students to occupy the campuses. The truth was that the PYMN did not have the population or numbers to effectively do so, and adopting that line of thinking would have been like selling itself out to the state security operatives and thereby enable them to have the basis to come and identify the key leaders of the movement. So it was ensured that, that the Foucault's theoretical line of argument by Femi Ahmed was defeated at the PYMN meeting and it was decided that the PYMN should call for closure of all institutions of higher learning in the country and to get the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) to support its struggle.

Part of the decisions that emanated from the said PYMN meeting was that it should ask the NLC to withdraw from the Committee set up to investigate the crisis in ABU because the then NLC's Secretary Lasisi Osunde (now late) and former NUNS President Segun Okeowo (now late) had been named as members of the Abisoye's Committee to investigate that crisis. After closing at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka the PYMN moved to Lagos, where it met with the Nigeria Labour Congress and the Congress decided that it would support the NANS protest fixed June 4, 1986 as a day of solidarity with the Nigerian students over the killing of ABU students. The government of General Ibrahim Babangida arrested the leadership of the NLC on the eve of the nationwide protest but NANS members had gone on to distribute NANS leaflets the NLC had produced for it. By

the time the members arrived where they were supposed to distribute the leaflets, they saw that the NLC offices had already been taken over by the police and the army. When they asked of what happened, they were told that overnight, there were raids of NLC offices across the country and this was the situation. There were quite a number of challenges that was faced during that period.

It is important to understand the leadership of PYMN in the affairs of the Nigerian Student Movement. The PYMN is the clearing house, principally run with a skeletal leadership, with the General Secretary and Assistant General Secretary. The job of these two leaders was basically to be the sounding board for policy directions and sometimes intervention that requires some immediacy. The bulk of the implementation of its policies lies with the campus movements. The campus movements donate delegates to the PYMN meetings, and it is those delegates that debate and agrees on whatever action(s) that had to be taken by the PYMN. It is the job of the campus movement to vet the quality of cadres that should attend the PYMN meetings. One of the advantages of this was that if there was any infiltration by the state, the secretariat could easily identify the campus from which such infiltration came from. For instance, it was easy to know when Bola Ajimoda was compromised by the state. The PYMN structure knew that it was from the Ondo State University, Ado-Ekiti (OSUA) campus movement that the infiltration came from. Even though mobile communication was limited in that era, it didn't take more than a day for the PYMN network to sort out this problem. This was by simply analyzing the arrest and release of Bola Ajimoda by the State Security Service (SSS).

The fact that a campus did not attend a PYMN meeting where decisions were taken did not mean that the cadres from that campus will renege from a decision taken from that meeting and refuse to implement same. It is called the *principle of democratic centralism*. For example, when it was agreed in March 1988 that the campus movements should oppose the Ibrahim Babangida's Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) when he attempted the increase in price of PMS from 11 Kobo to 20 Kobo, those who were at the meeting were dispatched to the campuses that were not at the meeting

to implement the decision. University of Benin for instance was not at the said meeting. But Bashir Adewale came from University of Ibadan and informed the Benin movement of the decision that was taken at PYMN meeting. The onus fell on the campus movement to organize towards the implementation of the said decision. What is left of the campus movement where such decision had been made was to determine whether it had the capacity to implement same, and where it could not; it was expected to provide justification that did not border on laziness or indiscipline.

From available information, it became clear that the O. E. leadership became the last stabilizing leadership for the PYMN. It has been argued that the success of his leadership may be tied to the fact that he worked in an environment where he had time to travel round the country, and as such was able to interface with most of the campus movements without the constraint that may have been faced by a leader of the movement who is either a student or a young worker who may face issues of stationarity as a result of workplace constraint. This argument is faulty for one or two reasons. In the first place in those days, cadres in their itinerary got support from wherever campus they arrived at. This support may come in form of feeding or transportation from their fellow comrades. People arrived at new places guaranteed of their meal, accommodation in a true sense of communist comradeship.

What may be an acceptable argument for the success of that period we could add may be the fact that there was increasing radicalization in campuses where the job of organizing was no longer left to the traditional major centres of action like Ahmadu Bello University and University of Ife. For example, the anti-SAP demonstration of 1989 practically did not take place at those traditional major centres, but grew in strength and popularity from UNIBEN before spreading like wildfire to other campuses. The leadership carried that momentum into the early 90's till 1993 when there was a change in leadership.

The change of leadership from 1993 was in the middle of the struggle to de-annul the June 12, 1993 Presidential Election. Many of the dramatis

personae in the PYMN were the foot soldiers against the annulment of the June 12, 1993 Presidential Election. The leadership went to O. O. In the middle of the June 12, 1993 campaign, the principal organization that was leading the campaign was the Campaign for Democracy (CD). Onyeisi Chiemeké in his book; *June 12 Election: Campaign for Democracy and the Implosion of the Nigerian Left* had documented the impact that the crisis in the CD had on the Nigerian left. One of the flagships of that period was the PYMN. And since the crisis seeped into most left groups in Nigeria, the PYMN was not spared. For instance, O O was a member of the Socialist Revolutionary Vanguard (SRV) which backed the leadership of Beko Ransome-Kuti when the CD splits at its conference in Ibadan in 1994. It was difficult for the then PYMN leadership to call a meeting where cadres belonging to Socialist Congress of Nigeria (SCON) would be expected to attend. With such fractious situation became a matter of time before the PYMN lost control of the NANS.

It was not as if there had not been tendencies prior to this situation, but in the past, the tendencies were split between Trotskyism and Stalinism. Both tendencies in that instance agreed on Marxist philosophy. And also by this time too, the smell of the NGO dollar was saturating the air.

By 1994, the last proper NANS leadership had decisive defeat after Nasiru Kura's leadership of NANS (from Bayero University). When they went to Obafemi Awolowo University, there was a huge crisis and the right wing took over control of the NANS. That is why NANS is in the sorry state it is now.

On a general note definitely, the organization (PYMN) that controlled NANS and the campus platforms was pan-Africanist. The campus organisations were socialist in orientation. They all wanted to build an African continent free from imperialist domination. This is against the backdrop of the reigning literature – Rodney, Fanon, Cabral, and the Marxian classics. These were the foundational referents of the pan-Africanist orientation. Most of the progressive students were studying the classic works of Marx and Engels and the revolutions in Russia, China, Cuba, Algerian struggle

for decolonization and the anti-Apartheid struggle which had led to the formation of additional platforms such as the Youth Solidarity on South Africa (YUSSA) first started in ABU, Zaria by radical academics such as Bala Usman, Patrick Wilmot and others. Later, it became Youth Solidarity on South Africa in Nigeria (YUSSAN). When YUSSAN was established at the University of Jos, it invited Alhaji Maitama Sule and Patrick Wilmot to launch it.

But platforms such as YUSSAN served an additional purpose – that of testing ground where potentially good materials were identified and kept under watch with plausible transition to core membership. Other than YUSSAN, there was the Nigeria – African National Congress (ANC) Friendship and Cultural Association. That came after some of us had left the university and been absorbed into the NLC where we then worked to form it in 1987. One of its very first actions was spearheading the protest against Margaret Thatcher in her visit to Nigeria straight from a visit to racist South Africa. That was in 1988. The protest became such a pain on the neck of the Nigerian foreign policy establishment that the IBB government asked the ANC to withdraw Victor Matlou, her representative in Nigeria. The government alleged complicity of Matlou in radicalising students and the working class against the Nigerian State. That was how Matlou and Rebecca, his wife, left Nigeria but only for Rebecca to be posted to France to replace Ruth First who had been assassinated. Rebecca was to emerge the replacement for Joe Slovo, the first Minister for Housing in the Mandela government after Slovo died. She was still the first female holder of the Minister for Housing in the Mandela government which was a key responsibility because the ANC had promised to build a million houses annually.

When Mandela visited Nigeria upon his release from prison, the Nigeria - ANC Friendship and Cultural Association was part of the organisations that put up a welcome party for him in Lagos, Kano, Kaduna and Enugu. In Kaduna, it was Waheed Sikiru, the current General Secretary of the Amalgamated Union – one of the public sector unions – who handed the ANC flag to Mandela. He was an activist of YUSSAN in Kaduna

Polytechnic at the time.

And beyond the CD's issue earlier pointed out, the further truth lies in the tragedy of the establishment's fear articulated by General Emmanuel Abisoye and the likes of Jubril Aminu that university teachers were teaching what they were not paid to teach. It was a very revealing statement, striking euphemism for anti-intellectual and anti-radical orientation. University teachers are trained to design curriculum, to locate knowledge boundaries. But here, we were being told that the body of teachers was failures in that. If the lecturers were failures in knowing what to teach, then it implied someone was needed to come in to teach them how to do it. And who could that be other than the Nigerian State?

So, the state started working to undermine proper intellectual orientation and radical awareness quite early by marking out progressive lecturers and making life difficult for those so identified. The Nigerian State started attacking radicalism since 1978 through large scale dismissal of academics under all manner of pretexts. Jubril Aminu improved on this under IBB regime through the strategy of witch-hunting of targeted academics.

Of course, the collapse of the USSR created its own problems by bringing radical thoughts to the crossroads. So, we had a situation where it was no longer fashionable or even possible to read the classics such as Cabral, Nkrumah, Ngugi, Sembene and so on. That is how you have the contrast between students of the 1980s well-grounded in radical or liberatory thoughts and who could fit anywhere and those of today who are dry and incapable of critical reflections as the campuses which produced them have since ceased to produce critical interpretive ideas about the society. How the curricular of universities were altered to produce this outcome by protagonists of neoliberalism has been fairly well documented by the Toyé Olorodés of this world. Right now and very unfortunately, the capacity of even the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) to contest the progressive devastation of our syllabuses away from anything progressive is in decline.

The key elements of the PYMN's success were that as a radical group of the left, it had the following:

- It had a clear ideological perspective, and recruited members to fight for that ideological perspective.
- It matched its theory with praxis.
- It was an organization that the centrality of its ideas of anti-imperialism, pan-Africanism and socialist order pushed back any other primordial sentiments of ethnicity and parochial interest.
- Above all, there was a commitment and discipline to democratic centralism.

In examining the PYMN, we are constrained to work under some level of constraints, as the subject of PYMN cannot be pigeonholed into a single chapter of a book. We hope for an opportunity for a deeper study of the organization. This is because it is deserving of such a study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **FROM NUNS TO NANS NASIR KURA**

After the crisis that led to the ban on the National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS) in 1978, the comrade students around the campuses started consulting on reconstruction of NUNS. These consultations were by the comrades or progressive students platforms. Some of these progressive platforms as I can recall were the Movement for Progressive Nigeria (MPN) in Zaria; the Movement for the Advancement of African Society (MAAS) at the University of Jos; Alliance of Progressive Students (ALPS) at Ife; the Movement for National Awareness (MNA) at UNILAG; the Marxist Youth Movement at UNN and the League of Patriotic Students (LOPS) before it was adjusted to Cultural Awareness Club (CAC) with the arrival of Grace Alele-Williams and her autocratic tendencies at the University of Benin. The comrades around Ola Oni and Laoye Sanda at the University of Ibadan and Ibadan Polytechnic respectively had theirs. They were particularly strong at the Ibadan Poly, with ideological support from Ola Oni. There was the African and Anti-Imperialist Youth Front (AAIFY) which later became the League of Democratic Students at Bayero University, Kano (BUK); the New Age Youth Movement (NAYM) at the University of Maiduguri. I cannot recall what existed at the Usman Dan Fodio University in Sokoto or they were possibly under the ideological coverage of Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria. The late Abdulrahman Black was a key mover, going from campus to campus in relation to the reconstitution of NUNS.

When a successor platform to NUNS was eventually established with the first set of leadership emerging from BUK and the whole efforts were on consolidating, the Nigerian State struck. The Tanimu Yakubu leadership was expelled from Bayero University, Kano. It was simply because the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) led Federal Government didn't want National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) to stabilise. But the People's Redemption Party (PRP), the radical Populist Party in power in Kaduna where Dr. Bala Usman was the Secretary to the State Government gave Tanimu scholarship to go outside the country to complete his degree.

It was part of the same plot that saw the expulsion of Lere Abdulrahman Black

from ABU, Zaria who was then the president of the students union in 1981. He was expelled along with Chom Bagu, Issa Aremu, the late Jonas Awodi, the late Jibrin Bala and several other members of the Central Committee.

In 1981, the Secretariat moved to the University of Calabar in accordance with the zoning arrangement peculiar to NANS. Chris Mamman became NANS president. During the administration of Mamman, the NANS drew close to the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) under Hassan Summonu and they began building the relationship between the students' movement. Summonu was himself president of the Yaba College of Technology and, by that, also Vice-President of the banned NUNS. It was in the same 1981 that the NLC produced its Workers Charter of Demands. The Mamman leadership of NANS started the NANS Charter of Demands. The document was subsequently debated and ratified at the December 1982 Convention of NANS. The NANS Charter drew a lot of inspiration from the NLC's.

The Mamman leadership of NANS was very anti-imperialist. When President Shehu Shagari succumbed to the American pressure against showing up in Tripoli until a quorum was formed and without which Gaddafi could not take over Organization of African Unity (OAU) leadership, NANS organised a protest and addressed a press conference telling then President Shagari how wrong it was for him to stay away until quorum was formed. That is a typical example of what NANS was doing that the establishment didn't like. NANS had maintained right from the beginning a zoning formula which divided the country into four zones – A, B, C and D. When the Mamman leadership was ending in December 1982, the University of Jos which was in Zone C was chosen to host the Secretariat, meaning that it was producing the president and secretary-General. That is the Secretariat system involving the two officials coming from a same campus during any tenure. The tradition was to select a school with a strong union or progressive movement platform in control. Jos fulfilled that. The Patriotic Youth Movement of Nigeria (PYMN) directed MAAS to produce the president and secretary-general.

Chris Abashi and Festus Okoye, all of them third year students from the Faculty of Law were recommended for the two offices. This was subsequently ratified by the PYMN ahead of the December 1982 convention in BUK. The

PYMN candidates won all the key positions in that election, including that of the Public Relations Officer which was hotly contested. There was the PYMN candidate but there was this Christian fundamentalist candidate of the Scripture Union blend from the then University of Ife. His surname is Omole, a very articulate speaker. There was also a contender from the University of Calabar. He was so desperate to become PRO that he converted to Islam in Kano, thinking that could help his cause. He got just a vote at the end of the day. The Omole chap from Ife was beaten by the PYMN candidate (Ngozi Ojido, now Ngozi Iwere) but by just a vote. It was a closely contested office.

When Babangida took over, a new window was opened. Prof. Jubril Aminu who was the then Minister of Education also had his own issues with the leadership of the student movement then at the University of Maidugui where he served as Vice Chancellor prior to his Ministerial appointment. He was considered a hostile and dictatorial Vice Chancellor in his time and uncompromising administrator who was anti-student in their activities to the extent that some student leaders were expelled by him, even though they later challenged their expulsion in the court of law. So when Babangida came on board, Jubril Adminu pretended to give NANS some respite by declaring that he was going to give life to NANS and was ready to compromise.

He went ahead to unban NANS and declared it legal but that was a temporary respite because in the year 1986 or thereabout at the convention at Bayero University, Kano where the Minister was invited, his disposition at the event turned sour, thus prompting a break-down in the fragile relationship they were trying to build. The students were not ready to give away their rights as Aminu's position seemed to advertise in spite of his pretenses that he was going to give life back to NANS. The incident at the convention eventually resulted to another phase of threat to NANS but its leaders went underground and ensure that new leadership emerged to take over from the outgoing officials. The new leadership that emerged was led by Comrade Emma Ezeazu (now of blessed memory). He became the President of NANS.

Ezeazu's emergence as NANS president did not change anything as the federal military government true to type was still hostile to the student organization.

This coincided with the **Ango-Must-Go** demonstration at the Ahmadu Bello University where some students were killed by security agents of the state. It was so bad that NANS was not just forced to go underground, but Ezeazu was arrested and detained. A number of other students union leaders like Chima Ubani (now late) of University of Nigeria, Nsukka and other student leaders across the country were forced to go underground.

That took NANS a very long period of time around 1988 when NANS had to mobilize underground to elect a new leader in the person of Salihu Mohammed Lukman of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. Because it was still under the Babangida administration, Lukman did not receive any cordial relationship or understanding on the part of the government. Rather, the hostility became more intense to the extent that the leadership of NANS was virtually run by a single individual to the extent that the era of Lukman witnessed a new strategy on the part of the government to infiltrate the leadership and perhaps get some of their agents as elected officials of NANS.

It was not long when the leadership realized it and the Secretary-General was impeached. So Lukman had to manage the organization with the NANS' Public Secretary. Quite a number of them were arrested, detained after the anti-SAP protest of 1988. Thereafter came the regime of Bamidele Opeyemi who is the current Majority Leader in Nigeria's 10<sup>th</sup> Senate. He was elected along with Luke Aghanenu from the University of Benin as Secretary General. Under their leadership NANS was banned again. There was no serious attempt except on the part of Director-General of the Mass Mobilisation for Social and Economic Recovery (MAMSER) in the person of Prof. Jerry Gana who attempted to negotiate with NANS but that also did not yield any positive result.

Therefore, NANS remained banned. Then emerged, the regime of Mahmud Abdul Aminu with Chima Okereke from the University of Jos as the President and Secretary General of the organization respectively and still the unbalanced relationship continued with much hostility on the part of the government to the extent that the leadership of NANS with quite a number of officials including the Vice President (National Affairs) were arrested and detained under Decree

2 of 1984 by the Babangida administration. That was how the Mahmud Abdul Aminu's administration managed to steer the affairs of the organization until the year 1991. By 1991, the secretariat moved to the University of Lagos where we had Mr. Olusegun Mayegun, as the President and Biodun Kolawole (now of blessed memory) as the Secretary General.

As at that time, NANS was still banned and there was no window of recognition or perhaps reconciliation on the part of the government, so the hostility kept increasing with attempt at different intervals by the state to either hijack the leadership or infiltrate it, which was resisted at intervals also by the leadership of the organization. Thereafter, in the 1991/92 session, there was change in leadership. The secretariat shifted from University of Lagos to the North, specifically Bayero University, Kano where I personally emerged as the President of NANS with Adagbo Onoja as the Secretary General. That also came with an incident because the convention that was slated for a change of leadership was initially planned to take place in Bayero University, Kano but there was serious resistance on the part of security operatives and other hired elements who came to invade the campus and made the convention not to hold. There were various forms of violence, gun shots and other means of scaring students such that students who came for the convention were forced to move out of Kano and moved down to Zaria where the convention held properly at the Ahmadu Bello University. That was where we emerged as President and Secretary General of the organization.

We held on to the leadership with many attempts by both the State Security Service, the police and other government agencies attempting to thrust, hoodwink and extend some kind of hand to see if they could either warn the leadership or get them to soft pedal in terms of their programme, activities, in terms of their organisation's campaign for academic reform which was nursed in the year 1990 by the Mahmud Abdul Aminu leadership which was sustained all through the three years of NANS ACAREF campaign. When that did not hold as well and by the year 1994, the organization, because there was this prolonged ASUU strike that led to the elongation of academic calendar then in Nigeria, the convention that came and changed the baton of leadership from our own secretariat in Kano which took place at the Obafemi

Awolowo University, Ife became more and more dramatic. Guns and other forms of arsenals were used to intimidate, harass and attack delegates into coercing them to succumb to the state backed leadership. This was as a result of disagreement by the radical section of the students which in itself was also deeply involved in sectarian crisis between some section of the progressive group that had to team up with those who were alleged to be secret cult members who were backed by the state to take over the leadership from the progressive section of the students.

That in itself came through and there was also a serious division among the students as there were those with the opinion that the leadership should maintain its position and refuse to hand over to those alleged to have been sponsored by the state. In that regard, the leadership then under my watch was of the opinion that in all our student organizations, we may have our different belief and approach to how NANS should be run and interfere in national politics but we should not allow such to split NANS as a body, because there were several attempts way back to break the NANS either on North versus South basis or other manner of devices to see that there was not unity among Nigerian students.

Even at that, we handed over to Mr. Dennis Inyang who was from the Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO) and thereafter there were disagreements and two factions emerged in NANS leadership. When obviously the leadership was taken over by the people who were suspected to be members of secret cult groups, it became so obvious that NANS had started vacillating to the extent that it is neither progressive but its nuances became more pro-government, more pro-establishment and those were the crises that reared their heads within the ranks of the students such that it became glaring that we had two or more factions claiming the leadership control of the organisation.

After Dennis Inyang, there was Comfort Idika but before her, there was a group which was claiming the leadership under the watch of Bashiru, a post-graduate student from the University of Benin who contested the leadership of NANS with Dennis Inyang. After Bashiru from Uniben came Comfort Idika

from the University of Jos. After Comfort Idika, emerged Ken Henshaw who came from either the University of Port Harcourt or University of Cabalar, I cannot remember his exact school now, that was after we had handed over and were busy doing our work. Gradually, when those with state support and state backing tenaciously held on to the leadership, they practically took over NANS and made the radical groups complete onlookers with no vibes unlike what obtained from the period the organization was formed to the period I handed over which was the period under which the radical section of the students were in total control of the student movement as it were.

But in the collapse of NANS was a combination of many factors. There was this sectarianism between pro-PYMN elements and the Labour Militant group which was also an extension of some radical Leftist groups within the larger society. Then also, there was equally the attempt by the split in the Campaign for Democracy itself which further accentuated the crisis because with the split in CD even before PYMN became factionalised, there were the groups, Campaign for Democracy group and the puritanical ones, like the Democratic Alliance. The CD elements were accused of pandering to ethnic tendencies, because those who were advocating for them were pro-June elements who at a point were opposed to the June 12, 1993 election.

They later made volte face and started saying that June 12 election was the most credible even though they did not participate in it and which they knew was fraudulent. That was what led to the split in Campaign for Democracy (CD) after the convention that took place in Ibadan. I was not there, but those who were there gave us the information that that was what really happened. As I said there was split even within the PYMN spectrum, leading to factionalisation. On a larger scale, there was also the division between the PYMN cadres and Labour Militant elements who were largely Trotskyite elements within the radical groups.

It is important to note, that the split occurred after the Auchu convention of 1991. But the Auchu Polytechnic incident was a foretelling of the problems NANS was facing in terms of ethnic/regional dichotomy in NANS. What really happened was that when we moved from Kano, some elements stopped

over at Kaduna Polytechnic for a meeting. Some elements from Usmanu Dan Fodio University, Sokoto, Federal University of Technology, Minna and other pockets of polytechnics around including Bayero University, Kano which was our campus by then, went behind and were holding meeting suggesting that by hook or crook, we must take the leadership of NANS. It was later when we got to realize that all those advocating for forceful take-over of the leadership were largely sponsored by the Nigerian state and most of them, were even working for the State.

So we went there and resisted the attempt. When we got to Auchi Polytechnic, it became obvious that there was serious plot on the part of those characters to hijack the leadership of NANS. We had to prevail under the leadership of Bamidele Opeyemi who alongside the likes of Secretary-General Luke Aghanenu, Onyeisi Chiemeke and others who came late to Auchi Polytechnic and we had to intimate them with the clandestine plan in place. We had felt the polytechnic was the ideal place to hold the meeting, but we had to move again to University of Benin. We had a small transition where Mahmud Abdul Aminu was elected President along Chima Okereke as Secretary-General. So at 1991 convention at Auchi, it was not a division or ploy among the radical section of the students. It was an attempt by the state, ostensibly because it was in control largely of campuses and unions in the northern part of the country but lucky enough, myself and another comrade Anslem Akele (now late) from Federal University of Technology, Minna and most others from Ahmadu Bello University, organized and resisted the attempt.

We were able to put everything to rest and were able to get Nigerian students to organize themselves and that was when we changed focus to Academic Reform (ACAREF) because by that time, NANS was opposed to the idea of ECOMOG (ECOWAS Monitoring Group) in Liberia and was insisting that students should be supported with bursary allowances, students should be recognized in the nation's decision making process in the university and other areas where decisions are made without inputs from the students. So it was clearly an attempt by the state not division within the ranks of the students, not the divisions amongst the organizations of the students. That was the summary of what took place in Auchi and later became the Benin convention.

From what happened at Auchu Polytechnic the State for several factors became desperate to decimate NANS by any means. First, there was no recognition of NANS on the part of the state. Even unions, except for strong ones, you would find out that most of the unions were controlled by the management of the schools or Directorate of State Security Service by way of infiltration, sponsoring of candidates and several other ways of controlling the structures of the student movement then. So from Ezeazu down to Lukeman, through Opeyemi Bamidele, Mahmud Abdul Aminu, Olusegun Mayegun, Kura, it was a battle with the state against the attempts to create this factional divisions within NANS. So there was no iota of support whatsoever, from any of the management, where they condoned and where the university or polytechnic authorities condoned those leaderships was because they were afraid of mass revolt, afraid of protest on the part of the students.

To buttress the point about the attempt at State infiltration of NANS, in the year 1990 when we launched the ACAREF, Mahmud Abdul Aminu, Chima Okereke before then Bumi Olusona who was the president of the University of Ibadan Student Union, Kayode Olatunji who was also Secretary of the NANS Senate alongside, a comrade post-graduate student from the University of Port Harcourt, Olaitan Oyerinde (now late), Biodun Ogunade (now late) and myself, were arrested by the State Security Service(SSS). We were taken to their interrogation centre at Ikoyi Lagos. We were detained at the Inter-centre behind Ikoyi Cemetery, Lagos. We were detained there for days and some of us were later taken to Kirikiri Prisons while others were taken to Ikoyi Prisons until we challenged our detention and incarceration in the court of law.

Our lawyer then working with the Civil Liberties Organisation was Chidi Odinkalu (now a Professor) and former Chairman of the Nigerian Human Rights Commission. He was our lawyer and he challenged our detention in court and after about three or four months, we were released. While we were in detention, we got to know the link between Chima Okereke and the State Security Service (SSS) agents. While we were protesting and some of us were on hunger strike, Chima Okereke made a remark that somehow gave him out. When the officials of the SSS came to plead with us to eat as they did not want the idea of hunger strike as they would not want any of us to die in their

facility, Chima Okereke flared up and said, what they were doing to us was unfair and was sort of challenging the authorities of the SSS in detaining us even after we were made to understand that our case was in court.

One of the SSS officials obviously angered by the remark from Chima, unconsciously retorted saying “Chima, why are you making such statement, when you are part of us?” Chima instantly became weak and we suddenly realized what was playing out. So when we were all released and later reconvened, to hold a Senate meeting at the University of Lagos, that was where Chima Okereke alongside Faith Osadolor from University of Benin were impeached. Osadolor is a lecturer now at the Faculty of Law, University of Benin. Quite a number of them were impeached and they lost their positions in NANS. So that was how Chima Okereke was removed from his position. Osadolor was a year behind Onyeisi Chiemekwe, Luke Aghanenu, Bamidele Opeyemi at the Law Faculty at the University of Benin (UNIBEN) as students that time.

There was also the case of Bola Ajimuda which came up at that time. It was alleged that when students were mobilized at Ondo State University, Ado Ekiti, it was Bola Ajimuda who went behind, negotiated with the school authority and by extension the SSS. That led to his arrest and movement to Lagos also for detention. Information got to us that he had actually given in, to state request, trying to be smart to show the students that he was for them, but obviously he was working for the state. He was also exposed later by his colleagues, by the likes of Kayode Olatunji and quite a number of people from his school who later informed us, including one of my good friends Omolade Adunbi who now is a lecturer in the United States of America. Those were the people who informed us of the development and then the student movement officially had to take decision on it as well.

Let it also be said that NANS was dynamic in developing programmes of campaign. An example was the ACAREF project which was approved at the NANS senate meeting in Ilorin Kwara State. It was a campaign effort at educational reform and funding. It came shortly after we had the problem with the Auchu/Benin Convention where Mahmud Abdul Aminu was elected.

It was resolved then that we had to go round the entire country to perhaps introduce the new leadership and also douse tension in areas where people felt that there were some misgivings either on the part of NANS leadership or the way, the convention held. Some elected activists were assigned the job to go round the entire country. I could recall Biodun Ogunade (now late) from University of Ibadan, Olaitan Oyerinde (now late) from University of Lagos, Gbenga Olawepo from the University of Lagos, Segun Jegede from Adeyemi College of Education, in Ondo State, Faith Osadolor and myself from the Bayero University, Kano. We went round the entire country beginning from the Northern part. We left Lagos, stopped at Ilorin, moved to Minna, Kaduna, Zaria, Jos, Bauchi, Adamawa, Maiduguri, Kano and had a break, but later converged and moved down Southern part beginning from Benin, Nsukka, Ebonyi and other tertiary institutions. We went round all over the country.

I could recall vividly that it was on our way from Bauchi to Adamawa during our discussion that Comrade Gbenga Olawepo mooted the idea of academic reform whereby the institutions would be democratized and students be given the opportunity of making input into matters that affect them, into decisions that concern the students. We advocated for government intervention in subsidizing education and providing bursary allowances and some other political demands including the unbanning of NANS. When we debated the idea, during the tour of the country, we presented the proposal at the NANS Senate meeting we had in University of Ilorin in that very year, 1990. That was when the Academic Reform which was shortened to ACAREF campaign. That was how it came about.

By way of conclusion as far as we are concerned, the death of PYMN was what led to the death of NANS or rather the death of NANS was what led to the death of PYMN. It is like asking a question: egg and chicken which came first. So both of them are interwoven and perhaps what led to the death of NANS if I would say this, the demise of radical section of the student movement was the demise of PYMN. I must be very frank about this, because when PYMN was intact, NANS was more coordinated. When PYMN was intact, students concern and demands were more articulate because there were committed cadres whose main concern and main pre-occupation was ensuring

the control of the NANS and that was what gave NANS the strength to resist all those attempt by the state to muzzle and repress it because the PYMN was strong and purpose driven. The PYMN was active and there to give strength. There were strong cadres who were in support of the leadership. They gave all the intellectual and moral support to the leadership of NANS.

# PART 2



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **ONDO STATE UNIVERSITY, ADO-EKITI - YOMI GIDADO**

*VOICES, REPRESENTATION AND THE DYNAMICS OF STUDENTS UNIONISM: AN INTERROGATION OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE STUDENTS UNION IN ONDO STATE UNIVERSITY, ADO EKITI (1986-1992)*

#### ***Abstract***

This paper focuses on the evolution and activities of the students union at the Ondo State University, Ado Ekiti (now known as Ekiti State University), from 1986 to 1992. Ondo State University, Ado Ekiti became a strong voice in the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) from 1987-1992 and was an integral part of the university administration, influencing key decisions relating to campus culture and governance. This paper examines the evolution of militant and ideological politics of the Students Union, the leadership recruitment and governance structures, the relationship with other stakeholders on the campus, and the contribution of the Students Union to socio-political change in the former Ondo State, (which now encompasses the two states of Ekiti and Ondo).

This paper is informed by the perspectives of critical stakeholders who contributed to the growth of ideological students' unionism in the institution. The argument of this paper reflects the experiences and perspectives of the author who was a major participant as well as the views of some critical participants who had contributed to the growth of ideological students' unionism in the institution. The paper discussed the roles of the Marxist Youth Movement in influencing the ideological politics of the students union, its synergy with the Patriotic Youth Movement of Nigeria, the National Association of Nigerian students (NANS), its relationship with confraternity groups on the campus, and the context and processes that conditioned it into political oblivion. The paper further dwells on the challenges of the Students Union, the crisis of leadership and opportunism that eventually eclipsed her constructive militancy within the politics of the University, the State and the Nigerian Students movement.

## **Introduction**

A Students Union is the critical component of University administration, which articulates the collective voice of students, on internal, national and international issues. From the mid-1970s to the early 1990s, students unions had become the only organised social groups in Nigeria that were able to survive the onslaught and repression of the Nigerian State. Importantly, students not only provided a strong platform for resistance against imperialist policies and their deleterious implications for the living conditions of students, but also offered some critical education and awareness on the strangulating consequences of policies initiated by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (and which were adopted by the Nigerian government), on the country and the education sector. Between 1988 and 1991, Nigerian students, through the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), had practically taken over the responsibilities of the Nigerian Labour Congress to oppose the military government of General Ibrahim Babangida over the wholesale adoption of the policies of World Bank and IMF. As a result of the lingering conflict which engulfed the universities in Nigeria, especially from 1988, over the consequences of IMF and World Bank-inspired policies on the quality of life of Nigerian students and the quality of education, President Babangida announced a 20 million naira grant to each university and a World Bank loan of \$140 million, during the 13th seminar of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors on 12 March 1990.

The essence of that grant was to address issues, which the leadership of NANS had articulated and also stem the increasing conflict and recurring closure of universities and other citadels of higher learning (a trend which had become very disturbing and embarrassing to the government).

By 1988, NANS had become a thorn in the flesh of the Babangida military government. The consistent agitation of NANS against the World Bank started after the 9th annual convention of NANS in January 1990 at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife and by 31<sup>st</sup> March 1990, the students of the Ahmadu Bello Univeristy, Zaria had started a public protest against government's policies that were considered to be detrimental and capable of plunging the country into recolonisation (Shettima, 1990).

In spite of the clarification of the World Bank Programme Director that the World Bank “has only come to finance the university system and has no other motive beyond that” (*The Punch*, 23 May, 1990), students from all the geopolitical zones in the country heeded the directive of NANS to protest against the increasing commitment of the Babangida government to imperialist policies that not only fueled inequality but also deepened poverty in the country. As a result of the effectiveness of NANS’ campaign (which was consistent and focused), the military junta found rather difficult to believe that students could be very cerebral and articulate in their demands.

Moreover, the organisation, sophistication and resistance of the students’ leadership to the imperialist policies of the military regime, in spite of the subsequent proscription of NANS; the decapitation of Students Unions on campuses and the incarceration of some student union leaders, became a nightmare to the Babangida government. The constant refrain from the government was that either disgruntled politicians who had been excluded from participating in the Babangida transition programme, or those who wanted to humiliate the military out of power were using students. The suspicion of the Babangida government that adversaries of the government were using students, found expression in the government’s response that students remained unappreciative of the resources which government had committed to the universities. The government had alleged that the leadership of NANS, “in its obsession for confrontation with Government (chose) to ignore the exceptionally generous and far reaching benefits contained for students in particular and the university community in general” (*New Nigerian*, 17 April, 1990).

Against this background, the responses of the students’ union leadership of the Ondo State University, Ado Ekiti were mainly structured, influenced and determined by broader issues in the society that related to governance and the policy implications of the Babangida military government. This does not suggest that there were no internal problems within the immediate university community, but it was indicative of the fact that the university administration at that time (under the leadership of the eminent philosopher, Professor Peter Bodunrin, the Deputy Vice Chancellor, Professor Sunday Oluwadare Agbi and

the Registrar, Chief Oladeji Adegbite) was always responsive to the demands of the students union leaders. It is important to state that our former and pioneer Vice Chancellor, Professor Oladapo Ibidapo, who was Professor Bodunrin's predecessor, was against independent students' unionism. He expressed undisguised dislike for Yomi Gidado and other students' activists. If not for his Deputy Vice Chancellor, Professor Olu Agbi, he would have either suspended or rusticated a few of the radical students that were known to him. A cloud of academic and liberal environment found its way back to the University when Professor Peter Bodunrin succeeded him as the Vice Chancellor. It was under Professor Bodunrin that the university authorities found an effective way to relate to the students leaders, having realised the ideological orientation of the leadership of the students union. Another key factor was the political disposition of Commodore Olabode George to always find time to listen to the students' leadership anytime we were in the government house in Alagbaka, Akure. There is no love lost between Governor Olabode George and Yomi Gidado as the students' leader.

### **Historical and Contextual Issues of Students Unionism in Ondo State University, Ado Ekiti**

The history of the Students Union at the Ondo State University is as old as the institution itself. The first President of the Students Union was Tewe Julius and the second President was Chief Awe Olajide, who later became the Chairman of a political party, the All Progressives Congress (APC), in Ekiti State. Instructively, the Students Union was proscribed by the University administration during the tenure of Chief Awe Olajide (as the President) and some officers of the Union were suspended.

Therefore, prior to 1986, the Ondo State University Students Union had become proscribed and any effort to resuscitate it was considered illegal and could earn a student suspension from the university or outright rustication. In spite of this clime of terror on campus, progressive students were able to identify one another and thus started to organise and work for the revival of the Students Union.

The first task was to organise for a broad alliance of students, campus journalists, religious bodies, representatives of students' faculty and departmental associations and the staff unions on campus. Our first challenge in this process was the apathy that existed among some students who believed their overriding concern was to complete their academic pursuit on record time. The second challenge was the divisive nature and inchoate growth stage of most of the staff unions on campus.

It became difficult for the staff unions to associate with the efforts and process of reviving the student union, because of the fear that the military government could come after them, ostensibly for teaching what they were not supposed to teach, or in other words, imparting radical ideologies to students. However, a few courageous academic staff and non-academic staff had given tacit support to the process and that was enough encouragement.

Based on our extensive subterranean political lobby and findings, it became clear to us that the university establishment would only accept the formation of a 'Students' Consultative Forum (SCF)', rather than the resuscitation or creation of an independent Students' Union. We also realised that the university administrators would support the establishment of the Students Consultative Forum, if we allowed students who were not seen to hold strong political views to emerge from an electorate system from their respective faculties. Once the University management gave the nod to form the Students' Consultative Forum (SCF), we spirited into action to identify, encourage and support some politically-conscious students, who possessed progressive ideas, to infiltrate the SCF membership and, thereafter, we developed a strong bond and informal relationship with members of the SCF in order to access first hand information.

Strategically, we identified and supported a female student leader, in the person of Bimbo Olofin, to become the Chairperson of the Students Consultative Forum (Bimbo would later joined the university as an academic employee rose to become a Professor in the Faculty of Education, before she passed on some four or five years ago). It is important to emphasise that we did not regret our decision of her choice as the Chairperson of the SCF, as she provided critical support to the voices of radical students on campus.

By the time Bimbo was concluding her tenure, the objective and subjective conditions for an independent Students Union had formed. Yet, we tactically chose to give support to the continuation of the Students' Consultative Forum, for reasons of political expediency. However, we had moved the leadership of the SCF (from the Faculty of Education) to the Faculty of Social Sciences, which had become a hub for radical student politics on campus. Thereafter, we campaigned for liberal students with progressive background to head the SCF. We identified and supported Israel Ovirih in the Department of Economics and Shina Adewale in the Department of Mathematics, to become the Chairman and Secretary of the SCF, respectively.

We were politically rewarded for this deft move, as the duo gave unwavering support to the resuscitation of an independent students union. Before the completion of their tenure as SCF leaders, a Students Union Revival Committee (SURC) had been formed and the caucus of students with ideological bent took a decision (informed by the advice of Messrs Ovirih and Adewale) that we should not contest the chairmanship of the SURC, if we were to get the support of the university administration, in later endeavours. We stuck to this decision and therefore supported the late Bayo Ogundipe from the Department of Political Science to become the SURC Chairman. Obviously, Bayo was the candidate of the Christian Movement (CM) on campus. On the other hand, the ideological caucus produced Yomi Gidado as Secretary of the SURC.

Upon completion of the onerous assignment of the SURC (which was to birth a system that would usher in an independent students union), the Students Electoral Commission (SEC) conducted an election. It is instructive to note that the composition of the Students Electoral Commission generated some disquiet, as the Chairman of the SURC, in conjunction with some few members, insisted that the University authorities must nominate the headship of both the Students Electoral Commission (SEC) and the Students Elections Petition Tribunal (SEPT). This insistence almost tore the SURC apart, as both the Chairman and the Secretary were at opposing ends. Both the progressive and ideological wings of the student population stepped down their opposition to the decision of the Chairman of SURC that the University management must nominate the heads of the Students Electoral Commission (SEC) and the Students Election Petition Tribunal (SEPT). This concession was done, because

we got strategic information from the Chairman of the SCF that the school management would not consent to the election, if the school authorities would not have their nominees head the strategic institutions that would organise the election. For broader political gains, we conceded that the nominees of the University authorities should superintend the election process. This convoluted environment set the context for an acrimonious campaign between the Marxist Youth Movement (MYM) and the Movement of Progressives (MOPS) on one side and another segment of the students who were perceived and tagged as “stooges of the school authorities and government”.

It is important to state that the late Bamidele Aturu and late Yinka Odumakin who were student union leaders from the OAU Ile Ife were in Ado-Ekiti, a week before the election, to support their comrades who were contesting for offices in the OSUA Students Union. Eventually, the MYM and MOPS won the students union presidency (with Yomi Gidado as President), the financial, sports, social and welfare director positions, but lost the offices of secretary general, vice president, PRO, assistant welfare and assistant secretary general to non-aligned students. Ayo Abina (who lost the presidential election) and his group were bitterly aggrieved by the outcome of the presidential election results and approached the SEPT, headed by Dr. Dipo Kolawole, who later became a Professor and Vice Chancellor of the institution. The SEPT affirmed the results of the election which was supervised by the late erudite History scholar, Professor Sunday Oluwadare Agbi, who was at that time, the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and the Deputy Vice Chancellor. A few years later, Professor Agbi would become the Secretary to the Ondo State Government and, later, ambassador to Greece and Spain in the government of President Olusegun Obasanjo.

At the twilight of the administration of Yomi Gidado’s presidency, the Marxist Youth Movement which was a platform for the selection of those who wanted to contest elective offices into the Union had started witnessing some strange culture that should not have been associated with a serious ideological political group. Some of the MYM cadres had started mobilizing for some candidates that had not been officially endorsed by the movement. Unfortunately, comrade Wale Olaleye who was the Secretary General of the movement and the official

leader of the Movement had also become entangled in this divisive politics. The meeting we had at the premises of the School of Nursing, Ado-Ekiti, on a Sunday afternoon, revealed that those who had supported Bola Ajimuda to succeed Yomi Gidado had mobilized both ethnic and other primordial interests to the meeting. The cadres loyal to the succession of comrade Bola Ajimuda mobilized against the Speaker of the Students Union legislature, Femi Orogbangba, who had been seen to be the candidate of comrades Yomi Gidado, Kayode Olatunji and Kehinde Edremoda, as well as some other members of the Students Executive Council.

That meeting was not properly managed by the Secretary General of the Movement, who had also become enmeshed in the politics of succession. It was at this meeting that one would say the MYM was politically buried. However, we managed to convey the impression that the MYM was indivisible. Subsequently, Femi Orogbangba and his supporters decided to go against the official decision of the movement to contest the Presidency against Bola Ajimuda. It took the intervention of the Patriotic Youth Movement of Nigeria (PYMN) leadership to resolve this issue, in a meeting that took place in my room, to the extent that we should abide by the decision of the MYM to support Bola Ajimuda.

However, we gave a caveat that we must be allowed to control the legislature (the Students Representative Council –SRC), in order to have some inclusion and avoid a win-win situation for the Ajimuda elements in the Movement. The PYMN leadership which attended this meeting included Okey Ekeocha (the PYMN Secretary General), Lukman Salihu, Gbenga Olawepo, Gbenga Komolafe, Opeyemi Bamidele, Bamidele Aturu, Luke Aghaneneu, Biodun Ogunade, Segun Jegede, Yomi Gidado, Kayode Olatunji, Wale Olaleye and Bola Ajimuda. It was at this meeting that we took a decision that Bola Ajimuda should be supported by the MYM, while Kehinde Edremoda would become the Speaker and Omolade Adunbi the clerk, respectively, of the Students Representative Council (SRC). Both contending parties supported the decision of the PYMN and elections were won and offices distributed as recommended by the PYMN leadership.

Thus, it is not misleading to conclude that ideology-orientated students' union

leadership was limited to the administration of Yomi Gidado and Bola Ajimuda. Prior to Yomi Gidado's leadership, the leadership of the students union was not known to the PYMN leadership and after Bola Ajimuda's leadership, the students union in Ondo State University, Ado Ekiti (now Ekiti State University) had become comatose and a reflection of the sad narrative of students unionism in the country.

### **The unconventional Synergy and Unwritten Accord between the Ondo State University Students Union and Confraternity Groups on the Campus**

The Marxist Youth Movement (MYM) became the engine room for the policy direction of the Students Union, immediately after the election of comrades Yomi Gidado as the President, Kayode Olatunji as the Director of Finance and Kehinde Edremoda as the Director of Sports. This triad was the only membership of the MYM in the Executive Council (during Yomi Gidado's administration). However, the Students Representative Council at that time was effectively controlled by the MYM, which clinched the Speakership, Deputy Speakership and the Clerkship of the House. What helped the MYM to secure the leadership of the Legislative arm was not her demographic superiority but the popularity and acceptability of those who were sponsored. It was clear that most members of the SRC were not aware that the leadership of the legislature was composed of members of the MYM. It is not unlikely they would not have given support to them, if they had been aware of their MYM membership. This is because there was a huge negative campaign and profiling of the MYM and her reputable members, after the election into the Executive arm had been concluded. Some of this negative profiling was not limited to unfounded allegations that a peaceful academic session would be truncated, but also included an unjustifiable grand campaign that most reputable members of the MYM were members of confraternities on campus.

This latter allegation might not be completely unfounded, because the confraternity leadership in OSUA had also reposed their trust and confidence in some MYM members to lead the Students Union. It is therefore not arguable that many confraternity members openly used their networks to campaign

and support MYM and MOPS candidates. It must also be admitted that the Students Union leadership also mobilized the resources of the Union to protect the activities of confraternity members, as payback for their support. The only condition the leadership of the Union demanded from the leadership of the confraternities was that they should never indulge in violence or fight one another. On this, the Students Union successfully extracted their loyalty and they became important in anchoring political protests and agitations against the government.

The contributions of the confraternities (also regarded as ‘secret cults’), between 1986-1991 in Ondo State University to efforts at resuscitating the students union was wholesome and, against this background, the conclusions of some studies that the “prevalence of secret cultism in reality constitutes a threat to active unionism on campus” (Onike 2009) may not be entirely true. The leadership of the confraternities on campus provided a necessary fillip to student activists who were at the front of the efforts to revive the students union. Again, at crucial times, the confraternities mobilized their groups to support student activists who had demonstrated uncanny courage to insulate the students union from the control of the university management.

The synergy and symbiosis between the Students Union and the leadership of the confraternities could be described to be perfect, under the presidency of Yomi Gidado. This could be adduced to the roles of Yomi Gidado in the efforts to revive the students union and as a critical and vocal member of a group of campus journalists. These, more than any other reason, must have inspired the confidence of the confraternity members.

It was a period when confraternities in OSUA were largely associated with progressive politics and members were political in outlook. It would be insincere to disregard the positive roles the confraternities had played in efforts to revive the students union, especially in areas such as the nocturnal mass circulation of enlightening and instructive flyers/handbills which canvassed the support of the student population against the repressive policies of the government and the school management. Importantly, the interest of the students was jealously protected and the students union recorded milestones in terms of achievements and their effective relationship with confraternities

on campus. Every political activity of the students union was consciously supported and promoted by the leadership of the confraternities. In fact, at no point, between 1987 and 1991, did the students' union leadership witness any attack or betrayal from the leadership of the confraternities on campus. Yet, this synergy should not create a spurious, hasty and lazy conclusion that the student union leaders in Ondo State University, at that time, were all members of the confraternities. The truth is far from it. Moreover, it would be a disservice to scholarship to describe the support given to the student's union and student's unionism, by the confraternities, as inglorious, or to ignore their weighty contributions to the politics of the students union in Ondo State University, Ado Ekiti. What was very clear was that both the leadership of the students union and the confraternities were opposed to the neo-colonial policies of the Babangida government. Again, it must be said that some of the confraternities on campus at that time, were controlled by extremely bright and intelligent students, who were never even thought to belong to confraternities by most ordinary students on the campus.

With the completion of Yomi Gidado's tenure as the President, it was obvious the enthusiasm of the confraternities had waned for some reasons. The first reason was that they did not trust the choice of Bola Ajimuda as the successor to Yomi Gidado, to provide courageous and inspiring leadership. The confraternities had subtly lobbied and mooted the choice of Kehinde Edremoda to be Yomi Gidado's successor. However, the first few months of Ajimuda in office proved them wrong, but the twilight of his administration justified the apprehension of members of the confraternities, who had reinforced the fears expressed by some of our comrades on Ajimuda's courage as a student union president. The second point was the decision of Bola Ajimuda (even when he had not yet been sworn as the President of the Students Union) to use two confraternities in resolving a crisis relating to the expulsion of some students' union leaders, at the College of Education, Ikere Ekiti. This decision became counterproductive, as the two confraternities resorted to fighting each other, after they had successfully mobilized the students (of the College) from their halls of residence to stand against the expulsion of their leaders.

Indeed, this situation led to bickering within one of the confraternities,

whose leader was injured. This situation was bizarre, because we had never experienced such a conflict among confraternities on a mission that was sponsored by the students' union leadership. This fueled the wild, though unsubstantiated allegation, against Bola Ajimuda that he could have given a body language to the other leadership of the cult group that inflicted violence on the leader of the other cult group that were on a mission to mobilize students of the College of Education (whose leadership had been decapitated by the management of the institution). This allegation against Ajimuda had a veneer of credibility, considering that the leader of the confraternity that became violent shared the same ethnic background/identity with him. For this reason, interpretations were given that this was done to alter the perceived dominance of the confraternity, whose leadership was seen to be too close to Yomi Gidado. It was a popular opinion that Bola Ajimuda used the opportunity presented by the expulsion of the students leadership of the College of Education Ikere and also exploited the fact that his predecessor had travelled out to Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Ile Ife to perfect the transfer of allegiance of a loyal and pliant confraternity to him.

This decision became the early signs that the followership base of the Union had become fragmented along primordial considerations. Efforts by some students' union leaders to reunite the confraternities to remain a united bloc in support of the activities of the students union were not completely successful. It was a significant collaboration that confraternities were mobilized to support students' union activities, without any rancour amongst the confraternities, in Ondo State University, Ado Ekiti. It is also instructive that in spite of this collaboration, the university was never shut down as a result of internal crisis or events and no student was either suspended or rusticated on political grounds, during the eventful presidency of Gidado and Ajimuda at the Students Union. It is important to state that the students' union leadership knew the leadership of all the confraternities. We guided their secrecy and related with them to monitor activities that might imperil peace on the campus. It will not be incorrect to say that the confraternities constituted an integral part of the success that was recorded by the leadership of Yomi Gidado and Bola Ajimuda at the students union. Admittedly, it was an unconventional and uncanny decision that the leadership of the Students Union chose to have a constructive engagement

with the leadership of the confraternities, at a time the university administrators had banned their activities. However, we considered the action of both the government and university administrators hypocritical, because, traditionally, they often used and manipulated the leadership of the confraternities to attack students' union leaders and undermine students' union activities, when it was desirable and expedient for them to do so. It is not unlikely that the roles that are sometimes played by some campus fraternities could have informed the decision of the leadership of both NANS and the PYMN to condemn cultism on the campuses of tertiary institutions. But our experience in OSUA was quite different from the experiences of other campuses when it came to issues of confraternity and its relationship to the students union.

### **The Marxist Youth Movement (MYM) and Its Struggle to Empower Change and Engender Radical Politics in Students Union Governance in Ondo State University, Ado Ekiti**

The MYM was the force that drove the success of the Students Union under the Presidency of Yomi Gidado and Bola Ajimuda. However, it is important to state that the Patriotic Youth Movement of Nigeria (PYMN) defined the character and purpose of the MYM and the Students' Union was used to accomplish the charter of demands of the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) as well as ACAREF. The Ondo State University Students Union (OSUSU) became a campus that was receptive to the NANS Charter of Demands and regular visits were made to the OSUA campus by NANS leaders. It therefore became a reliable ally of NANS and a host of NANS leaders from various campuses, and a refuge for those who had either been suspended or rusticated from their campuses for students' union activities.

The two administrations of Yomi Gidado and Bola Ajimuda had their programmes defined by the Charter of Demands of the National Association of Nigerian Students. Importantly too, the two administrations had to address the peculiarities of the problems that confronted the students of the Ondo State University, Ado Ekiti. One of the critical problems before the administration of Yomi Gidado was the problem of transportation, since the institution largely operated a non- residential policy and more than 90% of the students lived

in Ado Ekiti and Iworoko, a satellite town. The state government had given the institution two luxurious buses and one big bus, to alleviate the sufferings experienced by students, because of the shortage of school buses and the exploitation visited on students by drivers of commercial vehicles. This was the result of the closure of the institution for six months by the Babangida's administration. The State Governor, Commodore Olabode George listened to the argument of the leadership that it would not be fair to be left out from the distribution of buses to federal institutions especially when our institution was also closed for more than six months. Another problem was a N250.00 development levy that was paid by students.

The Students' Union leadership under Yomi Gidado was concerned with the abolition of that development levy, which was considered as an extortion of parents who had paid some considerable amount of fees to the institution, at a time students in federal universities were paying meagre amounts to the coffers of their respective universities. The development levy was eventually abolished, as a result of the sustained conversation around it and the university authorities' refunded monies taken from the students in that regard. The third agenda before the students' union leaders was to ensure the Ondo State Government committed considerable amount of budgetary allocation to the running of the University and the third agenda was the infrastructural development of the University. Yet another agenda was a fanatical commitment to the directives of NANS and a faithful implementation of the NANS Charter of Demands.

We were able to do this with huge success and the NANS leadership reposed its confidence in the OSUSU leadership. The institution became a beehive of activities for the NANS leadership. It was this confidence that made the NANS leadership to return the NANS Senate Presidency to Ondo State University, after we had turned it down the previous year on the grounds that we needed to develop and nurture our union, which had just been revived. It would be fair to say that we were able to achieve virtually all our agenda. However, the agenda for infrastructural development cannot be said to have received significant achievement during the tenure of Yomi Gidado, but a good basis for intervention was extracted from both the school authorities and the State Governor, Commodore Olabode George. It must be stated that as the Governor

of Ondo State he gave considerable empathy and support to the Students Union in Ondo State University, under the leadership of Yomi Gidado. It was quite an unusual support from a military governor, at a time the students union was a thorn in the flesh of the Babangida military government. And it must be appreciated that his robust and warm relationship with Yomi Gidado as the President of the Ondo State University Students Union should not be ignored in discussing the achievements of the students union.

It would be fair to conclude that Bola Ajimuda did not derail from the agenda that was pursued by the administration of his predecessor, Yomi Gidado. Unfortunately, the onslaught and crackdown by the personnel of the State Security Service (SSS) on student leaders, to prevent a situation where all the Nigerian higher institutions of higher learning would be shut down as a result of widespread protest, paid off for the SSS and the federal military government, with the arrest of Bola Ajimuda, who had become the NANS Senate President. Thereafter, under very strange circumstances, Ajimuda called off a planned protest by the Nigerian students. This sordid development irked his comrades from Ondo State University, Ado Ekiti and those from sister institutions. Thereafter, a decision was taken to remove him as the President of the Students Union by comrades within and outside his university. Subsequently, NANS student leaders, in cahoots with the leadership and members of the Students Representative Council of OSUSU, removed him as the President of the Students Union in circumstances that unfortunately paved the way for the University Administration to tinker with the process of containing the emergence of ideological students as students' leaders. In spite of the crisis in the students' union leadership as a result of the impeachment of Ajimuda, the university authorities did not meddle in the affairs of the students union but recommended a new election into the leadership of the students union.

It was this impeachment of Ajimuda that rekindled the old animosity among comrades and further polarized the fractured relationship amongst comrades in OSUA and brought the MYM to a dead end, in terms of its existence, functionality and relevance to the Students Union.

By the time another election was scheduled to hold to replace the leadership

of the students union, the MYM had become an ineffectual prostrate political group that could not produce any credible candidate for election into the students union. Our concern had become to rebuild the movement and a decision was taken not to contest election into the students' executive council. However, comrades were urged to contest elections into the SRC. The emergence of Stephen Kutelu, a sympathizer of the MYM, as the President of the students union created additional problem for whatever was left in the MYM. Kutelu became so ensconced in a wild world that alienated him from other comrades and supporters of the students union. His queer and combustible method of discussion with social groups on the campus and the university administrators was considered to be eccentric and antithetical to the culture of reasoned argument, which had characterized the administration of his predecessors. The university administration exploited the division, which his methods had caused amongst students, to accuse him of misappropriating funds allocated to the Students Union and stealing the property of the University. He was suspended and the university authorities directed the student leaders to initiate a new transition programme that would birth a new leadership for the student union. It was this transition process that led to the emergence of Kingsley Kuku as the President of the Students Union. However, it must be said that in a short spell, he was able to reenact the activism and militancy associated with the politics and character of the students union under Yomi Gidado and Bola Ajimuda. Yet, that militancy was not rooted in popular consciousness and the radicalism was short lived, especially after he was suspended.

The end of a political process that had commenced in 1987 to revive the students union, eventually ended with the administration of Kingsley Kuku, who later emerged to become an Ijaw ethnic irredentist and was eventually, some years after graduation, compensated with a position as Special Adviser on the Niger Delta, to Nigeria's President Jonathan.

It is disheartening to observe the present situation in which there is no ideological political group amongst the students of the Ekiti State University, Ado Ekiti (formerly Known as Ondo State University, Ado Ekiti). Thus, contest for elective offices in the student union is usually driven by the sheer popularity of these candidates, amongst their colleagues. This culture of ideological

vacuum in students' politics has assumed a national characterization and may explain why the present cadre of student union leadership in Nigeria is not fundamentally different, in terms of its orientation towards Nigerian leaders.

### **The Marxist Youth Movement (MYM) and its Synergy with the Patriotic Youth Movement of Nigeria**

The MYM in OSUA was affiliated to the PYMN, just like many other students ideological groups from other campuses. For this reason, the PYMN had its political cells in virtually all major campuses in Nigeria. The PYMN had a flawless, meticulous and diligent process of recruiting cadres into its fold. This was why the PYMN was a compact group of committed comrades. The reason for this compact nature was to ensure organisational discipline and coherence and to avoid the infiltration of the security personnel of the Nigerian State. Prior to 1988, I was the only member of the PYMN in tertiary institutions in Ondo State. The PYMN did not recruit cadres into its fold from the MYM structure in Ondo State University, until late 1990. The triad of Wale Olaleye (the MYM Secretary General), Kayode Olatunji and Bola Ajimuda became PYMN members, only after they had assumed leadership of the Students Union, towards the end of 1990. At no point prior to their leadership of the students union and the assumption of duties of Bola Ajimuda and Kayode Olatunji as NANS Senate President and Clerk, respectively, did they have even a faint idea of the existence of the PYMN. This was the extent to which the secrecy of the organisation was maintained by members. The MYM also had the following members constituting the inner core: Yomi Gidado, Wale Olaleye, Kayode Olatunji, Bola Ajimuda and, later, Omolade Adunbi and Kehinde Edremoda. The culture of the PYMN dictated and structured the way the MYM operated: the MYM had a compact inner core and usually had nocturnal meetings into the early hours of the morning.

At the front level, resulting from the activities of OSUSU, a decision was taken by the PYMN under the leadership of comrade Okey Ekeocha to bring the NANS Senate Presidency to Ondo State University and the NANS National Secretariat to be taken to the University of Benin. Comrades Opeyemi Bamidele and Luke Aghanenu were suggested as the NANS President and

Secretary General, respectively and Yomi Gidado and Wale Olaleye were suggested as NANS Senate President and Clerk respectively. I had to convince the key officers of PYMN that it would be more beneficial to the PYMN and NANS, if we were spared from the huge demands which the Office of the NANS Senate President would require, so as to concentrate on building a strong and virile Students Union. Our Union had just been resuscitated and we thought it was reasonable to concentrate on building a strong students union, which would be able to respond to internal issues, as well as the directives of NANS. Prior to the PYMN meeting, I had discussed with Comrades Emman Ezeazu, Okey Ekeocha, Olaitan Oyerinde, Bamidele Aturu, Gbenga Olawepo, Gbenga Komolafe, Biodun Ogunade and Ayo Akinfe, that we should be allowed to suggest an institution within Ondo State, for the NANS Senate Presidency. Comrade Ezeazu was very puritanical in his position that a decision had been taken by the PYMN leadership to take the NANS Senate President to the Ondo State University, for reasons that had to do with trust and reliability.

After an exhaustive debate, I was allowed to suggest Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo, for the Senate Presidency. Comrades Toyin Adeniran's and Segun Jegede's names came up for the Senate Presidency. However, a decision was taken to make Segun Jegede the Senate President and Wale Adebisi, the Clerk. I should think the decision to replace Toyin Adeniran was strategic. However, it is pertinent to be categorical that this decision had nothing to do with either her commitment or gender. She was one of our most committed comrades and quite outstanding in her passion for the NANS Charter of Demands. I would not want to think that it was not unlikely that the female gender of comrade Toyin Adeniran could have influenced the decision to leave her out of the NANS leadership at a critical period when the onslaught of the State on NANS was huge and real. Therefore, a decision was taken to retain her as the Vice President of the Students Union of Adeyemi College of Education. Consequently, I became the NANS treasurer and Wale Olaleye became the NANS Director of Finance. However, the PYMN leadership gave me the onerous responsibility to coordinate NANS activities in Ondo State and give a report of the state of students' union activities in institutions of higher learning in Ondo State at the PYMN meeting.

It would not be out of place to state that I was the first student that was

considered for eligibility and admission into the structure of the PYMN in all the tertiary institutions that existed in the former Ondo State. This placed a huge responsibility on me to coordinate the activities of student unions in the State and to suggest students' leaders that I considered worthy of membership of the PYMN. I was indirectly saddled with the responsibility of recommending student leaders in tertiary institutions in Ondo State to the PYMN Secretary. I enjoyed a good relationship with the late comrade Emman Ezeazu and Okey Ekeocha and was always enthusiastic to carry out directives from the PYMN Secretary. Other unionists from tertiary institutions in Ondo State who later became PYMN members, during my time, included Wale Olaleye, Kayode Olatunji, Bola Ajimuda, and later Omolade Adunbi and Kehinde Edremoda from OSUA and Segun Jegede, Toyin Adeniran and Ademola Azeez from Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo. It was only both institutions that had some of their students' leaders in the PYMN structure and this explained the closeness between some of the student leaders of both institutions.

It is important to note that the PYMN provided the cell that recruited students into the leadership of the NANS and of the various students unions and also provided a platform where student leaders were imbued with leadership qualities. The PYMN also provided a platform where student leaders from all nooks and crannies of Nigeria came together to debate ideas, strategies and methods on issues of governance in the country and deliberated on the implications of government policies for education and the quality of life of students. Students also shared experiences and reports of situations in their respective institutions. A new entrant into the PYMN in those good days would marvel at the high quality of conversations and solidarity among comrades. Issues around ethnicity, religion and primordial cleavages were never discussed and tolerated. We all had a pan-Nigerian and African mentality and global outlook.

The objective of the PYMN was to mobilize Nigerian students and youth to be opposed to all forms of imperialism. In doing this, the NANS and students union became the front organisations to drive this noble objective. The PYMN had often postulated that imperialism is the impediment to Nigeria development, and that the way out of this trap is to fight against the entrenchment of imperialism.

Both NANS and students unions were encouraged to fight against neo-colonial policies that the PYMN considered inimical to the interest of Nigeria. Nothing demonstrates the ideological stance of the PYMN than the communique written by the PYMN Secretary at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> annual convention of NANS. The communique reads that: NANS viewed with serious concern the total failure of the SAP imposed on the nation by the IMF and the World Bank. Delegates hold that SAP, its component FEM (Inter-bank foreign exchange market), privatisation and the so-called debt equity swap are designed by western countries as part of the conspiracy to subjugate the economic destiny of our country and subject our people to perpetual poverty and slavery (Ekeocha and Amidu, 1988:1). Incidentally, at the end of the 20th Senate meeting of the NANS in November 1988, a cluster of demands were made by Nigerians up to the age of 18, women and old citizens in the third republic constitution; (h) guarantee free education for all citizens up to secondary school level (The African Guardian, 10 June 1989). The PYMN was able to control the leadership of NANS and other students unions that were considered to be important to her agenda. There was no way you could become the NANS President and Secretary General or the President of a student's union considered important to the PYMN if you are not a member. The PYMN was the nucleus of the students' movement in Nigeria and commanded huge influence and respect amongst students' leaders. NANS and a six week ultimatum was issued to the Government. The demands included: (a) immediate abolition of the SAP; (b) stop IMF inspired rationalisation of courses; (c) abolish examination fees; (d) increase the funding of education; (e) stop the invasion of campuses by security agents; (f) stop the panic-closure of universities; (g) guarantee free health for all Nigerians up to the age of

Aside internal issues that defined the programmes and activities of the Ondo State University Students Union, the PYMN, through NANS, considerably influenced the programmes and activities of the Ondo State University Students Union, under the leadership of Yomi Gidado, Bola Ajimuda and, to some limited degree, Kingsley Kuku. This narrative was same for all the students unions whose leadership subscribed to the ideological stance of the PYMN and NANS, between 1986-1992/3. Even at a period when there were no mobile phones and communication was encumbered, student leaders were

able to coordinate effectively and transmit messages that would enhance the implementation of NANS' directives. The engine room of the NANS at this critical period was the PYMN Secretariat and the selfless commitment and dedication of students' leaders who were PYMN members, transformed NANS into the only formidable political group that the Babangida military government could not decimate, as it had done to NLC and ASUU. Therefore, the activities of the PYMN (until the 1994 crisis of NANS at the Obafemi Awolowo University), was captured by Odion-Akhaine (2009), who argued that the 'war of position' embarked upon by the PYMN with other social forces in the society and the success that resulted from that struggle, were because the PYMN had become "ideologically hegemonic".

### **Imperialism, Human Right Groups and the Destruction of the PYMN**

The historical task of the PYMN was a strident opposition to imperialism in all forms and its central concern was to educate the Nigerian students to be opposed to the neo-colonial policies of the Nigerian government, as they affect education and the quality of life of students in particular. Both the NANS Charter of demands and Academic Reforms (ACAREF) encode the ideological stance and opposition of the PYMN and NANS, to the sustained hogwash position of both the university management and the government, to implement the IMF and World Bank policies on education, especially higher education. It must be stated that the Nigerian students through the PYMN and NANS were able to successfully oppose neo-colonial programmes driven by the IMF, the World Bank and successive Nigerian governments.

However, there were some social processes that affected the unity and resistance of NANS to effectively oppose the neo-colonial policies of the government, especially from 1993 onwards. The first challenge to the unity of purpose of both the PYMN and NANS started with the unconscious migration of student union leaders, who had graduated from the universities, into the structures of civil society organisations. This development brought a new culture of independence and careerism into the psyche of the graduate student activists, who now found themselves absorbed into the imperial structures of civil society. This development was in contrast to the culture of graduate student

activists who were absorbed into academia, labour unions and the media.

In the past, student activists who graduated from campuses often found it a historical necessity to come back to their respective campuses, to hold meetings with comrades who still control the movements on campuses. The only organization within the Left, that appears to still maintain a modicum of this culture, is the Labour Militant. The growth of NGOs heightened the polarization of comrades along ideological divide. For example, the CLO was seen as a haven for students' activists who belonged to SCON. The CDHR also broke away from the control of SCON for reasons that were seen not to be politically correct. Even within academia, senior cadres had some unprincipled disagreement amongst themselves, to the extent that it affected their relationship with budding comrade-academics, who could have supported the position of one of the senior cadres against another. For instance, this can be said to have contributed significantly to how the Left lost control of both the ASUU and Students' Union at the Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Ile Ife.

A second point that is very instructive was the crisis within the Campaign for Democracy (CD). The Ibadan all left meeting was convened to deliberate on the desirability and outcome of Dr. Beko RansomeKuti's meeting with the military dictatorship of the late General Abacha, without the knowledge of the Secretary of the CD, the late Chima Ubani, was the last straw that broke the camel's back. The meeting was obviously disastrous to the unity of the PYMN and NANS. Comrades were divided into two major blocs at the outcome of this meeting and took the disagreement to their respective locations of influence, to overreach the other group, which had suddenly become a "class" enemy. It was this development that provided a context for the "burial" of both the PYMN and NANS in Ile Ife in 1994. The PYMN was roundly defeated in its efforts to sustain control over the leadership of NANS, as some fragments of the PYMN gave tacit support to the LM cadres, who had aligned with both the right wing elements amongst students and some segment of the students, who were working for the Nigerian government to destroy NANS.

Looking back, it appears ironic that both PYMN and NANS were buried at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, which had once provided a fertile

context for nurturing radical ideas and scholarship. Unfortunately, this culture of replication of neo-colonial statist policies has found expression in almost all Nigerian campuses. Presently, this is why, on one hand, NANS is unable to respond in any meaningful way to the decision of government to increase tuition fees and, on the other hand, ASUU could not successfully prosecute its agenda to stop the decision of the government to commercialise education and make government increase funding to the education sector and respect the rules governing the establishment of the universities. It is also the reason the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) could not as much as organise a coherent response to the decisions of the Nigerian government to unilaterally increase the price of fuel, with negative implications for inflation and the devaluation of the Naira.

On two different occasions, the NLC had called for strikes and protests against the unpalatable and unpopular decisions of government, but on both occasions, the NLC itself had demobilized citizens from participating in any protest, on account of the promise of the government to address those issues that had prompted the NLC leadership to call for protests, in the first place.

## **Conclusion**

Over the years, there has been a dramatic reversal of democratic ethos in the country. This reversal is not only peculiar to challenges of governance in the country, but it also relates to democratic platforms, such as student bodies and labour unions in the country. The path to democratic reforms and gains looks very dim, without active, vocal and responsive democratic platforms. The future, for democracy, looks bleak in Nigeria and good governance appears imperiled, without the active and democratic participation of citizens. This is the reason for collective despair in the country and explains why opportunism has become the culture among labour leaders.

The evisceration of democratic platforms provides the basis for the culture of impunity and arbitrariness that has characterized government and its institutions. It remains a mirage to expect student union leaders, who have borrowed the culture of corruption and brazen disregard for accountability

from government leaders, to champion the cause of students and oppose government officials, who often give them money for illicit and underhand purposes. The future of the country looks bleak and good governance looks elusive in the absence of democratic platforms.

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## **Glossary**

ACAREF: Academic Reforms

ASUU: Academic Staff Unions of Universities.

OAU: Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife

CD: Campaign for Democracy

CDHR: Committee for the Defence of Human Rights

CLO: Civil Liberties Organisation

CM: Christian Movement

IMF: International Monetary Fund

MOPS: Movement of Progressive Students

MYM: Marxist Youth Movement

NANS: National Association of Nigerian Students

NLC: Nigerian Labour Congress

OSUA: Ondo State University, Ado-Ekiti (now Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti).

OSUSU: Ondo State University Students Union

PYMN: Patriotic Youth Movement of Nigeria

SCF: Students Consultative Forum

SCON: Socialist Congress of Nigeria

SEC: Students Electoral Commission

SEPT: Students Election Petition Tribunal

SRC: Students Representative Council

SURC: Students Union Revival Committee

WB: World Bank

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **BAYERO UNIVERSITY, KANO (BUK) – SALEH MAINA STRUGGLES OF THE NIGERIA STUDENTS**

#### **MOVEMENTS IN BAYERO UNIVERSITY KANO**

##### **Introduction**

Nigerian students have been involved in various forms of struggles aimed at achieving objectives that revolve around the transformation of the social, economic and political fortunes of the Nigerian state. These struggles date as far back as the colonial era and extended to the post-colonial era after Nigeria attained the status of a sovereign nation with the attainment of independence from colonialism. During the colonial era, for instance, prominent Nigerian student's abroad such as the late Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe to mention a few played a leading role in raising the political consciousness and mobilizing Nigerians towards participating in the nationalist struggles against colonialism, a process that ultimately led to the attainment of independence from British colonial control. As members of the Pan African movement based in Europe and United States, Nigerian students have contributed immensely to the African people struggles against colonialism and imperialism.

After the attainment of independence and the rise of Nigeria as a sovereign state in October 1960, the Nigerian students under the auspices of the National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS) which later metamorphosed into the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) have been involved in struggles to shape the political and economic particularly the educational policies of successive administrations. Indeed, the Nigerian student movement has been at the fore front in the struggles against injustice and democratization of the Nigerian state.

##### **The Nigerian Student Movement – Bayero University, Kano (1982 – 1992)**

Students of Bayero University Kano have played a significant Role towards advancing the struggles for the achievement of the objectives of the students' movement. The struggles by students of Bayero University Students have found expression in the rise and existence of various associations that have been

operating on the campus particularly in the early 1980's and beyond. Among the associations are the African and Anti-imperialist youth front (AAIYF), Committee of Comrades which served as an umbrella for Marxist oriented individuals and groups including leftist and other democratic organizations. Equally relevant in this context is the Youth Wing of the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) and Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) which also operated on the campus and engaged in the mobilization of students behind the PRP struggles for the Emancipation of the Talakawa (Poor and Down Trodden) in line with the political philosophy of the Late Malam Aminu Kano. These and other groups played key roles in raising the political consciousness of students of Bayero University Kano and Mobilizing to participate in National Student struggles for reshaping the political, economic and social character of the Nigerian state in particular and Africa in general. The major themes of the student's movements operating in the University ranged from Struggles against colonialism, imperialism and the racist and minority regimes in South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Angola, agitations against the prevailing capitalist economic system operating in Nigeria and campaign for a radical economic transformation and the enthronement of socialism in Nigeria. Precisely, Bayero University Kano of the 80s was a scene of various forms of student's activism.

A very significant platform for the pursuit of the objectives of the Nigerian Students Movement in Bayero University Kano in the 80s was the Students Union. The Student Union is an Association that accommodates all registered undergraduate and postgraduate students. The Unions primary focus is the defence of the interest of students ranging from academic issues down to their welfare and other national issues. The leadership of the union is determined by way of elections. These elections were fought mainly on ideological basis. The 1980, 81, 82 and 83, student union elections were particularly contested along ideological lines. The University was divided into two major contending camps. On the one hand were the progressives which consisted of Marxists and Neo Marxists, democrats, pan Africanists and other like minds. On the other was the Muslim Students Society (MSS) which sewed as the official opposition to the progressives. Elections were bitterly contested by these two contending groups. Though the progressives were more popular,

the University authorities often intervene in the process in support of the MSS. This, notwithstanding, the progressive have succeeded on a number of occasions contesting and winning elections.

The Student Union has been instrumental in organizing off campus demonstration against national and international issues such as the Ali must go demonstrations against former Education Minister, Col, Ahmadu Ali, in 1978 Commemoration of the assassination of late Military Head of State. General Murtala Mohammed or against the apartheid policies of the minority racist regimes in South Africa.

It must be noted, though, that student activism in Bayero University Kano of the 80s was made possible by the level of academic freedom that existed on the campus. This academic freedom was reflected in the existence of an environment that encouraged free flow of ideas among both staff and students. This development was centered around the regularity of holding events such as public lectures, symposia and political education meetings on the campus where students and lecturers freely exchanged ideas related to a variety of national and international political economy. I could recall an incidence, in 1982, when the then Ambassador of the United States in Nigiera, Mr. Lennon Walker visited the University to deliver a lecture titled “The Myths and Realities of American Foreign Policy in the middle East”. Immediately the news about the lecture spread on the campus, students mobilized themselves to confront the Ambassador where he was literally compelled to abort the lecture. A student rose and challenged the Ambassador arguing that there were no Myths but realities of American Foreign which were aimed at maintaining US hegemony, expanding the frontiers of American and Western Imperialism and the perpetuation of the exploitation and plunder of the resources of the Middle East. The Ambassador was thus told in unmistakable terms that American Foreign policy in Africa and Middle East were injurious to the national interest of the regions in question. For this reason, the American Ambassador, Mr. Lennon Walker was stopped from presenting his paper and the lecture brought to a stop. It was later discovered that the objective of the lecture was to douse the level of radicalism and anti-imperialist disposition of students of Bayero University Kano of the 80s.

It could be said, without any fear of contradiction that activism of the Nigerian Students Movements was at its Zenith in Bayero University Kano of the 80s. This activism was made possible by many factors most important of which were the academic freedom on the campus, level of political education and mobilization of students along the path of critical and progressive thoughts and actions.

In the present era, it could be observed that the flame of student activism is no more burning in Bayero University Kano, as it used to be in the 80s. At present, Students are more inclined to the pursuit of luxury, worldly life, monetary and other material acquisitions. The university no more provides the enabling environment for free flow of ideas. Ideologically oriented groups are no more existing as religious, ethnic and tribal association have taken their place, thus negating the principles that defined student activism in Bayero University Kano of the 80s

Prominent students and lecturer activists of Bayero University Kano of those years deserve special tribute for their role in politically educating and mobilizing students along progressive lines. These include student leaders and activists like Mustapha Jummare (Late), Tajudeen Abdurahim (late) Nuhu Audu, (late), Y.Z. Ya'u, Tanimu Kurfi, Zanna Mohammed, Hassan Ganguwa, Dave Dung, Auwalu Anwar, Akilu Idabawa, Jide Balogun to mention a few. The same tribute goes to Lecturers like Dr. Bala Muhammed (late), Dr. Abdubakar Jalingo (late), Dr. Yolamu Baro (Ugandan), Dr. Andy Williams (British), Professor Attahiru Jega, Malam Mu'azu Yusuf, Mallam Ibrahim Mu'azam, Dr. Shehu Yahaya also to mention but a few.

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY –**  
**ONYEISI CHIEMEKE**

Members of the Cultural Awareness Club (CAC) were meeting at a corner of the Hall One Common Room of the University of Benin at about 9pm when the news began to filter in that the then national president of Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) Dr. Festus Iyayi had been sacked by the authorities of the University of Benin via a newscast by the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Benin City. This was on the 20th day of May 1987. The meeting was hurriedly closed with the hope that the movement's General Secretary may reach Festus in solidarity. But this was not to be because as the members streamed out from Hall One, two lone figures were chanting in the dark; *Great Uniben!* This is the chant song for Uniben students any time there was to be protest or there is a gathering of the students for political purposes. One of those students whom we later identified became a journalist and worked with Punch and The Guardian Newspapers.

In less than an hour the campus was in a bedlam- protest had broken out. As the night wore on two structures housing two restaurants went up in flames and school properties were damaged. The restaurants were looted but only few students were caught as majority of the looters disappeared into the night of commotion. One other thing, it was a quick position of the movement that members of CAC should not participate in the protest as we did not have control over what was going on with regard to the protest. But this protest was to become an albatross that haunted a few members of the CAC till they left University of Benin. This is because the CAC became the proverbial witch who must be held responsible for the death of every child who died in a village. The school authority came to believe that the CAC can conjure rain even in December.

The CAC was a child of circumstance birthed in the conflicts of the coming of Professor Grace Alele-Williams as the Vice Chancellor of University of Benin in 1985 by the administration of Ibrahim Babangida. Alele-Williams was deemed to be the academic outsider who was brought to become the vice chancellor of the university by Babangida. Babangida fed the energy and ego of Alele-Williams in his, "my beloved daughter's" speech at the foundation

laying ceremony of the University's Faculty of Law building in 1985. In order to assert her authority, there may have been a submersion in her thought process that; *there were those who didn't wish her well*. In effect she created her legion of enemies made up of academic colleagues in the university senate such as Professor Itse Sagay and others, the academic unions (Iyayi and others), and the student's unions and radical groups like League of Patriot Students (LOPS) and Youth Solidarity for South Africa in Nigeria (YUSSAN). There was a reason the latter was included; it was believed that the people behind the latter were also those behind the former.

In the coming of Alele-Williams the first group she clashed with was the student union of the school. It is fair to say that she was working in the frenzy of the atmosphere of the time as the Babangida's regime had developed a phobia for radical groups particularly in academic communities across the country. In the words of major general Emmanuel Abisoye (Rtd) there were lecturers; "who had been teaching what they were not paid to teach." There were some vice chancellors like Ango Abdulahi, Jubril Aminu, Chimere Ikoku and Alele-Williams who took this injunction like rote and ran with it to introduce a reign of terror in their universities. Much as Alele-Williams didn't descend to the barbarism of Ango Abdulahi and Chimere Ikoku, she was a good apostle of Babangida's vision of what a university should be – a non-learning environment in the true spirit of scholarship. In this effort to curb radical indoctrination either through lecture rooms or student groups, University of Benin in late 1985 dissolved the student union of the university. There was a protest that followed the dissolution of the union. In consequence the school authority implicated the League of Patriotic Students (LOPS) and blaming its members of being the brain behind the protest that trailed the dissolution of the students union. The school authority thereafter proscribed the organization.

The university authority clearly identified some students as being the brains behind the organization known as LOPS. In the forefront of those identified were persons like Martin Mukoro, late Didi Adodo, Solomon Oguns, Andrew Oduntan. Some that may have been classified above were in their final year at the university or out of the school system. In this latter category was Didi Adodo who graduated in 1986. Haven been proscribed, the former members

of LOPS who were deemed to be overtly Marxist/Leninist decided in 1986 to float an organization with a very innocuous name known as the Cultural Awareness Club.

In that same 1986 the school authority lifted the ban on associations and clubs. In the fervent of the 80s, radical movements in Nigeria were not short of followers and cadres. But with benefit of hindsight most of those cadres were of bad quality. They were a high dose of left cadres lacking of honesty, belief, integrity, conviction and the steeliness that a good cadre should have. In the words of Huey Newton a good cadre is the one that; rejects the love of one and inherit the love of all.” In a few months into 1987 and 1988 academic years the quality of the movement was called into question. In a way to escape the school authority’s scrutiny the CAC decided to bring unknown quantities to stand in as leaders of the group in the process of registration. Chosen for this purpose were Daniel Onojaife, Adekunle Andrew, Luke Aghanenu and Onyeisi Chiemeké. The latter two were year one students in the faculty of Law. The CAC was fortunate that they recruited the two because may be without them after the events of 1987 to 1988 the movement in Benin would have collapsed because they became the backbone with Adekunle Andrew to the rebuilding and the progress of the CAC thereafter.

Briefly the CAC recruitment process followed the pattern of setting a test for a member to be recruited. The basic test before an intending applicant must be admitted is that he was expected to read and do a written summary of either Frantz Fanon- *Wretched of the Earth* or Walter Rodney’s book ; *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Your membership would be put in abeyance if you could not do a good job summarizing any of these books. For a cadre to further develop he must open his or her mind to radical literature. And cadres were put through the rigours of writing papers for our political education classes every Wednesday of the week. The essence of the political education was beyond the issue of personal education it helped in political discourse and engagement. Under Luke and Chiemeké’s leadership primary emphasis was placed on quality over quantity. For instance there was one student in the faculty of law brilliant in his own estimation and close to the fence of the movement but was not recruited because he fluffed a simple assignment of distributing a leaflet

with other potential recruits. Such cowardly fellow is among the noisemakers shouting about how to make Nigeria a better place in the new frenzy of human rights advocacy- in popular lingo is called *human rights activism*.

And whether out of mischief or something else the school authority did not register CAC or decided to keep its registration pending until the issue of its status as a registered organization on campus became a subject of interpretation by the school. Neither the CAC nor Dr. (now retired Prof.) Boyowa A. Chokor, a Marxist Geographer of the Department of Geography and Regional Planning, the pioneer staff adviser was informed that our application for registration was not considered. With the dismissal of Iyayi and Barnabas Agbonifo and the subsequent and attendant violence that followed, the school authority set up the Professor Milton Iyoha Panel of Inquiry. The panel in course of its work became lucky as the owners of the restaurants that were burnt produced a leaflet, produced and circulated by the CAC. They claimed that a member of the club M.A. Mukoro gave them the leaflet and as well threatened them with dire consequences. As they further claimed a day or two after this encounter the two eating joints were burnt down. And even if we were to deny Mukoro but our name was on the leaflet and it became a slam dunk for the Iyoha Panel.

The Milton Iyoha Panel was informed by a Christian leader (his brother became a perpetual governorship contestant in Delta State) with Jesuit zealotry that the old LOPS never went away but simply morphed into what was now known as CAC. The panel further gathered that the CAC applied for registration but was not registered. When we appeared at the panel it was our contention that like every group that applied for registration that we didn't need to wait for approval before we could start and in any case there was no communication of our non-registration. The school told the panel that any association or group that did not receive notification of approval was deemed not to have been registered and did not need to be communicated to officially. The panel took note and in conclusion with other points recommended that the identified members of CAC were running an illegal group an 'arcane' organization in the words of Dr. Francis Okeke-Ezigbo of the Department of English and Literature and a member of the Prof. Iyoha panel of Inquiry, on campus and that they were the brain behind the violence of 20<sup>th</sup> of May 1987. Thirteen members of CAC were

identified and recommended to the school to be expelled. Those remembered were Martin A. Mukoro, Adekunle Andrew, Daniel Onojaife, Dominic Ugwu, Solomon Ogun, Andrew Oduntan, Luke Aghanenu, Onyeisi Chiemeké, etc. Luke and Chiemeké were a source of curiosity to the panel for reasons of the fact that they were year one students. But the panel made a mistake because they thought they could use our freshness in the university to intimidate us and when it backfired, they started calling us communists.

The school authority upon the release of the report embarked on what may be regarded as the torture game. All the students that were recommended for one form of punishment or the other had their second semester results withheld by the school authority till date. Andrew Adekunle's final year result was released and publicly posted alongside other students' but just 24 hours later the result was redacted on the departmental notice board. In late September 1987 they set up a disciplinary committee to try the CAC members with others. After the first day of the committee sitting the school authority disbanded it and said they would communicate a new date for the students to face the disciplinary committee this they never did until early February 1988. The Iyoha committee sat and particularly interviewed Andrew Adekunle for 2 days including a trip to his room in Hall 4 ('Abuja' Students Hall of residence) under security escort and accompanied by the Committee secretary Mr. Adodo to search for the membership files of the CAC and any other incriminating evidence. The search yielded no result. And this was about a week to the first semester examinations. Appearing before the panel was practically a waste of time because from their body language it was obvious that punishment would come and expulsion was on the table by virtue of Iyoha's Panel recommendations.

Between the periods of the first committee that was disbanded and the next committee sitting the CAC was in tatters. Majority of the members who were not identified had abandoned the club and those identified and facing disciplinary measures were at each other's throat recriminating about how they got entrapped in their current fate. And to be frank two errors trapped us at the doors of our fate. One we didn't need to put our club's name on the leaflet and secondly there was no need to show our face to those restaurant owners. As the Mafia's would say; why show your hand if the job can be done without

the enemy recognizing you?

In this state of discordant note Martin Mukoro the General Secretary of the movement openly broke rank. First he withdrew from the case he filed with Adekunle Andrew at Federal High Court, Benin Division. In the case they were challenging the withholding of their results by the University authority. Secondly he with the old guards in the CAC became consciously inactive. From late 1987 outside Adekunle Andrew there was no member of LOPS left in the movement.

As said the disciplinary Committee had sat early February 1988. Nobody knew what its outcome would be, as such we decided to take little precaution. It emerged that the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) delegates' conference was taking place in Benin. The place for the conference was SAIDI CENTRE. It was the conference that led to the splitting of NLC into two, with a faction led by Ali Chiroma and another by a certain Shamang. At the conference we met Emma Ezeazu, Chima Ubani and others. Emma Ezeazu was then the president of NANS and they were also facing their own trouble at UNN as they were facing the possibility of being tried by the Miscellaneous Offences Tribunal by the Babangida's regime for treason. They were sympathetic to the UNIBEN situation and after an emergency meeting that mid-afternoon it was agreed to take a small action in University of Benin. We returned to the campus aware that the university Senate would meet that night to consider the Disciplinary Committee's report. That same night the NANS group landed and circulated leaflets about the impending senate decision. The leaflet threatened to make the university ungovernable if there was any form of punishment to us. A few of us left in CAC had also decided that the university would see a brand of violence it had never seen before as we would not be expelled from the university without a fight.

When the university authority saw this new sign of protest they panicked. This was because they were working on their own peace process with the Mukoro group. But before then nobody told Luke, Chiemeké and Adekunle anything about this until after the leaflet threatening the university with a showdown emerged. Luke and Chiemeké lived in the same room and they had gone to

read in the faculty of social sciences only to return in the wee hours of the morning to meet a note requesting for an urgent meeting that morning at a room in Hall 4 hall of residence. When we got there we met Alex Onwuadiamu, a guy named Chima, a guy in our class his name was Eva for short and a few others. They did not beat about the bush, they said they have seen the leaflet in circulation and strongly believe we were the ones circulating it. They said we should call off anything we were planning to do as the school authority had only imposed a one year rustication which we would not necessarily serve as the school authority had converted it to pardon. Only that there were some conditions which included that all the pardoned students would live off campus, sign undertaking to be of good behaviour and stay away from the politics of the campus throughout their academic years in the university. The only person left in the cold in all this was Adekunle as they told us that they wanted to exhaust the court process. From this meeting we learnt that there was actually a minority position in the senate that pushed for outright expulsion of the students but because of the negotiation that went between the Mukoro group and the university they prevailed on the hardliners for a compromise. We believe the university had a further reason for reaching this compromise with the Mukoro group- they misanalysed the group by believing that they would in the post-pardon era help them to curb the spread of radicalism in the campus. But it was a woeful thinking because as at the time of making the compromise Mukoro and others had become irrelevant in the politics of the university. CAC was restructured to be a fighting machine though in his first fight of post-pardon it was defeated but it learnt its lesson.

In the month of March 1988 there was a meeting between Adewale Bashir, Luke Aghanenu and Onyeisi Chiemeké of a PYMN directive to mobilise the campuses for a protest against the increase in the price of petroleum price to 20 kobo per litre by the Babangida regime. The movement on the face of it was hamstrung to be part of this protest for two reasons. The movement lacked manpower as the movement had been depleted by the events of 1987. Secondly the principal leaders of the movement Luke and Chiemeké had just escaped expulsion by the whiskers with its attendant toll while Adekunle's case had just been dismissed on 5<sup>th</sup> February 1988 at the Federal High Court, Benin City where Justice Ojitalayo has just ruled that the plaintiff did not exhaust

internal remedies before heading to court. But the latter situation didn't serve as a constraint compared to the former. In truth our movement was short of cadres and in the course of organizing this protest on increase in petroleum price, this became a problem for us as the protest drew closer. We braved it and agreed to support the PYMN project even if our movement didn't participate in taking the decision. It is in every organization. Sometimes we do have people who are good in igniting fire with their mouths. This protest in the end, across Nigerian campuses faced disastrous failure. We will remain focused on Uniben.

To organise this protest members of CAC levied themselves to raise the money to produce the leaflet to circulate on campus. We had a secretary in one of the offices in the faculty of social sciences that in his own ways sympathized with us. He knew how to produce these materials with least encouragement. He was always there and did it with utmost discretion. In those days such materials were produced using cyclostyled paper. We took delivery of the materials and waited for night to come. When night came a problem emerged. Our cadres Opeyemi Bamidele, Ogaga Ifowodo, Aideloje Belo and Bola Aidi chose to go and join Dr. Tunde Fatunde in a rehearsal for his play – **Oga Na Thief Man**. And this wasn't the plan the job was left to be done by Chiemeké and Adekunle. We got a student in Optometry named Sola to join us in the distribution. We concentrated our efforts in Hall Three residence which had six blocks- A-F. We stayed in E block Room 6 and E block had its problem - it was home to medical students and the ones in Benin then were very conservative and reactionary. And this night in question they showed how reactionary they could be. This was because after the rehearsal by the four cadres above they passed through the E block and picked up their materials for distribution through the corridors of the faculty of social sciences and arts which also harboured the Faculty of Law. We bade them farewell with the hope of meeting the next day to finalize the final shape of the protest, but this was not to be.

In less than one hour everything was tumbling. The four had collected their own shares of the leaflet and left but we had a reasonable quantity still left to be distributed. At about 2am we were at the back of the bathroom trying to give the remaining quantity out when a voice in the dark walking down the staircase facing us started commanding; "Stop and come out or I will shoot."

Adekunle, Sola and Chiemeké from where they were standing could not see the person commanding them to come out and his steps in the dark at about that time heightened the tension. Adekunle proposed a very tough decision. He said he would step out and in the distraction that we should escape. Immediately he stepped out to step into our room E-6 the man (a medical student) apprehended him while Sola dashed out through the other door and headed towards the UBTH road. Chiemeké since he was wearing a boxer short dashed into one of the toilets hoping that he would not be discovered. The man started shouting; thief! Thief! He held tightly to Adekunle and Luke Aghanenu came out to identify him as our roommate. Upon hearing the shout of a thief other medical students had started streaming down. As the man was trying to prove his point one of them was banging the toilet doors and in one of them he saw Chiemeké who pretended he was answering nature's call. Relieved he came out and joined Luke that Adekunle was not a thief. But it still did not make sense what he was doing there at that particular point in time. Adekunle's position was that he went to the university Main Auditorium to watch the play *Oga na thiefman* and only branched to the toilet to ease himself.

We were going back and forth on this issue of a thief or not when a medical student came down from upstairs with some leaflets and dumped them on the floor and said; oh boy we can see what you were doing." That act now shifted the debate to something more serious. This was because as the students started dispersing some of them demanded for Adekunle's ID card and discovered that he ought to have graduated in 1987 but the crisis of 87 had changed that but that in their mind proved to them he was not as innocent as he was pretending to be. We offered explanation to them about Adekunle's situation and some of them were in sympathy, the Hall chairperson Andrew Orhibabor went to Hall 3 Common Room and called the Student Affairs Officer, JU Otokunrin that they apprehended an ex-student distributing anti-Babangida leaflets. By the time Otokunrin got to room E-6 he did not need any single diviner to tell him the story of the leaflet. This was because in a moment of risky kindness he had given the room to Luke with a plea of good behavior on Luke's part. But it is easier said than done. In an actual fact it was just a bed space of six spring of double bunk bed. Chiemeké and Luke squeezed themselves into the six spring space every night this is because the person Chiemeké squatted

with the hope that he would squat him in turn evicted him upon the claim that he did not want to be associated with a communist and jeopardized his chances of graduating that session. And Adekunle came and joined us in the room. And our roommates who were mostly year one students could not do anything but tolerate us as we got a six inches mattress for Adekunle to be sleeping on the floor.

Upon seeing us Otokunrin locked the room and ordered the university's security to report to Room E-6 as some anti- Babangida elements had been arrested. From the window of that room we saw the security men arrived with the chief security officer of the school (Capt. Edokpayi, retired) arriving like Angel Gabriel with his acolytes to evict Lucifer. We were hurled into a security bus and driven to the school security house near the university main gate. They hurled insults at us with the chief security officer referring to Chiemেকে as Igbo man who had come to Bendel state to destroy the only federal university in it. When Chiemেকে reminded him that he was from Bendel state he looked pitiable on the strength of the new fact. Very early in the morning they did a photo parade and took everybody's mugshot which was later sent to the state police command and may be other security agencies. As the day wore on tension began to mount between us and the year one students arrested with us as they became restless and wanted to capitulate by naming us as those behind the leaflets. We had encouraged them to deny knowing about the leaflet, for us even if we were caught red handed with it we would have denied knowledge as there was no name about the makers of the leaflet. If it is safe to remain anonymous remain so as a revolutionary duty. This is one of the laws easily violated by the left in Nigeria. We all have become empty headed clowns looking for limelight to hug and in the process feather our pockets in the name of the struggle.

We were sure that if we had been detained for more than a day some of those year one students would have given us up. The worst thing that could happen to a cadre is to have witnesses implicate a cadre for an act he could have been saved from. If you read the stories of torture during the era of the military in Latin America you will appreciate the point being made. But they did not have the opportunity to actualize their threat as at about the hour of 6pm we were informed that we were being taken to the vice chancellor's office. We were

driven in our disheveled state, having been kept without food and water from 2 a.m of that day, to meet with the vice chancellor Professor Alele-Williams. Whether based on the brief presented to her she quickly separated the wheat from the chaffs and placed Chiemeke, Luke and Adekunle on one side and the remaining students on another side. She singled out Adekunle for a tirade of threats and abuse in Yoruba language in which she was very fluent, in the presence of all, including the Deputy V Prof. Orhewere, The Registrar, Mr. Williams, and other top functionaries of the University. All attempts made by Adekunle to translate her threats to English for the benefit of all other in attendance who were nonYoruba speakers were blocked by her as the next thing she did was to request for the CSO and immediately ordered that he and his men should escort Adekunle to Room E-6 of Hall 3 and he be ejected from the university immediately. The CSO was a retired army captain he carried out this order obsequiously as if to impress his boss because by the time we got to the hostel Adekunle was already gone with order of arrest if he ever stepped foot into University of Benin again.

For Luke and Chiemeke she had a simple answer for us. To summarise her, much as you people denied knowledge of the planned protest she did not have a problem with that denial, but where she would have a problem with us was if any protest took place on that campus that night. We knew that staring us on the face at that moment was not Alele-Williams but expulsion from the University of Benin because as at that moment we were not even sure if the ink remitting our rustication to pardon by the university authority had dried up. Members of our movement as we later found out loitered around the security area and the senate building monitoring what may be our fate until we finally came out of the senate building. We briefed them at the hostel what has happened and we all agreed that we should call off the protest as to go ahead would have completely destroyed what was left of the rickety CAC and there were also concerns about the precarious situation of our academic career. It was agreed we should call off the protest.

In the course of a protest other interests are at stake especially if you don't have capacity to go it alone. So that night we gathered with those interests around faculty of science and informed them that the protest would not go on again.

Some were in the mood to appreciate the situation but for others the decision to call off the strike was a very cowardly act. But we were firm that no matter the insults from them that we were not ready to go on with the protest that night or in the short term. A year later we organised the same protest on a scale that the school authority and those who called us cowards could only watch and marveled at the audacity of what happened. In 1989 everybody that was in Nigeria and elsewhere took notice as an unprecedented upheaval gripped the city of Benin.

After the attempt to organize the protest against the increase of fuel price to 20 kobo by the Babangida's regime in March 1988 failed, as pointed out earlier on, there was a slight lull in the activities of the movement. But it wasn't for long as the vice chancellor; Prof. Grace Alele-Williams gave an order lifting the ban on student union politics within the campus. It was part of the recommendations of the Iyoha Panel of Investigation report. Some conditions were given to be fulfilled by students wishing to contest student union elections. Some of the conditions were:

- The student must not be under any restraint of political involvement from the school authority.
- And some sundry conditions.

Looking at the conditions, it was clear that the conditions were motivated by the desire on the part of the school to weed the student union of persons considered to be undesirable or hotheaded from running the affairs of the union. This particular point came against the batch of students that were recommended for expulsion and rustication from the aftermath of the events of 1987 to early 1988, as a result of the sacking of Dr. Festus Iyayi and the students' protest that followed. Those predominantly affected by this condition were members of the Cultural Awareness Club. Though, it is important to add that members of the Cultural Awareness Club had become decimated as a result of the facts that they took the brunt of blame for what happened during the 1987 students' protest. This much was said by the Professor Milton Iyoha's panel of investigation as it said; ***“that all members of the Cultural Awareness Club which is a group of extremists and anarchists should be expelled from the university.”***

For instance, before the 1987 sack of Dr. Festus Iyayi and the protest that followed, the membership list of the Cultural Awareness Club was 45, but after the sack of Dr. Iyayi and the immediate protest, and the report of Prof. Milton Iyoha, (Iyoha's Panel of Investigations Report) that the Cultural Awareness Club should be held squarely accountable for the protest that followed the sack of Dr. Iyayi. The report and other circumstances created palpable fears in the mind of its members, and as such the membership shrank to less than 7. The remaining members were Luke Aghanenu, Onyeisi Chiememe, Adekunle Andrew, Nosa Omo-Igbinonwahia and Ogaga Ifowodo what about Nosa Osaikhuiwu who still stuck around even though his parents scared him from identifying with the movement? You may correct me on this please. Though, there were some former members willing to sympathize, but the last thing they would do again was to be seen to be openly identified with the club. But the irony of it was that the club has never been in the open, but has predominantly operated from the underground, and the crisis of 1987 further drove it more and more underground that it abolished its regular Thursday meeting at the Common Room, Hall 2.

The Iyoha Panel was like a witch-hunt against members of the CAC. It was McCarthyite. Once you appeared before the panel it wanted the person to name names. If you didn't name names it became hostile. To the wisdom of the movement it agreed that members not identified should not be mentioned before the panel. As noted prior to the Iyoha Panel the movement had not less than 45 members. Onyeisi Chiememe later reported to surviving members of the movement that to avoid any security compromise, that one night heading to his uncle's residence where he was temporarily sheltered, with all issues arising from potential expulsion he threw the notebook containing the list of members into a bush near Uselu Market in Benin City.

But much as the Cultural Awareness Club went underground, it believed rightly so that the new lease of lifting the ban on student union would give it an opportunity to participate actively in the policy direction of the University through the Student Union Government. As such, in this regard, it decided to put forward one of its members, Ogaga Ifowodo for the post of the secretary general of the Student Union Government. The reason we settled for the

Secretary General was that, interestingly, University of Benin (UNIBEN) Students' Union Constitution greatly favoured the Secretary General. As the post of the Secretary General had a lot of power in terms of control of the secretariat, communications and correspondence. In effect, a well-groomed Secretary General can subtly rival the President of the Students' Union in the exercise of the Union's power. But getting Ogaga Ifowodo to run as the secretary general of the Students' Union was not a piece of cake. He raised serious objection about his candidature to the effect that his father would not approve of him being actively involved in the Students' Union politics to the extent of becoming the Secretary General of the Students' Union. And he was silently worried about the possibility of being expelled by the school authority. For these reasons, he sought particularly to get a clearance from his father before he could run. All effort to persuade him that such clearance would not be given failed.

As predicted, he went home and his father told him that he would disown him if he were to run for any post within the Students' Union Government. After he came back with this report, we held another meeting with him again, and after some wavering, he sought assurance from us that we would share any mishap collectively with him. We didn't need to leave the spot to give him that assurance, considering that he was not going there because he was Ogaga Ifowodo, but because the movement wanted to have a stake in what happened in the Students' Union Government. As it came to pass, there was no time that the cadres who were active in the Students' Union Government were punished by the school authority that; Onyeisi Chiemeka and Luke Aghanenu were not punished, even though they never held any post in the Student Union Government.

It was in the course of Ogaga's dilly-dallying that we decided to throw in Nosa Omo-Igbinowahia, **a medical student**, into the Students' Union politics to contest as the Public Relations Officer (P.R.O). This was a last ditched effort to belong to the SUG. Nosa Omo-Igbinowahia quietly accepted his fate and agreed to run. Luckily for us, by the time we sorted out the Ogaga issue, we had two (2) candidates – Ogaga Ifowodo and Nosa Omo-Igbinowahia. There was a problem running with unwilling candidates, particularly the former, whom

though he had accepted to run was like Lots' wife still looking at her back. Such it was that, it was Onyeisi Chiemekwe that submitted Ogaga's nomination form as candidate for the post of Secretary General of the SUG as he didn't want to miss a class. The money for the nomination form was borrowed by the movement from Luke Aghanenu, and we could not be too sure if he was ever paid back the money by the movement.

To be fair to Ogaga Ifowodo when he finally turned the corner, he became a phenomenon, especially for his oratorical skill which could hold an audience spellbound. But there was a bigger challenge to his candidature, from the greater picture of the school politics. Somehow, the school smelt or was told by some informants that Ogaga may not be as innocent as imagined as there was an underground group behind his candidature. In this regard, the school working covertly, decided to back the candidature of a certain Idahosa, who was being sponsored by the Christian Union members in the school. The Christian Union had a strong membership base in Hall 1 in the female hostel and Hall 3 in the male hostel dominated by the medical students and year one students, the latter deemed to be naïve, and the former deemed to be conservative in voting pattern. Against this background, our group sought an alliance with one of the presidential candidates Ihuoma Alalazu, who in our view was liberal. The alliance plus Ogaga's speech at the manifesto night defeated the alliance of the Christian conservatives and the medical students. Fortuitously, Nosa Omo-Igbinonwahia, even though there was a bleep at the manifesto night against Okechukwu Nwaeze, who had a pedigree on public relations as he was beyond being a Theatre Art's student, was then doing some skeletal programmes on Bendel Broadcasting Service, Bendel State. As it turned out, he did not meet the G.P.A of 2.75%, and was subsequently disqualified, and Nosa was returned unopposed.

The movement celebrated its minor, but strategic victory as it now had a foothold in the SUG. This is important as the events of the coming months were to prove. A few months after the election of the SUG, the school authority, acting without a directive from the National University Commission (NUC) or the Visitor of the university, decided to abolish re-sit examinations in the school academic calendar system. The re-sit examinations as the name implied

was an examinations that students who failed some courses in the course of regular sessional examinations were permitted to take sometime in the month of August, in order to avoid carrying over such courses into a new session, thereby avoiding increase in their academic workload. The re-sit examination in some sense did not confer too much advantage on the students more than the fact of reduction in the workload, as the credit point is not more than a C, which was 1 point. But the school abolished this programme without any notice to the students.

In consequence, the SUG wrote to the school authority for purpose of restoring re-sit examination into the school academic calendar. The school in its reply informed the SUG that the re-sit examination system had been abolished in the school academic calendar, and that the decision would not be reversed. This created a stalemate, and each party dug deeper into its own position until the vice chancellor called a meeting at the University auditorium to explain the crisis surrounding the question of re-sit examination. Unfortunately, she played bad politics at the said meeting, her argument was not more than the fact that those students clamouring for re-sit examinations were unserious students who did not invest enough energy into their studies, that university was being depleted to organise the re-examination and further that the whole dingdong of re-sit or no re-sit was an agenda of those who did not wish the university well. At the end of her long speech that might be considered a monologue, she ruled that the re-sit examination was dead in the university calendar.

A day or two after, the SUG called out the students for demonstration on the campus. The school was paralyzed for three (3) days as the students surrounded the senate building, having gotten information that the university senate was meeting to consider the issue and possibly have a meeting with the SUG on the way out. In the course of the protest, the Cultural Awareness Club decided to exploit the situation and play a card on the university. We have mentioned in the course of this writing that Adekunle Andrew was one of the students that Iyoha's Panel of Investigations Report recommended should be expelled from the university. And based on the panel's report, Adekunle's final year result was seized by the university authority, and he went to court to challenge the Iyoha's Panel of Investigations Report before the Federal High Court Division

in Benin-City. It was the decision of the court that the University had acted appropriately in withholding the result, and that Adekunle's coming to court was premature as the court said; *"The reliefs sought in this application belonged to the domain of the university as enshrined in the statute establishing it, and since it has not been established by the applicant that there has been or likely to be a breach, denial or abuse or abridgment in the domestic forum, and the applicant haven not exhausted the domestic remedies of the university, i.e. having 'jump the gun,' the resort to the court at the stage is premature."* After the decision of the court, Adekunle continued to live in the university with Onyeisi Chiemeké and Luke Aghanenu until the school banished him after the events of March 1988 with respect to the protest against the increase of fuel price by the Ibrahim Babangida's regime.

Nothing seemed to have worked again, and the matter stood still until the re-sit examination protest started. The movement took its chance and pushed through the SUG that as part of their demands outside the restoration of the re-sit examination was that Adekunle Andrew be given his result and cleared to proceed on National Youth Service. After the back and forth at the negotiation table, the school granted the two requests. The school didn't take this affront lying low, as after the conduct of the second semester examination, students proceeded on their sessional vacation for a return in the month of October, 1988. Upon their return, two things happened in different phases. First, the SUG was dissolved by the school authorities, calling for fresh elections with stiffer guidelines. Secondly, fresh students were to learn that there would be no more re-sit examinations in the school academic calendar.

As said in the preceding paragraph, in the early life of the new semester in October, 1988, the school authority as said dissolved the SUG. The SUG leaders tried to argue as a preliminary step that they were elected for one year, but the authority of the University of Benin pushed through with the argument that the life of the Students Union is tied to a session and not calendar year tenure. In effect, even if the SUG was elected in the month of May or so, their tenure ended at the end of 2nd semester of session 1987/88. For various reasons, the tendencies within the SUG, agreed with this position except the Cultural Awareness Club, which felt that it should be for a calendar year. In the end,

this position was not sustained, and the SUG was dissolved for the purposes of a new election. At the end of it all, the students' representative council was asked by the school authority to set up a care-taker committee to paddle the affairs of the SUG until the election of new leaders for the Students Union.

In the struggle for spaces and power, every interest, interested in space and power must pay attention to every movement in the process of power relationship. For instance, immediately it was agreed to set up the caretaker committee, our group, the Cultural Awareness Club, made sure that its members occupied key positions in the caretaker committee. In this regard, Opeyemi Bamidele, became the chairman of the caretaker committee, with another of our member as the secretary of the committee. Also set up was the electoral committee, we got our member, Nosa Osaikhuiwu to become the alternate chairman of the electoral committee, as the student affairs officer was the chairman of the electoral committee while Mr. Kayode Olajubutu, one of our members became the secretary of the electoral committee. Armed with the benefit of hindsight, from the events that followed between November and December, 1988, our members occupying these positions, helped us to occupy the lever of the leadership, not just of the students politics on campus, but a hand in the direction of the general politics of the school.

From the moment the SUG was dissolved, all interest not excluding the school authority who were not uninterested in the politics of the SUG began to reassess and re-strategize with regards to their interest in the SUG. For instance, the conditions required to contest for any position in the SUG election were:

- Submission of manifestoes for vetting.
- Disqualification without reasons.
- Non-use of university policy as campaign issue.
- Non-membership of associations; and
- Possession of a minimum GPA of 2.75

The previous condition of banning some students from contesting the SUG elections did not need to be repeated as it is for the stretch of their course

duration in the school. The argument of the school about the GPA was that a student who didn't have a good GPA by implication was a poor student, and as such should not be trusted with leadership. They made this argument with some mischievous glee, betraying their lack of altruism about this particular condition.

Strange enough, our movement found itself caught in the web of this particular condition, as outside Nosa Omo-Igbinonwahia, this condition had become a burden of candidates we wanted to put forward. Say what you like, it was a disingenuous way at disenfranchisement. In the first place, under the defective structural *banking concept of education*, to borrow from Paulo Freire; a higher academic qualification does not in any way imbue the person with such qualifications with any better leadership quality. This is because; leadership is a product of cultivated and practical understanding of societies. A good leader is that person with a good historical, political and cultured education, and not the ephemerals of certificates that speak to GPA. Secondly is the fact that the school authority as in this instance did show that they did not understand the meaning of university education. University education essentially, we concede, maybe about grades, but it was something bigger than that. And what it is; is to create men and women with the right sense of humanity or with the wrong sense of humanity the latter being the poverty of education. Our group, the Cultural Awareness Club was the key group that provided an alternative narrative to the concept of scholarship in the history of the University of Benin as at that time. This was possible because we had a political education programme which our members must subscribe to before they could gain membership to the club. It was such that when an Ogaga Ifowodo spoke at a rally, he was speaking from cultured political education, garnered at a political table where Marxist education and philosophy were applied in understanding the dynamics of societies.

Against this background, the movement felt affronted by this policy that was nothing, but an attempt to constrict political spaces for purposes of power. The movement met and pushed that this policy should not be allowed to stand. But as we pointed out earlier on because of diverging interests of those scrambling for the new positions in the SUG, the movement was not able to garner enough support to defeat this policy. The obvious implication was that the movement

was going to stand by and watch new leaders emerge in the SUG. And there is a popular cliché by Lenin about – *what is to be done?* It was agreed that what is to be done was that the SUG elections would not hold. From that resolution emerged the need to work out how the election would not hold.

As a first step, it was agreed that the caretaker committee will write to the school authority expressing our reservation about the conditions relating to the elections, and the need to remove those conditions in order to allow a free and fair election. But as we said, because of the factors stated above about some of the candidates jostling for some of the positions in the SUG and believing that they could use the technical constraint of the GPA to gain advantage with respect to the election, they didn't see the need for a common front in the position of the caretaker committee. The school authority having seen the division felt in typical Lugardian style of divide and rule, encouraged the students who met the GPA conditions to go against the SUG caretaker committee and buy forms for the election. This they exactly did and started their campaign in earnest. Against this background, the school authority fixed the election for the 10th day of December, 1988.

Upon fixing the elections, the candidates kept campaigning, and the movement found itself unable to field candidates for the elections, and the school authority refused to budge about the conditions stated for the election. Each party at the divide increased their push for and against with respect to the elections. In the middle of this, the school authority dissolved the SUG caretaker committee headed by Opeyemi Bamidele, but the school did not know that we had prepared for a day like this. So upon the dissolution of the SUG caretaker committee, the movement advised members of the students' union Electoral Committee to step into the shoes of the SUG caretaker committee, and exercise the mandate of representing the students in all ramifications until the elections of new students' union leaders. It didn't sit down well with the school authority, but they tried to endure the situation till the conduct of the election. But our movement was still determined that the election would not hold despite the approaching date for the election. But how to abort the election remained a problem until two days to the elections when the solution was found.

On the 7th of December, 1988, a good number of the members of the movement met at the Water Fountain, Faculty of Social Science and decided to play a propaganda game against the university, and it was simple. It was agreed that on Friday the 9<sup>th</sup> of December, we would engage the school in a propaganda game that would test its credibility. By the stroke of dawn the dice rolled for the game and the school was not at all prepared for what happened. And every attempt made to throw their dice proved futile. The idea of this scheme was that if students felt outraged by this particular action of the school, they may most likely boycott the election, and in consequence, the election would flounder. And as predicted, the students to express their anger about what has happened boycotted the election *en masse*. Credit must be given to Charles Ofili who set forth before dawn, and got some sympathizers who quickly distributed leaflets in Ekehuan campus and the main campus at Ugbowo. The movement issued a directive to its members not to under any circumstance join any discussion with any group of students on the subject of what happened; this was to ensure that no member of the movement made any slip about what had happened.

By the noon of the Saturday, the school had called off the election as not up to 50 students were reported to have voted across the two campuses. The worst was that they had a bigger battle to fight throughout the weekend. This was about explaining why their dice got stuck in the cup. And pitifully they have no information. And the more they tried to pull their dice the more they floundered miserably. As a result of the failed election the way forward became a democratization process that would involve the drafting of a new constitution for the Students Union and removing of all those impediments that formed how the students' union operated.

The school authority battled with some situations, first, the accusation that it masterminded the events resulting to the propaganda war. Secondly, the embarrassment of the cancelled election and thirdly, new agitations that aimed to strip it of the control of the Student Union by the agitation for a new constitution. The first it could not explain till today. The reason why the propaganda gambit was successful was one of the basic rules of propaganda, that if the enemy cannot be believed, you can hang the unbelievable on the neck of the enemy. The school authority had thrived on intimidation and

recklessness, as such who for once would not believe it that it wasn't reckless on this score. On the cancelled election, there was nothing it could do because it had been outwitted and the semester was about to close. The third issue of democratization, the school lost out. Its loss became the gain of the movement because of the next step it took. In any case why the university authority should be bothered about the student union when by virtue of the Abisoye Panel report the higher institutions across Nigeria were instructed not to collect check-off dues for the unions on campuses? And the authority of the University of Benin found this aspect of the report very useful and implemented it with fanaticism. In actual fact it was the movement that funded what was left of the caretaker committee as well as the Electoral Committee from 1988- 1989.

The school tried to fight back. The next step it took was to rely on an inconclusive disciplinary committee sitting of the university involving Ogaga Ifowodo, Opeyemi Bamidele, Charles Ofili and Nosa Osaikhiuwu, Kayode Olajubutu to suspend them from the university indefinitely. This indefinite suspension was to later end up in the court, and became known as Opeyemi Bamidele & 3 Others vs. University of Benin. What was interesting about this sitting was that this sitting played into the game plan of the propaganda game. In the end, while the students were protesting the act the expulsion of these leaders, the school called in the security force, and teargas started to rain. The students fought back using kerosene to neutralize the teargas. Later, the school authority was to claim that the use of kerosene against teargas was a dangerous chemical and another wave of expulsion started. Many students were expelled on the ground that they were seen distributing dangerous chemical (kerosene)! On this new wave of expulsion, the only members of the Cultural Awareness Club that were not expelled were Jiti Ogunye and Nosa Omo-Igbinonwahia. In fact, it became a joke that the school authority spent the whole Christmas and New Year's holiday season in expelling and suspending students. We believe that in this *winter of expulsion*, no less than 100 students were expelled from the University of Benin, and it remained a record till date. Because of this expulsion, in the new year of 1989, the local newspaper, Nigerian Observer 24<sup>th</sup> January 1989 had a headline titled; **GUERILLAS INVADE UNIVERSITY OF BENIN.**

After the wave of expulsion that continued into January, 1989, the movement agreed that it should seek legal assistance to restore the studentship of its members. After the first batch of its members, there was a second batch of Kayode Olajubutu, Onyeisi Chiemekwe, Luke Aghanenu and Belo Aideloje. There was sense of belief bordering on fear that the school authority may drag the court case for a long time, the way it did that of Adekunle Andrew. In order to cut out that shenanigan from the school authority, it was agreed that there should be a political solution to the whole question of highhandedness by the university authority, headed by Prof. Grace Alele-Williams. It was to be an interesting fight for few reasons, principal of which was that the movement has lost more than 80% of its members to expulsion from the university who were practically living off campus. The school has circulated everybody's picture on campus as well as to the security agencies for the possibility of arresting any of the expelled students, particularly members of the Cultural Awareness Club.

It was in the context of this that the movement appealed to its parent body, the Patriotic Youth Movement of Nigeria (PYMN) for its intervention through National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS). The planning of this action was left for the Cultural Awareness Club to execute, with NANS on standby to mobilise cadres, once the clearance has been gotten to organize a protest in the University of Benin. The protest would be of a dimension never seen and, meant to shake the school system. As a first step, proximate schools were required to provide cadres in executing the plan. In this regard, we got a Law student from the then Bendel State (now Ambrose Ali) University, Ekpoma, and the then President of University of Port – Harcourt Students' Union – Charles Nwanuka (now late). Charles Ofili volunteered to camp them at his uncle's place, somewhere behind UBTH. While some of the expelled students who were on ground came to meet them in the morning. In order not to intrude into the family of their host, they went with them to a restaurant that was run by Charles Ofili uncle's wife. It was at the restaurant that the plan to attack the school was worked out. The first step was to print a leaflet that was inflammatory in nature, basically targeted at the students to rise up against the gale of expulsion that was rampaging through the school like a wildfire. This was true as even at the date of the decision to attack the school; more students were still being expelled.

Sometimes, things do not go according to plans. As Charles Nwanuka, and the Law student from Bendel State University, Ekpoma named Abraham were distributing the leaflets inside the campus in front of Hall 2, they were confronted by the University of Benin security authority, and Charles managed to escape, while Abraham was apprehended by the university security. After a lot of beatings and interrogation, he was transferred to the Police Headquarters, State Command, Benin City. It was a disconcerted Charles Nwanuka that later came to meet us at Charles Ofili's uncle's wife's restaurant, which we were using as outpost. He informed us that Abraham had been arrested and everybody's head went down because we knew that the school authority and the state security agencies were going to come down hard on those who produced the leaflets that were being circulated on campus. But by a twist of fate, Abraham could not say or place a face on more than 80% of the persons he met the previous day, or that very day. The only person he could remember was Charles Ofili and possibly Charles Nwanuka. It was such that when Charles Nwanuka reported of Abraham's arrest, it was the position of members of the movement present that we should leave the restaurant and relocate to another place, but Charles Ofili, intrepid as usual, opted to stay at the restaurant with Charles Nwanuka, others beat a retreat to a restaurant by the popular Edegebe Motor park at Uwasota Junction in Benin-City.

It was while we were at this restaurant with a lawyer from Alao Aka-Bashorun's chambers, Sola Ebiseni that Charles Nwanuka rushed in again that Charles Ofili had been arrested by the police. This is because Abraham had led the police to the restaurant where he ate in the morning knowing full well that it belonged to Charles Ofili Uncle's wife. Charles Ofili was arrested while downing a bottle of **Guinness Stout, his favourite**. Again Charles Nwanuka was lucky as he escaped through the back of the restaurant and came to inform us of the latest development. It was hard to imagine the disorder that ensued as a result of the news of the arrest as Ogaga, Sola and Opeyemi ran into the next available night bus back to Lagos, while Chiemeké, Luke and others disappeared into the night of Benin-City. We didn't even know how Charles Nwanuka got to Port-Harcourt as all we could hear him say was that he would find his way. In the end, it turned out that the arrest of Charles Ofili was for the good, as the police had spent the whole afternoon pressuring Abraham to remember

more names. When Charles Ofili joined him in the cell, he was able to calm him down, warning him that recalling more names would not save him. After a few days in detention, they were both charged to court and the Magistrate granted them bail. It was late Prof. Tunde Fatunde that stood surety for them. This arrest left everybody stranded for a couple of weeks, but the plan was back on track. A few days after, as most of us, having been expelled had nowhere to go, as we couldn't return to our families but regrouped in Benin. As luck would have it, we got a Greek lecturer who gave us a room boy's quarter to stay, as he was on sabbatical outside Nigeria. It was in this boy's quarter, off Uwasota Road, Benin-City, that the final push was sorted out, and it was that push that gave rise to the headline by the Nigerian Observer.

On January 22nd, 1989, the extra force required for the push began to arrive in Benin. They were led by the then NANS President, Salihu Mohammed Lukman. All the details of how to beat the security and enter the University of Benin were worked out. The key was to distribute the leaflets couched in the same language of the earlier leaflets of the aborted protest. It was also agreed that the operation would be carried out at night in order to protect our identities. The leaflets were to be distributed in the classrooms, halls of residence, and anywhere that students could be found. The additional force and those of us on ground were about 17 in numbers. In less than 15 minutes from accessing the school from the UBTH gate at about 8 p.m., there was bedlam, and everywhere was taken over, students were mobilized for an emergency rally at the Hall 2 foreground. As we predicted, based on the work that we had done, we knew that a large number of students would come to attend the protest rally. From the protest ground, many of the strategic places were taken over by the students, and some went to the house of Dr. B. B. E. Bafor, the then Dean of Students. Reports later emerged that he had escaped through the fence from his house at the staff quarters.

The stream of protest moved to the Vice Chancellor's lodge and remained there late into the night. All the hope to get the vice chancellor, Prof. Grace Alele-Williams to come down and address the students failed. Though nobody was sure if she was still in the house, or had been ferreted out to a safe place, as the mass of the students gathered there late into the night, tempers began to

flare. At some point, some students accessed the one story building through the garage, and that was when one or two shots were fired from inside the house. At that instance, the students were advised to withdraw from the vice chancellors' lodge, and everybody relocated to the main gate. Beside the main gate, was the security outpost, and that security outpost represented all that was repressive about the university, and in anger, the place was vandalized. We could see some students wasting the jars of fire extinguishers on the Benin-Lagos express road. Students remained at the main gate till about 4 a.m. to 5 a.m. when suddenly the sound of security operatives' siren began to sound, students were then advised to dispersed, in order to avoid the police hiding under the canopy of darkness by shooting people.

Before 6 a.m. the next day, all the leaders who took part in this protest had disappeared from the streets of Benin-City. It was the instruction as we knew that the school authority would most likely embark on a crackdown using the state security services. The reverse was the case because in the alternative, this protest sobered the university of Benin authority, and outside the batches made up of ten students plus Ihuoma Alalazu, that regained their freedom through the court, the school authority after the protest recalled everybody, including those who went with their parents to beg the school authority for forgiveness. At the end of these hard punches, the school authority came out dazed and put in place some reconciliatory measures, one of them being the drafting of a new constitution for the University of Benin SUG. As usual, the movement injected itself into the constitution drafting committee. We were in the process of drafting the constitution when the movement fought what may be considered its biggest fight. This was because of the national implication of the fight. This is what is known in the history of the Nigerian students' movement and the broader history of Nigeria as the Anti-Structural Adjustment Programme (Anti-SAP) demonstration of 1989. It was the demonstration that shook the ancient city of Benin and the military government of Gen. Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida's administration to its core foundation.

In August 1985, Gen. Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida in a palace coup overthrew the regime of Maj. Gen. Muhammadu Buhari. The coup to be fair enjoyed popular support from the country's elite, both in the media and other spectrum

of the society. Riding on the wave of the popular support, Gen. Babangida proclaimed some social engineering programmes to put the political wheel of Nigeria in a levitational state. There were two key programmes he put in place, one was the political bureau headed by Prof. S. J. Cookey, tasked with the responsibility of fashioning out a political model for Nigeria. Secondly was the International Monetary Fund (IMF) debate on whether implicitly Nigeria should adopt the Washington Consensus model of economic development. To help him push the latter agenda, he got some Western universities trained ideologues to push this agenda. Principal in the fore front were Drs. Chu S.P. Okongwu, Kalu Idika Kalu, Olu Falae and other supporting casts.

The core theory of the Washington Consensus School was at best in the words of its chief ideologue, John Williamson;

- *guarantees of fiscal discipline, and a curb to budget deficits;*
- *reduction in public expenditure, particularly in the military and in public administration;*
- *tax reform, aiming at the creation of a system with a broad base and with effective enforcement;*
- *financial liberalisation, with interest rates determined by the market;*
- *competitive exchange rates, to assist export-led growth;*
- *trade liberalisation, coupled with the abolition of import licensing and a reduction in tariffs;*
- *a welcome to foreign direct investment;*
- *privatisation of state enterprises, leading to efficient management and improved performance,*
- *deregulation of the economy;*
- *protection of property rights.*

Despite the optimism of the apostles of the Washington Consensus School, the SAP programme of the Babangida's regime kept floundering, plunging

the Nigerian economy into crisis. This was to such an extent that even Babangida himself at some point was quoted to have said that “*he was surprised that the Nigerian economy has not collapsed.*” The members of the movement were part of the general Nigeria left movement that have thoroughly analysed the SAP, and had no iota of doubt that it was a programme leading to disaster. It was against this background that the 1988 effort to protest against the increase in the price of Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) was organised. But as we have noted for some structural reasons, the protest failed.

One lesson learnt from that effort in March 1988, was the need to engage in a better plan that discarded with the effort at spontaneity. There were discussions across Nigeria, spearheaded by the PYMN to protest against the SAP, but campus movements were left with the responsibility of determining by their internal mechanism, their capacity to organise the demonstration. To us in Benin, we believe that we have the capacity; this is in consideration of the fact that the events of late 1988 into early 1989 had put the students union back in our hands, even if the school authority insisted that the caretaker committee was illegal, but we had insisted otherwise, and the school authority had to live with the nightmare of the caretaker committee acting as a union.

Even though the union was deemed illegal by the school authority, it enjoyed legitimacy among the students, and it is on the strength of that legitimacy that we decided to call the students out to oppose the SAP programme of the Babangida’s regime. We took time to plan the protest. The first step was to identify the fact that to organise a protest of that scale, we must deal with the facts that some liberal students in the school would oppose any protest against the SAP programme, and they would get the support of the school authority to effectuate that resistance. From feelers, we have gotten idea of the resistance to come and those who were championing it. The movement then decided to create a forum for a debate against such students. Part of the agreement was that those who would engage the students were not going to be known faces represented by the union leaders.

In this regard, one afternoon, members of the movement met in an isolated BQ in UBTH staff quarters. At that meeting, it was agreed that the union

should propose the topic for discussion; **“PEACE ON NIGERIA CAMPUS-ES”**. The meeting agreed that Onyeisi Chiemeké should square off against Alex Onwuadiamu. The movement had a fair knowledge of Onwuadiamu, starting from an encounter that dated far back to February 1988 where he was among a group of students that interfaced between the remnant members of the movement and the school authority over the outcome of the disciplinary committee decision from the events of 1987. Secondly, some of our comrades shared room with him and we knew his temperament and his intellectual disposition.

On the day of the said programme, Ogaga Ifowodo moderated while Opeyemi Bamidele squared off against Ihuoma Alalazu. There wasn't much disagreement between the two as Alalazu was more progressive in thinking than Onwuadiamu. Before that day, it had been agreed that Onwuadiamu would speak first so that Chiemeké would pick up the weak points in his argument and add it up to his own argument, and thereby nullify any serious argument that Onwuadiamu would have made. That was how it played out, such that by the time Chiemeké spoke, a good number of the students at the discourse had become the apostles of opposition to Babangida's SAP programme. In a week after the discourse, another one was scheduled, and this time, we got idea that the school authority had gotten some lecturers with threat to others that they should join in the intellectual war to prevent any demonstration against the SAP programme. We remember one of the lecturers, Wang Metuge, a Cameroonian with strong background in Marxist political economics. The school authority we later learnt threatened to apply the Patrick Wilmot's solution to him if he failed to speak up against the impending protest. Unfortunately for them that day, we also got some sympathetic lecturers to speak up against the programme (SAP), while we on our own matched them scholarship for scholarship. By the time the programme ended, it was clear that the school authority must have learnt from what transpired that the Anti-SAP demonstration was going to take place, no matter any attempt to stop it. And secondly in their mind was the possibility that those behind the protest were not going to be in a position to pull it off, but they got it all wrong, as it was a protest that had a date with destiny from the day that the Anti-subsidy protest of 1988 failed.

Having cleared the road of the intellectual cobwebs and the argument of non-justification for the protest, the only thing left was working out the details of the protest which started off on May 23rd, 1989. As the momentum builds for the protest, and we saw our capacity, it was agreed that in opposition to the SAP programme, we were going to take the protest into town, which was exactly what happened on the first day of the protest. As we returned to the campus after the first day protest, the feeling was to hit the road again the following day, and on the second day, the number of students tripled that of the first day.

On the second day of the protest, as we demonstrated in the streets of Benin, up to government house in Benin GRA, the movement remembered that there was small unsettled business arising from the arrest of Abraham, the student from Ekpoma, and Charles Ofili from the botched protest in January 1989 for which they were arraigned before the Benin Magistrate Court, at Sapele Road. The students went there and saw Charles and Abraham sitting in the courtroom and waiting for their trial. At the time the protest got to the magistrate Court, the Magistrate hurriedly adjourned and that was the end of the trial of Charles and Abraham till date. As the day wore on, the atmosphere in the city of Benin began to degenerate, leading to the freeing of prisoners from the Benin Prison along Sapele Road, and a great damage to the Bendel State House of Assembly at Ring Road. By this time, the police were already on the street trying to curtail the protest, firing teargas, and in the process injuring many students and other citizens. Many students were able to get back to the campus safely.

On the night of the second day of the protest, we listened to the broadcast by the military governor of Bendel State, Brig. Tunde Ogbeha. In his broadcast, he talked of how a peaceful protest by the students of the University of Benin has been hijacked by a group of anarchists with the intent to overthrow the government of Gen. Ibrahim Babangida. Flowing from that, the warning was that the government would not tolerate any further act of dissent against the government of Babangida, and that the government was ready to match its words with force. Ogbeha's speech was long and tedious, and in the least to say, frightening because he left a clear message that they were not going to

tolerate any further act of terror from any quarters. The message was specifically sent to the authorities of the University of Benin to rein in her students and make sure that they did not step into town the next day. This speech came in a little bit late when obviously members of the movement have analysed the protest of that day and dispersed.

In the morning of the next day, it emerged that three members of the movement, Opeyemi Bamidele, Ogaga Ifowodo and another member not remembered now had held a meeting with the then state chairman of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) – Deacon Obadan and late Prof. Tunde Fatunde, and it was a backdoor meeting at the instance of Governor Ogbeha advising that the student should call off any further protest. There was a caveat from Ogbeha, the caveat was that he still had a threat clause to the effect that he was going to muster all forces and deal with any threat to the security of the state. After the meeting with the above comrades, they left with the belief that Ogbeha's wish had been granted, but when an emergency meeting of some few members of movement was summoned which had in attendance Onyeisi Chiemekwe and Luke Aghanenu, the earlier promise was reversed and it was agreed that Ogbeha's broadcast or no broadcast, we were going to hit the streets of Benin to continue the protest, and that was what happened on the third day.

As a result of this dubious overture by Ogbeha, which we were sure the school authority had knowledge of, the school authority latched on the propaganda by the Ogbeha's regime by trying to dissuade students from further hitting the street to protest. This effort by the school authority achieved limited success as the movement believed that to back down and not go into the streets of Benin City would damage the protest psychologically. In this regard, it embarked on hall to hall, room to room mobilization of the students, and the students returned to the street through the back gate of UBTH. This was because the military had cordoned off the university main gate with armored tank that even a fly cannot pass through. Passengers on the Benin-Lagos route were stranded. When the protesters came out from the UBTH gate, the military blocked the road at Uwasota junction, and the students were trapped between the main gate and the UBTH gate. To prevent the military from making any further movement, students were asked to sit at the middle of the road and a

sea of students sat on the road preventing the soldiers from both sides of the road from coming forward. After sometime, the ones from the Uwasota junction decided to retreat into Benin town and the students marched on and headed towards the Bendel Broadcasting Service (BBS) at New Benin because there was some loose agreement being worked on that the students union leaders upon getting to the broadcast station would be led in by the students to make a broadcast, countering the earlier one made by governor Ogbeha.

Getting to BBS was a tall order for two reasons. One was that it looked as if the military authority lured the students into a blind alley, because as the students took to the New Benin Road, at around Medical Road junction where the popular Eghosa Grammar School was located, the military attacked from both end, the Ugbowo end and the New Benin Market end, trapping the students in between and at this point, the tanks broke in from both ends, breaking the chain of the crowd, as people could only jump into side streets and gutters. When the students managed to re-converge at the front of BBS, there was an ugly spectacle hanging by the gate of the broadcast station. The spectacle was that of a dead Alsatian dog, hanging in a crucifix by the locked gate of the broadcast station. Who killed the dog? Nobody could say, but it was such frightening that nobody could dare step into the radio station. The students converged in front of the broadcast station chanting songs while the military regrouped from the Uselu side of the New Benin Road, pushing the students towards the New Benin Market.

Nobody could say what happened, or whether there was a further instruction from the higher hierarchy of the military government. This was because, suddenly they stopped firing teargas and anybody listening carefully could hear and notice that they were firing live bullets at the students. Some students of the University of Benin standing in front of an opposite street in front of the broadcast station looked at the New Benin Road and saw a boy of less than sixteen years old lying on the ground. He had been hit by a bullet, and the intestine was bulging out from the stomach. They only managed to lift him up and ran with him into the side street, while the soldiers fired more bullets. Nobody could carry him further because the atmosphere had become very dangerous.

At that time, students began to flee in different directions and as they fled, the soldiers were in the street picking up any young person they suspected to be a student of the University of Benin. In this regard, not less than 145 students were arrested on the final day of the protest on the various streets of Benin. The casualties of arrest could have been more, but Benin-City has a peculiar geographical layout that is unique to it. If you study the city well, you can from the beginning of the city get to the end without meeting the major roads. This is because it had major streets that paralleled the major roads.

By the time the students got to UBTH and the main gate, the school authority had released a circular on the instruction of Brig. Ogbeha that every student must vacate the campus on or before 4 p.m. And as if working with military precision, by 4 p.m. teargas started raining into the different hostels, as they were raining in, doors were being broken down to find if there were students hiding in the hostels. The few students they met were given all manner of beatings. And in a few hours, everywhere was quiet like a grave yard and the school authority came and locked up the gate to the hostels, bringing an end to the 3 day protest in Benin-City.

We have read in few places where anti-historians tried to argue that the protest was inspired by the fabled Ebony Magazine story of the wealth of Maryam Babangida, but this is far from the truth, we don't know of any other university that joined the protest after it finished from the University of Benin on the basis of the Ebony Magazine story. But the truth was that after the first day, some students came up with these stories and said we should use them to mobilise more students for the protest. Upon request that they should produce the story, they all said that they didn't have a copy of the Ebony Magazine that carried the story. Upon this response, we told them that we were not going to use the Ebony Magazine as a propaganda tool, as we have enough capacity based on the work we have done to mobilise a large percentage of the student populace for purposes of confronting the Ibrahim Babangida's regime of misrule, and that was exactly what we did.

At the close of the protest at the University of Benin, the protest like a river with many tributaries spilled into various Nigerian university campuses. This forced the Babangida's regime to in the first instance shut all the universities in Nigeria, whilst six of them, including the University of Benin were closed for six months. The regime further directed that each of the students unions in each of the campuses be given a 42 seater Toyota **Coaster bus**. **This, the NANS labelled a Greek gift, though, these buses were to prove very useful in the execution of students' union work.** The authorities of the University of Benin as usual raked up their usual suspects, the members of the Cultural Awareness Club. They were accused of being the brain behind the anti-SAP programme demonstration and set up a Prof. Philip Kuale's Committee to extract a commitment from members of the movement that they would guarantee peace in the university. It was clear from the events at the meetings of the committee that the university authority was not serious, but merely pandering to some instructions from the Babangida's regime.

After the events of the anti-SAP protest and the opening of the school, a new constitution was drafted for the University of Benin Students Union. The new constitution removed the student affairs officer as the chairman of the electoral committee, removed the issue of GPA, and practically placed the conduct of election in the hands of the students. On the basis of the new constitution, the movement had one of its oldest members Nosa Omo-Igbinowahia elected as the president of the students union, and weeded the union of the influences of the university authority.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **UNIVERSITY OF CALABAR – CHIDO ONUMAH**

I arrived University of Calabar, Cross Rivers State in late 1987 to start a first-year programme in Philosophy. It was quite interesting even though before I came to the University, I had been quite active in following political developments, reading newspaper articles about Nigeria's politics and books on political science, socialism, Marxism and all of that. So, by the time I arrived, my major aim was to link up with both lecturers and students within the university community who were disposed to the kind of things I saw or I thought were needed in the society then.

We had just come out of Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida era of 1986 Political Bureau activities. I keenly followed the Politburo intervention closely as a young person reading the Guardian and the way Babangida mismanaged or mishandled the Political Bureau Report which was supposed to create a new Nigeria. He had rejected the report and threw the country into further confusion. So that was the conversation in 1987 when I got to campus. The Babangida's transition was generating a lot of interest and it was in the midst of it, I arrived Calabar and wanted to quickly link up with teachers and students who were predisposed to my aspiration. The rejection of the Politburo report paved way for the initiation of what would later become Babangida's endless transition programme.

I was in Calabar for four years between 1987 and 1991. One of the earliest things I did was to look for a progressive organization and I quickly found one known as Movement for Progressive Nigeria (MPN). It was the core of the left-leaning students' movement on campus. They had very active cell at the University. By that time, University of Calabar was really known for students activism, President of the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) Chris Mamah was from UNICAL. He was a product of the Movement for Progressive Nigeria. After the 1978 Alli Must Go crisis, government banned the former student union known as the National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS). That union reincarnated as NANS and University of Calabar produced the first President. In fact, talking about history of the whole Alli Must Go crisis, I must say that it had its origin in Uniben and part

of it from the University of Calabar. It started the protest and it spread across the rest of the country.

So, it was in the middle of all that I arrived Calabar and joined the group. I also joined the campus press. In fact, my first week at the University I just visited the campus press club area and I saw different campus publications and I liked a particular one called the Echo Press. There were a number of them like Premier Press, Peoples Press, Echo Press etc. Because in those days, there were no phones on campus, so I looked for the details of the Editor-in-Chief of the publication. He was a final year student of the Department of Philosophy. I went to him and submitted an article. He read the article and really liked it. He published it and was asking if I had a background in journalism. He thought I was a professional journalist. He asked where I had worked as a journalist, but I told him I was not a professional journalist and never worked as one before I came into the university. Immediately that same week, he came back to me and said since he was in final year and busy with his project with little or no extra time, could I deputize for him as acting Editor-in-Chief pending when he would finish.

This, of course was the first time, it was a history making incident because the Editor-in-Chief was usually a final year or third year student. But here I was, even though I was not particularly young since I was 20 or 21 years, I was a year one student and was given this task. What it meant for me was that almost instantly I was able to turn that club into a something. It became revolutionary and different from other press clubs because here I was, quite conscious politically more than I was, when I came in. I applied all my political education, learning and experience over the years acquired before coming into the campus. By the following year when I was in my 200 level and the Editor-in-Chief was leaving, I became the substantive Editor-in-Chief. This was another history making occurrence because I was not even in 200 level proper before I became the substantive Editor-in-Chief. It was at the end of my year one when the Editor-in-Chief was leaving that the mantle of Editor-in-Chief proper fell on me, though we had to wait till the beginning of new academic session before I fully took charge after the Board and Management of Press Club had ratified the appointment.

So the press contributed a lot to the development in terms of our approach and attitude and how we responded to campus politics. We really expanded the conversation about the issues, things that people were not used to, like gender issues. We tried to promote issues of protection for female students on campus, draw attention to what the authorities were doing that were not right. Importantly, another press picked up from there which started focusing on national politics, taking on Babangida and his cohorts, what was going on with respect to the transition. Sometimes, we culled articles from the Guardian and republish same for students to read. We helped to develop the culture of reading and active participation of students on campus. The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) riot of 1989 was really brutal. The Gideon Orkar coup of 1991, students mobilized and we almost got killed during the Orkar coup. Of course the 1989 anti-SAP riot led to the closure of University of Calabar. We mobilized students from the South-South part of the country to take active part. I was also out of the campus and joined colleagues from the University of Benin to stage the massive demonstration that cut off the link between Lagos and South South, South-East parts of the country. I think it was during Professor Grace Alele Williams' time as the Vice Chancellor of Uniben.

Specifically, the Orkar coup, I could remember vividly April 22, 1990 or so. I was heading to Uniben. Briefly let me give this background by saying that with the help of the Movement for Progressive Nigeria, we had reformed campus politics because by the time I was admitted, there was embargo on campus unionism so one of earliest things we did, using the platform of the Movement for Progressive Nigeria and the press, because there was no students unionism on campus, the Press under the aegis of the National Union of Campus Journalist was vibrant. The National Union of Campus Journalist was the umbrella union of all the Press Clubs on campuses. Though UNICAL did not have a department of mass communications in my time, so it was mostly students in English Department that populated the Press Club because English was the closest to Mass Communications but then I was in Philosophy and some of the students in Political Science formed the core of this Journalism association. So when they did election, I was elected Vice President of the National Union of Campus Journalists.

This gave me additional leverage and then by 1989 we had a convention in Ile Ife where I emerged one of the four Vice Presidents of the National Union of Campus Journalists. Opeyemi Bamidele who is now a Senator was the President of the National Union of Campus Journalists. He was then a Law student at the University of Benin. That was why Uniben was the hub of the SAP riot of 1989. Onyeisi Chiemekwe, Ogaga Ifowodo, Luke Aghananwu (General Secretary of NANS) were all there. The four Vice Presidents had specific portfolios and I was Vice President (Special Duty). So in 1989 after the convention in Ife, I came back to Calabar but before then we had been able to mobilize students using the National Union of Campus Journalists to bring back students unionism on campus. So we pushed the University authority to lift the embargo on campus politics, so there were a lot of activities and people wanted to get involved but at the same time, the school authority wanted to control the process. So, we succeeded in bringing back campus unionism and were set for election. As typical of the leadership of the University as at that time, like the politicians do outside, they wanted to manipulate the process by being in charge. When we started pushing, the school banned me from contesting the election.

My story is like going back and forth. Before the election by the time I moved to year two, one of the major things I tried to do was also groom people coming after us. The likes of Sam Amadi (now Dr.) who had come in to study law, Isaac Osuoka now a lecturer in Canada, they came in following us. So we deliberately went to recruit these students as JAMBites as they were being admitted into the university. We were focused on recruiting young boys who would learn from us or whom we anticipated would fill in the gap by the time we left the university. We introduced them to the campus press and we were going from class to class to talk to them creating awareness about the existence of the campus press and anyone who could write was free to join us.

Because the Movement for Progressive Nigeria was more of a clandestine organization as it operated underground using cadres, we did not use it to woo students but rather the National Union of Campus Journalists (NUCJ). So once we got boys and girls interested in NUCJ we started talking to them about campus politics. Those ones who showed further interest, we started talking

to them about Movement for Progressive Nigeria and then we recruited them. We had this weekly forum. Richard Mama, now a poet and publisher was leading the Movement for Progressive Nigeria. He handed over to me when he left in 1990. Some of the things I did at the level of the Movement was reading Marxist literatures, having sessions, learning and teaching younger people. It was mostly political education, we tried to educate ourselves. We also had sessions, reviewing happenings on campus, events at the national level, taking a position and linking with the national students' movement. So we started by 1989/90, there was going to be election on campus. The year I got admission into University of Calabar was the year Akwa Ibom State was created by Babangida's regime. So there was so much tension when we got to Calabar because once Akwa Ibom was created, a lot of civil servants, administrators from the defunct Cross Rivers State who were of Akwa Ibom origin started moving out. Apart from the Vice Chancellor, Charles Effiong; a Professor of Medicine from Cross Rivers, leadership of the University then, were largely made up of Akwa Ibomites. The Registrar; one Mr. Akpan, more than half of the Deans of Faculty, Chief Librarian etc. were all from Akwa Ibom. It did not go down well with people from Cross Rivers. The Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC) was from Imo State, not just from Imo but from my village Mbieri in Mbitoli Local Government Area. The Deputy Vice Chancellor was Prof. Emenyonu who is currently somewhere in Michigan, United States of America. He is a Professor of Literature. He was the Deputy Vice Chancellor of the University.

I did not know how they conspired. They went and had a meeting at the DVC's residence, with students who were opposed to us. They banned some students like Sam Amadi whom we wanted to contest for the Secretary of the Union because he was our own cadre from the Movement for Progressive Nigeria. He was banned and we went to court seeking for court order to nullify the ban. Somehow, the matter could not proceed in court as we resorted to settling out of court. The school had also banned me from contesting and then created all kind of ugly situations. The immediate past Nigerian Ambassador to Netherlands; Ngoffa Orji was then the President of the National Union of Campus Journalists. We planned to make him President. It was deliberate as we had planned to use the platform of NUCJ to contest the election. I

accepted to be his Vice President operating under him. That way the union would not be seen as another radical group. Ngoffa was just a student and was not part of the radical left but was very progressive and active in the student union movement.

What happened was that the school planned (this was in 1989 when I was already the NANS Vice President) or conspired, although I could not really find out how it originated. The school called about 20 students together and met at the DVC's residence where they shared official positions excluding Akwa Ibom students completely. So as I said, this was two years after the creation of Akwa Ibom State and this was going to be like, taking the only industry from Akwa Ibom. University of Calabar was big and the only institution or industry then. We used to tease the people of the old Cross Rivers with it. So the UNICAL authorities wanted to get rid of many Akwa Ibom people on campus as much as possible in terms of the administration because there was also fear that a very popular Akwa Ibom student was going to run for the President.

It was like a nightmare for the authorities as they were still trying to rid the university administration of Akwa Ibom citizens, now they were being faced with the challenge of a popular Akwa Ibom student coming up for student union election as President. So they held this clandestine meeting where they shared the positions, about eight or ten in student union government. So they gave Cross Rivers the President and the South East because constitutionally, the position of Vice President was reserved for woman, so a female from the South East got the Vice President position. They shared the other positions. My friend Ngoffa got a position, I think Public Relations Officer which was zoned to Rivers State but he rejected it. They shared the positions according to the people or state they wanted in the administration.

When they came back from the meeting, the guy who had also been penciled as Speaker of the Student Union Government; an Ibo guy was now teasing me that we thought we could control the happenings on campus. I did not know that meeting had held but this guy was like it was a done deal and we would get our people to win. We would do everything. I said okay, let us see

now. We were doing our own plan because they had already stopped our own people from coming in with the rules they put in place. So, we were now re-strategizing and then what we did was to support a candidate. We tried to prop up some very conservative candidates but we also did not want to lose completely. So, we put year two or three English student, Nosa. Interestingly his mother was from Cross Rivers but his father was a police officer from Edo State. I think he grew up outside Calabar but came to Calabar for his university education. So he could not speak the Efik language as they would want it to be. So they identified him and said, this guy did not know how to speak Efik, that he was not an authentic Efik, only his mother was an Efik.

What happened was that this Ngoffa Orji told his friend and class mate one Aniette Ekong, who was close to me even though he was not a member of the Movement for Progressive Nigeria but a good writer as an English student in year two or three what had happened. Aniette had come to perch with me in my room. According to what Aniette disclosed to me about what Ngoffa told him, I could not believe it. Aniette was from Akwa Ibom State and immediately I recalled same in relation to what he told me, my mind quickly went into over-drive and I said, these people want to destroy this campus. We have to stop them in their track. I said to him, are you telling me the truth, Aniette replied in the positive and insisted that I could go and find out from Ngoffa. We immediately left my room for Ngoffa's room where he confirmed the story to be true. He said, I know you, do not say anything about this to anybody. If anybody hears it or it goes public, I am going to deny that I told you. I said okay. We left him. Aniette and I walked back to my room and as we discussed along, we said we could not leave things like that but Aniete asked what did I think we could do?

I said we should issue a press statement. So we went back. Aniette was a scribe in our political movement. In two minutes, he could write a presidential speech. So we went back to my room, those were the days of lack of computer, we sat down. It was in the afternoon when our mates were in the lecture halls studying or receiving lectures but here we were, denying ourselves of lectures or studying like others but battling with the politics on campus. Aniette sat down and I started dictating for him. In about twenty minutes, he had written

three foolscap sheets of what happened in the meeting including the names of the twenty - three people who participated. He was nervous but I was not. We could not meet on campus because of how sensitive the topic was. We did not want it to leak, so we went to town with the draft material. That was the days of cycle-styling machine with stencil.

We went to town with our own feeding money, typed it, corrected it and printed same on NANS letterhead. I had collected the letterheads during one of NANS meetings at Ife or Uniben. The idea was to enable us use it to disseminate any information that has to do with Nigerian students in our zone. It was only the President and Vice Presidents who had the right to use NANS letterheads on communications that had to do with students. There was no phone on campus for us to use at that time. It was interesting that even without phone in those days, students promptly responded to invitations to meeting both intra campus or in other campuses even if it was Maiduguri or any other far distant campuses. We could travel in trucks or trailers by that time.

So, we typed the letter, I signed with my name and we printed several copies on NANS letterhead. We packed same in a plastic bag, then bought starch. When we were coming back, it was about 7pm with darkness looming everywhere. The University of Calabar was fenced round and there was a small gate to exit to town so we passed through that gate. There was no security at the small gate but the main gate had security manning it. We did not pass through there. What we did was to create some space near the small gate and dumped the plastic bag there. We went into campus to sleep. Around midnight we woke up and went back to the gate, packed the materials with the starch and came in to start pasting. Even though we were four occupants in my room, none of my roommates knew what was happening. We made the starch and set out to paste about 3am, by then everywhere was dark even though some students were still moving about from night study in the lecture halls. We saw them but they did not know our mission.

We planned that it was better to go to the main campus and paste the materials there and on our way back, we could paste in other places and hostel when

we returned them. So around 3am, we went into the main campus with a bag pretending as if we were going to read. We were dodging security men. We eventually commenced pasting from the Vice Chancellors office, pasted in Philosophy and English Departments, Faculty of Arts, Library, Sports arena and everywhere. We were walking round campus for almost two hours. By the time we finished about 5am, Man O'War boys had started their usual show of force and the noise that went with it. We pasted near the press club, the boys hostel and other places.

The way UNICAL was constructed, the three major hostels for boys, Halls 4, 5 & 6 were in one quadrangle which made it convenient for thousands of students to assemble in one place at any time they were called out. About 5am, we had retired. We came back to our rooms, took our bath and slept off. About 8am, people were banging on my door, saying school had closed down. People woke up and read the pasted message and information promptly got to the VC, DVC, and the military administrators of Cross Rivers and Akwa Ibom States. As early as 9am the Governor of Akwa Ibom arrived Calabar to meet with his counterpart in Calabar to discuss the issue. Because they did not know the implication of the message, so they were forced to a hold security meeting.

As early as 9am, the VC had also alerted the Obong of Calabar. They had sent a school vehicle to fetch my senior cousin who was like an uncle to me from Owerri. He was actually my first cousin but because of his age, almost like my father, I used to call him uncle. He is late now. Interestingly, himself and Prof. Emenyonu were school mates at the University of Nigeria. They graduated in 1966. Meanwhile they had reported in Radio news bulletin in Imo Broadcasting Corporation that one Chido Onuma had written a petition seeking to destroy the most high ranking academic from my village of Mbieri, Prof. Emenyonu. The news was all over the place. The Cross State radio similarly had story painting me in bad colours, that I was attempting to destroy the university. The school authorities met immediately with a decision to shut down the campus with a resolution that they were going to expel me from the university.

That was the resolution. Then they sent an official vehicle to Owerri to bring my uncle to Calabar. So we woke up and I learnt of all of this, I was so tired. We had not eaten essentially because we had spent all money on typing and printing of the circular. It was so expensive because it was like an emergency. I remember we had to pay more because we needed to get the document ready that evening. The lady we engaged to type was complaining of working beyond her normal closing time, insisting we should pay her more to stay and finish the typing. While the typing was going on, we had to approach and beg the cycle-styling machine operator to stay late to print for us. There, we spent all our feeding money to achieve all this, and were financially broke.

After the initial thing, some students suggested I should disappear from campus, but I could not easily agree. Ngoffa refused to see me because he had earlier warned me not to implicate him in any way since I was acting entirely on my own. So we were thinking, how could we deal with the situation? Some of the boys who attended the meeting came to me. They said, this one you have ended your life. You used to do things before and get away with it, but this one you are gone. I was not even bothered. I went back to sleep without thinking about the implication of my action. About 1pm, somebody came and woke me up and said, your uncle is here. I said uncle from where? When I stepped out, I saw the DVC's official vehicle. The DVC Prof. Emenyonu had come with his driver and my uncle sitting at the back. Immediately he saw me, he opened one door and asked me to come inside.

He asked me, what was going on, that the whole village of Mbieri was awash with ugly news about me. Luckily my parents were in Lagos and that was the era of no phone and no internet, so they did not hear anything immediately. He told me that news had it that I went and collected money from Akwa Ibom people and they took me to a shrine to swear that I would help them destroy the University of Calabar, so that Calabar people would not continue their domination of other tribes in the University. My first response to him was, uncle you know me. I am like a son to you. He had a daughter of almost same age with me. So most holidays, while I was in the secondary school, my dad would send me to the village to spend the holidays with them, because he was principal of a secondary school. He would teach us English. He studied

English, Literature, Writing at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. I said uncle you know me, that even though I was young, I had a mind of my own. He interjected and said do not say thing, I know what happened. I had told them that my nephew would never do any such thing as they had believed, so keep your cool. That was why I insisted in coming to Calabar to see you personally. But I told them you would not do any such thing as alleged.

I said as I am talking to you now, I have not eaten anything. It was due to hunger I went to sleep; otherwise I ought to be in the lecture room even though class had ended because of the confusion. When we woke up that morning, people were standing in batches discussing among themselves, the outcome of the circular. Some people had ripped off the circular particularly around the hostel area where we pasted a lot on the notice board, press club. The security agents of the University were going round, tearing away the pasted copies and washing off the boards so that people could no longer read but by then, some students had removed some copies to make photo copies or gone to town with same. So people were busy. A lot of people heard about it but did not get the details. Typical of students of those day; you could see about ten students reading one copy of the statement.

After our discussion, my uncle gave me some money to eat before he left. That was the beginning of what turned out to be more than one year of ordeal for me. Interestingly, when the university resolved that I was going to be expelled, the chairperson or so of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), University of Calabar chapter, Prof. Bene Madunagu of Biological Sciences or so (wife of Dr. Edwin Madunagu) insisted on due process because she was like an advisor to the Movement for Progressive Nigeria and each time, Dr. Madunagu came to Calabar, my friends and I would go to his house and he would give us books, talked to us. Interestingly, Bene is originally from Akwa Ibom and there was Prof. Eskor Tuoyo, so Bene stood her ground and said even if they were going to expel me, due process must be followed. They wanted to write a letter of my expulsion that same day but Bene resisted it. The security people and university authorities denied it that there was such meeting as they believed that all the students who participated were going to say that there was no such meeting. So they denied but Bene insisted, using

ASUU leverage to argue that if there was going to be expulsion, due process must be followed. That was what saved me and gave me a temporary relief. So immediately, they set up a committee to try me. For two semesters, every time the committee would send me letter to appear before it. I would go there, sat down for hours and they would not attend to me even when other people would be testifying on other issues, they would invite me to come sit at the reception. They just wasted my time, and at the same time I would not be in class. This thing lasted for a whole year.

Much of my third year, I spent it going to Panel but luckily at the end of the day, the 23<sup>rd</sup> person was Ngoffa Orji. Throughout the period, he refused to talk to me. He was the last person to testify. The 22 students, who had come before him, all said one thing that there was never a meeting as alleged, that the purported meeting was a figment of my own imagination and so on. I was also invited the same day Ngoffa was to testify. The Panel members wanted me to come and defend my allegation about the meeting. I was sitting at the reception when Ngoffa passed me and did not say anything. He pretended as if he never saw me. Before this time, Aniette my friend who was much closer to Ngoffa had started making overtures to see if Ngoffa could give me soft landing since he seemed more reasonable than all the other 22 students who in any case were not my friends.

I must however say that while I was honouring the Panel's invitation, I had made up my mind to face the consequence of my action, concluding in me that if eventually I was rusticated, I would simply find a way to leave Nigeria to pursue my studies overseas. So I was not really disturbed with what would be the outcome. Apart from this, because I had read many books and the life struggle of many nationalists like Anthony Enahoro who became an Editor at a very young age even without attending a university, I tried to console myself and concluded that no hope was lost as I could still be somebody after the expulsion. So I sat there at the reception of the Panel's meeting place when Ngoffa walked past me. He walked in, to face the panelists who were about six in number, all professors and elderly persons who knew the truth but were poised on standing truth on its head. After about an hour or so, Ngoffa walked out. He did not talk to me and I pretended too that I did

not see him. Few minutes later, the panel members walked past me one after the other without saying a word to me. They were so mean. They did not call me to exonerate me. They just walked out. That was how I sat there till 4pm when the school was about to close for the day. I was tired of sitting and later I asked the secretary at the reception if the Panelists were coming back. I could not really remember her response and I just left. The following day, I went to Prof. Bene Madunagu to give her update because each day I went to the panel, I usually went to give her update. She would encourage me and said do not worry. She asked me to give her the truth and I narrated everything I got from my friend concerning the meeting. She asked me to ignore them that Ngoffa confessed to the panel that every single thing I wrote on the controversial statement was the truth. That one of the panelists hinted her about it. The panel in the face of this, naturally dissolved itself and the matter ended there without me being expelled.

So, they opened the election up for every student to participate and then we had the election. Of course, the politics of the election and few other things happened. So many things happened. Several times, I was arrested by the DSS and detained in their office. One of such occasions, when I was being released, they gave me N20 note which was the highest denomination and I rejected. They would persuade me to take but I retorted that if I should collect the money from them and my colleagues got to know about it, they would kill me. The Director would ask, who would tell your colleagues and how would they know we gave you money. But I would reject it telling them that I had a mind of my own.

The whole student unionism episode was an interesting thing. The period was quite interesting. The student unionism at UNICAL was not just unionism but a militant one. We had the press club, the student union that though, we did not control. We had a student parliament where we had a few of our members who would always stand up to the school authorities and this conservative leadership of the student union that was in place that was doing the bidding of the school leadership. If they wanted to take any action, they would first consult the Dean of the Students Affairs to take permission or ask for advice. However, I must confess that in a way we helped to install the student union

government in the sense that we wanted to break the back of the school authorities in terms of who they wanted after that Emenyonu imbroglio. We now put this completely conservative guy who had no interest in student politics or activism and then, he entered that place and just like typical Nigerian politician, the trappings of office overwhelmed him. He had a 504 salon car to himself, a full room to himself with a queen size bed while other students were four in a room. He had a refrigerator, television and full complement of other things. There was always party with girls. He had a girl friend who would bring her own friends.

The guy just emerged like some green horn who was lucky as power was thrown on him. The guy went and sewed many traditional dresses, *agbada* and others during campaign. By the time he won the election, he went and got more of such dresses. Every day he was wearing *agbada* and would sit at the owner's corner on the back seat of the car with his girlfriend who was more of a typical Nigerian First Lady. He was always driven around by his driver accompanied by a student who was serving as his Personal Assistant. During this time of his tenure, nothing was happening in terms of the normal student union activities. He was just having some good time, enjoying himself as he was not interested in positive student unionism. The school was deteriorating. It was in the midst of this thing that the National Union of Campus Journalists took over as the opposition party. It was an interesting part of UNICAL when I was there. The Union of Campus Journalists was so powerful that it stood in the gap when there was no student union government (SUG). Even when there was SUG but was not doing anything, the NUCJ had stood in place. But of a truth, it was getting the ideological and moral backing of the Movement for Progressive Nigeria which was not an officially registered association. So we could not formally make noise or come to the open. Even the quarrel among fraternities, the different cult groups which were on campus, the NUCJ was able to mediate by standing as a buffer, when they were having issues. The NUCJ was a very neutral and progressive and clear-headed association. So, it was the union that took charge when all these crazy things were happening after the election.

## **The Long Snake Saga**

We had started writing about over grown bush around the hostel. Grasses had over grown everywhere. Snakes and other dangerous species were all over the place. The situation was so bad that even those students living in ground floor of the hostel could hardly see outside due to over grown weeds. So, we wrote the school complaining to them, but they were not doing anything for weeks. So, one evening, a Sunday I guess, I was taking a nap when I heard some commotion outside within the quadrangle middle of which was like half of a football field. Since the three main male hostels were all linked to the quadrangle, it was easy for the hostel residents to assemble spontaneously once alarm was raised.

On that fateful day once the alarm was raised, hundreds of boys gathered at the quadrangle. There was this long snake which was killed in Hall C. It was a massive and full-length snake measuring about six feet. The snake had crept into the grass and was probably looking for a way to creep into the hall when some boys who were resting and playing scrabble saw it and quickly killed it. Immediately I came out, due to my own orientation as crisis manager and peculiar situation on campus, I quickly resolved to take advantage of the situation. So I quickly rushed to the place and told students to wait. I was already popular on campus due to the student union election clandestine meeting incident. Students had begun to respect me, so when I told them to wait and bring the snake for me to see, they listened. The snake was already killed and it was about to be butchered and scattered but the moment I asked them to wait, they brought it to me.

They brought it to the circle and I addressed the students saying you guys have an opportunity now, let us not waste it. Then, they asked what do we do? I said let us take the snake to the Vice Chancellor's house. They could not understand the underlining intention even though they had shouted yaaa, let's take it there. I told them to calm down, that we had been telling the school authority to clear the bush but they never bothered. So, we entered one of the kiosks within the hostel environment and bought a big size 'Ghana Must Go' bag. Due to the big massive nature of the snake, we had to force it into the

bag, called a commercial motor cyclist to help us. The bag was carried onto the motor cycle and headed out to the Vice Chancellor’s residence located out the campus. The VC was supposed to live on campus but probably due to the incessant student crisis, he chose to reside outside.

We got to the VC’s residence and on arrival; the security guards who were there already with the police were quite uncomfortable with our presence. Four commercial motorcyclists had brought some of us. When we alighted from the motor cycles, leaving the snake on top of the motorcycle without the rider knowing what was contained; I went straight to the gate and announced to the security guards that we needed to see the Vice Chancellor. We were told the VC was not at home. They asked our mission but we declined and only told them that our mission would only be disclosed when we saw the VC. We tried to cause commotion, doing some *shakara* if they would not let us in, but the police threatened us with tear gas.

I told my colleagues that we should not proceed further since our number was about eight and if we caused crisis, the police and security men present there, would overwhelm us. Tactically, we had to withdraw after I had sufficiently convinced my colleagues that it would be dangerous to force our way into the residence. We returned to campus with the snake bag and on arrival, the motor cyclist disappeared leaving me with the snake bag which I eventually carried to the Student Union President’s room. On getting there, he asked, Chido what is it? I said Oga, since we elected you as President; you had never done anything for us. If you mess with this one, we will impeach you. He said what happened? I replied that I needed to put the bag inside his freezer for preservation.

I told him, you are the student union president and a big snake was killed in hall of residence and you never bothered to show concern. By that time, there was much hatred for the guy by students. He could not even come out to address the students. As I told him that I wanted to put the bag into the freezer till the next morning, he never asked what was inside even as I insisted that the bag must not be opened. However, I was convinced that he was aware that the content of the bag was snake but he could not decipher

what we planned to do with it. So, we put the snake inside the freezer and by the next day, it had gotten frozen seriously. It became heavier and that very morning was the convocation ceremony of graduating medical students. The school used to pay premium attention to the graduation of medical students as many important dignitaries such as the Obong of Calabar were usually in attendance.

This very graduation ceremony had attracted the likes of the Military governors of Cross Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Pro Chancellor of the University and other eminent personalities. As early as 7am, I had dressed up in my room wearing my jean trousers, T-Shirt and proceeded to the SUG President's room to fetch the snake bag. One of my colleagues and I, went together to collect the snake. We hired a commercial motor-cycle to carry the snake bag to the convocation venue – the arts theatre where the performing arts students usually had their play. The university was later to build a more befitting convocation arena. The art theatre could take up to 200 guests and it was a beautiful structure. By the time, we reached there, decoration work had already been completed. Dignitaries had started arriving and one could only enter with a very well-designed invitation card. It was not an open ceremony for all comers. It was a good thing, we went early. Immediately we got there, I carried the bag and the security guard at the entrance had mistaken us as one of the vendors contracted to provide services at the event, and so never bothered to ascertain what we carried in the bag. The moral lesson behind this whole episode was to demonstrate how tactical one could be and not just acting on the spur of the moment. One has to be dedicated to the cause, understanding the nuances, know how to be tactical, when to withdraw and so on. So we moved in there like vendors and put our bag by one corner inside and were watching as people entered. By the time the event was about to commence with the governor already arrived or about to arrive, the VC was waiting for everybody to be seated before he could lead the procession from his office which was about 100 metres to the venue of the event.

By that time, the security men had ordered out everyone who was not supposed to be at the venue of the convocation like the service providers soon as they completed their assignment. It remained only my colleague and I. A security

guard came to us and said we should go because the VC was coming. I said we want to send something to the VC. He told us that the VC already dressed, was coming for a big event and we could not see him. There and then, I unzipped the bag containing the snake. The guy was shocked and jumped as he saw the snake already in a defreeze situation. He wanted to make noise, but I told him to keep calm if he did not want us to disrupt the occasion. The story is like a make belief movie kind of story. It is quite unbelievable but it happened. That I eventually graduated from the University of Calabar was a miracle.

As the security guy was still worried and about to raise alarm over the snake in the bag, I cautioned him warning that if he made any such move, we would take the snake to the front area of the event venue where the VIPs would seat. This kind of boldness I must say, no longer exists in our campuses in contemporary time when the university authorities would come up with all kind of obnoxious acts against the students populace and yet, the students would take it hook line and sinker. I could remember when there was power outage in UNICAL in our time during examination and the generator was supposed to automatically switch on but for minutes, it never did. Students protested around midnight and vandalized the generator house and many students who were already financially broke used the opportunity of the crisis to vandalize the students' canteen and stole yam, stew, beans and other food items already prepared against the next morning.

In the process of vandalizing the canteen, many of the students sustained serious bodily injuries and the following morning, the university authority declared state of emergency and they were looking for me. The security people on campus came and picked me up and I told them, I knew nothing about it and that I could not have participated in such despicable act of vandalizing the generator house and the food canteens. I must say that if one would understand the dynamics of students, he should be above board. So, I was under pressure to belong to one of the fraternities on campus. A lot of my friends literally wanted me to belong but I was very careful not to belong because if I had joined one group, others in different camps would be after me. Because of my neutrality, if anything happened on campus, the different

fraternities like Pyrate, Buccaneer, Black Axe, KKK and so on would come to me. Till today, a lot of my friends did not know where I belong because I was always hanging out with many of them in different camps, ate and dined with them. When they come to me for advice, I would always tell them to do it this way or that way. So, nobody knew where I belonged.

This matter of not belonging, there was a day we wanted to protest. My friend Aniette and I went to town again to collect used tyres which we brought and kept them behind the campus. Around 2am, we woke up, collected the tyres, went and made burn fire with them on the main express in the campus. So, teachers could not come out. Visitors and other persons could not go to lecturers' hostel. So, I did not know what happened, either somebody saw us or assumed that nobody else could do this crazy thing except me, about 5am I heard a bang on my door. It was Man O' War boys. They dragged me out while the fire was still on and started beating me. They took me out of the hostel and started dragging me on the floor to the security in the main campus which was almost 500 metres away. Either one of the students coming back from early morning study saw them dragging me, immediately he got into the hostel (Hall 4) he informed my classmate; Austin, we used to call him Cannon of the Movement. He was a very vibrant guy. As soon as he hinted Austin that Man O' War had kidnapped Chido, Austin went and pressed the alarm and immediately as usual over 4000 students jumped out from their bed early morning. He addressed them; informing that he learnt Man O' War had dragged me to the main campus.

In a jiffy, the students went after the Man O' War people and by the time they got close to them, we were close to the school security. There used to be a burial ground around there. Over a thousand students descended on the Man O' War and they abandoned me and fled. The students carried me back to our hostel with chanting of songs "no more Man O' War, no more Man O' War." The students ensured Man O' War did not operate on campus until after one year when they eventually came to apologise to me. The students anger against Man O' War boys was made worse by the fact that prior to my abduction, they had formed the habit of disturbing students with their noise at night and early mornings when people were asleep. I brought in, this issue of Man O' War to show the solidarity and spirit of camaraderie that used to

exist on campuses in those days.

Back to the incident of vandalism and injury to students, those who were injured were quickly taken to hospital and I could not know how the security got to know that they were taken to the University of Calabar Teaching Hospital. That was where they were all arrested and interrogated to explain how and where they got their injuries. Some were even chained to their hospital beds to ensure that they did not escape. Those arrested in the hospital eventually implicated others involved in the vandalism. But in all of this, even though I did not participate nor sustain any injury as evidence of participation, I was the principal target for the school authority. They checked my hostel, but they could not find garri, yam, stew or any of the stolen food items. That was how I became free from their accusation of being part of the vandals. Because I was the prime target in every crisis, I really had to be above board to ensure I did not easily fall into the trap.

This came and gone as in some other cases. Back to the snake episode, when the security saw the snake, he wanted to run but I told him not to run, that if he said anything, I would take the snake out. He said okay and asked me what we wanted to do. I told him, we would not say anything but ready to leave. He offered not to say anything. Meanwhile, his head was working on over-drive as I did not tell him; we would go to the VC's office because if I did, he would have alerted them. I had already secured his commitment that he was not going to say anything. I was also hoping that he would not say anything and if we left there, the security would not come after us and possibly see the snake. I just told him, I would respect you and leave but ensured he would not say anything because if he did, I would certainly cause trouble.

So we carried our snake bag and marched out quietly. We were about five of us and while two of us were inside, the other three were waiting outside. We carried the snake bag with two persons holding each side of the snake bag. By the time we arrived at the VC's office, people were astonished and frightened with questions coming from several of them at the same time asking why are you carrying the bag. They knew me and were wondering what must have been the matter. I simply told them that I wanted to see the VC. They replied

that I could not see the VC since he was getting ready for the convocation. As I peeped, I saw somebody opening the VC's office door to alert him that I was there with some students. As I peeped, I could see the VC being decorated with the convocation gown and other ceremonial accoutrement.

The person came out and told me that the VC said he would not see me, that he was busy. As the person who brought the message was about to go back into the office, I diplomatically opened the bag for him to see the snake. I then left a message with him, that he should tell the VC that we had just killed the snake in our hostel area. Meanwhile, I guess the VC was told that we had visited his residence the previous day but obviously did not know why we came. As I opened the snake bag, the VC's message bearer took a glimpse and saw the already de-frozen snake. I repeated my message that he should tell VC that we killed the snake in our hostel area the previous day and had wanted to show him.

In a jiffy and having smelt something fishy, the security men started gathering around to know what was amiss. They went in to tell VC and I could hear him shouting on top of his voice that if he died, they should hold me responsible for his death. I heard him threatening that "Chido want to kill me, but before I die I would make sure you do not graduate from this school." He said so many things out of anger. So some staff of the school in the VC's office including the Registrar came out to find out from me what the problem was. I told them that we had merely come to show him the snake we killed in our hall of residence that we would have dropped it at the convocation arena for people to see, but out of respect we chose to come straight to the VC's office for him to see. As the security officials were threatening to possibly manhandle or intimidate us, we quickly beckoned on other students and in a few minutes over 50 students joined us in front of the VC's office. I made it clear to the security staff that if the VC was not ready to see us, we would be left with no choice but to take the snake to the convocation venue. On hearing this, they quickly went and told the VC who incidentally was under pressure as time was running late for the occasion. The procession was about to begin. They were already holding copies of the event brochure and other things. Some of the officials asked us what we really wanted. We told them

that we did not want anything but commitment of the school to clear the bush that surrounded our hostel.

Someone came back to tell us that the VC promised to attend to our need after the event. We said no, insisting that we wanted the commitment immediately. There and then, before we left the place, they issued us a letter that the University's Director of Works should take immediate action. It was contained in a two-paragraph letter which was handed over to me. I collected the letter and carried the snake bag and immediately went to the Director of Works office to give him the letter. He collected it and promised that by the next day, his staff would embark on the clearing. We countered him and warned that he should direct his people immediately to commence the clearing that same day and not the next day if he wanted peace. Not even after we had secured the VC's approval. I told him that we were in a state of emergency and we extracted the letter from the VC for action to commence immediately and not the next day. The work had to begin immediately and could possibly stretch to the next day. I told him, it was not a one-day job. So, he had no choice but to mobilize his people immediately.

They carried us in the Works Department vehicle and we drove straight to the hostel. So as students saw us and the Works Department workers alighted to begin the clearing, there was thunderous jubilation all over the place. We then brought out the sake from the bag and scattered it. There was wild jubilation. That was the power of unity and collaboration. We were united and fought for our right and got it.

### **The Orkar Coup**

It was April 22, 1990 when it happened. Babangida had become public enemy number one. People so hated him because of the pains they were going through as it was a year after the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was introduced. The introduction of SAP had precipitated massive protests across campuses in Nigeria. University of Calabar also participated and the school was closed down like others during that period. April 22, 1990 was a Sunday. I was heading to the University of Benin for NANS meeting. I left

the hostel about 6am carrying only small travelling bag. Immediately I left the hostel, a roommate woke up and turned on the radio. He had a coup broadcast being made by Major Gideon Orkar in which he talked about excising five northern states from the country. He rushed out and before I could board commercial motor cycle from the park near the hostel to town where I could board vehicle to Benin, my roommate had caught up with me. He said; *oh boy, there is trouble*. Come and listen to the broadcast about military coup and you are travelling. He told me that it was dangerous for me to travel on a day like. So I had to return with him to the hostel.

I could not go anywhere again, but kept listening to the coup broadcast and heard Orkar announcing repeatedly. As the broadcast kept coming, my brain was under pressure as I was worried about my journey whether to continue the journey or taking full charge of the situation on ground. After I stood for about 20 minutes, I just unpacked my bag, put my things away and I said to my friend; *oh boy, we have to respond*. Immediately about 6.30am I stepped out of my room, put on the hostel alarm bell. Spontaneously, boys gathered and I quickly announced that there was trouble, that Babangida had been overthrown. People were so excited. As more students joined the crowd, I addressed the crowd saying that we had to lend support to the new regime. Immediately, we rushed from our hostel about 300 meters away to the female hostel. There used to be main road where cars could take, but there was also a narrow “apian” way from the boys’ hostel. So we took the apian way and in less than five minutes, we were in the girls’ hostel. They had a bit of restriction. Since we could not go into the hostel due to the official restriction, soon as we arrived there, we started banging on their hostel window, telling them to come out that Babangida had been overthrown. By the time we walked from their window area to the main door, many of the girls had turned on their radio. Once they started hearing the broadcast, many of them trooped in their night gowns, pants etc. They did not mind to change or clean up. They just rushed out and immediately from there, the number of students increased. From there, we moved to Calabar Polytechnic which is now the Cross Rivers University of Science and Technology. On arrival there too, we started banging on their windows and in just about 45 minutes, thousands of students were on the street of Calabar. We started heading to the White

Market which was in the middle of the town and main express way leading to Calabar main town. It was called the Murtala Mohammed Way where Radio Nigeria was located. We gathered there. Bassey Ekpo Bassey (now late) who later became a prominent journalist and Chairman of Calabar Municipal Transition Committee, Babangida had put in place, addressed the students. Meanwhile, when we were coming, we saw some policemen removing their uniform changing to mufti. People were so scared; no soldiers on the street, nobody knew the true state of things. Students literally took over the street.

While more people were gathering in their thousands, in the vicinity of the White Market, I led a detachment of the students and started heading to the Radio house. I did not tell the students what we were going to do. My intention was to go to the radio house and make a broadcast in support of the coup plotters. Half way to the radio house amidst heavy sweating, that same guy Austin (Cannon Way) who had saved my life many times, started running towards my direction, shouting my name. He called me and said there was trouble that the coup had failed. He made me understand that Orkar's broadcast had stopped while General Sani Abacha was on air making broadcast. In a twinkle of an eye, the whole street was taken over by security personnel. There were soldiers everywhere. If we had arrived the radio station before the switch of broadcast to Abacha, we would probably have been shot or arrested and charged for being part of the coup. We were saved by the grace of God.

As soldiers' presence had overwhelmed the entire space, many students eventually could not escape. They were arrested, tortured and beaten mercilessly, both boys and girls. I managed to sneak out to return to the White Market side and dissolve the demonstration. Everybody had to quickly leave. The security agencies were still not satisfied, as they came back to school to hunt and look for students. So, we all had to go underground. They arrested Bassey Ekpo Bassey and he was imprisoned for a long time, up to six months or one year. By the time he was released, his eyes were already failing him. He had almost lost his sight. That was how bad things were. This was in 1990 and this came and passed.

We started mobilizing again. There was this big incident on campus which had to do with a Commissioner of Police, Maifa. I think a spoilt son of his was driving or was with some police men. I was out of campus, spending some days in Owerri when I heard on the local news that UNICAL had been closed, that students had gone on wild demonstration, burning and destroying things in the town. So, what happened was that, my roommate Victor was driving his brother's car and there was an accident involving Victor and the police officer's son. When the incident happened, either the police men accompanying him or he called them from the station, I could not really remember, came and beat Victor mercilessly. When I saw him, his two eyes were closed. He could not open the eyes. The eyes were swollen, to tell how badly he was beaten.

So by the time I heard the news, students had started protesting. I immediately cut short my vacation and went back to Calabar. Students had violently reacted, poised on burning down one police station and wanted to attack the town, but I tried to calm them down. It was a Volkswagen vehicle that the boy was driving. We managed to seize the vehicle and drove it into the campus and parked it near the quadrangle where students usually gathered. The car was badly pummeled by angry students until it flattened out. They named the mangled car "Maifa" as a reminder and it became a ritual for students who wanted to indulge in some funny mischief, to take stick or iron occasionally to beat the mangled Volkswagen as if it was a community bell.

One lesson derivable from the demonstration was the fact that UNICAL students could not be taken for granted in that town. It showed how critical the students were, in the scheme of things. The demonstration showed the spirit of solidarity because it was wrong for anyone to just arrest a student without giving him opportunity to explain his action or make amend and went ahead to beat the student to almost death. The police commissioner had to come with letter of apology to beg the Vice Chancellor. That incident brought about a sort of ban on the police not to come into the campus for anything. Within that period, any police man found in the campus was a target. For many months, the police commissioner had to make peace, took care of Victor's hospital bill.

Over time, all these skirmishes on campus showed us the power of students. It showed that if students could come together and act with one mind, their purpose could be achieved. I am not happy that in contemporary time, students on campus are so docile and complacent. These days, students are afraid to speak to their Vice Chancellors. Many of the Student Union Presidents in the campuses are mere stooge of the Vice Chancellors and would not bat an eyelid. In the presence of a vice chancellor. We need to go back to what it used to be in our days.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### UNIVERSITY OF JOS – CHOM BAGU

#### *Students' Power at the University of Jos*

Documentation of the history of student power has tended to concentrate on national student unions and associations. The heroic struggles of students at the individual universities have received very little attention. Student activists who have shouldered these struggles have often been treated as if they dropped from the sky, as it were. Their campus experiences, social background, the primary groups they belong to and their linkages to political and other organizations on campus and outside, have been neglected. This may account for the little insight into why Nigerian students were the last to fall to the repressive and manipulative politics of decades of military despotism. Indeed, individual campuses have been the arenas where all the major student struggles took place. It was here that leaders were identified and groomed and where students on the ground provided their support base. To fully understand the dynamics of students' power therefore we must look at how it was constructed at the campus level, providing a launching pad for national student politics. A heroic and healthy culture of student activism evolved at Jos which has seen the university provide three presidents of NANS, three general secretaries, two public relations officers, the only female NANS president, as well as two female presidents of the Unijos union.

The university opened the gates to its first 89 students in January 1972 as a campus of the University of Ibadan. Ahmadu Bello University, then the only university in the north, had refused to open a campus in Jos, despite a formal request by the then Benue/Plateau State Government. According to Chief Anthony Goyol (1996), this was done to discourage the 'Middle Belt' elite from thinking they could do without the north. It was in this circumstance that the Commissioner of Police, Joseph Gomwalk, the then military governor of the state, approached the opening ceremony, the Acting Principal, Professor E.A. Ayandele, announced policies that were to become major issues of contention. According to him:

*...the duty of a university is not to provide lodging for students or spend most of its time, resourcefulness as well as a substantial part of its funds that we*

*shall not be in a position to offer their successors this expensive privilege (Goyel 1996:139).*

Professor G.M. Edingon, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ibadan, in his own speech added another policy that has been the cause of eruptions. While the new campus, he said, was being established to end the regional disparity in educational development, both students and staff would be drawn from different parts of the country (Goyel 1996:140). This contradicted the intentions of the Governor of the Benue/Plateau state which were to expand the educational opportunities for the people of Governor had criticized the admission policies of the Universities of Ibadan and Lagos, which he considered discriminatory, despite both being federal institutions. This, he said, had informed the desire of other states to have their own universities in order to be able to cater for the educational needs of their own people (Goyel 1996:141).

In October 1975, the Federal Government announced the establishment of seven new universities including the University of Jos and Professor Gilbert Onuaguluchi was appointed its first Vice-Chancellor. Rather than to recruit staff from different areas, however, the new Vice-Chancellor relied heavily on people of Igbo origin in addition to a few foreign academics. There was a similar lopsidedness in the admission of students. By 1978, the tension created by this lack of balance broke into open confrontation. Dr. Chris Abashiya, the Deputy Registrar, challenged the Vice-Chancellor and the state government and other northern interests supported the challenge. Professor Onuaguluchi's quest for a second term as Vice-Chancellor was dead. Rather than to try to assuage the grievances of the so-called 'catchment area', the Federal Government appointed Professor Emmanuel Emovon from Edo as the new Vice-Chancellor. In response to the agitation by local interests, however, graduate assistants were recruited from the 'catchment area' and the tension subsided without necessarily coming to an end. A school of Remedial Studies was established to cater for students from the 'catchment area' that did not have the academic qualifications to be admitted into the university.

Since there were predominance of Igbo students in the university, naturally, they also dominated the student union. As more students from the catchment

area gained admission through the Remedial Programme', this domination was challenged. In the 1979/80 union elections, just a year after Onuaguluchi was removed, the first 'catchment area' student, Ninfel Nimiel, was elected union president. The sources do not agree on why this happened. Some claim that Ninfel was rigged into office by a Students' Affairs Department dominated by 'catchment area staff. Others think that it was an indication of the change in the student ratio due to the massive admissions under the Remedial Programme? It was only in 1985, 10 years after the university was established, that a 'catchment area' professor was appointed Vice-Chancellor in the person of Professor Ochapa Onazi. The appointment marked a turning point in the history of the institution. At the time of his appointment the university had become a cosmopolitan university, a microcosm of Nigeria, both in staff and students. However, a chauvinist faction had developed seeing it primarily as a Middle Belt institution and, at a later point, as a university that should be reserved for Plateau State indigenes. Onazi's three successors as Vice-Chancellors, Malum, Gomwalk and Mwangyvat, were all Plateau State indigenes.

However, as the regional tensions that saw the ouster of Onuaguluchi subsided, the pattern of recruitment of both staff and students became more balanced. There was no dominance of students from any particular area and the university paraded the best credentials also in terms of the spread of staff from all across Nigeria. Both staff and students were proud of the university being national in composition and cosmopolitan in outlook. While the associations of Plateau and Tiv students were more vocal on university issues, student union politics was open to students of all origins. The origins of the union presidents provide an indication that this was the case. They included Ninfel Nimiel from Plateau (1979/80), Reuben Chuga from Nassarawa (1980/81), Musa Yelwa from Bauchi (1981/82), Victor Lar from Plateau (1982/83), Charles Ekanem Eta and Mosun Ogunote from Cross River and Oyo respectively (1983/84). all three from Nassarawa, and Luka Dalang (1990/91) and Charles Oriaku (1993/94) from Plateau. Those who held NANS offices were Chris Abashi and Festus Okoye, president and secretary, from Nasarawa and Imo respectively (1982/83), Chom Bagu, PRO, from Plateau (1983/84), Victor Olisa, Vice President National Affairs, from Anambra (1984/85), Labaran Maku, PRO, from Nasarawa (1985/86), Mahmud Abdul (1988/89) and Comfort Idika

(1995/96), both presidents and from Edo.

The liberal environment that brought lecturers from far and near to the campus started to change in the late 1980s. From 1987 onwards the local branch of the academic staff union (ASUU) began to fractionalize. The situation was particularly bad in the Department of Sociology where regional scheming caused the resignation of Norma Perchamock and Professor Onoge who left the Department for the School of Post Graduate Studies. As the economic crisis continued, the situation among students and academics degenerated even further. The local ASUU branch broke into factions with indigenes confronting non-indigenes. As for the students, by the mid-1990s, it became difficult for those who were not from Plateau state to win elections for the presidency of the union.

The degeneration of campus politics was a direct response to the damaging effects of the Structural Adjustment Programme, which had virtually wiped out the middle class and forced a large number of academic staff, particularly foreigners, to depart. As academics struggled for survival, academic competence was thrown to the dogs and the competition for positions took ethnic and regional dimensions. Simultaneously, a campaign was launched by the Babangida government against radicals which was later reinforced by the collapse of the Soviet Union. The role of ideological groups, like the Movement for the Advancement of African Societies (MAAS), that had cultivated a radical and national outlook among students, gradually faded out due to harassment by state and university authorities, giving way to cultism. The university was opened to the influence of partisan politics, causing the end to students' power. *'A university on wheels'*

The physical location of the university in Jos was a source of conflict in itself. It first opened as a campus of the University of Ibadan on Murtala Mohammed Way and moved later to Bauchi Road with the plan to finally move to a Permanent Site on Bauchi Ring Road. While student hostels and staff quarters were built adjacent to what was expected to become the Permanent Site, that site never materialized. Onuaguluchi, the first Vice-Chancellor, operated from the Murtala Mohammed Way site, which had teaching and other educational

facilities and also accommodated male students. Female students were housed in a rented compound on Bank Road in town. It was during Emovon's tenure as Vice-Chancellor that the university moved the bulk of its facilities to the Bauchi Road Campus leaving only the Department of Continuing Education on the old one. While the Bank Road Hostel was retained, other satellite Hostels were acquired at Abdulsalami Street, Bauchi Road, and Rock Haven. The university also built the Naraguta, Village, and Abuja students' hostels on the Permanent Site. With academic facilities still at the Bauchi Road, Murtala Mohammed Way and the Medical School at Shere Hills, a substantial part of students' lives on campus was spent in buses. Other problems associated with a scattered set of rented hostels included the arrangement for students' feeding, the maintenance of joint conveniences, and the facilities for students' evening studies.

Much student agitation was therefore related to the failure to develop the Permanent Site. The university had very little to show for itself in terms of infrastructural development when compared to other federally funded universities. Professor Emovon was considered the greatest culprit in this respect. The students claimed that during his tenure "the university recorded no single achievement infrastructurally"? Apart from inadequate teaching facilities and poor accommodation, the University Library remained under construction. The authorities claimed that the development of the Permanent Site was hindered by lack of funds and the hostility of the host communities, the students refused to accept those reasons. They claimed that the university had received 86 million Naira from the National University Commission for capital development between 1976 and 1985 and that it had spent large sums on what students termed "fraudulent rents" on staff houses and a chain of University Guest Houses. They also queried its failure to get contractors to complete the projects on the Permanent Site. The Movement for the Advancement of African Societies (MAAS) urged Professor Onazi, the new Vice-Chancellor, in an open letter of October 1985, to probe his predecessor and use direct labour in completing the projects. It was an attempt to engage the new Vice-Chancellor and provide him with alternative views on critical problems facing the university. How much the students succeeded in this respect is not clear but he actually went ahead making the Bauchi Road Campus the Permanent Site,

building an auditorium and other facilities, which helped to diffuse the tension.

Inadequate accommodation was another sore point in the relations between the university authorities and the students. As the economic crisis persisted and less revenue was made available to the universities, Unijos decided to stop renting accommodation for students. Students estimate that due to this decision about two-thirds of the student population were left without university accommodation and had to rent their own in neighbouring streets and communities. This situation became even more serious after the ethno-religious conflict that erupted in September 2001, which made Ungwar Rogo, where most students without university accommodation resided, a no-go area for Christian students. A large internally displaced population was in dire need of accommodation. The students found it difficult to understand why the university was bent on handing back the Bauchi Road hostel to the landlord, especially as it owned the land on which the hostel was built. The negotiations lasted for more than 15 years. The students finally lost the case in the mid-1990s when the university handed over the property.

With the inadequacy of accommodation came the problem of the allocation of rooms to students. Initially, the Students' Affairs Department and the student union jointly conducted the allocation. This practice lasted until 1984 when NANS was banned after the boycott of classes to stop the government from introducing tuition fees and ending food subsidies. Subsequently in 1986 when a national protest broke out as students were massacred in Zaria; student unionism was made optional and voluntary. In the circumstance, the university authorities took sole responsibility of students' accommodation. This has remained a source of conflict between the authorities and students as there are always allegations of favouritism, surreptitious attempts to increase accommodation fees, and corrupt practices among the staff in charge. Since the scattered hostels were several kilometres away from the classrooms at Bauchi Road, university transport, which may be a luxury in other universities, was an absolute necessity for the students. Normal academic life depended on a high investment in transportation. Consequently, the university had a relatively large stock of buses and maintenance took a huge part of university revenue. As a result, the university has now and again attempted to introduce transport

fares to cover some of the costs. In 1984 after the boycott of classes over the withdrawal of feeding and accommodation subsidies, the university succeeded in imposing a fare of 10 kobo per drop. Students had to spend a minimum of 60 kobo per day on transport, an amount that has been increasing over the years. It was a major burden as they also had to pay more for food and accommodation at a time when many state governments had either abolished scholarships to their student's altogether or reduced them drastically. A situation developed where students, who could not afford the fares, resorted to trekking to classes or cutting down on the number of classes they chose to attend. This problem has persisted till date and successive student union leaders have found themselves fighting against new increases.

The withdrawal of the subsidy on feeding in 1984 was a cause of a long and bitter struggle. The standard of feeding at Unijos was relatively high and the struggle became particularly complicated and drawn out. The university had invested heavily in the cafeteria and the kitchen equipment. In fact, it had just taken delivery of a two million worth of NANS secretariat and the current host to the NANS Public Relations Officer, the Jos students were very active in the May 1984 campaign. Several congress meetings were held and the university was shut down. Security officers were used to arrest student leader like Steven Musa, president of the National Association of Plateau State Students. Scholarships were withdrawn by the Plateau state government for the former NANS president Chris Abashi, the then NANS PRO Chom Bagu, the National Association of Plateau Students (NAPS) President, and Tom Adanbara, the former Speaker of the University of Jos Students' Parliament, also the general secretary of MAAS. The university threatened to expel all student leaders.

When the university was reopened negotiations started. The authorities wanted to close all the cafeterias and sell the equipment. After several months of negotiations at both Unijos and the national level it was agreed that the university should lease its cafeterias to reputable caterers who would provide meals at reasonable cost to the students. At first the caterers in Unijos announced that they would charge N15 per meal but this was rejected by the student union. After another set of negotiations, a two tier feeding system was introduced where the 'elites' were provided meat at between N3.50 to N5 per meal. Some

resorted to preparing their own meal in the hostels. It reinforced the class system in the university where poor students could be found cooking meals, making errands, or washing clothes for the richer ones. The inappropriate cooking facilities in the rooms caused regular outbreaks of fire with losses of students' property and sometimes grave injury to persons. In recent times, feeding has become the sole responsibility of the students themselves, who either cook their own meals or purchase food from the numerous vendors that operate in both the hostels and the lecture areas.

The relationship between the university authorities and students was at most times cold if not hostile as a result of the various grievances, including the ongoing battles over regional domination, the failure to develop the Permanent Site, and the handling of accommodation, transport and feeding. During Professor Emovon's tenure as Vice-(1979/80), out of the seven student union presidents, four had their academic careers terminated prematurely, including Ninfel Nimiel (1979/80), Reuben Chuga (1980/81), Musa Yelwa (1981/82), and Charles session, was terminated. After Emovon there was a respite as Professor Onazi worked hard to carry students and staff along. Things took a negative turn again when Professor Para Malum took over and started the politics of "indigenization". He was able to do this easily because the government had dissolved all student union governments after the 1986 Zaria massacre and the subsequent national protest by students and trade unions. After a long time, the universities installed caretaker committees. It was only in the early 1990s that student unions in the proper sense began to take shape again. Even so, they were weak due to their voluntary status, which meant that the university no longer collected union dues to remit to the union.

The economic difficulties of the 1990s made it hard for students to survive. The crippling of union finances made them look for external financial assistance, first from human rights organizations, then from foreign funding agencies, and finally from politicians and the government. In Unijos this opened the door to cultists since they had their own dubious methods of mobilizing resources from clandestine sources. The Plateau State students, who had capitulated to the ethnic machinations of the Vice-Chancellors (Malum and Gomwalk) in the early 1990s, found ready sources of funding both from the university

kitty and the Plateau State Treasury. As Unijos approached the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a manipulation had weakened students' militancy and created divisions among them. The gates had been opened for cultists, government agents, and politicians. Although the cultists have been forced underground, they still have a strong foot in the University. Things have degenerated to a point where, in the current election campaign (2002/03), Jos students have split between the three governorship candidates in Plateau State.

### **The dynamics of students' power**

Students' power in the University of Jos was built in an environment that was cosmopolitan, liberal, and pluralistic, and that enjoyed a fairly stable balance of power between major regional interests within the campus community. The Movement for the Advancement of African Societies (MAAS) took advantage of this environment to develop a strong ideological presence and thus dominated students' politics for most of the history of the institution. In the effort to weaken this group, the university authorities allied themselves with cultists and ethnic chauvinists among the students. As shown above, power relations were initially lopsided in favour of the Igbo group. With the removal of Onuaguluchi as Vice-Chancellor in 1978 and the appointment of Emovon from Edo, the ascendancy of the proponents of the 'catchment area' position was kept at bay. They were stronger now no doubt, but could not dominate the power structures of the university, although serving as a strong check on Professor Emovon. The dominance of the top echelons by academics from the south and from overseas provided in turn some checks on the ambitions of the 'catchment area' advocates.

At the students' level, the relatively buoyant economy of the late 1970s and early 1980s meant that activism largely concerned advancing and protecting immediate gains rather than fundamental problems of survival. A key issue was the lopsided nature of recruitment and admission. The successful fight against Onuaguluchi and the establishment of the School of Remedial Studies, however, meant that the ratio of 'catchment area' students to those from other parts of the country gradually evened out. While Plateau and sometimes Tiv students were prominent and vocal, they had no overall numerical superiority

that they could use to disregard the voices of others. This pluralism and diversity helped to give the students at Unijos the political space to assert themselves for nearly two decades. The annulment of the Nigerian presidential elections in June 1993 and the escalation of the economic crisis, however, strongly enhanced ethnic consciousness and agitation for ethnic self-determination. Unijos could not survive the strain and collapsed into ethnic and regional acrimonies that not only destroyed the basis of students' power but also undercut the excellent academic status of the university.

MAAS, the Movement for the Advancement of African Societies, started as a club for Pan-Africanist students, inspired by General Murtala Muhammad, whose patriotic passion raised the profile of Nigeria and Africa in world affairs and emboldened the youth. Ideological and philosophical currents rather than "bread and butter" issues dominated students' politics. Murtala's assertion that "Africa Has Come of Age" struck a strong cord in the fertile minds of university students, who could not understand why a continent so rich in natural resources should remain first Obasanjo regime and the handing over to civilian politicians in 1979, the movement became more militant and adopted a Marxist ideology.

The appointment of Professor Ali Mazrui as a Visiting Research Professor to the university in the early years of the 1980s generated a heated and rich debate that helped to raise the profile of MAAS and to establish its dominance of students' politics. Professor Mazrui's coming to the university was seen by the radical students as a ploy by the authorities to blunt students' radicalism. He arrived at Jos when the social sciences were under the influence of Walter Rodney's *How Europe Undeveloped Africa* and Franz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*. His pro-American and right-wing empiricist views were met with suspicion. His alliance with Professor Isawa Elaigwu of the Department of Political Science, well known for his pro-establishment views, set him on an ideological collision course with the radical students grouped under MAAS. The debate was over Africa's future and whether it was more secure under socialism or capitalism. Mazrui's claim that Africa could not follow the path of either the western or eastern ideological camps because it was communalistic was considered revisionist and, in practice, a support for capitalism'. MAAS capitalized on a reference to Mazrui as a possible CIA informant in a book titled

*CZA* in Africa to undermine his influence among the students. His threat to drag MAAS to court on the issue further enhanced the standing of the Movement. The threat did not materialize and MAAS became a household name for having taken on an internationally rated academic and won. This was particularly important at the time as the university had no vocal and outstanding academic staff except Elaigwu. Although Professor Onoge had joined the university he was yet to have a public impact. MAAS took up the mantle of intellectual leadership by organizing public lectures on topical and controversial issues. To counter the influence of Professors Elaigwu and Mazrui, MAAS brought in equally internationally rated academics like Patrick Wilmot, Björn Beckman, and Yusuf Bangura from Ahmadu Bello University, the then centre of radical scholarship in Nigeria.

To further consolidate its political position MAAS sponsored other front organizations like Youth Solidarity on Southern Africa (YUSSA) and the Committee against Political Repression in Kenya. Working through ‘cells’ or hostel-based working groups, MAAS conducted weekly ideological classes where both national and international events were analyzed and critiqued. Members of MAAS forged a common worldview through these classes and public lectures as well as through active participation in the meetings of the Patriotic Youth Movement of Nigeria (PYMN), the national umbrella organization of the radical student groups. They acquired a reputation of being highly organized and intellectually talented with effective leadership and a strong commitment to political unity. They could “out-debate’ everybody, university authorities and lecturers included. The underground mode of operation gave MAAS a larger than life image, which weakened opposition to its candidates. From 1979, its role in shaping politics in the university became strategic. It developed early working relations with ASUU and the local branch of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC). Labour leaders in Jos were regularly invited to MAAS public events. MAAS members participated in labour’s May Day activities as well as in strikes, including mobilization, the distribution of leaflets, and by mounting the rostrum to address the striking workers.

The early 1980s saw a steady movement of academic staff to Unijos from ABU, where political repression against students and staff was increasing. Among

the academics that moved were Aaron Gana, Monday Mwangwat, Norma Percharnock and Chamba Ngou. The students included Chom Bagu, Joseph Lombin and Abram Waya, who were all expelled from Zaria in March 1981. Omafume Onoge, who had been dismissed from the University of Ibadan for supporting the Ali Must Go agitation in 1978, also secured a teaching position in the university. There was also the Sierra Leonian radical sociologist, Alfred Zack Williams. To complete the cycle was the return of a good number of graduate assistants including Ayu, Alubo, Odekunle, and Logams, who had been MAAS and the ABU immigrants and gave radicalism a boost in the university.

More importantly, MAAS was reinforced by the escalating economic crisis that was precipitated by the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). The growing influence of the organisation was manifested in its control of both Unijos students' politics and its holding of offices in NANS. In the 1980/81 session, a MAAS member (Wilson Inalegwu) held the powerful position of speaker of the students' parliament. In 1981/82, Musa Yelwa was elected union president and Tom Adanbara speaker on the MAAS ticket. Infact Unijos student union election then was based on a presidential system. Musa Yalewa's team included three third year Sociology Students-all MAAS members, John Odah, Olusegun Salako and Festus Osayi who were elected Welfare Secretary, Public Relations Officer and Treasurer respectively. In the 1983/84 session, the MAAS candidates were defeated when the authorities sponsored a notorious cultist by name Charles Ekanem Eta (alias "Charlie P"), who was elected president. Since MAAS controlled the parliament, however, Charlie P was impeached within three months of his election and Mosun Ogunote, the vice president, took over. For the first time in the history of the university a female student mounted the seat of the presidency. The following session MAAS came back with a vengeance by clearing nearly all positions, including the president (Labaran Maku), speaker (Chom Bagu), treasurer (Hauwa Ibrahim), clerk (Kingsley Odika), the social secretary and others. In 1985/86, the MAAS candidates again won the elections and in 1988/89as well.

As we entered the 1990s, however, student unionism had received a lot of bashing, including the banning of student politics, the expulsion of leaders, and the worsening of the economic conditions on campus. A succession of

ASUU strikes was also having a negative effect on students' morale. Things were made worse by the appointment of Malum as Vice-Chancellor in 1989, replacing Onazi. To consolidate his position Malum initiated the politics of 'indigeneity'. Working with other Plateau chauvinists among the teaching and administrative staff and students, he sponsored the election of Luka Dalang to the student union government. He also recruited thugs among student cultists to harass those students definition of 'catchment area' to mean Plateau State alone alienated a substantial segment of both staff and students. Thus in the election of student leaders in 1991/92, MAAS again swept the polls and installed for the second time a female union president in the person of Ene Obi.

With the annulment of the Nigerian presidential elections of June 12, 1993 and the revival of ethnic consciousness in the country generally, MAAS influence began to wane. The global ideological change that saw the collapse of the Soviet Union, the changes of regimes in Eastern Europe and in African socialist states, blunted the ideological edge. The Jos 'cell' of the Socialist Congress of Nigeria (SCON) reported that "our links with students is borne more out of the necessity of linking up with mass democratic organizations than the presence of ideological congruency with the present leadership." This was said at a time when the post as NANS president was actually held by a member of MAAS from Unijos.' MAAS had lost its vibrancy as well as its ideological and political momentum. It also became more difficult for MAAS candidates to win elections as the authorities were determined to control students 'politics. They had been given free hands by the Government to intervene and influence the outcome of student elections. The ASUU strikes and the repeated banning of student unionism in the 1990s strengthened their hands in this direction. Developments within MAAS contributed to the decline, including the anarchic leadership of Kayode Ogundamisi, better known as "Sankara", who was a MAAS member and a charismatic student leader with strong roots in the cult movement. As the secretary of the union in 1990/91, Kayode was and fond of taking unilateral decisions, leading the first year students of the Abuja Hostel on to the Jos streets, most of the times against the wishes of the MAAS leadership and in contempt of the student union executive of which he was a member.

At the level of NANS Unijos was from the beginning in the progressive

camp. In 1981 Chris Mammah, a radical, was elected president. The National Party of Nigeria (NPN) Government, which was opposed to NANS, plotted to undermine him by sponsoring a rival leadership. Unijos, under the secure leadership of MAAS members, provided both moral and financial support for Mammah's presidency. In the subsequent NANS elections, Chris Abashi and Festus Okoye, both MAAS members, were elected president and general secretary respectively. The next year, Chom Bagu, another MAAS member, was elected PRO. Victor Olisa, also of MAAS, got the position of Vice President National Affairs in the following NANS executive. In 1986/87, Labaran Maku yet another MAAS member, was elected PRO. After a few years of absence, Unijos returned to the leadership of NANS when in Aminu (MAAS). To crown it all, in 1995 Comfort Idika, another MAAS member from Unijos, was elected the first female president of NANS ever.

At its height, MAAS was a major ideological pillar of the socialist movement in the country. Between 1985 and 1987 when NANS was banned, unbanned and banned again, MAAS engaged the Alliance of Progressive Students (ALPS) of the University of Ife in an ideological battle that was both ferocious and rich. These were difficult times for the student movement and there was disagreement over what forms of struggle would be most effective in fighting the despotism of the Babangida regime. ALPS, which at that point in time controlled the secretariat of NANS and was allied to Ola Oni's Socialist Party of Workers, Farmers and Youth (SPWFY), proposed that PYMN, the umbrella organisation of the radical student movement, should take the federal government to court over its proscription of student unionism. MAAS on the other hand rejected this position and wanted to expand the scope of the struggle by bringing in secondary school pupils and state students' association. The debates demonstrated a deep commitment to ideological issues and tended to revive the arguments over strategy between Lenin and Trotsky. Simultaneously, they indicated the beginning of the end to serious ideological politics in the campuses and maybe in ticket for both local and NANS offices in the 1990s were in most cases MAAS only in name. With no ideological classes and serious movement activities, MAAS had become a mere electoral platform without a clear ideology or a programme of reform. This is not surprising as PYMN, its ideological mentor at the national level, as well as

other organisations of the radical left, both on the campuses and outside, had all degenerated ideologically, including the central labour organisation, the NLC. Many had revised their ideological positions and capitulated to ‘post modernism’, while others, like Dr. Ayu of Unijos, had joined bourgeois politics.

### **On the barricades**

Before this happened, however, MAAS had experienced a wide range of struggles on many different fronts. At this point, let us recall some of the concrete battles of the 1980s. In 1982/83, MAAS confronted the authorities over the expulsion of Musa Yelwa, the union president. An earlier effort to expel four MAAS members in their final year, namely Tomson Adanbara, John Odah, Tony Akika and Yusuf Pam was blocked by progressive lecturers in the senate of the university. This was followed by the attempt to expel Chom Bagu, on the ground that he Adanbara, the speaker of the students’ parliament, was also expelled. MAAS led the students in the struggle to reverse these decisions. In the case of Musa Yelwa the students lost, but they were able to stop the expulsion of Chom Bagu. As for Tom Adanbara, the university was compelled to reverse its decision and to recall him. Unfortunately, Tom refused to return to school. The 1984 action against the removal of food subsidies was the next major battle, leading to a national boycott of classes. At the University of Jos, the authorities tried to stop students from joining the national campaign, offering to guarantee the security of all students who ignored the NANS call and remained in school. The State Security Service (SSS) infiltrated the union executive and helped to identify members of MAAS, who were arrested by the police. ‘Charlie P’, the former union president who had been impeached, went round with security agents to identify MAAS members and other student leaders so that they could be arrested. MAAS members went underground while continuing to mobilize for the action. The branch of the NLC in Jos assisted with transport and public speakers to be used in the hit and run campaigns.

On ‘D-Day’, a congress meeting was called at the students Solidarity Center where students disembark from the buses when attending lectures. Holding the meeting at this spot ensured that no student sneaked into class. The meeting

was effective and the students proceeded to lock up the class rooms before returning to their hostels. The university was forced to close. The administration now colluded with the Plateau state government in order to weaken the radical students, withdrawing the scholarships of the leaders, all MAAS members. Road blocks were erected on all roads leading out of Jos and photographs of key union and MAAS leaders were given to the police to ensure their arrest. When the university was to reopen, the authorities announced that those students who failed to re-register within two days should consider themselves to have withdrawn from the university. SSS agents were positioned at the venues of the registration in order to bar the MAAS leaders from registering, hoping to get rid of them more easily. However, ‘comrades’ among the lecturers alerted the students and the MAAS leaders were the first to present themselves for re-registration on the day of the reopening. The Vice-Chancellor requested that the Senate should expel the students who had been identified as members of MAAS. Again, this move was resisted by the lecturers who sympathised with the MAAS cause and a committee was set up to investigate the issue as a compromise. Working with the ‘lecturers-comrades’ the leaders of MAAS visited all members of the committee in their homes in order to make their case. When they appeared before the disciplinary committee set up by Senate they therefore received a sympathetic hearing. The Vice-Chancellor’s demand for the expulsion of the MAAS activists was rejected by the Senate meeting that considered the report of the committee.

The university did not take the defeat lightly. The MAAS leaders were targeted by a hit squad. Both students and university officials were earmarked for attack. MAAS mobilized mass meetings and congress sessions to prepare the students for the confrontation with the authorities. In an attempt to pre-empt the mobilization, the speaker of the students’ parliament was arrested and detained for five days. In response students marched to the Police Headquarters and Chom Bagu, the speaker, was released. At a massive congress meeting to receive the speaker, the students demanded an apology from Professor Emovon, the Vice-Chancellor. Although he refused to tender the apology himself, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Administration, Professor Lasa, apologized on behalf of the university.

Since the students union at ABU had been proscribed and its leaders, led by the late Ya'u Musa Yar'Adua had been rusticated, the University of Jos took over the leadership of the students' movement in the north. February 13, 1985 provided a test of its leadership. This was a day of commemoration for Murtala Mohammed, the military head of state, who was assassinated in 1976 and remembered as a national hero by students and other radicals. During the years of civilian government this tradition began to ebb. With the Buhari/Idiagbon coup d'état and the subsequent intensification of despotism, particularly after the May 1984 students' agitation, the students decided to test the might of the new regime. Unijos students led the campaign. On the appointed day, the students boarded two "luxurious buses" and drove to Zaria where they offered transportation to students at ABU and other institutions of higher learning in Kaduna state as well as from nearby states and headed for Kano. On entering Kano, a large military contingent blocked the road. The students came down from their vehicles and started marching into the city on foot. The military contingent, realizing that by allowing the students to march into Kano they were bound to attract more sympathizers, begged them to return to their vehicles and to continue the journey. The students thus arrived in the campus of Bayero University with military escort! The BUK campus, however, was already under siege by the police who had helmed in the students to stop them from marching to the Murtala Mosque, the venue of the national rally. The military cleared the barricades and allowed the students to address a massive rally before heading for the mosque, where speeches were made and solidarity songs sang before they dispersed back to their institutions. They had challenged the military and won! It was a great political and psychological boost for the students. Back in Jos the union organized a rally to celebrate the victory in Kano.

With NANS banned but operating underground, the struggle of students took a new dimension. Key local unions were mandated to coordinate other unions within their localities or region on behalf of NANS. The Unijos union took on the responsibility of coordinating all unions in Plateau state. It organized meetings in each of the institutions of higher education, including the Federal College of Education, Pankshin, the Federal School of Forestry, Jos, the School of Preliminary Studies, Keffi, the School of Agriculture, Lafia, the Schools of Nursing and Health Technology, Jos, the School of the Blind, Zawan, and the

Institute of Veterinary Research, Vom, among others. The meetings enabled the intimidation and harassment mounted by the Buhari/Idiagbon government. A major battle took place in the aftermath of the massacre at ABU in May 1986. As the panel headed by Justice Mustapha Akanbi Panel was set up to investigate the spate of demonstrations that followed, the Unijos authorities, using Dr. Ayu as an intermediary, approached the students and appealed to them not to use the panel hearings to “wash the dirty linens of the university in public”. The students led by Labaran Maku, the NANS PRO, since the Unijos union had been banned, refused to comply. Security operatives attempted to arrest Labaran when he began his testimony before the Panel, but the students moved in quickly to prevent the arrest. They provided him with bodyguards both day and night to forestall similar attempts. The report of the Akanbi panel was not officially released to the public but it was leaked to students. It recommended that:

- Student union constitutions should be revised by university authorities to make membership voluntary.
- All the 1985/86 students’ officials should be banned from active participation in student union politics.
- Postgraduate students should be banned from participating in student union politics.
- The Police should be better equipped to deal with future students’ crisis.

The recommendations further incensed students’ feelings and the agitation continued. In the mobilization that ensued, MAAS provided

The next battle concerned ‘university reform’. The government took advantage of the banning of the student unions to start a process of ‘rationalizing’ university departments and faculties. Using the excuse of graduate unemployment, the government maintained that certain faculties and departments would have to be closed down. The University of Ilorin set the ball rolling when it closed its Faculty of Law and threw out 11 lecturers and 276 students at different stages of their studies. The next victim of ‘rationalization’ was the Department of Creative Arts in the University of Benin. At the University of Jos, three faculties

were earmarked for closure, the Faculties of Law, Medicine and Pharmacy. The students of law were to be transferred to Maiduguri while the others were not told what would be their fate. The fact that the move was associated with a World Bank/IMF demand further annoyed students and they took to the streets on several occasions in opposition to both to ‘rationalization’ and to the despotism of the international finance institutions.

December 1988 was another flash point. The government had been toying with the idea of increasing fuel prices. When the students learned that the new price would be announced in a matter of days, they decided to pre-empt the move by taking to the streets and were later joined by members of unions affiliated to the NLC. The demonstration in Jos gave the NLC a lead and, one by one, the different state branches joined the strike, which gradually gained the momentum as a national strike. At the conclusion of the strike the NLC signed a “Memorandum of Understanding” (MOU) that stipulated that no price increase on fuel will take place without consultation and provision of relief for workers.

In the absence of a student union, MAAS resorted to alliances with other organisations on campus. At one time, the National Association of Plateau Students provided support after MAAS had infiltrated and taken over the leadership of the association. This happened during the 1984/85 session when the university sought to isolate leading MAAS members from Plateau state for victimization. Other alliances involved departmental associations. They were used for the purpose of collecting contributions from the students to fund underground union activities. To ensure that this was done, MAAS infiltrated the organizations and took over the leadership. Another, less fortunate alliance was with the “Keggites” or the Palm Wine Drinkers Club. It was an attempt to defend a liberal environment on campus which was under threat from the university authorities, which sought to stop male students from visiting their female colleagues in their hostels. This type of alliance, however, opened the movement to infiltration by cultists. In 1985/86, Tom Bee, a member of the ‘Pirates’, another cult group, was admitted to the central committee of MAAS. Kingsley Odika, a member of the “Buccaneers”, was soon to follow, becoming the clerk of the 1984/85 students parliament under MAAS sponsorship.

## **Conclusions**

This brief history of student activism at the University of Jos has established certain salient points that may need further inquiry. The first relates to the necessary socio-economic and political environment for the development of radicalism. As a cosmopolitan and climatically hospitable environment, the rich and powerful, particularly from the south, were encouraged to send their children to the University of Jos. However, many poor local students were also admitted, especially through the “Remedial programme”. This set the stage for ‘class struggle’ among the students. The sharpness of the class differences, however, were mitigated by the provision of scholarships for students from the poor ‘catchment area’ and the north. As long as such scholarships were forthcoming and the economic conditions of the students remained manageable, the ‘class struggle’ remained primarily on a philosophical or ideological plane. However, once the economy deteriorated and the scholarships dried up, primordial identities surfaced and became an important basis for mobilization. This shows clearly in the rise and fall of MAAS.

A second point relates to the dynamics of campus politics. The story of the University of Jos demonstrates that when there is both ethnic/political and academic diversity there tends to be more stability and a more liberal atmosphere on campus. However, when this balance is undermined either by a faction of the university community seeking and getting collaboration with the state or other forces, politics of desperation comes in and all means, fair or unfair, are resorted to. The politics of “‘indigeneity’ introduced by Professor Para Malum as Vice-Chancellor destroyed the university by creating chauvinistic factions that lived on corruption and other malpractices. In admissions, for instance, these malpractices took on unprecedented proportions. His claim to be a champion of the Plateau people fell to pieces when it was disclosed that most of those who gained admission irregularly had paid money to corrupt university officials.

A third point concerns the role of networks in sustaining students’ radicalism. MAAS was well connected and it operated along several students’ fronts. It worked well with radical lecturers who kept it informed about plots against its

cadres. Outside the campus, MAAS Campaign for Democracy/Democratic Alternative. It also had good relations with the NLC. These multiple relationships provided ideological reinforcement. They also contributed to the financial and logistic support of the struggles as well as legal assistance for victimized and expelled members. The degeneration and collapse of MAAS must therefore be understood in terms of what happened to the other participants of these networks.

The question is how can the students' movement be organized to benefit from such non-campus solidarity while simultaneously being protected from the negative dimensions of this relationship? No clear answer has been suggested by those interviewed for this account of the Jos experience. What is clear though is that unless the universities in constructive relationship with the society, healthy students' politics may never become a reality. This as should be clear, cannot happen unless Nigeria reorganizes its socio-economic life and rationalizes its politics. This is the challenge.

## ***CHAPTER EIGHT***

### **AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY – ISHAYA DANIEL**

I got enrolled into the Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) to study Quantity Surveying in the Faculty of Engineering in 1982/83 Academic Session. A year prior to my admission, there was a massive purge of students following protests against the school authority's maladministration that led to poor feeding and accommodation services. Events of that year were infamously dubbed the 'Rice Riot'. The school authority, led by Prof. Ango Abdullahi had expelled 30 students and rusticated 165 others. Three years before then, in 1978, about seven (7) students were killed in nationwide protests against the Obasanjo military regime's plan to introduce tuition fees - the so-called "Ali Mungo" "Ali Must Go". So, by the time I got into ABU, the school already had a radical student union tradition.

During my time in ABU, we had the Movement for a Progressive Nigeria (MPN), Youth Solidarity on Southern Africa (YUSSA), National Association of Seadogs (NAS/Pyrates Confraternity) and other not so radical groups like the Kegites. The MPN was at the center of it all and was nearly always at the receiving end of administrative highhandedness. The MPN had a Central Committee and a cell structure in all the halls of residence and open meetings/discussion fora that held regularly in Room 70 of the then Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Membership of the movement was by co-option. The MPN's ideology was Marxist-Leninist. It was also nationalist and pan Africanist.

The MPN networked sister movements on other campuses such as the Movement for the Advancement of African Society (MAAS) of the University of Jos and the Alliance of Progressive Students (ALPS) of the then University of Ife (Obafemi Awolowo University).

The movement's life was one of permanent struggle against maladministration by the school authorities, demanding accountability etc. The struggles were not limited to students' welfare issues but also focused on national, African and International issues. It also operated through front organizations such as the YUSSA. The cells were for political education, sensitization and mobilization of students.

Most of the students affected by the 1981 purge were its members.

It is interesting to say that throughout my time as an undergraduate in the 1980s, most of it under Ango Abdullahi as Vice Chancellor, there was only one Students Union EXCO that survived administrative high-handedness by neither getting disbanded, rusticated or suspended. This is the 1983/1984 EXCO led by Naja'atu Mohammed as President and Rima Shawulu as Secretary General. The next EXCO led by the Late Yau Musa Yar'Adua as President, Idisi Park as General Secretary did not survive the cudgel of the VC. In 1984, there was the solidarity action in support of NMA/NARD (Nigerian Medical Association/ National Association of Resident Doctors).

The ABU Students Union supported the medics' action against the Buhari junta for improvement in health care services nationwide. The regime descended heavily on the striking medical doctors by sacking them. The students' leadership decided on a boycott of lectures in solidarity with the striking medics. The students' action led to the closure of the school, expulsion of three students - Late Ya'u Musa Yar'Adua, Patricia Burromvyat (who was Financial Secretary) and Ya'u Alhaji Ado (Speaker, 21st People's Parliament). One student, the late Gayus Obed was rusticated. The decision to support the doctors' action was debated and resolved in Parliament.

Further down the line, in 1986, under the watch of Ango Abdullahi, Students were massacred on May 23. Before the massacre, ABU hosted the NANS Secretariat (1984/85). The rotation of the secretariat to ABU was for it to serve as a fulcrum for students; activism given the ban on students union. In 1985, the university administration had set up a caretaker committee with a view to electing officers for the Union. Matthias Yohanna was Chairman of the CTC, Emmanuel Bello (E. Bello) the Secretary and Bala Hamid (PRO). Elections were later conducted, I think in April/May. About 70% or more of the EXCO members and Parliamentarians were in the MPN or were radical students. The new leadership was to be sworn in on Friday May 23, 1986. This was not to be for on the ill-fated day, students were to be massacred.

Two significant activities in April seemed to have made the university

administration angry at the CTC which continued in the radical tradition of the school. First, America bombed Libya on April 12, 1986 and by April 14/15, ABU students mobilized and protested the dastardly act in Kaduna, the State capital which is about 80 km away from Zaria. The protest also took place at the American Consulate where the American flag was burnt in protest. The second event had to do with the commemoration of the 1978 massacre of students. NANS had directed students to observe the event with activities on various campuses. In ABU, this included a procession through all halls of residence with a mock coffin. As the procession was about anchoring at the Freedom Square, those at the head turned into Amina Hall, the female hostel. They passed from the reception area along the walkway through the ‘Lion Gate’ (Besides the Mosque) and returned to the Freedom Square.

This was the perfect alibi the administrators needed to deal with an ‘errant, impudent’ CTC and scuttle the inauguration of the newly elected union leadership. For the records, Usman Ladan was elected President, Mustapha Gwadabe was elected Secretary General, Sanusi Abdu Sani (Maikudi) was elected PRO amongst many cadres of the MPN that contested and won the elections. All cadres were de facto members of the Students Union Movement (SUM). The SUM as a broader category included non-radical students that were politically active. Cadres were members of the movement. They might or might not be deployed to politics. Usually they were successful in getting elected into positions in the student union. Sometimes they got assigned to carry out specific duties. Not all cadres were visible. It was impactful. It sustained and passed on the tradition of struggle.

The NANS charter of demands was launched circa 1983. It built strategic relationships with ASUU (Academic Staff Union of Universities) and Trade Unions notably, the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC). It opposed the anti-people programme of the Buhari and Babangida military juntas. There was active engagement of the political debate of 1987 where Nigerians expressed preference for a socialist government, the Anti-SAP protests, etc. Every anti-people policy of the juntas was resisted. For instance, the 1986 crisis in ABU, mischaracterized as *Ango Must Go*, became a National crisis because NANS (radical students under the umbrage of Progressive Youth Movement

of Nigeria (PYMN) provided guidance and mobilized society in favour of the students' cause.

The massacre in Zaria took place on Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 1986 and by Monday 26<sup>th</sup> May, 1986 NANS Senate converged at UNN (University of Nigeria Nsukka) reviewed the situation in Zaria and other campuses nationwide, took far reaching decisions that included the removal of police posts on school campuses, boycott of the General Emmanuel Abisoye Panel set up to look into the ABU crisis, mobilize the support of their strategic allies, especially ASUU and NLC. The Festus Iyayi-led ASUU National Executive Committee (NEC) met in Federal University of Technology (FUTO) Owerri on Tuesday/Wednesday 26/27 May 1986, got briefed about the NANS resolutions, rose from its meeting with its own resolutions in support of those by NANS. The NANS resolutions also got the support of the NLC. June 4, 1986 was set aside as a nationwide protest in support of the students

By the time we returned to Zaria from our "tour de force", the Abisoye panel had been inaugurated and started sitting at the Kongo Conference Hotel, Zaria. The local ASUU branch of ABU, led by the Late Abdullahi Mahdi, sabotaged the decisions reached by its NEC, NANS and NLC. They had written hundreds of pages of their understanding of what were the issues.

I noticed the signs of sabotage when upon our arrival in company of Malam Bonat and Abubakar Fulata, Mahmud Tukur, now of blessed memory approached us, the students' representatives and requested copies of the resolutions of ASUU NEC, because he knew the local branch would sabotage the NEC resolution. We obliged him.

While all that was going on, I can still hear the voice of the then ASUU ABU Chairman, Abdullahi Mahdi shouting "what is NANS? NANS is hanging in the Air! Better prepare and defend yourselves. Ango is there lying against you!" His outburst was in apparent response to information given to him that NANS was boycotting the Abisoye panel, therefore the local students were not going to confer legitimacy on the panel by appearing before it. No doubt, a few students appeared before the panel but majority of the activists

boycotted its proceedings.

In continuation, the success lies in the fact that student activists graduated to take up jobs in the Labour movement and provided the pool of activists for the human rights movement birthed in the late 1980s.

## **CHAPTER NINE**

### **UNIVERSITY OF PORT-HARCOURT – CHIJOKE UWASOMBA**

#### Understanding the Nigerian University System

As the Nigerian nationalists were struggling for the liberation of the country from the shackles of colonisation and imperialism from the colonists, the essence of education (especially University education) and the values it confers on the people were not lost on them. It was in recognition of the value of higher education at the University level that led to the struggle that saw to it that the 14-member Committee was set up in 1943<sup>1</sup> with the mandate to report among other issues on the state of higher education in the colonies as well as outline the organisation of the institutions. One of the outcomes of the Committee's report led to the founding of the University College, Ibadan in 1948 which later became the University of Ibadan in 1962.

Universities anywhere in the world exist to engage in research activities at a higher level and students constitute important forces within the system. Because they are not robots and given the capacities that their training engenders in their consciousness, they are not only receptors but also active agents both in the University system and their world environment. And as active agents given their training, they ask fundamental questions that challenge the status quo. In the process of engaging in these questions, they become targets of harassment and clobbering by regime forces who would want them to remain docile and pro-establishmentarian. This is the case all over the world and Nigeria is not an exception.

It should be recalled that even before the University College Ibadan became an indigenous University in 1962, University of Nigeria, Nsukka had already been established as the first indigenous University in Nigeria in 1960. Until the establishment of the Midwest Institute of Technology by the then Military Governor of Midwest, Col. Samuel O. Ogbemudia on November 23, 1970 after the civil war<sup>2</sup>, there were five Nigerian Universities known as first generation of Universities - University of Nigeria, Nsukka; University of Ibadan; University of Lagos; Ahmadu Bello University and University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University, Ife). The Midwest Institute of Technology was

changed to University of Benin on July 2, 1971 by the same Col. Ogbemudia's government that set it up. It is also on record that at the request of the same government, it was taken over by the Federal government on April 1, 1975. Therefore, Uniben was neither a first-generation University in the class of the previously mentioned Five First Generation Universities nor was it part of the subsequent Universities known as the Second Generation Universities in Nigeria – University of Calabar; University of Ilorin, University of Jos, Usmanu Danfodio University, Sokoto, University of Maiduguri, Bayero University Kano and University of Port-Harcourt. Other Universities were established by the Federal government styled Universities of Technology and Agriculture which could be called Third Generation Universities alongside State and Private Universities occasioned by the introduction and implementation of the neo-liberal ideology and its orthodoxy of market fundamentalism<sup>3</sup>.

### **Nigerian University Students and their Struggles in Nigeria**

There are many documented heroic efforts of Nigerian students including but not limited to Odion-Ahkaine 2009; Beckman 2009<sup>4</sup> who apart from their academic status were also involved in the crucibles of the practical struggles of the students, teachers both as students and organizationally. Students were involved with the anti-colonial struggles that led to the birthing of flag independence of Nigeria in 1960. In March 1960, students in Enugu, Lagos, Ibadan and Zaria embarked on protests against the Sharpeville Masarchre in South Africa. They fought against racial discrimination and segregation in South Africa and even in Africa in general.

In 1959, even before independence students organised demonstrations against the visit to Nigeria of the then British Minister, Harold Macmillan because of his alleged hostile policies against Black people and African nationalism. They also protested against the murder of Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba of Congo Kinshasa by the forces of imperialism. In November 1960, just a month after independence, some Nigerian students began peaceful demonstrations against the Anglo-Nigeria Defence Pact. In 1965, the students protested against the Southern Rhodesia's (now Zimbabwe) Unilateral Declaration of Independence from Britain.

With the contradictions and crises of governance taking more dangerous dimensions, Nigerian students were up in arms fighting and campaigning for a better and well-governed Nigeria. After the ban of the Nigerian Union of Students (NUNS) in 1978 by the Obasanjo fascists' government over the All Must-Go riots<sup>5</sup>, the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) was founded in 1980. NANS was founded on a radical, patriotic, anti-imperialist and pan-Africanist sentiments. It was not surprising that the association was banned given its uncompromising posture and activities. The banning of NANS and harassment of its leadership pushed the organisation underground leading to the formation of the National Patriotic Movement of Nigeria.

The leadership, ever uncompromising and desirous of fundamental change, replaced the Movement's name to Youth Solidarity on South Africa and Nigeria (YUSAN). The youths of Nigeria of the old were conscious and militantly campaigned and fought for the defence of Nigeria and African liberation. The apartheid regime in South Africa was brutal in the way it ruled South Africa and denied the people an opportunity for majority rule. Nigerian students of that era identified with the South Africans and other imperialist footholds in Southern Africa including Zimbabwe, Namibia, Mozambique and Angola. They also challenged the military government to ban YUSAN and be seen as supporting the Apartheid regime in South Africa, which the government was at the forefront confronting its supremacist and inhuman treatment of the blacks in South Africa. YUSAN took this position because it knew that banning the organisation would not be thought of considering its anti-Apartheid posturing.

**University of Port-Harcourt as a Battle Ground for Ideological Contestations**  
The University of Port-Harcourt was founded in 1975 as a University College, Port-Harcourt, and later graduated to University status in 1977. It was a University College of the famous and first indigenous Nigerian University, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. It is not surprising that a good number of the academic staff came from UNN as pioneer staff. Like any other regular University, it offered both Arts/Social Science and Science/Engineering courses. In the Arts and Social Sciences, it attracted many radical academics with Marxian and Political economy orientation. Scholars like Claude Ake,

Inyang Etteng, Ikenna Nzimiro, Mark Anikpo, Ekwe Ekwe, all in the Social Sciences and others like Chidi Amuta who later summersaulted and never came back to the University system when he joined the Babangida regime as the Imo State Director of the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRI).

Claude Ake of the Political Science and Administrative Studies was a Professor of Social Science with strong orientation in Political Economy and Professor Nzimiro was known for his Marxist credentials and their academic activities influenced the thinking of the students.

It is in the context of the radical scholarship on offer that one could appreciate students' responses to their condition during the period under review. It is also important to note that the ideological rivalry between the West and the Eastern Blocs<sup>6</sup> fired the imagination of the students into embracing the socialist way of life. This does suggest in any way that all the students identified with the socialist agenda but it is worthy to note that the voices of right wing elements were muted as they did not exude the type of confidence and clarity which the socialist –minded students displayed for the latter read beyond their insular Departmental engagements.

In Uniport, there were many other students' organisations that provided opportunities to the students to express themselves in all areas of life. Each of these groups had their Press Boards which were strategically hung for the readership of the students. There were organisations like the Nigerian Students Soviet Friendship but they were not revolutionary-minded. The Students' Union, in spite of its status as the defender and promoter of the interests of the students was in most cases not led by strongly ideological leaders and forces. This always led to the disagreements between the Union and YUSAN.

### **YUSAN in the Context of Students' Struggles in UNIPORT**

As can be seen from the foregoing discussion, the Uniport academic environment had thrown up organisations of students, some visible, others invisible, including secret cults and press outfits. YUSAN was bold in all its

activities. As a Marxist/Leninist organisation, it wrote incisive weekly editorials on its Press Board articulating many issues as they affected the living conditions of the students, their environment, the crises of governance in the country, Pan-African affairs including the Apartheid regime in South Africa which continued with its oppressive and discriminatory governance style against black majority. Through its writings involving circulating leaflets, it mobilised public opinion on campus and therefore, became a respected and leading force among the students so much so that even the University authorities grudgingly respected it, even as they tried all tricks to undermine it. The organisation became attractive to the students, not minding that the membership was very small by every calculation and consideration.

### **Structure and Organization**

As earlier noted, YUSAN was an ideological organisation of students anchored on the principles of Marxism and Leninism. The structure was such that even some of its members did not know that there was a Core<sup>7</sup> which saw to it that the organisation was run well. The structure was such a tight affair as the membership of the Core was determined by the level of consciousness that one had attained in one's understanding of the principles of the organisation. Members of the organisation were recruited through an open and transparent process but those who were found wanting in terms of their inability to understand a lot of issues were not taken. The organisation was very selective. Those who were recruited were found worthy ideologically and the process was usually conducted by selected members of the Core.

It bears repeating that there were members of the organisation who all through their membership never know that there was a group within the organisation known as the Core. Without the Core the organisation would not be alive to its responsibilities.

The Central Working Committee (CWC) whose members were part of the Core ran the organisation at the front level and issued statements from time to time on behalf of the organisation. It was the face of the organisation and the General-Secretary (GS) of the CWC was at the peak of the organisation. He/she never

enjoyed any higher status but enjoyed the respect of members. The General Secretary was appointed through the instrumentality of the Core. He/she was well read and respected because of his/her high ideological consciousness and development. As one who was in charge of the Secretariat, all internal and external relations of the organisation were within his/her redoubt.

Regular meetings which usually held on Sunday evenings into the early hours of the following day were announced by the General-Secretary who was also the custodian of the books and other relevant materials of the organisation and he/she defended the organisation from various attacks that came from the authorities and other groups of students who did not share in the values and principles of the organisation. In all, every member of YUSAN was as important as the other and each person was an equal joiner. Every member tried to develop themselves by reading and showing interest in the Political Education classes which were very deep and extremely stimulating as political, social, economic and cultural affairs were taught including international affairs.

### **Admission/Recruitment of Members**

YUSAN was not a bourgeois organisation. It was not like one of those fanciful associations of students. As an ideological organisation of the Left, it was students who were impressed by its activities which were very open that sought it out and wanted to become members. In spite of the interest of these students, the recruitment was very selective and those who did not measure up with the ideological criteria were not taken after the interview session.

### **Principles of the Organisation**

Students with non-radical orientation did not show interest in the organisation because of its strong principles and values. Members of Secret Cults were afraid of the organisation and were afraid to identify with it. In one or two occasions, the Press Board of the organisation had been clandestinely broken because of the constant and consistent write-ups that warned those hideous secret societies to turn a new leaf and become responsible students. Most members of the organisation were guided by the principles that it set out for itself including the respect for fellow students and an uncompromising

commitment to socialist ideals. Members were not expected to romance with the University administration. The members were not angels but they stood out as responsible students who were known as strong debaters in congresses. Drunkenness and other anti-social behaviours were considered as anathema. Those for whatever reasons who were involved in such displays were not recruited into the organisation and if mistakenly recruited were openly and disgracefully sent out by the organisation. This method of dismissal made the organisation to be feared and at the same time respected. This is not to say that the organisation was a priestly conglomeration.

### **Programmes and Operational Mechanism**

YUSAN was run on the basis of its foundational ideals which emphasised the rule of law, accountable government, freedom for the black majority in Southern Africa and other parts of the world where colonialism was still in operation, class and working class consciousness and solidarity, internationalism and such other orientations of the Left with liberationist inclinations. It identified with the ANC, SWAPO, MPLA, the South African Communist Party, etc. The organisation had an array of programmes and operational guidelines in line with its Marxist/Leninist grounding. As an ideological group it focused on ideological issues and arranged educational classes which came up every week alongside public lectures which were also platforms to educate and mobilise students. Topics on Political Economy, International Politics and Relations and many other items of concern attracted the attention of the organisation. It was programmes of this nature that gave one the opportunity of reading and debating the PhD Thesis of General Yakubu Gowon who had gone to the University of Warwick in the United Kingdom to take degrees in Political Science after ruling Nigeria for nine years as a Military Head of State between 1966 and 1975 when he was removed from office by his fellow putchists<sup>8</sup>.

Assignments were always given to members in the form of Book Reviews alongside other intellectually-sapping engagements all aimed at exposing members and empowering them with knowledge about the world and preparing them for the future in a world where might is right with dire consequences for the poor. The movement was really a platform for political education.

## **Relationship with the Students' Union on Campus**

As a body which was based on campus, it showed interest with the concerns and problems of the students. The struggle of which campus group to occupy posts in the union was very intense and in most cases YUSAN was involved at all levels of the competition. Even in some cases when it would not field its members, it participated in ensuring that the processes leading to the emergence of union leaders including elections were free, fair and credible. Since it had a Press outfit, it participated in Press Nights and Manifesto's Presentation which afforded the contestants to answer questions about why they were contesting and why they should be voted for. It must be noted that some contestants won or lost the elections based on their performance during the exercise.

The Movement could become antagonistic or supportive to the leadership of the union based on its activities. A leadership that ran the Union with all forthrightness and sincerity in defence of the welfare of the students enjoyed the support of the Movement but one that undermined the principles of the Union did not enjoy its support. In such a scenario, the Movement attacked the Union leaders, insisting on the right values in the interest of the students.

## **Relationship with the National Body of the Students (NANS)**

In some Universities where the leaders of the union were not products of a campus Movement, the relationship between the local union leaders and the national leadership of the union was not as cordial as those who were members of a Movement. For those who were products of a Movement, their leaders were part of the Popular Youth Movement (PYM) which was the Core that ran the national leadership of NANS. The National Headquarters of YUSAN was in Unijos and since it was the members' financial contribution that sustained the running of the Movement, one or two comrades attended meetings in Unijos as representative(s) of the Movement. All decisions of the National leadership of NANS were usually taken at PYM meetings which were clandestinely done. The PYM was the backbone of NANS because of the high-level ideological content of the Movement.

The implication of the above meant that the Uniport branch of YUSAN was

part and parcel of the National leadership of NANS as its Core was involved in the decision-making of the association. The relationship was robust and in the service of the Nigerian students.

### **Relationship with the Academic Union of Universities (ASUU)**

Unlike what happens today, YUSAN in Uniport had a robust social and political relationship with the leadership of the local branch of ASUU to the satisfying point of getting some of its needs. The Movement's leadership and by extension the rank-and-file members benefitted in terms of advice and political education. Since the focus was to train its members and deepen their political and class consciousness, it invited the ASUU leadership to its programmes which were open to members of the public. At no time was there a friction between the Movement and the Union of Academics. It was therefore, not surprising that when Dr. Julius Ihonvbere, a former ASUU Chairman of the Local Branch of ASUU ran into troubled waters with the authorities of the University over an alleged plagiarism case, YUSAN alongside the Students' Union did all it could to fight for him even when the matter was a grievous one bordering on plagiarism. YUSAN and the Union did not care about the merit of the case but went ahead to disrupt all the programmes of the University leading to its closure.

It should be recalled that at inception in 1978, the Academic Staff Union of Universities had its footing grounded on a strong ideological mooring. It is true that ASUU was an offshoot of the Nigerian Association of University Teachers (NAUT) but it was in every description different from NAUT which could be characterised at best as "a butter and bread" union<sup>10</sup> given its economic concerns. ASUU was out from its beginnings to challenge the status quo and was a thorn on the military dictatorship of General Obasanjo and has remained committed to defending the University system and challenging the looting of the country by its military and political leaders and their business friends since the country's founding.

Given the nature and character of ASUU, there was no way YUSAN as an organisation of students and youths with a historic mission would not have had a robust relationship with it both locally and nationally.

## **Funding of the Movement**

The Movement got its funding from its members. It did not get funding from any other source. And because of the way the Movement was structured, there was no infiltration of any sort. It was not a rich organisation by any standard but, it enjoyed a lot of respect from the students because of its ideological content. Members freely donated money and papers to the organisation and there were no cases of fraud since there was no money kept in any bank or elsewhere. The Movement proved that a group or people who were determined could make changes and progress without having too much money in their kitty. It was truly a self-sustaining ideological group that survived on the basis of the sacrifices made its members.

## **Disciplinary Measures**

Members of the Movement were always on their toes knowing that as a revolutionary organisation discipline was key. Those who violated the rules of engagement were shown the way out and publicly ridiculed as their expulsion was publicly announced. The movement did not condone any form of indiscipline and was very strict. Trust was one of the principles that sustained the Movement for the period one spent in the University, not many members were expelled from the movement. Apparently because the tight process that undergirded recruitment of members, violators of the rules of engagement were far and between.

The State Security Services were always on the look-out for whom to pick and sent some of their men who acted as students or some who were students to join the Movement in order to file secret reports to their office. It is meet to state that YUSAN members were bold and courageous and there were instances in which their boldness saved them from being taken by the secret Police. A particular member who turned out to be a Secret Service agent was found out and publicly declared an agent provocateur. Such public declarations sustained the mystique that surrounded and sustained the organization.

## **The Current Situation**

YUSAN in Uniport was a strong ideological organisation which drew the attention and respect of students who were not even aligned to it. Because of the way it was run and the impact it made in building the ideological consciousness of the students, it enjoyed massive support of the students and surprisingly that of the authorities of the University. It must be stated that the ideological defeat of the former Soviet Union and the push for a neo-liberal order with its theology of the market constituted a big blow to Marxist/Leninist organisations on the campuses including YUSAN. Apparently, the ideological/political education classes were not as active as they ought to be when many of the cadres had left the Movement after graduating from the University. The global system is still battling with the consequences of a unipolar world under the influence of rabid and brazen capitalist mongering. The impact is more felt in the peripheries with its lethal effect on the lives and livelihood of their peoples. Countries within the peripheries that were struggling to escape the spectre of underdevelopment and were making giant progress in the past have under the current world order gone deeper into the morass of further underdevelopment and unfreedom.

In today's Nigeria, because organisations like YUSAN are no longer in existence on campuses, the latter have become grave yards of peace and ideological battles. Even ordinary symposia which hallmarked the Universities of old no longer take place. Students' time and focus have been directed to other concerns and even some say that Universities have become centres of Yahoo-Yahoo and Yahoo-Yahoo plus<sup>11</sup>. It does not appear that there are attempts by alternative truth-seekers to change the situation. This is disaster in all its ramifications!

The implication of the foregoing dismal reality should be a challenge to individuals, groups and concerned activists who have not been co-opted into the current ruling order in the country to get the Universities and other higher institutions stirring for the benefit of the country and humanity. The youths are axiomatically the leaders of tomorrow and must be imbued with the correct training and education for the development of the country on terms and values

that are pro-people and egalitarian. Our efforts should be anchored on these lines in order not to end on Golgotha or Barbarism. The choice is clear!

## **NOTES**

1. 1943 – Sir Walter Elliot’s Commission was established with 14 members who were given the mandate to report on the state of higher education in the colonies as well as outline the organisation of these institutions for Nigeria.
2. The Nigeria/Biafra war was fought between 1967-1970 and it was a devastating war and barely one year after the war the Technology Institute was set up. There were stories to the effect that Colonel Samuel Osaigbovo Chinedu Ogbemudia, Military Governor of Mid-West (1967-1975) was interested in getting the Federal Government of Nigeria to embrace the technological prowess of the Biafrans immediately after the war but that the Federal Government rejected the advice. Many commentators have concluded that by the rejection it was obvious that the government’s integration proclamation at the end of the war was a ruse.
3. Nigeria fully introduced the neo-liberal ideology in the early to mid-1980s with the embracement of the IMF/WB conditionalities and these policies apart from liberalising the establishment of Universities also created many economic crises that undermined the existence and survival of the students and even the academic institutions. It is therefore, not surprising that the students during the period under review resisted the implementation of the obnoxious economic policies of the government and used their students’ organisations to challenge the government which led to the killing of students and the shutting down of the Universities. Some students were imprisoned, some killed while others were rusticated.
4. Sylvester Odion-Akaine was a Student Union leader at the University of Lagos and he was also the General-Secretary of the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR) when he had left the University. He was detained for a number of times by the Dictatorship for his various roles as a campaigner for the liberation of Nigeria from the clutches of the military. Bjorn Beckman was a Nordic who spent his active intellectual

period in Nigeria teaching at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria where he was one of the foremost Marxist scholars. But he and Odion-Akaine have written things on the struggles of the Students' Movement in Nigeria.

5. In 1978 when the government of General Olusegun Obasanjo in his first incarnation removed meal subsidy and imposed some anti-students policies, the students through their national platform, National Union of Nigerian Students (NUUS) resisted the policies, calling for the removal of the then Commissioner of Education, Colonel Ahmadu Ali to resign hence the sobriquet "Ali Must Go". Government response to the students' protests was high-handed with some students being killed. Some radical lecturers in University of Lagos, University of Ibadan and UNN were also dismissed for allegedly mobilizing the students and influencing them.
6. At the end of the Second World War, the world was divided into the Western and Eastern Blocs. The United States of America led the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) while the former Soviet Union led the Warsaw Pact. NATO promoted the capitalist mode of economic production and its values while the Warsaw Pact was socialistic. There were other countries like Nigeria that belonged to the Non-aligned Movement which claimed that they were neither for either of the two Super Powers. These two blocs influenced the ideological direction of the world in various ways as each bloc was as important as the other and bipolarity was guaranteed.
7. The Core of an organisation works from the back while throwing up the front organisation. It is not seen but it determines how the organisation is run. Those who operate at the level of the Core are advanced cadres of the organisation. In the case of YUSAN, major decisions were taken and defended before the organisation. Democratic Centralism was the basis of decision-making. It was also the Core members of the organisation that represented it at the national and other levels including the Patriotic Youth Movement (PYW) which was also the Core of NANS.
8. General Yakubu Gowon had taken over the affairs of Nigeria after the

counter-coup by some Northern officers of the Nigerian Military. In 1966, a Military, coup which led to the killing of some important personalities from the Northern region of Nigeria had taken place. The coup was led by Major Kaduna Chukwuma Nzeogwu of Igbo extraction. The coup did not succeed in the Eastern region of Nigeria and was later labeled an Igbo coup. This led to a counter-coup culminating in a civil war which was fought for thirty years between Biafra and Nigeria. Those who led the counter coup and appointed Gowon Head of State were also the ones who toppled his regime in 1975 during his state visit to Adis-Ababa, Ethiopia for the Summit of the Organisation of African Unity (now African Union). General Gowon went into exile in the UK and ended up going to school. His PhD Thesis was on ECOWAS which he helped to form. The thesis is to say the least, was a deliberate incorporation of the ECOWAS Protocols. As members of YUSAN, we had the opportunity of reading the Thesis through Comrade Chris Akani who was a highly committed Postgraduate student of Political Science and a strong member of the Movement.

9. Julius Kayode Ihonvbere was the Acting Head of the Department of Political Science and Administrative Studies, University of Post-Harcourt. He was one of the outstanding lecturers who supported the Movement and in fact, the Students' Union to the point that his rivals dubbed him a Symposium scholar. He was politically and intellectually involved in the University. He is currently a member of the House of Representatives where he is the leader of the House. After his suspension in Uniport, he made some attempts to challenge it but according to him, he bribed some agents of the State Security Service (SSS) who facilitated his movement away from Nigeria to Canada. He later went to the United States where he was employed by the Ford Foundation as the Director for West Africa. Since 1999 when the country was returned to Civilian Rule, he has been involved in the politics of the country at the sub-national and national levels, renouncing some of the beliefs he held at Ife and Port-Harcourt as a lecturer. Many who knew him have dubbed him a turn-coat.

10. Some of the hidden forces that formed ASUU were Drs Segun Osoba of the Department of history at the then University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) and Bala Usman who was also a History lecturer at the Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) Zaria. Both were some of the finest ideologues whose inclinations to Marxism were loud and clear. Because of their outstanding intellection, they were appointed into the Constitution Drafting Committee to produce what turned out to be the 1979 Constitution upon which the Second Republic was built. But Osoba and Usman disagreed with the 49-member Committee and wrote a Minority Report. Chapter two of the current 1999 Constitution is a product of an aspect of the Minority Report of the duo.
11. Nigeria has witnessed many booms and dooms since its creation in 1914 by the colonial powers. Barely six years after independence, the country was thrown into chaos and the country has not recovered from it. The coup of 1966 and the counter-coup led to the killings of Easterners and the war between Nigeria and Biafra. Because of the way the country has been badly run by Nigerians, many creative but criminal ways have been devised by the criminal underworld to survive. There had been what was termed 419, a term taken from the Nigerian criminal Statute book to represent smart alics who defrauded Nigerians and foreigners alike with promises that were not delivered. A new criminal device to obtain money from the unsuspecting foreigners known as Yahoo-Yahoo carried out especially by young people is in vogue. The operators of the criminal scheme have since developed more ingenious but crude methods including killing their victims and using their vital parts to make quick money. In spite of efforts by the police and other security agencies to stem the tide, it has not abetted. Those in authority in the country are not better than those who

**CHAPTER TEN**  
**UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS – SYLVESTER ODION AKHAINE**

I am Prof. Sylvester Odion Akhaine, a Professor of Political Science at the Lagos State University. I had my undergraduate studies at the University of Lagos (Unilag) and was there between 1987 and (officially) 1992 because I was expelled at a time and had to spend extra year waiting for my result to be released. When I was admitted to Unilag, the university had a strong history of participation in students' activism. From the 1970s, Unilag was one of the second generation federal universities in Nigeria and we had great unionists like Faye, Panaf Olakanmi and Segun Okeowo who incidentally epitomized unionism in the school in his time. We had martyrs like Akintunde Ojo whom the students union building was named after.

By the time we entered the university, we did not meet any union on ground ostensibly due to the Emmanuel Abisoye Panel Report over the *ABU MASSACRE* stuff on the need to regulate student unionism. The Panel had come up with a range of criteria for participation in the student union movement, emphasizing on the idea of having about 3.5CGPA by any student who wanted to participate in union activities. That was a way of regulating the student union movement against an assumption that the never-do-wells were the trouble makers involved in students unionism.

What this meant was that if one must participate in union activities, he must be a student in good standing academically. He must be a brilliant student. Therefore, the student would not likely want to mortgage his academic excellence, so one has to moderate his activities. I think this was the basic assumption of the panelists. So we also found a way around it. When we came, there was no union. The Vice Chancellor (VC) as that time was Prof. Akin Adesola. By the time we were in year two, Professor Nurudeen Alao a Professor of Geography took over as the Vice Chancellor. That was the VC in power when we agitated for a student union. So it happened co-incidentally that a few other comrades who graduated with National Diploma from Kwara College of Technology were admitted into University of Lagos same time with us.

We therefore converged and even at the level of activism, we already belonged to some primary movement before we got admitted into the university. People

like Gbenga Olawepo, Olaitan Oyerinde were all graduates of Kwara College of Technology. So they entered Unilag as 200 level (direct entry) students. I came in as a JAMBite. So we all met there. It was a constellation with some elements of the Democratic Socialist Movement, Labour Militant and Socialist Youth League which Rasky Ojikutu was a prominent leader. So, all of these forces led to agitation for a union. We eventually cooperated and got aligned. There was nothing like ideological differentiation or what we called sectarianism. It was not a barrier for us. We cooperated and demonstrated in front of the Senate Building to ask for resuscitation of the student union.

It became obvious to the university authorities that if they did not lift the ban on student unionism, there would be crisis. That was it and the management of the university was always conscious of preventing trouble makers from leading the union. So, the process kicked off. I cannot recall exactly whom we fielded that year as our candidate, whether it was Rasky Ojikutu or not but the person who won was a pro-management candidate. His name is Phillips Madujitimi. We participated in the process but he won. He became head of the union. But we were in charge of the popular forces. We had control over the students because of our own ideas and the way we were able to hegemonise those ideas on campus. So that laid the foundation for a further contest for the radical student movement to intervene in the union process.

We wanted to intervene by fielding yet another candidate. The candidate we chose was a woman, Juliet Southey-Cole now Affiong, but the election was truncated by the anti-SAP protest of 1989. Usually, it is a practice that when one is in 300 level and is a union official, he has just one year to spend at the level of the union. So Juliet could no longer continue when we returned to campus after the anti-SAP crisis. The lot then eventually fell on me who was at a lower level to become the candidate of the Movement. Our movement that was established, the Left ideological movement was called Marxist-Leninist Study Group (MLSG). At that time, it was headed by one of our comrades who was doing his Masters degree programme. His name was Comrade Mohammed Bala. He was from the University of Maiduguri where he was lecturing.

He came for a Masters degree in Mass Communication at Unilag. So he was leading the Movement. We had two other lecturers; Ukem Uyekpe and Andy Kanabe who is now late as part of the movement. Gbenga Olawepo, Samuel Jimoh, Olaitan Oyerinde, Assen Iyoha and Taiwo Keshinro, Biodun Kolawole and my humble self. At the later part, we brought Olusegun Mayegun, Ken Akali and Victor Ukagu who is now a Professor at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka into the Movement. Nonso Uchegbu was also part of the Movement. All these people constituted the cell at University of Lagos. So, I became the candidate of the Left movement and we campaigned and ran for the election. It was a struggle between pro-establishment candidate and those of us who were of the radical left. We lost the election at Idi-Araba campus but won the whole of Akoka campus. It was clear that the election was tampered with, at Idi-Araba campus to ensure that the pro-management candidate won and the guy was Chris Anyaeze who later became Chris Odiaka but he is late now. We challenged the result of that election and at the time they were to be sworn in, our Movement asked me to also get my own academic gown to be sworn in. So we went to the auditorium and I adorned the gown to be sworn in. The Vice Chancellor Prof. Nurudeen Alao came but it was impossible for him to perform the swearing in.

He just said, “I have come, seen and observed.” He just uttered those few words and left the auditorium. The next thing we saw was that a panel was set up to try us for what they called unruly behaviour. The panel was headed by Prof. Jelili Omotola who was a law lecturer. Years later, he became the Vice Chancellor of the university. We were rusticated and we had no choice but to challenge the action in court. We were in court having exchanges with the university authority but were courteous about it and also conscious of the law in our engagement with the Unilag authority. Eventually, the case dragged on for over a year but we later got justice delivered by Justice Onalaja at the Ikeja High Court. With the judgment in our favour, we came back to the university to write our departure examination. I had actually finished at some point, but they did not release my result and I could not complete some courses.

So I was allowed to write those courses and the rest of them, though the University initially with-held my result. There was one Bankole who could

not graduate and another young man who eventually ended up at Delta State University who had earlier gone to beg Unilag authority. He is now an Oba (traditional ruler) in one of the towns in Kwara State. We spent more time than necessary but being on campus for some of us, also helped us to mobilize the students in some of the national struggles such as the 1989 anti-SAP protest. There was also the 1992 economic protest which was actually directed at the level of Unilag campus because Olusegun Mayegun had become the NANS President at that time, so we provided the ideological backing for his tenure. The one we need to emphasize is that the MSLG did not continue after many of us who were the original protagonists left the campus on graduation. That continuity was not there. We attempted to seize power after Mayegun by fielding Gbenga Otunuga (a.k.a. Baggis) against Omoyele Sowore. We adopted Otunuga because Sowore was not actually a Left-wing person ideologically speaking. He was just a populist student. I think that the choice between Baggis and Sowore came before us because first, we were playing ideological politics. It was not a question of looking for a liberal element to pull to our side. One thing that has to be granted was that Sowore was one of our many foot soldiers. In all the actions, we carried out on campus, he was always there but he was not ideologised along the Left perspective. So, we did not feel confident fielding him. In fact, he had to seek alliance with other forces on campus.

Some of those groups we regarded as anti-social elements (cult groups) on campus also gave him some backing. That was it. We chose Baggis based on ideological preference at that time, though Sowore eventually won. In actual fact, Sowore was not a cultist to my knowledge but he engaged most of the cult groups on campus, which led to his bodily harm along the line, for reasons I may not be able to explain. Eventually, he left the University of Lagos for the United States on the grounds of going for medical rehabilitation. He was attacked and allegedly injected with cyanide. Going back again, it is pertinent to say that the ideological movement that was built on campus helped many of the national struggles that we waged.

For example, the 1989 anti-SAP protest would not have succeeded in Lagos without the MSLG because before the resuscitation of the Union between

1988/89, Unilag was a bastion of reaction as progressive tendencies have actually ossified, if not completely dead. We were able to use the structure to mobilize and socialize students to core national issues like anti-imperialism and other policies that were anti-people, around that time. We were also guided by the NANS Charter of demand which was heavily loaded with anti-imperialist and anti-establishment documents in terms of our demands.

We demanded of course the nationalization of the commanding heights of Nigeria's economy. We demanded free education, free health care and a foreign policy that was anti-imperialist. These were some of the high points of NANS Charter of demand. So, we espoused it and at the level of Unilag, one thing happened. When I lost the presidency as a candidate of the collective, I was subsequently elected the Public Relations Officer of NANS. Interestingly, the position gave us more power on campus than even the Unilag Student Union President. So, we had a perfect control of the campus in terms of protest activities on campus which was why it was possible for us to organize and mobilize against two of the major policies of the Babangida regime which were the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) and economic protest of 1992 which Babangida himself described the former as the civilian equivalent of a military coup de tact during that period.

The anti-SAP protest was also very fundamental because if you look at it very well, the April, 1992 coup de tact was a culmination of all the activities of Nigeria student movement. The radical Nigeria student movement at that time which was highly ideological also inspired the military coup led by Major Gideon Orkar. Most of the demands the students were making which were against the World Bank loan became issues in the coup speech and if one can recall very well, some of our senior comrades who were in the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) were arrested over the coup. They included Omotoye Olorode, Idowu Awopetu, Chris Mamah (who was Editor of Punch Newspaper) and Julius Ihonbvere who had to run away from the University of Port Harcourt and fled abroad. They were indicted for writing the coup speech even though they had nothing to do with it.

Christ Mamah was arrested because he reported the full coup speech in the

Punch newspaper. The regime suspected that the newspaper editor had prior knowledge of the coup and all of that. The irony is that the Left perspective left the Student Union by the time many of us who were the protagonists in MSLG left the campus.

***Question: It looked as if the Left had problem winning student union election at Unilag, what were the factors responsible for this? You talked about the election at Idi-Araba campus, was it rigging out or was it this feeling that medical students were very reactionary?***

**Answer:** This is a very good question but you know the Left-wing mode of mobilization is quite different from Right Wing elements. It is true that the character of students at Idi-Araba was supposedly conservative. We worked on that factor but that was basically not why we lost the place. It was a question of our ability to man the votes because the guy we posted there as polling agent; Taiwo Keshinro went out to take some drinking water. Before he returned, malpractices had taken place. Obviously, it was in an attempt for Keshinro to refresh himself that the manipulation took place and Keshinro in all honesty was not a forceful character. Olaitan was shuttling between Akoka and Idi-Araba campuses. We had a vehicle we were using to monitor the election. So, we won at Akoka campus overwhelmingly such that for a whole week, there was no calm when it was announced that we lost.

Many people could not believe that we lost. There was the perception that we won the election. That perception increased our popularity because there was a difference between officially occupying the union positions and controlling the mass of students. So we retained the mass control of students which was an evidence that we could not have lost the election. It was that popularity that led to our capturing of the Union under the leadership of Olusequen Mayegun who then introduced some social policies such as ***Mama Put canteens***, cheap transportation on campus etc during his tenure. This also provided the basis for us to continue our hegemonic control which we lost again when we fielded Baggis. So, if we had compromised with hind-sight to field Sowore, it is possible that we would have had control over Sowore

***Question: But Sowore as it were, was not coming from your own MLSSG ideological block?***

**Answer:** Everything is possible. If we had thrown our weight behind him, it would mean that he would have gained overwhelming victory and the little I can say is that Sowore had respect for many of us in the leadership of the Students Movement on campus. So chances of resisting our orientation or some of the policy advice would have been very lean because what he eventually was doing, were things we would have probably done, but of course with some moderation and coloration. We would have given it ideological coloration. We could have fought in a different way. When we were on campus, cult groups were even afraid to announce themselves. We successfully de-legitimized them through propaganda.

***Question: Now that we are talking of cultism which cuts across couple of campuses within this period and we do know that in some cases, the state was propping up the cults. What was the strategy put in place to contain them in your campus?***

**Answer:** University of Lagos had a history of the students fighting cult groups which is why Baluba Kingdom (Mariere Hall) was notorious in throwing bottles. The students would climb the pent-house and were raining bottles on the cult boys. That was where the notoriety came from which earned the Hall, Baluba Kingdom. The whole of Mariere Hall is called Baluba Hingdom. The point really is that at the time we came to campus, cult activities were not popular at all. We had a programme we called cultural clinic where we taught about main-streaming progressive ideological views that would negate all those anti-social behaviours. Actually, we were doing it, organizing symposia and bringing most of those radical leaders to campus. People like Akin Oyebode, Alaba Ogunsanwo etc were all part of it. We were bringing other comrades from outside of Unilag such as Femi Falana, Femi Aborishade and a few other comrades outside to campus to talk to our students. That was part of it.

Now, we have proliferation of cult movements. According to history, earlier the Pyrate Confraternity was very popular at Unilag but in our time, it was not popular any more. We could not hear about them even when they sailed,

they did so in their rooms. They were not doing it in the open. But the Sea Dogs in Unilag which was Pyrates Confraternity, was not like what we have now. The earlier ones were what we can call the professional Sea Dogs led by Prof. Wole Soyinka. The likes of Ebenezer Babatope were part of that group at that time. We did not meet that civilized mode of operation of the Pyrates on campus. By the time we were on campus, cult activities were very modest and it was even difficult to know that they exist. One common thing at that time was the fact that if anyone wanted to undermine the reputation of any leader or student, he or she would be framed as member of a cult group. That was used against my candidacy. I remember there was a propaganda material that was released against us when we were running for the presidency with me as the candidate. The propagandists were alleging that our candidate (myself) was rarely seen in groups but when he moves, he moves only among the radical group, that the candidate (meaning myself) must be a cult person. That was the allegation that time.

***Question: Can you talk more about how the anti-SAP protest was organized in Unilag.***

**Answer:** It is very important to talk about anti-SAP Protest. When the student union was resuscitated, the major protest during that period was actually the anti-SAP because during the time of *Ali-Must-Go* some of us were not yet in the university even though we mobilized from the outside as comrades. The 1989 anti-SAP protest was instructive because that was the time we were testing our strength and popularity on campuses by mobilizing the students on a large scale against the economic policies of the Babangida regime. Getting the students to demonstrate was extremely difficult. The person in charge of the Union Phillips Madujitimi was a pro-establishment person, but we got to a level that he was forced to join us though ironically to dilute the process even though he could not oppose it. It was extremely difficult for us to mobilize the students but the turning point was that after perseverance, our comrades in University of Benin who had already pulled the students into the street had to come down to Lagos to join us.

I remember very well that Bamidele Aturu, Debo Adeshina, Ogaga Ifowodo,

Bamidele Opeyemi and others came to join us. There was also some cultural element of that struggle. Fela Anikulapo had just released his music album titled BEAST OF NO NATION. That music was what we used to mobilize the students and galvanized them into action as we were playing the music around the campus. The music was a mobilizing lyric that pointed at some inadequacies in the corridors of power. We made effective use of the music. By the time our comrades who came from other campuses joined us, it was possible to pull the Unilag students into the street. Eventually, we shut down the entire Lagos, because literarily speaking, when it had not happened in Lagos, it would look as though the protest had not succeeded. That time, the regime had not relocated its seat of power from Lagos to Abuja. The lesson was the conscious alliance that students built, because there was a vanguard movement that directed much of the work we did during that period.

So we were not acting in isolation. We were acting in concert with the student leaderships in Universities of Benin, Calabar, Ife, Jos and others. Where the protest movement did not quite succeed, it was obviously a product of the level of mobilization of students at that level and the structure they had on ground. So, at Unilag, for the fact that we had a Left structure made up of highly conscious students, it was possible for us to organize on such a scale that we could paralyse the entire Lagos, many of the times we came out to protest against the ills of government.

***Questions: You have mentioned conscious leadership. Now, we are projecting into the post 1992 students protest and if one may ask, what was the problem of MLSG with the transition at Unilag.***

**Answer:** What I can say is that when Mohammed Bala was leaving campus on completion of his programme, he handed over to Gbenga Olawepo the leadership of MLSG and Gbenga when he was graduating in turn, handed over to Samuel Jimoh who was in Actuarial Science department. I am not quite sure what happened, but when Samuel left, automatically I took over the leadership of the Movement. That was basically what happened and many of our comrades also left. We cannot forget that by virtue of our expulsion which later resulted in court case among others, some of our comrades who

were not expelled graduated and left. So, we actually had a very small force for those of us who remained. Biodun Kolawole was more Left than even Mayegun but like I earlier said, Mayegun had this popularity on campus and we had to use him. We actually wanted to use Biodun Kolawole but since Mayegun had a more popular image, we had to balance it, by making Biodun Kolawole the General Secretary of NANS while Mayegun was the President.

That was how we played the politics as at that time. Mayegun was not in a position to build any movement but Nonso had graduated and was with us on campus. I cannot really speak for them, but I also feel that Nonso was not in a position to build the movement. I am not sure whether he was doing his Masters degree programme by then or just staying with his brother (Prof. Uchegbu) in the Faculty of Law. He was not in a position to build the movement and the comrades we recruited towards the end of our studentship were not socialized enough to be able to take initiative to continue the structure. So we can describe it as the failure or inability of the structure to reproduce itself at that level.

Talking about Biodun Kolawole, I can say he was a younger person in the MSLG in Unilag but I think the thing is that he was sufficiently socialized in the Left ideology and he understood it very well that he carried the tradition in Unilag into the larger society. He was saddled with the responsibility of pioneering Ola Oni Centre for Research in Oshogbo practically at the instance of the then Governor of the State, Rauf Aregbesola. If you know Ola Oni very well, he was one of our ideological fore-bearers. He was a renowned Marxist who lived in Bodija Ibadan and his house was a rallying centre for many of the Left radicals. So this young Marxist, Biodun Kolawole was saddled with the responsibility of pioneering the Centre for Research in Ola Oni's honour. It was in the course of that job, he died in a ghastly motor accident along with his wife, leaving behind their children. His own particular history illustrates what one might call exemplary commitment to the struggle for a progressive Nigeria. He was really a committed person and he was a partaker in many of the social struggles we waged in Nigeria in the 1990s and early 2000.

In a circumstance such as this, it is a point to ask question about those who are committed to the struggle for a better Nigeria and died untimely, who takes

care of their children. I think in the case of Biodun Kolawole, we were very conscious of that. The manner of his death along with his wife was quite traumatic and painful for all of us. However, what happened is that Biodun Aremu and I, took care of his first son after the painful incident. I secured admission for him into Lagos State University to study Biochemistry and he stayed in my house all through. I fed him all through, while Aremu and I, jointly paid his school fees until the point where I took it over alone. I am aware that there are some of Biodun Kolawole's friends who may have intervened in assisting the children one way or the other. Remarkably, the boy had an uncle who was based in Ilorin that provided fatherly umbrella for him over there.

There was a local government chairman in Kwara whose name incidentally is also Biodun who also intervened in assisting the family especially to Kolawole's daughter Eniola who graduated from Federal University of Technology, Minna. There are two other children, Olamide and one other. However, I do not have update on those ones. This is how we could help in our own way.

**UNIVERSITY OF ILORIN, ILORIN – OLAWALE SAINT**

**UNILORIN MAYIST, IRON GRINDER TRADITION IN THE STUDENTS' MOVEMENT (1982 – 1992)**

“Blood is thicker than Water

True... but,

Steel, is thicker than them both “... Baba Aiye

**General Introduction**

In the period under review the poetic truism best sums up the narratives of youths/students' social activism at the University of Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. Established in 1978, in Kwara South Local Government Area of Kwara State, North Central, Federal Republic of Nigeria, University of Ilorin situated on a land area of 295 sq.mtrs. is the 7th largest in terms of land mass in the country. It runs a dual campus system, Main campus off Tanke and Mini Campus off Ibrahim Taiwo road. The institution with the maxim, “Probitas Doctrina “indeed produced veritable youth, students that uphold probity and doctrines of good governance based on welfare of the people as the supreme law in the 1980s – to – early, 1990s.

The institution played host to one of the radical, if not revolutionary, dye in the wool activists in the 1980s to early 1990s in the students, academic, human rights, pro-democracy, labour and social movements. Paradoxically, almost in defiance of the well-known history of Ilorin town, with contending forces the Yoruba Afonja group and the Emirate Kingdom, Muslim versus Christian clashes, the campus was relatively insulated beyond these inanities because activism raised the bar of social yearnings and aspirations of the institution to the pedestal of seeking sound management of the campus, welfare of students and workers, human and democratic rights of citizens as well as termination of jackboot, military despotism in the country. It was a banner, which substantial majority of the institution's populace subscribed to either overtly or covertly. The students' movement in the 80s draws a lot of strength from the fertile, progressive, fighting traditions of the movement. Activists at Unilorin just like

their peers on other campuses, are inspired by the history of King's College, Lagos, Students' Protest which formed crucial nucleus of the firmament for the formation of the famous West African Students' Union, WASU – the leading Youth/Students umbrella body for anti-colonial struggles in the sub-continent. WASU produced most of the foremost nationalist leaders for the region. Reference ports are generally found in the heroic struggles of 'Anglo Nigeria Defence Pact Protest, Protest against the Killing of Kunle Adepeju, considered as the first Martyr of the students' movement, following the Zik Hall, students' welfare crisis in University of Ibadan, 1971, A.B.U, Zaria Massacre of Students Protests of 1986, and, of course, the "Ali Must Go' Protest of 1978".

Dr Iyhiorcha Ayu gave a penetrating analytical submission on the Nigerian students' movement drawing inspirations from examples in Europe, America, Latin America and indeed Africa Ayu showed that-

“Unionized students activism” and the vanguard role it plays in confronting and bringing to the forefront of national focus anti-people socio-economic and educational policies is not unique to Nigeria but is rather a global phenomenon as examples of the American anti-Vietnam war protest of the 1960s by American students, the French students anti-French Algerian policies protest of May 1968, pitched battles with police and the army in Peru, El Salvador, Nicaragua etc by students in Latin America which has led to Latin American Universities to be dubbed “Political Universities” because of the resistance of Latin American Students to feudal land policies and the domination of American capital which has reduced the working classes of Latin America to virtual slaves. Equally of note are students led agitation for social reforms which abound in Africa, a good example being the Soweto uprisings of 1976-1977” ..... (Oluajo, S. B }.

This approximates the historical duties, challenges and organizational positioning which the PYMN and other left leaning, ideological movements deployed as compass to chart the trajectories of the national umbrella body for the students' movement, the NANS.

## **Contextualising University Of Ilorin Activism In National Association Of Nigeria Students, Nans**

The National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) was established at Yaba College of Technology in June 1980. The military regime of Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo, (Rtd). banned its progenitor, National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS) in 1978 after the nationwide protests against the removal of meal subsidy in the tertiary institutions. Patriotic Youths Movement of Nigeria (PYMN), an anti-imperialist platform formed in 1973 at University of Ibadan maintained the unbroken cord of the fighting spirits of Nigerian students. Some of its fiery cadres were victims of victimisations like, AbdulRahman Black and Ayatollahmo, who were expelled for their courageous stand. The pioneering NANS President was Chris Mammah from the University of Calabar, while the Secretary-General was the President of Yabatech, Comrade Ayodele Akele. This NANS leadership was succeeded by the Presidency of a former Secretary General of “Great Ife Varsity” students’ union, Lanre Arogundade. It is apposite to here-in note that the activities as well as leadership of the umbrella students’ body was directed, coordinated and given concrete material force by ideological movements across campuses, particularly the PYMN.

Buhari / Idiagbon military dictatorial regime attacked the welfare of Nigerian students by cancelling the meal ticket system. This became a litmus test for Arogundade NANS leadership.

Students rose in resistance against the reactionary actions of the junta. From the end of March to the beginning of May 1984, Nigerian students protested from Ilorin to Lagos, Ife to Benin, Calabar to Kano with lecture boycotts, protest processions and mass demonstrations. The junta reacted with closures of campuses, arrests of student activists and expulsions of union leaders. Prominent amongst those expelled on April 3rd. 1984, were the then inimitable President of Unilorin Students’ Union, Comrade Sola Mike Olorunyomi, the union’s Secretary-General, Comrade Joe Abereoran and PRO, Comrade Mathew Keyi. The NANS was hammered with a ban, Unions proscribed. It is important to point out that these attacks by the Government was obeyed only in defiance by the students’ movement as the ideological core sustained

the operations of the umbrella body and continuous resistance on campuses by cadres.

The NANS, in May 1986, under the leadership of Emman Ezeazu from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), and the students' movement led yet another mass protest linked with the A.B.U. Massacre. The University Students' Union Caretaker Committee in its commemoration of the massacre, addressed students in Amina Hall, which the Vice Chancellor, Prof. Ango Abdullahi turned into a blood bath by inviting mobile policemen to the campus which led to several students' death fatalities, claimed to be more than twenty "...Nigerian students across the country rose up with fervor against the massacre. Students' unions after students' unions were dissolved, campuses closed, Jonas Awodi, now deceased, the then NANS Secretary-General and Chima Ubani the then immediate past President of UNN Students' Union were detained in prison and the National Association of Nigerian Students for the second time in two years was banned....." Baba Aiye

In Unilorin, with the military repression and proscription of the democratic students' union body led by Mike Olorunyomi, the students responded with extempore convocation of a Congress where, Ayodeji Jaiyeoba Gaskiya emerged as Chairman of Congress that held sway in 1986. Almost in the same fashion the students at University of Ife, "Great Ife" held that their Union is neither a cube of sugar that can be dissolved or, a balloon that can be suspended in the air by the authorities. Generally, at this period, the students' movement ran semi open, underground engagements ably coordinated by vibrant, ideological organizations. Notable along with the PYMN, are the Labour Militant {LM}; the May 31st.Movement (M31M) and the Reformers Academy.

### **University Of Ilorin Mayist Intervention In The Students' Movement**

Any universal citadel of knowledge worth its salt is generally constructed on a tripod stand, the Gown, Town, and Globe. University of Ilorin student movements' tradition is conscious of these considerations and factors in molding its programs, perspectives, and interventions. Be it at the level of the campus, multi-campus activities, i.e., micro – struggles or, the larger State,

National or Continental, macro – struggles.

The major arrival port for most of the crops of the students' activists on the campus is the creative, pen pushing, and vocational callings. It is like a melting pot of some sorts where, the academic, non-academic staff and students cross incubate ideas for building a better clime. Some are utopian, others just adventurous and a few, scientific with burning fervor for a means of social expression. In the mid-80s, whilst there subsist banning of the democratic students' union bodies, the Executives, Students' Representative Council, SRC, and Judiciary, the only viable platform that can raise critical issues and ideas were the Press Clubs. The press organizations are registered by the Office of the Dean of Students' Affairs (D.S.A.). They operate through press boards' publications on both Mini and Main campuses. Thus, it provides an ample avenue for students' social interactions to cross fertilize ideas. The notable ones are the Modern Writers Club, Fire-point, and Veritas. These clubs were manned by people like Abdurasheed Na'Allah, Yomi Shittu, Jide Fashiku, Jide Otitoju, Rasheed Olawale to mention a few. Some of them played roles in the national polity after graduation.

It is instructive to note that despite the ban on the students union, these press clubs in collaboration with organizations like the Youth Solidarity for South Africa and Nigeria, YUSSAN, later Current Affairs and Cultural Association, CAFCA, Pan African Youth Congress, PAYCO, radical lecturers like Poju Akinyanju, Prof. Oduleye, Remi Medupin, Mr. Salami and former students' union leaders who were practicing journalists in Ilorin metropolis like Mathew Keyi, Dapo Olorunyomi, younger brother to Sola Mike regularly organized enlightenment symposia, workshops in the students' union buildings on both campus. The sharp criticisms of the Rtd. Gen, Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida military "benevolent despotic "regime and the school administration soon became intolerable to the Professor Tola Adeniyi led authority. It should be noted that, the Department of Students' Affairs are administered by senior personnels from the Non-Academic staff under heavy overbearing influence of operatives of the Department of State Security Services, DSS. Many of their officers and agents were planted on campuses to monitor, report militant, anti-establishment activities of students and staff. The democratic space for

ventilation of students' yearnings was further constricted with the banning of all Press clubs on the campus. All the Press bodies responded by pasting a graffiti of 'Padlocked Lips' on their boards. The banning of the press was sometimes in the month of May 1988.

A motley group of activists resisted the banning with defiant innovations. They resolved to keep churning out articles, reports, and directives to students by creating what they tagged "Liberation Walls" on both Main and Mini Campus. They simply surreptitiously at night paste their publications on the walls of academic lecture halls, using varied pseudonyms like Batman, King Cobra, Ayatollah, Lenin etc. Then, followed up with open agitations around the "Liberation Walls" in the morning where students usually massively participated, freely ventilating their views for better welfare in the halls of residence, improved learning environment, against the school authorities' high handedness and, for termination of military dictatorship in the country. These organized interventions were never accidental but cautiously being guided by an emerging ideological nucleus, clear about its historic mission.

Most of these youths have their paths crossing from different currents of campus life. As pointed out above, literary exploration through Association of Campus Journalists, A.C.J. played crucial roles, but nexus included commitments to social causes. For instance, when late Gani Fawehinmi was framed up with trumped charges and fined N6.2 million for defamation against IBB goons, Colonels Hakilu and Togun, a group of activists under aegis of Gani Fawehinmi Solidarity Association, GFSA took up the gauntlet to solicit voluntary contributions from within the campus communities and Ilorin town populace to raise funds to part offset the Fine. The G.F.S.A has membership across the academic, non-academic staff, students at the University and adjoining Kwara College of Technology, Kwaratech, like Mr. Salami and Baba Were, a lecturer and student respectively from Kwaratech. The cadres on the G.F.S.A. March were Femi Amao, Ola Saint Jherico, Kunle Adegoke, Kayode Aremu, Babatunde Aiyelabola, Baba Were, one Rasta Femi and a few others. There is also an organized recruitment of militant female activists into the Women In Nigeria (WIN) campus, two notable activists from this stream were Comfort Idika and Joe Okei. It suffices to state that most of these students

are members of an underground ideological movement named Current Affairs Friendship and Cultural Association-CAFCA.

CAFCA organizes through core members and a wild ocean of sympathizers embedded in various bodies from Students' Departmental to Faculty Associations, Cultural Organizations of different States and communities, Clubs and Social Societies. It also had cordial relationships with progressive segments of the two main religious bodies, Islam and Christianity. It organized political educational outreaches with workers, peasant traders, transporters and Community Development Associations in Ilorin town and environs. This is outside but, with active collaboration of the academic and non-academic staff on campus.

A comic incident deserved to be put on record during this period of semi open, underground operations of the movement. The University Management invited the then, military Head of State and self-decreed President, Gen. Ibrahim Babangida – the Visitor of the institution – as the Special Guest of its convocation ceremony at the University. CAFCA and its allies seized the occasion to secretly mobilized students to demand for resuscitation of democratic students' unionism, better students' welfare, respect for human rights, rule of law and democracy. On the day of the convocation however, many students trooped to the Convocation Arena just to have a glimpse of the maximum dictator, IBB's smooth, fresh body, feel the scent of his perfume and general mystical aura of the Dictator! A few committed students joined CAFCA cadres on the picket lines to raise their placards. At the end of the event, it was reported in the underground news mills that IBB lost his highly expensive silver, fortune ring while having handshakes with admirers. This terribly irked the University management particularly officers of the Department of Students' Affairs under whose purview, with men of the State Security Services, SSS are directly in charge of protocols and security of the Special Guest. This security breach was considered as a dereliction of duties and failure on their part. The proscribed, vibrant campus press through the underground "Liberation Walls" gave heightened publicity to this incidence on the campus, practically ascribing it as a major gain of the intervention of CAFCA activists. The Department of Students' Affairs in its desperate bid to

find scape goats invited some of the cadres for a panel interrogation. These include, Omotaje Olawale Saint Jherico, Adegoke K. Rad, Dele Sallam, Aremu Kayode, Segun Dickson and a few students' agents of the authority, perhaps. to give evidence to implicate the genuine activists. The activists met with their other co-travelers led by Prof. Oduleye and Poju Akinyanju and perfected their responses to likely posers by the Panel. At the session in the Students' Affairs, the cadres gave a collective response. That, they merely honoured the Panel's invitation because it was sent through their various departmental heads and, to clear their names. They pointed out that if the DSA have conducted diligent search, they would not have erroneously addressed them with wrong names and without matriculation numbers. They submitted that the names invited to the Panel are unknown to the institution. More importantly, the so-called pseudonyms of writers on the "Liberation Walls" like "King Cobra, Batman, Lion Heart etc. "can best be located in the jungle, not in a learning environment. Aremu Kayode killed it for the day, dressed fully in Islamic Babariga, adorning a huge Turban on his head and a long Muslim rose beads (Misbahar) in hand, he declared to the Head of DSA Interrogators... "My name is Aremu Kayode Abdul-Tajudeen, a devoted Muslim from Ilorin. I believe all these framed allegations are the handwork of Zionist detractors of my faith. I will move from here to report this case to my brothers and sisters in town..." The Panel was instantly awed by the prospective scepter of volatile clash on campus! They were not only overwhelmed, withdrew all allegations against the students and apologized. Case dismissed courtesy of the prank of a non-practicing, socially outgoing, peripheral member of CAFCA.

The movement at University of Ilorin, CAFCA, hitherto historical experience, cadres especially Jaiye Gaskya was instrumental to berthing the National body, the May 31st. Movement (M31M). It forms the nucleus of the Movement and through marathon sessions of retreats at a rural community, Idofia, distilled out its cardinal ideological pillars. The pool of ideological currents covered wide range of divergent fields, from Gaskya who cannot be bottled by the bureaucracy of Stalinist, Socialist orthodoxy, Aiyelabola with classical Marxist-Leninism, accepting Trotskyites perspectives, K. Rad' Tony Cliff's typification of defunct USSR as " State Capitalist State", the Pan Africanist group, those with sympathies for the Palestinian Liberation cause and Arab

nation's anti-imperialist countries – Iran, Libya, to, those advocates of a moral rebirth, radical, anti-imperialist, social welfare society with the Latin American revolutions of Cuba, Peru etc. Beside classic Marxist literatures, inspirations and ideas were drawn from works of Che Guevera's "Man and Society", Fidel Castro's "History will Absolve Me", Cheik Anta Diop, UNESCO Reports on General History of Africa, Chancellor Williams' "Towards Destruction of Black Civilizations", Collected Works of Leon Trotsky and, many others. Thus, the final Mayist Manifestoes document capture: -

- Characterization of the USSR and former Eastern Europe Countries as "Deformed, Bureaucratic State Capitalist States. Therefore, a dire imperative for genuine Socialist, Workers Democratic Revolution from to finish the aborted Bolshevik Revolution. This was long before the collapse of the defunct, deformed bureaucratic East Block States.
- Critical interrogation of the Two Stage Revolution theory and Popular Fronts perspectives.
- Construction of a radical socialist, welfare State with scientific, pan Africanist approach.
- Acceptance of Mass, Insurgent Insurrections as means of carrying out the revolutionary transformation.

### **Anti – Sap Protest As Baptismal Of Fire For The Mayist Tendency At Unilorin**

It is apposite to emphasize that even without having a democratic students' union body; the cadres of CAFCA have been attending Senate meetings of the National Association of Nigerian Students, NANS as Observers. Comrades Ola Saint Jherico, Kunle Radical and Aremu Kayode attended these sessions and gave reports on the state of affairs on the campus, which invariably reflected in the Communique. Transportation to these NANS meetings were always through voluntary contributions by CAFCA members and support from academic staff co travelers. In this regard, the Academic Staff Union headed by Poju Akinyanju did not only offer financial support, but it also equally gave letters of introduction to colleagues in the hosting institutions. It was from

these kind of understandings that CAFCA teams on NANS assignments met persons like Dr. Ayu in University of Jos and Dr. Bala Usman at the Ahmadu Bello University, A.B.U. Even with this support, cadres travelled in Goods/ Cargo Lorries often times to evade security operative networks and inadequate funding.

The participation in NANS programs and Anti – SAP protest leading to the closure of the campus in May 1989 was thus, a conscious work of multiple ideological movements. As a matter of fact, the PYMN sent one of its members, Biodun Ogunade from University of Ibadan to ensure that Unilorin joined the Mass Action even while still agitating for democratic students' unionism. Forces on both campuses aligned for this mobilization;- Femi Abayomi, Bayo Ojo, Shoga Fashoranbaku, Babatunde Aiyelabola held forth in the Main Campus while Ola Saint Jherico, Kunle Radical and Jaiye Gaskya from Ilorin town held forth in the Mini Campus.

The Anti – SAP protest started with the Convention at University of Ilorin, in July 1988. The campus, which was slated to be host institution, was invaded by armed operatives of the state. The Convention had to hold at the Kwara State Secretariat of the Civil Service Technical Workers Union of Nigeria (CSTWUN), showing the fraternal bond of the youth/students' movement with the organized labour. The Convention produced Comrade Lukman Salihu from ABU, Zaria in the saddle of leadership. NANS, under Lukman smirching from stigma of its underground days' operations, dismayed by Government's hypocrisy and deceits on Cooney's Political Bureau recommendations as well as cruel implementation of harsh neo-liberal economic pills, the Structural Adjustment Program, S.A.P, the students' movement was eager to test its grits at the barricade of mass action. No doubt the resurgence of the All-African Students Union activities and students' movement renaissance from Korea to Tiananmen Square, Joburg to Buenos Aires, Paris to Milan saw to the Association rising again as a fighting organization.

The Anti – S.A.P mass protests of May 1989, was an anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist struggle echoed and waged with the mass organizations of workers, peasants, traders, lumpen youths, transporters and neighborhood artisans. The

NANS, with its enigmatic Public Relations Officer, Gbenga Olawepo from Unilag, and irrepressible Deputy Senate President, Gbenga Komolafe from U.I. even as the then president Lukman Salihu bore the blow of incarceration, NANS took the torch of struggle far and wide. Market women and men, trade unions, professional associations, etc. were mobilized in Nigeria while passing through the All-African Students' Union Secretariat in Ghana, they travelled to various countries including South Korea to mobilize global support for the struggle of the students, for the struggle of the entirety of oppressed and exploited people in Nigeria against the domination of International Finance Capital. This of course, greatly embarrassed the government. The Babangida junta was forced by the uprising of the masses to make available what it called "SAP relief" to workers, citizens in general and very importantly to the Nigerian students. This came significantly in the shape of union buses amongst other benefits.

After the Saliu Lukman led Anti- SAP protest, the students' movement witnessed a general boost with the provision of Anti – SAP Relief buses to schools and students' unions to alleviate transportation hardships. The successor, Bamidele Opeyemi/Luke Aghanenu – led administration of NANS major campaign was against the World Bank Loan for education in Nigeria, 1990. Unfortunately, the foiled Gideon Okar coup attempt disrupted full execution of this campaign. The tenure however, organized elaborate events to mark the 10th Years Anniversary of NANS. The tenure laid the process for the involvement of the students' movement in the pro – democracy struggles through Alao Aka-Bashorun led National Consultative Forum.

### **The Nans Academic Reforms (Acaref) Protest, 1991**

By 1990, democratic students' unionism was resuscitated, with Sunday Aiyegbusi emerging as President. Most of CAFCA cadres were prevented by the Management from contesting through several booby traps. The Movement, heeding counsels of co travelers in ASUU resolved to massively enter the Students' Representatives Council and only contest with relatively unknown cadres for the Central Executive Council. These tactics paid off as the CAFCA had total majority control of the students' parliament with a leading ideologue,

Babatunde Aiyelabola-Iree elected as Speaker while “a white horse” cadre, Seyi Salami was elected Vice President of the Union.

The movement deployed its hard-won democratic union to strengthen and spread its tentacles at intervening in adjourning campuses in the State at Kwara State College of Technology, Kwaratech, Colleges of Education in Ilorin and Oro and Offa Polytechnic. It also became more visible in the activities of the students’ national umbrella body – NANS. In the same breadth, its cadres were involved in the emerging human rights, pro-democracy movement, labour and informal sector education, organizational work.

Two major events marked the return of the Union, one, adventurous, the other, revolutionary. The President of the Union, Aiyegbusi had an understanding with the Kwara State Military Administrator that Anti – SAP Relief Bus would be released to the Union. When the Military Administrator was dithering, he mobilized students to the Government House to demand for the bus. The protest of the students at the Government House Gate blockaded the First Lady convoy on an official engagement. After the security details were not able to persuade the students for right of ingress, the Chief Protocol Officer ordered forceful clearance of the protesters. Many students were brutalized by the combined team of army and mobile police at the State house entrance gate. At the end of the melee, bruised General Secretary of the Union, Donatus Nwakpa, the Speaker, Babatunde Aiyelabola, Taiwo and Muyiwa Fowowe, Omotaje Ola Saint Jherico and a few other students were picked up and detained at the Government House. President Aiyegbusi, Vice President Seyi Salam and Public Relations Officer, Femi rushed back to the school and in a jiffy massively mobilized students to protest the brutalization and demand the release of Union leaders. During the protest, some police officers were picked and detained by the students on the campus. The Military Administrator had no choice than to order the immediate release of detained students. The Commissioner of Police had to personally ferry the detained activists in his official car convoy to deliver the students leaders. It was like an exchange of Prisoners in battlefield. The Commissioner and his armed officers on one side of Ilorin Town Express Road while the Union President and students occupied the opposing side. The Commissioner alone brought the students activists

in exchange for the security personnel arrested by the students. The protest singularly demonstrated the power of Mass action over State armed force. The other major mass struggle of the students was the protest called by the Abdul Mahmud led NANS for Academic Reforms (ACAREF). At the NANS Convention at University of Benin, Unilorin had fielded Omotaje Olawale Saint for the post of Public Relations Officer. The PYMN bureaucracy in control of the NANS leadership machinery had slated the post for Sylvester Odhion Akhaine from University of Lagos. At the end of the day, Unilorin was offered one of the Vice-Presidential offices, but this was turned down because it was not the resolution of Unilorin SRC which considered and approved the ticket. After immense pressure, Unilorin held a seeming emergency SRC session to consider fielding for any other post; the Convention had to be temporarily halted because the PYMN cadres insisted Unilorin must be represented in the new Executive Council. In the end, Ola Saint Jericho was elected ex-Officio I of the NANS, the Office which the Union and Movement used to reconnect the students' movement following vicious State repression to quell the ACAREF protests.

The thrust of the Mahmud Aminu - led NEC was its Academic Reforms (ACAREF) programme. The programme of ACAREF campaign, which was adopted at the 24th April 1991 Senate meeting held on the permanent site campus of University of Ilorin demanded amongst other things:

- Improved Funding of the Educational sector
- Academic Freedom and Autonomy
- Two-Thousand-Naira (N2,000.00) Bursary for each Nigeria tertiary institution student to cushion the effects of serious collapse of living standards.

An ultimatum was issued which lapsed on May 26, 1991. There were fierce battles in some campuses for instance, at Unilorin and Unijos, Molotov cocktails (petrol bombs) were used against policemen resulting in the shooting of a student at the former and the burning of a police jeep at the latter in Naraguta. At Benin, Calabar and Ibadan as well there were mass protest

demonstrations. The state, however, did manage to contain the situation in such key schools as Unilag where a right-wing element held sway and BUK Kano.

The IBB military junta bared its fangs to contain this NANS clarion call. There were severe casualties, betrayals, and consequential sanctions of erring officials by the NANS Senate. Abdul Mahmud (the President), Chima Okereke (the Secretary-General), Naseer Kura (Vice President, National Affairs), Ola Kay (Clerk of the Senate) and PYMN cadres such as Olaitan Oyerinde, Abiodun Aremu, Biodun Ogunade (Revo) and B.F Aturu were arrested and detained by the State. Equally, Comrades Adeola Soetan, (Ife Varsity Students' Union President), Abass (Deputy Speaker), Gbajumo, Self-Pikin a.k.a Defensor (Welfare Secretary) and Tony Fash (parliamentarian) were detained at Ilesha prisons for seven months while Comrade Kayode Ogundamisi a.k.a Sankara also spent some eight months at Jos prisons all as fall outs of the ACAREF struggle.

The new, vibrant leadership University of Ilorin Students' Union with substantial numbers of CAFCA / May 31st Movement cadres rescued the students' movement from the uneasy lurch after State clampdown on the NANS officers during the ACAREF struggles. The Mayist / CAFCA had seasoned core members manning elected offices of the Union like Kunle Adegoke, K. Rad as General Secretary, Ajibola Bashir, SRJ as the Deputy General Secretary, Bamidele Abdusallam, D.S as SRC Speakers and Dauda Jimoh, DJ as Clerk of the House and a strong, articulate sympathizer, Chris Nwachukwu, Gani Jnr, as the P.R.O. The team of Unilorin activists moved on an assessment and re-invigoration tours of campuses. Along with cadres of the Militant Trotskyite movement at Ife, they reached out another, the newly emerged vibrant students' union President at Unilag, Segun Mayegun, M.O.J. for the institution to host NANS Senate session. The team then went to Unijos to confer with the NANS President, Abdul Mahmud and later, the Senate Clerk in Ondo State University, Ado Ekiti. The students' movement was going through a perilous period with density of cloud of Trust Deficiency because the then, Senate President – Bola Ajimuda, without any democratic consultations called off the NANS ACAREF protest on a national Television station. At Senate meeting in Unilag principal officers of NANS were impeached – Bola

Ajimuda, Senate President, Chima Okereke, General Secretary, Faith Osadaor, Vice President, National Affairs.

### **1992 Unilorin Mayist Led Students' Executives Victimisation**

As pointed out earlier, the Union at Ilorin was squarely and manifestly under the ideological sway and direction of the May 31st Movement with Bob Marley's "Redemption Song" as CAFCA anthem. It may be vouched that it was a matter of time that University authorities and military junta would head on collision with the Union. The Union's revolutionary intervention is not targeted for containment but for beheading. The expulsion of Ilorin Militant Five (IMF) was the inevitable outcome.

## ***CHAPTER TWELVE***

### **OBAFEMI AWOLowo UNIVERSITY, ILE-IFE – *MIKE KEBONKWU***

#### **Pacesetters Movement and Students' Struggle**

The 1980s to 1990s witnessed active progressive students' movements on university campuses across the country. The National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) was the heartbeat through which the pulse of the nation was determined or felt. The Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) Ile Ife was a hub of vibrant students' activism made possible by committed student Movements with Marxist Leninist socialist orientation. This was also a period of repressive military regime bent on taking university education out of the reach of ordinary Nigerians. The military government planned to introduce tuition and other sundry fees in a bid to commercialize education. There were also political issues like the national debate on taking loans from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) with stringent conditionality and the bitter pill of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) which the government was planning to introduce.

This period also witnessed active organized labour union movement with progressive temper and vibrant leadership. The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) was equally part and parcel of the struggle in the educational sector and an engine room and Think Tank which the student movements drew from.

The contending issues were both local as they affected the individual university administration and national in the area of funding for tertiary institutions and education generally. These included dealing with the university administration in areas of provision of affordable and decent accommodation for students, to improvement in the decrepit infrastructure, teaching and learning aids. We also had national issues of academic freedom and better working conditions for staff of the universities. These were issues around which the students embark on regular struggles and protests to save education in Nigeria during the period.

At a point also, there were political demands like the scrapping of the

interminable General Ibrahim Babangida's transition programme for which some student leaders were arrested and kept at different detention centres of the Department of State Services as well as the Correctional Facilities like Kirikiri prison; I remember Comrades Bamidele Francis Aturu and Aminu Mahmud who spent sometimes in Kirikiri prison. It must be stated here that political demand by the NANS during the period was not about support for individual political parties or personality on partisan basis but a call for democratic governance and application of the rule of law.

Pacesetter was at the forefront of the movements driving the struggle at the Obafemi Awolowo University and offering support to other local institutions on that axis of the south west zone of the NANS during this period also. There were other organizations on the OAU Campus some of which were liberal elements whose interest coincided with the university administration with unquestionable submission to the local school authorities and government's anti-peoples' policies.

The story of these other movements is the story of Pacesetter because the activities of these groups reinforced and gave impetus to the progressive socialist groups on campus. In addition, there was collaborative synergy and interface with comrades in other Movements on other campuses and universities across the country where we had similar Cells that also came around from time to time to help conscientize and mobilize students.

In OAU we had two such Marxist-Leninist Movements of socialist orientation: PACESETTERS and Society for Current Affairs and Progress (SCAP). These two movements with same ideological persuasion stood out and collaborated in the major struggles even though they had their shade of difference in what one may see as doctrinal approach. There was also the Movement for Social Justice (MSJ) a moderate politico-religious students' group representing mainly evangelical Christian factor. The Muslim Student Society (MSS) was not left out as they became also a political force on campus to reckon with at a point. Then there is the traditional though unorganized group of "I want to graduate students" opposed to radical student movement. This latter group is fixated on non-disruption of academic calendar who want to pursue their course of

study and leave the University in record time.

The focus of this discourse is Pacesetters Movement and its unique role in the transformation of the students' movement in OAU, and landmark struggles against the establishment and University's authorities. It is important to make this clarification that the Pacesetter movement or group was not a Marxist-Leninist movement as most people erroneously believe even to active members. It no doubt had socialist orientation and outlook and fed from the fountain of socialism and Marxism. Pacesetter was only a front used by the Patriotic Youths Movement (PYM) which is driven by Socialist Ideology of Marxism.

The PYM is made up of advance cadres who are socialists that have relished Marxist literatures and pamphlets with good knowledge and understanding for socialist revolution. PYM acts as the Think Tank of the Students union government in OAU based on socialist doctrine using the Pacesetters as front. The membership of PYM was strictly limited to tested and committed advanced cadres who were socialists, and they were few in number and could be counted at the finger tips.

It is also important to mention here the Ife Democratic Group (IDG) which was a Platform through which members of the PYMN interacted with Marxist-Leninist Progressive wing of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), OAU branch. It was the synergy between these groups that gave strength and vitality to Pacesetter as a leading students' movement in Ife. This is in addition to the interface with other professional bodies and mass based organizations like Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) the organized Labour under the aegis of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and some Human rights Organizations and Non-government Organizations (NGOs). It would be important to mention specifically the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR) and Civil Liberties Organization (CLO) which we became almost affiliate with and nominal members in their programmes and recruitment.

Zeroing in on Pacesetter, it was organized round very enthusiastic students who wanted to be part parcel of activities of the students' union government

in OAU. It had a leadership of very bright and articulate students who were highly respected amongst their peers for their integrity and commitment to students' welfare. It became a platform for recruiting students' movement leadership and the spreading socialist ideology for possible revolutionary change. Its recruitment formula was to identify bright and brilliant articulate students in their various departments, at symposia and seminars organized from time to time by the students' union government.

OAU remains one of the institutions where activities of Secret Cults were curtailed due to zero tolerance by the student activists who formed the leadership of the students' union government. The Pacesetters led a consistent siege to cultism on campus denying the cult boys freedom of action on campus. However, this feat was broken when cultists from other campuses invaded the OAU Campus and killed about six students in January 2000. The Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife was synonymous with revolutionary unionism fearlessly leading the charge in major protests against government policies that are anti people or excesses of the university administration.

The Pacesetters repositioned activities on OAU Campus in the late 1980s through to the 1990s and dominated the revolutionary government of the Students union with activists that showed unusual commitment to the struggle of the Nigerian masses against harsh economic policies of government affecting education and students generally. Talking about the achievement of the Pacesetters, one would discuss the major struggles the OAU students prosecuted under its watch. The 1980s was the most agonizing and trying period for average Nigerians. There was biting economic crises occasioned by mismanagement of the country by the political elite leading to military takeover of government. Nigerians were almost feeding from the dustbin even though it was credited to the Minister of Transport at the time that was quoted as saying that Nigerians should not complain when they were not feeding from the dustbin. The struggle for the wellbeing and political emancipation of the country has been a historical duty of Nigerian students which every generation and epoch has applied itself to the reality on ground to confront it.

The economic crises in the 1980s were compounded by a military takeover of

government in a coup de tat by General Muhammadu Buhari that toppled the democratically elected Alhaji Shehu Shagari led government. Muhammadu Buhari was himself overthrown by General Ibrahim Babangida barely two years in a palace coup after which he started experimenting with all sorts of policies using Nigeria as guinea pig. The government recruited very brilliant scholars and academics who became political jobbers working even against their constituency and the interest of the Nigerian people. All the major protests against government policies and cost of living in Nigeria were successful only to the extent to which it was supported by the Nigerian students across board. Whether it was the anti-sap protest, June 12 election annulment etc. all of them had the signature of students' movement with committed leadership on the different campuses.

It took the organization of the National Association of Nigerian students' (NANS) leadership to mobilize to challenge the gradual collapse of the economic and social systems that stare the nation in the face. The first of this protest was the Anti-SAP protest of May 1989 which was dubbed as students riot depending who was looking at it. It became violent and riotous when government planted agent provocateurs and security operatives and thereafter cracked down on student leaders, killing students on peaceful protest. The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was the economic experimentation of the General Ibrahim Babangida led administration to address the recession of the early and mid-1980s. Basic and essential commodities were out of the reach of the ordinary citizens just as there was rising cost of living and loss of jobs as companies started folding up. The government in response decided to implement measures prescribed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) such as removal of petroleum subsidy, payment of tuition fees in institutions of higher learning and unguided deregulation of the oil sector.

The leadership of NANS mobilized students across the tertiary institutions across the country; secondary schools were not left out. There was interface with other progressive unions and the organized labour. The government tried every means possible to demobilize the students and abort the protest, warning parents to advise their wards not to take part in the protest threatening dire consequences.

The student leaders and unions made flyers, handbills and posters to mobilize for the protest. The Secret Police, Department of State Services (DSS) and other security agents were chasing and harassing student leaders. The student leadership of this era was quite informed and enlightened enough not to be dragged into religious and ethnic dichotomy to sabotage the protest. The enthusiasm of the mobilization was everywhere; amongst students, market women and traders, organized labour etc. People heeded the warning to stock essential needs and food to avoid hardship and sabotage. This was the power of mobilization; it will be difficult to bring back that level of national mobilization without being ethnicized or reduced to religious campaign.

The government did everything possible to demobilize the students through threats and coercion, warning the students' leaders that they would be picked one after the other like snails. One recalls General AK Adisa the governor of Oyo State who issued orders warning students of OAU of dire consequences if they proceeded with the protest. Soldiers and Policemen were deployed and university communities were militarized. The university administration at Ife tried to use student leaders on campus to demobilize the students from taking part as if taking instruction from the State government and local police units. The real leaders of the Union were actually the leadership of the Movements who direct the affairs through the Student Union government. The protest went ahead as planned and it was like a moving theatre to behold. Before, 0430 hours in the morning of the protest, the students were out on the street stopping vehicular movement and paralysing every economic and social activity. Articulated trucks bringing produce from the Northern axis were used to block the road at the University gate in OAU stopping vehicular movement from south to north.

The governor was to observe later that the protest was organized like a military coup de tat in sheer audacity and execution. It is difficult to say whether Nigerian students will have the same organizational ability to mobilize on such scale for such nationwide protest involving every segments of the society. It was because of this success that university administration decided to take more interest in the students' union leadership by trying to plant pliable students

to lead the union government. They invested so much into this venture to take over the students union after threat of proscription and banning of union activities failed. In 1991 the university administration tried to hijack the union leadership after a controversial election which the Dean of Students affairs tried to secretly swear in their favoured and preferred candidate. Just as they perfect the plot, the Dean of Students' Affairs died the same morning they planned the inauguration of the leadership secretly in his office.

There was intra-students struggle in OAU campus between students loyal to the revolutionary government of the students union and those loyal to the university administration which eventually led to the killing of a student. This led to a prolonged closure of the university and clamping down on student leadership and their detention and trial. Following the crises, about 61 students of the Obafemi Awolowo University were expelled. It took the organizational ability of the Pacesetter to mobilize for the reinstatement of the affected students who were defended in Court by Late Chief Gani Fawehinmi (SAN) who to the students was senior advocate of the masses (SAM).

The beauty and success of the protests during this period is that it happens simultaneously on other campuses in other zones. Even though internet and mobile phone were either not available or popular information went round so quickly amongst students who throng to news vendor stands to monitor the events happening in the country. This is quite unlike the EndSars protests where everyone is on the internet and information super highway of facebook, whatsapp, tiktok, twitter etc., and making mobilization easy. The excitement was to hear that the students of Universities of Lagos (UNILAG), Ibadan (UI), Benin (UNIBEN), Jos, (UNIJOS) Bayero University Kano (BUK), Nsukka (UNN) are out on the street with burn fires and disruption of socio-economic activities.

The Pacesetter was the movement through which such mobilizations were carried out. Apart from organizing for such protests that challenged the commercialization of education and other policies that made life unbearable for the ordinary citizens, students also challenged the local conditions peculiar to their campuses; poor teaching aids, leaking lecture halls and poor conditions

of living in the hostels.

It is important before we wind up this discourse to talk about the funding of the movement with such effective leadership. It is to the credit of student leaders of this period that they funded their activities through voluntary contribution and taxes on members from their stipends whenever there was any activity to be carried out or executed. This is sometimes augmented by Lecturer activists who come to our aid and pay for posters, handbills and trips to students meetings outside the campus. We also had comrades working with some Civil Society Organizations like the CLO and CDHR who assisted us with resources especially during students' union elections and major activities. Everyone involved in students' activities was involved one way or the other out of genuine interest for positive change on campus and the improvement of the conditions of living of the people of Nigeria.

The question may be asked if we can ever have the same organizational ability and commitment on the new generation of student leaders. This is a difficult question to answer because student leaders of today appear not to understand the concept of student movement globally. Their approach appears to Xerox the politicians and their lifestyle. Today, a student union leader has special advisers (SAs) on everything. He goes about in convoy of vehicles soliciting for fund from politicians and wealthy individuals which are never accounted for. Students now campaign for politicians and organize awards of different kinds for very corrupt individuals and criminals just to get money and live large. Student movement has lost its bite as they have become very divisive on the same fault line the politicians have created.

The way forward is for our cadres who have found themselves in the university system not to distant themselves from grooming students who can bring back the conscious, militant progressive students unionism on our campuses. In the same vein, the CSOs and Human Rights groups should try and build cells in our institutions of learning rather than sectarian campaign for politicians and groups for the purpose of raising money for bread and butter.

***ALUTA CONTINUA: OBAFEMI AWOLOWO UNIVERSITY, ILE-IFE  
– SENI AJAYI***

**INTERVIEW WITH SENI AJAYI**

My name is Seni Ajayi. Like you know, the Nigerian situation is still an ongoing struggle, so I will try to be as open as possible because we all need to start documenting our history. I got into the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) in 1985 but prior to that time, I had been going to Ife and so became a conscious leftist around 1983/84. 1984 was the turning point concretely. From the 70s I grew up in an area which housed the earliest leftists. I was actually born there, at Aje Street in Ebutte Metta of Lagos.

There, you will find a union building still standing there, though an ageing infrastructure. The building was donated by the Left of the past and it used to be a centre of activities for a whole host of workers from various elements from the Left. I guess my father came from the working class. His own father was a worker. My father was a worker with Railways, his own father also worked with Railways and when you take cognizance of the fact that Railways had a rich Leftist militant tradition, you know that some of them in their various homes had access to Left Wing books. So, it was not alien when I was growing up, my father had a lot of socialist documents. It is therefore from that point of view that one could guess that those agitations, processes that Pa Imoudu and others got those socialist ideas.

I could remember when I was reading those journals (some of them were quite fascinating), I fell in love with Soviet Union at a very early age. While some people were looking at United States of America at those initial stages, some of us were fixed on the Soviet Union. There was something very appealing in Soviet Union and it is not surprising that we ended up the way we ended. By 1984, we were getting more conscious and I can remember that we dared not miss any Thursday edition of the Guardian newspaper where we got the writings of the likes of Dr. Edwin Madunagu. Every Thursday we must read Madunagu's piece in his page in the Guardian and it was always rich. So by the time, I was entering University of Ife, the stage was probably set before

I was moving from a restricted environment into (I was very young) a place where there was freedom.

On campus, we were attending several programmes, as I was curiously reading notices on notice boards as a JAMBITE, I started coming in contact with the Left, such as people like Comrade Olorode, Dr. Dipo Fasina (a.k.a. Jingo) and host of others. University of Ife was like a Mecca of Nigeria's Left, quite rich and I was fortunate enough as a JAMBITE to have attended the orientation programme. There was no way one could attend orientation programme and would not come in contact with the speeches of such comrades like Awopetu, Omotoye Olorode and a host of other leftists and the students also were not left behind. People like Opeyemi in those years were also Left leaning. So it was a good beginning. And of course in the first year, we did not know much. The only thing was once in a while we saw them organizing students' parliament. In fact, I never actually attended any of those parliamentary sessions in the first year but I think what later changed the entire scope was that in the first and second semesters, we had several activities on campus, quite enriching in spite of the fact that we were under military rule by then.

The year 1986 precisely in the month of May, was a turning point. I cannot forget that date, 18<sup>th</sup> May when the news came in the airwaves that four students had been slaughtered by the Nigeria Police at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. I cannot forget that historic night when the news came. There was a spontaneous protest on the campus and some of us were part of that protest as we went round the campus in anger. In those days, an injury or attack on one student could trigger chain of reactions from other students quite unlike now, when every student seems to be docile. When we heard that four students had been slaughtered, a mega spontaneous reaction started. It was that night the union leadership at Ife, led by the President of the Student Union Government, Owoseni Ajayi, were forced to declare that there would be a tactical committee to coordinate the protest. Immediately by 9pm, the committee had been constituted.

It was in the SUB that the committee was constituted and it was declared that interested students should come to the SUB that night. The Tactical Committee

would be under the leadership of the Students Union Public Relations Officer Kehinde Bamgbetan, who later became a commissioner in Lagos State. That night was a turning point. I was at that meeting and it was there we met Olumide Fusika who is now a Senior Advocate of Nigeria. Through Fusika in charge of the Tactical Committee the path changed. We were able to organize the students. My contribution was what probably drew them, because with benefit of hindsight, I made a push for protest. Some students were actually surprised at my position as I was quite and relatively new on campus. They began to wonder who was this boy with such a stance? That was where the connection came from. The following days were quite turbulent but the tactical committee was always meeting to decide on what we would do. Even when we had some back reaction from the local cult group who attacked us, on the second day of the protest, we were capable of managing the team. The protest was like a four day event with lecture boycott. We gave a lecture boycott notice and the protest started. By the second day, there was a major protest event all campuses in reaction to the ABU massacre. By then National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) had declared a national protest by all the campuses in the country.

There was this divide and rule that the military regime was always playing, so they now wanted to divide the campuses by going on propaganda to say Ife was calm, and so on, trying to create impression that there was no protest from Ife which was literally known as the hotbed of students activism on such things that touched the lives of students. The Nigerian Television Authority network news had carried that fake story that University of Ife was calm, so that other campuses would not contemplate of going on protest. Ironically, this news broadcast was like pouring fuel on a burning fire. So the second day of the protest was a major incident as the student union president who was earlier calming the students down turned to spear head a mega protest the second day contrary to the news in town. The protest nationwide was a major event that subsequently led to the shutting down of campuses for five months.

So it was when we came back, that I went back to all those Care Taker Committee people, the most promising ones then. We shut them aside and it was then that people like Fusika and others said, come. That was how I joined

the Movement, called SCAP – Society for Current Affairs and Progress. It used to be APS – Alliance for Progressive Students. It was a Marxist platform and I may not be well equipped to tell the full story about the Movement but I can tell from the 1986 period. It was the sole platform on the campus, Marxist in orientation and focused on orthodox Marxism. It was founded on firm Marxism without the tendency to be adulterated. This is because people make commentaries that pass for Marxism, whereas such commentaries are not founded on true Marxism. The Ife Movement had more focus on what Karl Marx, Engels and other forerunners what they actually said not what somebody had interpreted. By then, we never saw or read about people like Walter Rodney, Franz Fanon. Our focus was on the source, because they took it from the source, so we had to go to the source, so that we can as well be like the source.

### **Why was aps changed to scap?**

Alliance for Progressive Students (APS) was actually banned by the University. APS had a secretariat, founded and registered by the early leftists on campus. People like Olorode would shed more light on what happened prior to my arrival on campus. Even people like Bamidele Opeyemi and others had relationships, though some of them have died but someone like Olusegun Mimiko; former Governor of Ondo had his activism teeth cut at Ife. APS like I said was banned and the name was changed to SCAP. The ban was obviously due to the radical views APS canvassed on so many things. There was also a move to ban SCAP when it came into existence but there was another platform set up ahead. It was called MONA – Movement for National Awareness, but it was affiliated to PYMN – Progressive Youths Movement of Nigeria.

I guess Ife was a rebellion in ideology because then it was one of the earliest converts to Trotskyism and it is necessary to emphasize that it was possible because it was focused not on digesting materials from China and Union of Socialist Soviet Republics (USSR) that had already adulterated the ideology. Ours was on strict Marxism principles. It was possible for one to be open to more ideas. So around 1987 while in the movement, we came back. I joined the culture of going for Sunday meetings, where papers were prepared.

In fact, if one was preparing paper for any outing of the Movement, the minimum one could write was about 12 pages and the organization was an ideological propaganda platform. It had several theoretical news journals called LIBERATION - a Marxist journal. PETALS, BEES, VOICE and others for activism. Each journal had its own peculiar orientation but LIBERATION was the one for theoretical news that centred primarily on Marxism. It was bulkier in size than other publications when produced.

The LIBERATION was usually a product of papers presented at different fora within the house. Funny enough, every copy of the various journals were submitted to the University library because in those years, the University had a Press Council where every newspaper must submit two copies of each publication. The university maintains an archive where people can access those publications.

It was a rich tradition that we met on campus. It was not until about six months, it was just a casual thing that the ideological variation of SCAP from the general left was exposed to me by FUSIKA. It was a Sunday, because I joined as fan of Soviet Union, but I did not really understand the ideological bent in it. I know there was a conflict between Stalin and Trotsky and as a pragmatic person I presume that the person who won must have been the most just. I did not know what actually happened. So it was on Sunday for the first time that Olumide sort of took me in. Something occurred because I used to regularly buy and read materials from USSR. I used to read several publications from the Soviet Union like NEW TIMES, SOVIET MILITARY REGIME and others. I had always bought them including SOUTH MAGAZINE, NEW DAWN, NEW HORIZON. I never missed any of the editions. They were sold cheaply about 5kobo per copy and I usually bought them. We were always present at any book exhibition because books sold there were usually cheap and we could easily afford them. We were usually mocked as boys who believed in cheap materials from Moscow.

It was that day the first critique of Soviet Union took place. I was shocked and someone said Soviet Union had a case of, and it was as a result of that conversation he wrote one article titled SOVIET UNION: THE CASE OF

SOCIALISM WITH K-LEG. The article was written by Olorode. He broke it down. That conversation shocked me and it took me some days before I could discern things. That shock which came with a feeling that what I had been looking at, for about a decade of my conscious life was actually not the way it was supposed to be. By then, we had been exposed through correspondences to the Trotskyites Movements at the international arena, particularly the main one which was led by Ted Grant. The initial shock lasted for about a week or so but some of us are addicted to the truth. If something is true, it is true. I do not waste my time going round the corners trying to debate or dissipate energy on what has been proved to be the truth even though, truth is relative to some scholars.

At some point due to the emerging beliefs and tendencies from the Soviet Union, we began to shift to the Marxist but Trotskyite tendency but we had a relationship with the PYMN. As a young member of the Leftist movement, one may not know what is going on in the system. We had a tradition to follow. We had an executive. The generation then led by Fusika and others were the ones who were our face with the PYMN and co. So we had that hierarchy. Later we took over leadership of the student movement and we can actually speak on this. That was 1986, 1987 and 1988 we were already coming into the leadership of the Movement. 1989/90 was quite decisive in the student movement. In 1986, the Union was banned. The Babangida regime attacked basic democratic space. The regime set up two panels namely Abisoye and Akanbi panels and they went after what the students had achieved, basic democratic rights to organize, independent unionism and so on. The student's union dues were attacked because the regime believed that such dues helped to empower the students union. They went further to attempt stipulating that only first class students can contest student's union election.

The government disbanded the union (NANS) completely but what happened within that 1986 and 1987, the field was dominated by students of the Left. They led the underground agitation for independent student's unionism. This culminated in the June 7, 1987 protest. This made the authorities to declare that they would organize independent unionism. They made attempt to impose restrictions again, but we damned everything and by late 1987 we

had elections, a new student union regime came on board led by Adegbite. We had leadership sessions consisting of Adegbite and the leadership which succeeded him. Adegbite's successor was later impeached for his stance against the anti-SAP revolt.

Within that period, the political system in existence was a sort of theory and practice. It was quite rigorous; we had cell meeting in the week and Sunday meeting, which was a must for everyone. At every meeting, there must be paper presentation, there was political programme, education programme where topics starting from the philosophy, history to where capitalism works, to socialism. So we had all these. It was an all-round process. It was a university course on its own. The anti-SAP was also another turning point, because more actors had come in then. It was that movement that also gave birth to Lanre Arogundade's emergence as NANS President in 1984. By that period, it was a transition which later became complete.

It was around March, 1988 another protest erupted against increase in pump prize of fuel. Within that period Bamidele Aturu had his challenge with the then Governor of Niger State Col. Lawan Gwadebe. So within that period, we started interacting and collaborating. In 1989, Speedy and others were members of SALT? (explain meaning of SALT) which was like a liberal group but he was the most Left leaning among them. I want to explain the growth period of what we called the Stalinist degeneration. You see, SCAP was formed on Marxism, Trotskyism which we did not consider as any deviation. The Ife Movement was more radical and by that time as we were having relationship with the likes of Olorode. We had also become three years in the Movement. We had acquired some level of confidence and theory to engage in our conversations. We just discussed that we were having conflict on positions, attitudes on various issues. By 1986, 1987 the split was complete for some of us individually but by 1988, 1989 and within that period that Gorbachev in USSR disorganized the system. Many of the comrades could not cope when Gorbachev started Perestroika and Glasnost.

Anti-SAP was a joint activity, between us and people like Speedy, by then Bamidele Aturu was already coming on board. Many of the comrades on

campus, he could relate with them very well but he could not relate with us. And when you look at some things, we were more theoretical. We are not social democrats and if you could not talk Marxism do not come. We were not for liberalism and others. They could flow better with Speedy (Fola Odidi) and by 1990; there was a turning point because for us as a Movement, we decided to take over leadership of the Student Union which was contrary to what the early comrades used to do.

The comrades were completely satisfied with taking the Public Secretary of the Student Union and use that platform to reach out to the mass of the students in organizing programme, leftist programme, just to make sure that the space for ideological and intellectual engagements is enriched and protected. Let us not forget that we were now in the period when there was attack on the Union. After the anti-SAP protest, the pressure mounted, we grew apart. In those early days Bamidele Francis Aturu was not a Marxist per say. He was more of a social democrat because we noticed he was more on the commentaries rather than the Marxist philosophy. They were more of the immediacy and not much deep into the theoretical line like some of us.

There were many pretentious members like Yinka Odumakin. Though he was from my tendency, yet the tendency had several layers and those are some of the faults we see even now. There was a front and everybody was admitted to the front. The front always had a rear behind it.

**It is a general problem of the left within the context of student union movement. Was it that the movement got carried away and recruited cadres it ought to have filtered more before recruiting them. It did not happen only at Ife, but we need to have your own experience.**

At times, one wants to grow, the urge to grow is always there and at times, when you want to grow, you tend to forget to also focus on quality. So within that period, one may tend to allow in some impurities. Let me give example with Yinka Odumaikin. When I was in the movement in 1987 period, we never saw Yinka. He was nowhere. He was not part of the movement, not coming for meetings until after the June 7, protest and the campus went on

vacation and later resumed and we were to have election.

### **Why did you people make him PRO of the student union?**

Somebody like Opeyemi Bamidele who was also one time PRO of the student union and some of others who were like robotics actually were front men. The Movement usually had effective control of the apparatus, so the movement always looked out for people who are saleable. They were not there in the beginning; they were not people that actually aspired to those offices.

The Movement in many instances, saw somebody, it considered saleable and went ahead to convince him to stand for the position promising to sponsor the person, do the campaign and other logistics. All that was required from the person was just for him to stand as a representative of the movement. The selection of any such person might come through contact, like in the case of Yinka Odumaikin who was brought by Fusika. If not for that accident of history, may be Yinka would have ended up as a manager in one company or teacher in one school and not as an activist he eventually became before he passed on. His involvement in the campus activism obviously changed his path in life.

### **Why will one person be allowed to bring another to occupy a position like Fusika brought Yinka? Was it not a sign that the Movement was not democratic enough?**

No, the Left movement had certain methods comparable to the military. Do not forget that we were building a military-like high command upon which authority flowed from the most conscious, so the tendency was usually that the most advanced, clearest must be in the leadership. At times, it could be abused. But decisions must be taken and as at that period, it was necessary to carry out certain activities and to the best of its own understanding, that the fellow could play that role. That was why Yinka was brought in. Second, was the fact that it was not all the time that we should put our best cadres as public figures. If you had taken cognizance, you would realize that it was not all the time, we put our best elements. If you have a group, the most theoretically clear people, we do not put them in public office. They are to do the rear guard

activities because somebody needs to be working behind the public office to recruit, come out with materials and provide guide. That is why at times, we usually have conflicts with the comrade who is put in the public office and the comrades who are behind. There would be conflict because the person in the public office would start developing his own ideas. The person would start having some funny ideas that could complicate things.

So, when you have reached a level, you cannot be in a position to actually take some decision on behalf of the movement. If the movement comes out to say we do not agree with this, it has to be discussed with every other member of the movement and if they all agree, so be it. It is not as if it must be forced down but a decision must be taken concretely. And it did work. Yinka contested the election practically unopposed. We had the authority. I was a member of the Electoral Commission, those were the kinds of activities we did that prepared us and put us in a position that we could manage a country. In all spheres, we were not just talking, we had people. When they said they were going to set up a committee, we had people in the parliament. We had people in the committees, we had people in the executive council of the Student Union. We had people in the Halls. So we could always influence anything within the entire political system that existed that period. In the best of our period, we had close to a hundred people that we could call on at every point in time.

### **Did you have problem with the front men?**

We always had problems with the front. I have just said it. We had example with Yinka's case. When we fought in the last days of the anti-SAP protest, as we were working along with Fola Odidi, it got to a stage whereby we wanted him to break away, because the executive council was treacherous. We wanted him to break and call for a congress independent of the President of the Students Union who was vacillating and become incommunicado. I cannot forget that day, a critical period. Odidi said he just could not do it. We felt betrayed, but again we had to absolve all these processes. Eventually, a bigger movement developed, that consumed the entire treacherous executive elements that were opposed to the anti-SAP revolt. But what later developed was that Fola Odidi became a centre of attraction. Bamidele Aturu subsequently came on board

and many of the individuals who were not comfortable with what they tagged “The extremists” gravitated towards their group. They flowed readily with Odidi and Aturu axis and behold, they had the Pacesetters. When anybody came in to the campus from the PYM bloc, Chijioke, Gidado, Olorode help them make the preferable choice with the Pacesetters.

We were the stubborn people but by that period, as I said earlier, we had already built a network of about hundred persons. Averagely per a year, we had nothing less than 50 persons who were members and contacts of our movement. Again, we also had presence in the Labour Movement on the campus. We had a comrade like Ekemina, who is currently a publisher, lawyer etc. He was somebody who joined the university as a non-academic staff and rose to the highest level. We also had a colleague who was in our movement. He had joined the university as a messenger before becoming a student. It was a big political system we developed while in the movement as students. We were present at NASU, SSANU meetings. We had conflict with ASUU but had a mutual respect for the Union.

**The labour militants seemed to control most of the unions and they still complained that the unions were traitors, why?**

No, we were not in control. We had relationship with the union leadership because we were publishing papers and always sold to the workers through our cells among the workers. And it is necessary to make the distinction that even though we had a relationship with rank and file did not mean we were in control of the leadership. No, we were not in control. The leadership of the unions was still under the control of the main Left tendencies.

**What was the crisis of 1990/91 you mentioned in passing?**

That was when the elements of Labour Militants officially broke away from the Workers’ Vanguard led by Ola Oni. So we started producing paper (I still have copy of the first paper). Unlike what happened in 1984 when the identity was not too distinct and Lanre Arogundade could become the NANS President. By 1989 the tendency was already in existence. The state of the student movement and the complaint about the movement, there was that

need within the movement to actually fill that distinctive alternative for the students in general nationally. By 1989, we took over the leadership of the student union unlike the past when we were running as Public Secretary and co. By 1989, Opeyemi Bamidele became President of NANS but his leadership method was not too okay. By 1990 from the national leadership of the Labour Militant, the decision was taken that we should also make an attempt to take the leadership of NANS, at least run for it. Adeola Shoetan was in the best position to lead in that direction. That now led to the open conflict between the Leftist and Ife tendencies. Maybe, if it were to be now, we probably would pursue the same line of thought and action. I could remember that when Opeyemi Bamidele was in leadership, we were all with him and it was a big thing. We were always together, always having conversation. Opeyemi was close to me and I can write a book on him. I was one of the nine delegates from Ife who voted for him for NANS leadership.

Again, there was the attitude of the PYMN not to integrate the Ife movement into it. I remember there was PYMN meeting SCAP could not be part of it and by that time, there was severing of relationship with the forming of Labour Militants as at then, practically every other things collapsed.

**But your people Olumide, Fusika were attending PYMN meeting, which means the problem may be from Ife cadres in no longer becoming part of PYMN?**

No, it was not. Fusika was a Trotskyite and he was part of the movement. Lanre was a Trotskyite and was also part of the national movement. Do not forget that there was a national movement of the Labour Militants (LM) also. The national movement of LM was also in strict Marxist line that needed to follow an independent line.

**Do we then suggest that there was a decision by the LM at the national level to withdraw from PYMN?**

Yes and No. Yes, to the extent that there was the need for the LM to have its own independent banner upon which it would put its own programme out to the movement. If it could win over, don't forget the Trotskyite movement won

over some movements. If it could win over the entire PYMN, there would be no problem, but it did not. So there was that need to have its own expression, its media, its own organization, its own rank, its own apparatus. It was that distinction that was sharpened by 1990/91 NANS Convention after Opeyemi Bamidele. That conflict of 1989 led to the gradual death of NANS and allowed the right wing to penetrate the movement. If it were to be now, one would look at all these things and approach same more scientifically.

Under Opeyemi's leadership of NANS, we had the buses after the anti-SAP protests. We had a Senate meeting at BUK, Kano where for the first time the issue of Sovereign National Conference came up. It is part of the conflict we had.

**CHAPTER THIRTEEN**  
**UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, NSUKKA –**  
***OSAZE LANRE NOSAZE***

## **INTRODUCTION**

My name is Osaze lanre Nosaze. However, in the period we are talking about, I was known as Osaze Lanre Ehonwan. It was later I changed my last name. The first two names remain the same. Most people would be surprised to hear that I have another name apart from Lanre. Many knew me as Lanre without knowing Osaze. I was at University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) from 1980 to 1989 and was part of the student movement on that campus. I spent nine years doing a four-year course because at a time, I was suspended. I spent some time outside, going back and forth like that. In the process, I got some experience.

We had an organization called the Marxist Youth Movement (MYM). It was actually somebody I could call my landlord because I was squatting, (Chris Uyot who is currently Deputy General Secretary of the Nigeria Labour Congress) was one of those who hosted me in the room I was squatting. It was he and another person I could not really remember his name now, who recruited me into the MYM. Prior to that, I had been a member of the Palmwine Drinkers Club but I later got tired of the activities of the group and wanted something more relevant and challenging that could deal with issues of the time. I had become acquainted with Socialism when I was in secondary school.

There were some Zimbabwean students who were refugees in Nigeria that time and they came to my school in Benin City. We became friends and they introduced me to socialism at that level. As a secondary school student, I could understand. So I was very familiar with some of the ideas of socialism which I keyed into. So joining the Marxist Youth Movement on campus, it was logically natural as a next step when I became a student at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

The Movement had been in existence there for quite a while, more than five or ten years before I became a student at the University. The organization like I said earlier was called Marxist Youth Movement, but it was just a unitary organization, but had kept out of the picture in the sense that it followed the classical Communist strategy of having a core organization and that

organization operating in the public through fronts. So many people knew that it was there, but they did not know what it was really doing. It was its fronts like Youth Solidarity for Southern Africa (YUSSA) through which it was acting and a number of other organizations like that but this was the main one.

By the time my generation of students entered UNN, Nigeria was in a crisis. One would recall that in the 1980 period, the economic crisis was already developing in Nigeria. The broader crisis of capitalism to give it a wider perspective actually began in 1968 or thereabout but it did not hit Nigeria until later in 1979 during the administration of Alhaji Shehu Shagari. Since that period, Nigeria began to experience the global crisis of capitalism but it manifested here in the form of crisis of oil prizes. There was a boom in oil prizes in 1970, 1973 and a smaller boom in 1975.

So because Nigeria was oil rich, it was shielded from the direct impact of capitalist crisis. It was only in 1977, 1978, 1979 that it began to manifest in Nigeria and in 1980, the crisis was clear. We can recall that the government of Shehu Shagari under the auspice of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) denied that there was crisis. Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the leader of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) had warned that there was economic crisis as the naira was depreciating in value as compared to the dollar but Shagari government dismissed it as a fluke. NPN refused to accept that fact but few months later, it was manifest and the government could not deny it any longer.

When we got into the university, Nigeria was already implementing some form of austerity measures. It is relevant to point this out, as it helps to explain why radicalism became much more militant at Nsukka at that period. Before then UNN was the most conservative university in Nigeria. We used to mock the school that all the other universities in Nigeria would be on strike, but UNN students would be indifferent as they would be attending classes. That was before our set got into the school. However, by the time we came to the school, the crisis was manifest and there were rumblings in the campus against the policies of austerity, the government was beginning to introduce.

I remember the first time I was suspended along with others like Chima

Ubani, Olu Oguibe and so on. We were about 15 of us who were suspended by the university authorities. How it happened was that there was this talk of introducing tuition fees in my very first year (1980) in the university. The students union at that time, even though it was conservative; the logic about the circumstances compelled the union not to keep quiet about it. So the students union opposed it and the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) which at that time was a very militant organization was under the control of Socialist and Communist Marxist groups which had very clear perspective on issues.

The National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS) had been proscribed and the radical students at that time were trying to re-establish NUNS but on a new foundation, on new ideological platform and structure, so it was in that 1980/81 period that NANS took shape as successor to NUNS. So, NANS declared a national strike for students in opposition to the talk of introducing tuition fees. The campus union at Nsukka broke the tradition that had been there for decades since the civil war and decided to participate in this strike. Before then, the bogey man at UNN usually was that they would tell students that they were hated by other parts of Nigeria because the school is located in Igbo land and the Igbos were hated so much before the civil war.

The students were often reminded that UNN is the only university of world standard and if they joined any national protest by students of other universities, UNN would be shut down forever and ever and there would not be UNN anymore. So, we would be asking ourselves, what were our chances if we participated in all those protests? This singular threat has been the cause of UNN students' non-participation in national strikes over the years until 1980/81. So, in that 1980/81, the bogey man literally died and was buried temporarily even though we thought the 'death' of the bogey man was permanent.

At that particular time, I was not yet a member of the Marxist Youth Movement but I had come into the university with some radical aspiration. So naturally, I participated in the strike. We went from class to class disrupting lectures, hostel to hostel, galvanizing students and mobilizing them, explaining why we should join the lecture boycott. So what they did, was to unleash the

repressive mechanism on us. As that time, they did not have the kind of forces they developed in late 1980s.

In this era we are talking about, what the school had was basically the school administrative structures. They got our names, pictures of people and were able to identify us. They went to our department and two days into the lecture boycott, our names were published that we had been rusticated. Fifteen of us were involved in the rustication. That was my first test. It was an indefinite suspension but the story did not end there. Naturally, students took up the case and we occupied the Vice Chancellor's office. On a lighter note, I must say that the syndrome of occupying places as a form of public protest against political office holders like "occupy Nigeria", "occupy Abuja" etc we had few years ago, actually began with students in our days when we occupied the VC's office.

All the students mobilized and we sat round the VC's office. He could not drive in and students insisted we must not leave the environment until he had lifted the rustication. It had never happened at UNN. So, the VC, Prof. Frank Ndili first tried intimidation and threat; that they would close down the university and the students would spend extra year. The VC's threat did not work and finally the Registrar came and spoke to the students in a rather friendly manner, trying to calm us down, explaining that he knew how we felt.

He pleaded with us that the issue of introduction of school fees was going to be revisited and asked us to go back to classes, that before long everything would be resolved. We told him, we were not leaving. We insisted that the issue must be revisited there and then. They delayed, waited for a whole day. Finally, they said okay, the students union leaders should come and meet the VC. We said no, insisting that the VC should come out to speak to all the students in the open so that the union leaders would not be intimidated or bribed if allowed to go in and see the Vice Chancellor. We demanded that the VC must speak to us in public.

About 5pm, the University authority issued a notice lifting the rustication and registering us back. That was the first test for me of practical struggle at the

university level. I must confess, I liked it because it suddenly brought me and others into prominence. We became popular and a sort of hero. However, my father was livid with anger, though many times I was suspended in later years, he did not know. I never took the news home but this first one and the last one in my final year, he got to know about it. He was 'mad' with rage. So I liked it but more importantly, it brought me into the Marxist Youth Movement. It was in the course of that protest that Chris Uyot marked me and chose to bring me to join the Movement. I joined and that was how the journey really started.

It is imperative to situate this whole radicalism we saw in that period within the larger context of capitalism. People make the mistake of isolating the campus struggle from the global situation or the reality that was existing at that time. Capitalism had deep structural crisis and that crisis manifested in protest all over the world beginning with the 1968 students protest in France and the United States. In France, actually they had a situation that was very similar to what we had in 1993 here in Nigeria. The government had basically collapsed. The students were in control of France in 1968 and the government had to call in the Gendarmes (the military police) to come and restore order. The same happened in the US where there was also mass movement of Black Movement which was led at that time by the Black Panther Party.

They actually took over Black Panther Party, a better known one led by Huey Newton and people like that. There was another one later known which was more closely affiliated with the Communist Party, Angela Davies' own. So it was in that context, we must see this struggle. The radicalism on Nigerian campuses did not just spring out of nowhere. It was the adversities the crisis of capitalism unleashed upon the world that caused students, who were as the natural vanguard of this protest to become more militant. So in planning my piece for this work, this is how I structured it, linking it very clearly to those global events situating the militancy at Nsukka and other campuses within the larger militancy across the world that lasted more than ten-year period.

Haven said that; I would go further to say that the Marxist Youth Movement was a behind the scene organization at that time. It operated behind the scene. We had front organizations with the classical Marxist approach, through which we

operated. At the time, there were about 30 of us on UNN who were members of the organization. Other campuses had various organizations, like at University of Benin, there was the Cultural Awareness Club, and so on. All these groups were linked together at the national level by the Patriotic Youth Movement of Nigeria (PYMN). It was at the PYMN level these various groups were linked together and were steered as a national movement. These various groups or organizations at different campuses were known as “cells” under the PYMN.

There were other organizations on campuses like the Palmwine Drinkers (Kegite) Club, Reggae Club which Chima Ubani began with, before he outgrew later. He still loved the Reggae Club, but he began to see the political and ideological limitations of the Club, but never joined the Marxist Youth Movement at that time at UNN, but he affiliated very closely with the Movement. In 1985/86 Emma Ezeazu came back to do his masters degree programme at UNN. He was a member of the Marxist Youth Movement during his undergraduate years. Jonah Awodi was a student at Ahmadu Bello University (ABU). He had gone through a lot in the struggle. At ABU, he was a member of the cell there and was expelled in his final year during the “Ali Must Go” Protest along with people like Abdurahman Black and others.

Awodi later worked with Tunji Braithwaite (founder of Nigeria’s Advanced Party) in his structure and finally left Braithwaite and came to begin afresh at UNN. At ABU, he was studying pharmacy but he began as a year one political science student at UNN. In the same period that Emma Ezeazu was an undergraduate student at UNN, there was also another comrade Femi Ahmed both members of the Marxist Youth Movements. There was a number of others, but these two were most prominent in the sense that even though Ahmed had graduated, he was always coming back to the campus when he felt that the Movement was still fragile. So, he always came back to groom and develop us, the activists of the Marxist school.

He was one of the most committed comrades I can remember in that period. He could make any sacrifice for the Movement. He would spend his own money and students were often indigent and some of us were surviving on the charity of our friends, feeding us. He would come and give us money, give

us his clothes to wear. He was very committed.

Part of the problems of the movement became evident even at that time. It became very clear to me, not just me alone but members of our Movement that Femi Ahmed and Emma Ezeazu were not on the same page. They were both committed, extremely committed but one could see very clearly that both did not seem to agree often times. There were no theoretical differences because the Movement had a unified theoretical framework in Marxism but it was more of personal differences not in the interpretation of Marxism. As a mature member of the Movement, I could observe that such difference in personalities of the struggle was not only at UNN but some cells in other campuses.

The differences became very obvious when we tried to form a unified socialist organization in Nigeria. Some went to form Socialist Congress of Nigeria, some went to form SRV. These were the two major groups at that time. Emma Ezeazu belonged to the Socialist Congress of Nigeria while Femi Ahmed joined SRV. So, some of the difficulties we experienced later in the movement, the seeds were already there, at the very beginning. That was how the Movement became redefined with the coming of Ezeazu and return of Femi Ahmed even though he did not come back to study but to groom and assist us. There was also a number of other comrades like Chris Ndiribe (who later became a journalist) and others. There were five of us who were at the core of the Movement at UNN. These were Emma Ezeazu, Jonas Awodi, Femi Ahmed, Chris Ndiribe and myself. We had two female comrades in the Movement but one was much more active by all standards and even more active than some male comrades. She participated in all our activities including lectures, protests etc.

The crisis developed further in Nigeria as the years went by. When Muhammadu Buhari emerged as Military Head of State in 1983 December, all protests were banned and they introduced some draconian laws. One of the things the regime did was this talk of tuition fees. It came up in that period again and naturally, we fought it. The Movement began to spear-head the agitations unlike before when we were at the background. The Marxist Youth Movement came to the fore-front and began to spear-head the struggle. What we sought to do was gain presence in the struggle without over-exposing the organization because

we knew there would be repression. So we sought to be in contact with the students union. We did not quite do that directly.

Going back in the days, in 1985/86 there had been discussions at the NANS level, as we were going to have a new leadership. NANS was rotating its leadership among the campuses. It was however, not an automatic rotation which was going zone by zone but the campus that was chosen to host NANS usually had to be a campus where we had a strong cell that could bear the amount of work that NANS would have to do and be in a position to protect NANS itself. It must be a campus with enough of committed comrades who were ideologically clear and would not corrupt NANS like what we have today. So, all those things were absolute and there were no negotiations about them.

When it fell to our zone, UNN had a group of experienced comrades like Emma Ezeazu, Femi Ahmed. I was the youngest and was learning very fast as these comrades took time to groom me, Jonas and others. The Movement decided that UNN should host NANS. When NANS announced that the Secretariat would be coming to our zone, there were those in one other organization (called something like Revolutionary Front) and went to Chima Ubani who was the student union president at UNN that time, and wanted him to ensure that he brought NANS to UNN but they did not know how things had been working previously.

At that time, I had been privileged to be selected by the comrades to become the General Secretary of Marxist Youth Movement. Emma Ezeazu was there naturally but they gave me that privilege, so any negotiation with the organization had to be through me naturally. So Chima Ubani sent a delegation to the NANS secretariat, I think the delegation also went to Uniben and was lobbying for their own candidate to be NANS President. Our comrade Didi Adodo (now late) told me later that when the delegation came to Uniben, they met our comrades there under the auspice of League of Patriotic Students. They had gone to lobby for their own candidate. Meanwhile, back at UNN we had already positioned Emma Ezeazu and Jonas Awodi as our own candidates.

So, Didi narrated to me that when the delegation came, they allowed them to

be the first to speak. They subsequently asked them, if Emma Ezeazu was a member of their group. They replied no. They asked again, if Jonas Awodi was in their group, they also replied in the negative. They subsequently asked if Femi Ahmed, Lanre Ehonwa were in their group, they replied no. They then asked them what were their identities and pedigree even as they wondered how they could imagine coming to take over NANS leadership just like that. Chima Ubani was the student union president at UNN but he was not a member of Marxist Youth Movement at that time and we had various groups competing for clout on campus. So when their group (... Progressive Revolutionary) returned to Nsukka, they reported their encounter at Uniben to Chima, explaining that they could not listen to them since they did not come through MYM. Chima then sent a delegation to me when they found out that I was the General Secretary of MYM. When they came, I told them that we would call a meeting of the Central Committee and subsequently get back to them. That was exactly what we did. Chima finally found out that there was no way his group could get into NANS without going through MYM.

When he finally found it so, he began to get more serious by drawing close to us, principally Emma Ezeazu. He and Emma became quite close. Both of us were close too but not as much as he and Emma were. That was the only compromise on our part. Ezeazu was naturally a committed and dedicated comrade. There was no doubt about it. He told Chima that there was nothing he could do about what they were asking for, as we had already selected our own candidates for the NANS positions. At that time, Chima and his group were not even aware that Emma Ezeazu was our candidate for the election. It was in subsequent meetings and negotiations that they got to know. When they finally realized that Ezeazu and Jonas Awodi had been selected to contest for the positions zoned to UNN, they discovered that there was nothing they could do but to work with MYM. So, that was how Chima began to associate with us. We all became a team subsequently and Chima had absolute commitment to the struggle. He was ready to do whatever needed to be done to push the struggle forward even though some of our comrades were a bit circumspect about him; not because he was very close to us, but for something else.

I worked with him very closely and discovered that he was truly committed. So, I did not have any reservation about him at all. I believe Emma did not have any such reservation either. Jonas was a bit more reserved though we all worked together, concerning Chima's relationship with us. All this set the framework for the struggle that erupted subsequently. We decided to work together and then, there was the **ABU massacre** in 1986 when Prof. Ango Abdullahi unleashed the Mobile police on students who were protesting. They slaughtered some students. It was that time that we had just taken over leadership of NANS. University of Nigeria, Nsukka hosted NANS in 1985/86 and we had just assumed leadership of NANS when the ABU incident occurred. Emergency NANS Senate meeting was held in Nsukka, during which NANS resolved to declare a nation-wide mobilization to protest the killings in ABU.

That was how the whole thing started. We mobilized on campus, and MYM was now in the fore-front and no longer at the background as it used to be since government had gone ahead to proscribe NANS following the declaration of the protest. The school authorities at UNN had suspended the student union and that was how the second phase of the struggle started. In the previous phase, it was mainly local issues. Yes, the issue of tuition we fought it over there on campus. There were local issues like when there was no water in the hostels. Chima was the union president at that time. The VC told us that it was technically impossible to give us water. We had to wait until they repaired the pumping machine.

Chima had mobilized students and we were going from hostel to hostel. The kind of mobilization we were doing then was quite different from what obtains now. There was no Twitter, No Facebook, No Instagram or WhatSapp. We were going from hostel to hostel, classroom to classroom, making our case known to students and seeking their cooperation. In many cases, Chima Ubani was an excellent, excellent, excellent speaker. On campus those days, we had what I may call a sequence of how we address issues. I was the worst speaker among the three of students who were always leading the students. Usually, they would put me in front. I would be the first to speak. Emma Ezeazu would be the next to speak while Chima Ubani would conclude everything with such finesse that every listener could not help but admiring him. By the time

Chima ended his speech, the student populace would be ready to even match to anywhere he would want them to go. Chima was an excellent speaker that could not be compared to anyone during our set.

Emma Ezeazu was also a powerful speaker in terms of the energy he brought to bear in his speeches anytime he stood to address the students. He was of a very solid body frame and imbued with a lot of energy which he leveraged on, anytime he was speaking. He usually spoke with a lot of strength and energy. Because I knew I was not as good as the others, I often basically introduce the issue anytime we were gathered. I would speak in a manner that tilted more to intellectualism with no flame of fire to stir the students, but Chima Ubani had the magic wand and oratorical prowess to sway the populace with his well blended words that could even melt a steely heart. He had a way of buying the minds of students with his speeches such that if not for the virtue of restraint inculcated in us as activist, it was very easy for him to stoke violence against the authorities anytime he addressed the students. However, such violence inevitably occurred some day. It was during the protest against the ABU killings that the police station at UNN was razed down.

That period when NANS was proscribed, MYM was proscribed and Student Union was 'suspended' showed everybody that the organizational sectarianism (working independently) was no longer tenable. We had to work together, so we subsequently formed what we called the Association of Patriotic Students (APS) at UNN. Reliable activists from the various platforms who could be depended upon, trustworthy had come together to form the APS, even though we later found out that we made the mistake of admitting two unreliable fellows into our fold. We approached people like Olu Oguibe and someone else who were though sympathetic to our group interest but never truly identified with APS for fear of being rusticated.

Somehow, it seemed to a larger number of students that since NANS, MYM had been proscribed and Student Union suspended, the only choice left for the student populace should be to discontinue with any form of struggle and concentrate on their academics and pursue other life endeavours. Many of such students perceived us as very unserious elements who insisted that

NANS. MYM must be un-proscribed and Students Union un-suspended. In that period, there was a strong conviction among students that Nigeria was on the brink of revolution. We had that strong conviction. As earlier said, the economic crisis had erupted in Nigeria in the late 1970s and early 1980s with the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) and everything. It was manifestly clear and we had the tripartite alliance between the student movement, labour and the Academic Staff Union of Universities; which is technically part of labour. Each of these partners was under the ideological sway of radical persons and given the economic crisis which I insist must be understood in the context of all the students protest that took place in that period (global and national), there were so many strikes and all kinds of protests. We felt strongly in the student movement that the country was on the brink of revolution. There was element of that in the approach we took towards the struggle at UNN. It was like there was going to be revolution. Yes, we would study but the study would be only towards the revolution.

Therefore, going to classes was not taken seriously as it should have. Some of us did, but most of us did not because we felt what we were doing was building towards the revolution which would soon explode. Ironically, we were a bit naïve on our part as there was no national organization to lead any revolution. The ideology that obtained within the movement was very shallow. In many respects, our perspective was very idealist which did not remove the fact that it saw and read the situation correctly which was that Nigeria was in an upheaval and with proper structures in place, we could have moved further towards revolution. But we jumped the hurdles that were ahead and just assumed that it was a matter of time that within ten years, we would have a revolution in Nigeria.

That informed how we approached the struggle at UNN. We were attending classes but many of us did not apply the seriousness which ordinarily would have been brought to bear on our studies to become excellent students due to the expectation of the perceived revolution. I could remember a particular case. We were organizing for a protest and were distributing leaflets from class to class, when we got to my department, my classmates were taking a test. I did not even know there was a test, so I told Chima to wait with the leaflets

while I sat for the test. After the test, I continued with the distribution of the leaflets. I had missed many lectures and obviously did not know when the lecturer scheduled the test. Due to the fact that I used to read widely and even till now, I was able to join my colleagues to write the test drawing knowledge from various spheres to answer the questions. However, I did not do well in that very test. It was like that for many of us. Chima, Jonas and all of us missed many classes due to our involvement in the students struggle.

When those students were taking us as unserious elements, there were some elements of truth in their assertion but we had felt then that we were seeing beyond what they were seeing. As far as they were concerned, their intention was to graduate and move on to face their future career and make money but for those of us in the movement, it was a matter of insisting that Nigeria must change for good. With the way things are currently going on in the country, I dare say that if our vision had come through in those days of struggle, I do not know if the situation would have been much better but Nigerians would have taken control of their destiny. But that is a different subject.

However, when the protest against the killings in ABU erupted, it had to be successful naturally at Nsukka because UNN was hosting NANS. If it did not succeed at UNN, other schools would complain that UNN was hosting NANS and yet their students were attending lectures. So, we had to make sure it succeeded at UNN. We had the forces at Nsukka. As earlier said, we had broken the fences that divided the various organizations and had brought in, what we saw as the best in those organizations into APS. So it was not just Emma Ezeazu, Jonas Awodi, Chima Ubani, Chris Ndiribe and myself anymore. There were other people like Harmony. We brought in these people, so we had the forces.

However, NANS did not want to take any chances. So we brought in what we used to call Revolution Mercenaries at that time; coming from other campuses to join us at UNN. That was the first time I met Abiodun Aremu and he slept on my bed. We had a NANS meeting at UNN in the heat of the killings at various campuses and closing of various campuses. They called a NANS Assembly meeting at UNN. People came to attend. Many of them stayed to

make sure it succeeded at Nsukka. That was where I met Aremu for the first time. He had come with injury on his leg. He was said to have jumped the fence in his school and barbed wire tore his leg and it was bandaged in the hospital where he was treated before he left Ilorin to Nsukka.

That was the time we had student radicals. These days I hear that when they are going for NANS meetings, officials would insist on getting flight tickets. Those days, we were used to travelling to various campuses mostly on trailers conveying goods from one area to another part of the country. So Abiodun Aremu came from Kwara with the injury on his leg with blood showing on the bandage all the way from Kwara to Nsukka. It is necessary to give everyone his dues. Today, many of us do not see eye to eye again on political issues. We must recognize the sacrifices people made at the time, the struggles were going on. There were other comrades like Aremu who made so much sacrifice in those. One of them was Labaran Maku who was NANS Public Relations Officer and President of his university's student union. He later became a Minister in the Fourth Republic.

All of them were at the meeting at UNN and we all insisted that the protests would continue but some students were saying we had made our point and should therefore call off the protests. They suggested we should negotiate with the government but others insisted that the protest must continue in view of the killings that had already taken place. We demanded that the lives of those students killed must be atoned for, even if we knew that they could not come back to life. Prof. Ango Abdullahi was still the VC of the Ahmadu Bello University and students had continued to insist that he must go. We did not succeed in getting him out but the struggle transformed the landscape of the student movement from 1986 onwards.

The morning after the NANS Assembly meeting, we held a local meeting at UNN and one of the resolutions was that we should drive out the police men from the campus as they were perceived to be agents of oppression, but like in every revolution or struggle there must be excesses. We marched to the police station at UNN with a threat that the policemen there should vacate the station and in case they decided to shoot, students would retaliate by killing

them even though we knew pretty well that we could not do so as we were covertly joking. The policemen eventually left the station without any attack and the students set the station ablaze. Even though it was not our intention to burn down the station, those violent ones among the students could not be blamed really as we did not regret anything.

However, I must say that as Marxists, we did not share in violent protest. Violence can be very destructive but we did not share that position even though in certain situations, violence can be very productive. Though we did not have principle promoting violence as such but if it takes place, it had to be an organized or targeted violence. Take African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa for instance. ANC embraced armed struggle which was a form of violence but it was principled armed struggle unlike other organizations. Though they were communist but not with Marxist tendencies. So we were not against violence as such but against unprincipled, wreck less, uncontrolled violence. Hence nobody regretted the burning of the police station.

We took over the campus. The VC had to vacate the campus. We laid siege on the Chief Security Officer of the University whose name was Uchendu. He was a terror on campus, so we took over his residence so he had to run. Some students caught him in the campus and marched him round. There was this song constructed in Igbo language weaved round Chima Ubani's name which literally translated, meant that in good or bad times, we must follow Chima Ubani. The students were not seeing, MYM, Students Union or NANS but just a leader they could trust and that leader was Chima Ubani.

The students knew the rest of us but Ubani was the master speaker and the leader they could identify with, hence they sang the song in his name. The campus was in our hands for a long time. The VC lost control of the campus. It was like a premonition of what happened in 1993 when the government lost control of Nigeria. If the Campaign for Democracy (CD) was better organized then, more serious with a clearer programme and more resolute, the organization would have been in a position to form a parallel or splinter government.

That was how things were. The VC like earlier said had abandoned the campus and would often issue instructions from outside the campus but we in the APS would give our own counter instructions and students would obey us instead of the VC. It is just like the present day Indigenous People of Biafra (IPoB) sit-at-home order in the South East where people obey IPoB instead of government. The situation was like wine which could always go to the head. We were very popular on campus. Everybody knew us. Girls would throw themselves at us. We had suddenly become celebrity of some sort.

There were some frivolous things, but somebody like Emma Ezeazu would never allow any girl to come near him. He was more serious-minded than the rest of us. So that was the situation on campus. I remember the government had to respond because what was going on was not only at UNN but across the country. Some campuses were not as severe as taking full control of the environment by students, but there was unrest in all the campuses. The Babangida regime had to take control. UNN was one of the hotbeds of the struggle as it was hosting NANS at the time and clearly there were radical students there who had a clear idea of where we were going.

We were calling for revolution and of course, they saw us as dangerous. So they had to take charge. What they did as a counter-measure, was to set up a counter force against us. As I said earlier, we were very popular on campus. What they did was to look for natural opponents.

Basically, we cannot tell this story in a sketchy manner. So many things happened. The government had to respond and each response was to build a counter force. They saw that the student movement generally, though not every student was radical, but the student body as a whole had the mind to accept the radical wing. Wherever the radical wing led the students, generally they would follow. So in Babangida's counter-strategy, he knew that he could not win the student movement. He knew he could not become popular among the students but he could build a counter force within the students using a natural proclivities or structure of the students. There were those in year one and there were those in final year. What was the primary motivation of the final year students other than to graduate and leave the campus? Only very few

final year students who were of the radical group could not contemplate such.

What Babangida did in the circumstance was to recruit people from among the final year students who saw what we were doing as opposed to their interest to graduate. That was one strand of their strategy. The second strand which was almost similar to the first was that they needed a force that could exercise violence because like I earlier said, at UNN and some other campuses, the students were in control. They needed a force to checkmate the larger student populace but certainly not the police force living among the students. So they built the force among the cultists on campuses.

At UNN we have always had cultists right from the 1960s but they were never prominent. They were always at the hills and other hidden places to hold their nocturnal meetings and they never appeared in public so that people would not agree that they were members of those cults. So Babangida took them and trained them in the use of violence and equipped them with guns and other weapons. I cannot really say if it was police or the State Security Service that trained them, but they were trained by one of the security agencies and thereafter, they were unleashed on us. They came by the name OZO at UNN. It was an acronym for Operations Zero Options but because *Ozo* is a word in the Igbo dialect, the acronym keyed into the Igbo language parlance which made it easy for the group to be misunderstood of what it really was.

When the debate on campus got very heated, some people threw the options to the student that they either followed the APS or succumb to the government. The OZO members presented themselves as neither for the APS nor government. They made us understand they were for zero option as they belonged to neither APS nor government group. They began first by trying to create dissension among the students, bringing up old arguments that centred on the fact that UNN was the only Igbo University of international standard and anything that would lead to its closure by government would be hurting. They tried to play up the ethnic differences among the radical students with the contention that most of them were not of Igbo extraction and would not feel bad if the university was closed.

Even among the students of Igbo extraction, some regarded themselves as superior to others. Students of Delta Ibo, Rivers extraction and others for example were not even regarded much as core Igbos and this was largely played up to drive home the argument of those who were against protest by the UNN students. They brought up those arguments, but they did not quite work. The way we responded was not what they expected because we were highly motivated. We believed a revolution was coming and could see the forces of the revolution. We would hold our meetings, marshaled out our argument, in the dead of the night while others were sleeping. We usually engaged a typist who at night would do the typing on stencil, do the cyclo-style and print as many copies as our money could afford. We would go ahead in the middle of the night to slip copies under the room doors of the hostel rooms so that soon as our colleagues, woke up they would see the message from APS and read same.

It was a very powerful tactic because it was usually the first message students would wake up to see in the morning and it would form their agenda for the day as they gathered to discuss it. So by the time the OZO guys would post their own message on the notice board, students would tear it off. So they now unleashed violence on us. They knew where we were living, go from hostel to hostel, beat up our people. Because some of us have been suspended, we had to give formal leadership to younger generation of our activists that was how Harmony and co came in. They became the official face of our movement. We were operating underground. They almost killed Harmony. They went to his room one day, unfortunately for them; he was out of the room in the bathroom or so when they came. They caught, beat him mercilessly, twisted his penis. There was another member Omene whose one eye was blinded by the OZO group who were empowered to fight us. They went to our female activist room but luckily she was out of the room. They were roaming day and night beating up activists.

So whenever we were holding meeting, they would come to storm it with guns and everywhere would scatter. Most of them were final year students. They thought that they were fighting for their future trying to graduate from the school while we were considered as unserious students causing the university to be shut down. Then, they kidnapped Emma Ezeazu. There was a meeting

at Enugu Campus. Emma went for that meeting and did not come back, so the Movement sent me to find out what happened. When I got there, I saw some of our comrades there. They told me that he was arrested on the campus there. They did not witness it, but were told about the arrest by other students. I understood SSS operatives had come in a vehicle and soon after the meeting; they blocked Emma with the vehicle and abducted him.

So when I returned to Nsukka and reported the matter, we began to mobilize for the release of Emma Ezeazu. The SSS guys were reportedly working with the OZO group. So when we began to mobilize to fight for his release, in the course of that, they got Chima Ubani. In the night we held a rally in Eni Njoku Hall which was my hall of residence, I was the only one to speak since Chima and Emma had been arrested. They were other people like Awodi but he could not speak as he was a stammerer. Public speaking was very difficult for him. But because we did not have other comrades around, he had to speak. As I got on the stage to speak, there were sporadic gun shots all over the place. The armed guys grabbed me and one of them was blind folding me immediately. The students were trying to free me from them, but the shooting continued and everybody scattered.

The next thing I knew was to find myself in the vehicle. They took me to Enugu into the SSS cell. We got there about 11pm. They questioned me briefly asking if I was Lanre Ehonwa. I said no, I was not Lanre Ehonwa. I denied it, insisting that they had arrested the wrong person. They themselves were not very sure because among themselves they began to ask if they had arrested the wrong person. I continued to insist that I was not Lanre Ehonwa. It was there one of them, a beautiful lady stood before me, I could see she was trying to get some information from me. Every morning she would come and say Lanre how are you? I would respond that "I am not Lanre they were looking for." The first morning she came, she told me she heard they brought me yesterday night. This happened a week to my final examination. I asked if she could help me to be released as I was not the person they were looking for. She told me that Emma Ezeazu just left this very cell I was occupying, that he was asked to be brought to Abuja. So he had been taken to Abuja. I said yes, I knew one of our students called Emma Ezeazu was arrested but

I did not know him very well. I played that character to the end. She smiled and said “well if they ask us to bring you to Abuja, we would equally do so, but in the meantime we are trying to verify your claim.” I told them that my name is Lanre but not Ehonwa. I told her that I was sure they would verify well and eventually find out that I am not Lanre Ehonwa as they claimed. She was coming to my cell every day. I spent a total of ten days with them. One day she came and said I seemed to be right but everyone on campus seemed to know me as Lanre Ehonwa. They asked people and one OZO guys said they should not mind me, insisting that I was one of the students leaders.

They eventually took Emma Ezeazu to Abuja. I can now recollect very well on who was arrested first among the comrades. The SSS arrested Chima Ubani, Chris Ndiribe and about six others. We were mobilizing for them to be released and it was in the course of that Emma Ezeazu travelled to Enugu and they got him there. The arrest was not an OZO inspired arrest, but had to do with the allegation that we were causing disruption on campus. Prior to that, they had put our activists on trial at the military tribunal in Enugu and anyone convicted stood the risk of going to spend 21 years imprisonment. It was over NANS protest against the killings in ABU. They charged the students with attempt to overthrow the government. It was hell for us because we were dealing with a military regime.

I remember we met and put money together to travel to Lagos to engage Barrister Femi Falana. It was Emma Ezeazu, I and one other comrade who came to speak to Femi to represent us. In the meantime, Chima Ubani, Chris Ndiribe and others were still in detention. What happened was that we were to hold a meeting outside the campus since we were on suspension and operating underground. We did not know how they got the information about the meeting. As the meeting was waiting for the arrival of Ezeazu, myself and others before commencement, the SSS and the OZO guys raided the place and got Chima and others and took them away. It was now left for Emma Ezeazu and me to mobilize and fight for their release. That was how Ezeazu went to Enugu Campus and got kidnapped there. I was left to organize for their release and I also got kidnapped.

So Femi Falana came from Lagos to represent us. We had to raise money

for ourselves. This incident as earlier said was close to our final degree examination. So I had to spend money meant for my final year project in the struggle. Others did similarly just to enable us get Falana to stand for us. In actual fact, Falana did not charge us any money. He did it pro bono but we had to take care of our transport fare to and from Lagos including feeding and other incidentals.

The Tribunal sat in Enugu. I was there. They brought Chima Ubani and co to the Tribunal. Falana argued our case and the students had given an ultimatum that there would be a nation-wide strike unless Chima and others were freed, so the Tribunal was under pressure and was trying to avoid such nationwide protest. Babangida himself seemed not to be comfortable with the situation. So by the time we appeared at the Tribunal for a second time, the State withdrew the case and dropped the charges.

When Ezeazu was arrested close to the examination period and I too got kidnapped subsequently, I missed three papers in my degree examination. When I was finally released after ten days in detention, smelling and with overgrown bears, unkempt hair and returned to Nsukka, people were looking at me and guessing “is it not Lanre?” It was Jonas Awodi who received me and took me to our hideout to shave and take my bath.

Generally, the department was gracious to me. It was obvious they were tired of me and actually wanted me to graduate and leave the campus as my continuous stay would create more trouble. So they allowed me to sit for the remaining papers along with other students while I would return in September to sit for the three papers I earlier missed. So that was how finally I got out of UNN. Chima, Ezeazu, Awodi and the rest others also graduated and we left. Regrettably, Awodi died years later on his wedding day at the reception while he stood up to make a speech.

# PART 3



## *CHAPTER FOURTEEN*

### **WOMEN IN THE NIGERIAN STUDENT MOVEMENT – *HAUWA MUSTAPHA***

#### **Introduction**

In discussing the socio-economic division in the society and the subsequent struggle to challenge the oppressive character of the division in the society, we are driven by Karl Marx concept that ‘the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles’. The dynamics of the division is based on power relations and the creation of a class of the exploiter and the exploited, the working class versus the bourgeoisie and capital versus labour.

This tendency has characterized the reality in Nigeria from the colonial master, to the military dictatorship and all through the weak democracy. The common thread running through has been the dominance of power within a class with a system of governance that has led to the perpetuation of economic and political injustice against the dominated class.

This has led to the division of the society into a class of the obscenely wealthy and an abjectly poor. While the former which constitutes less than 10% of the population regales in an overwhelming control of our common wealth and resources, at the same time the over 90% of the citizens who are excluded from the process of governance and consistently suffer the consequences of deepening poverty, inequality and an increasing hopelessness.

The existence of the dominant exploitative class with the excluded and oppressed majority in the face of a worsening socio-economic condition has led to successive conflicts and the struggle to build a society that is anchored on social justice, equality, inclusive and transformative development.

Among those who were actively in the struggle for Nigeria’s independence were women, youth, and students all of whom had a common goal. The common goal was to free Nigeria from the shackles of colonialism which was characterized by oppression and mindless exploitation.

Unfortunately however, the post-independent leadership that emerged shared

a common class trait with the colonialists fundamentally because the system of governance remained the same; the consequence was the deepening of exploitation of the working class, widening inequality and an increasing poverty.

Military and civilian regimes showed no significant impact in the lives of the citizens. Indeed as the years went by socio-economic policies were having direct negative impact on employment, cost of living with deep impact on education and general wellbeing.

Again the need to continue to struggle for social, economic and political justice reverberated among women students, workers and other group of citizens. The students being young, vibrant and directly impacted upon by local and global factors, were justifiably most consistent in reacting to policy action and inaction that threatened their education, wellbeing and of course their future.

### **Nigeria's Socio-economic trajectory: 1982-1992**

Nigeria's experience in resource management can be described as one of 'riches to rags' ironically even as the country is increasingly endowed with human and natural resources. The discovery of oil though directed focus away from agriculture to oil and gas, up until early 80s, the country was still respected as a fast growing economy. However its path to development was not laid on a foundation of sustainability nor was the economic policy strategized for effective diversification.

The collapse of the international oil price in the early 80s which subsequently led to a global recession had impacted heavily on the Nigerian economy. The impact for Nigeria further exposed the precarious nature of overdependence on petroleum while agriculture was relegated and manufacturing sector had little no local content. This policy incoherence the recklessness and corruption in governance as typified by the long years of military rule are still having a toll on the Nigerian state till date.

### **Structural Adjustment Program**

In spite of the national debate it generated and the popular opinion against

taking a worldbank loan due to its stringent conditionalities, the then military government under General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida went ahead to impose the harsh conditionalities based on the recommendation of the IMF. What followed was a series of economic policies anchored on the capitalist ideology of free market and economic liberalisation. This led to the devaluation of the Naira, privatization, commercialization and a general withdrawal of government spending on social services and removal of subsidy.

There was a sudden sharp increase in poverty, inequality and a myriad of social disorder. Women, girls and the youth became more vulnerable to the emerging socio-cultural malaise. The reaction that followed this increased hardship was a mass national protest across most of the tertiary and some secondary schools, trade unions, professional bodies and women across the country.

Indeed SAP was a turning point in the socio-economic history of Nigeria, with a mass exodus of trained professional and youth to ‘greener pasture’. The anger pushed many more women to become part of progressive movement for a change. More women across the campuses in ABU Zaria, University of Jos, University of Sokoto and a few others would become more active in student union politics, making their voices louder in their numbers.

### **Issues beyond the economy: Political and External**

The decade 1982 and 1992 was not all about economic crises, as there were several local, regional and global political issues that shaped the direction of national policies and also affected students and women responses

#### **▪ Apartheid**

Perhaps most popular external political issue was the apartheid regime in South Africa which was premised on white minority rule over black majority citizens of South Africa. Nigeria’s foreign policy since independence was informed by its experience of colonialism and therefore inspired her to commit to an accelerated decolonization of the African continent. This moral commitment manifests itself in Nigeria’s persistent support for the oppressed black people in Southern Africa in general and South Africa in particular.

During the period of post-independence, many South African youth were admitted to study in Nigerian secondary and tertiary schools. The interaction between the South African students and their Nigerian counterparts sharing stories and experiences deepened the passion of Nigerian students to be part of the struggle for an apartheid free South Africa, the women and the stories told about rapes and violence against women inspired many women to join in the fight for South African freedom which is seen to guarantee the freedom of women in South Africa.

To make the struggle organised and focused the Ahmadu Bello University Zaria established the Youth Solidarity against Apartheid in South Africa and Namibia (YUSSAN)

#### ▪ **Cuba and the Palestinian Liberation**

In the same way that apartheid was destroying the blacks in South Africa, the people of Palestine were also going through Zionist occupation and all of these had one thing in common which was an aversion to the students both women and men.

#### **Women, Human Rights and the onslaught of IMF and World Bank**

For Nigeria the second wave of feminism also coincided with the period of heightened military dictatorship, increasing poverty and inequality with a larger number of women as victims, unemployment, gender violence and the decreasing access to education by women. The anti-SAP protests closely followed series of protest across the nation's campuses over the removal of food subsidy and a general increase in the cost of living between 1982 and 1992.

For students in ABU the abduction of students by the state security service at every time of protest was a call for more anger. Particularly when female students were abducted as was the case when I was arrested at the same period with Salihu Lukman and a few other student union leaders.

The most agitation where women participated was however carried out when

the police deliberately and consciously shot at the female hostel of Amina Hall with live bullet and killed Farida Mustapha who was jolted out of her sick bed by the noises outside. She was standing in front of her room when she was shot dead in 1986. Yahaya Abdullahi another student along with some youth within the immediate environment of the ABU samara campus was also shot dead by the police and many more injured.

This happened after the then Vice-Chancellor Professor Ango Abdullahi a fascist who ruled ABU like an emperor, known for financial and administrative recklessness invited the police into the campus and sadly the police opened fire on unarmed students.

### **Women in the history of the struggle for liberation**

Nigerian women have been known historically to participate in the struggle for national liberation, before, during and after colonialism. Our early school history included the stories of women's participation in the struggle for liberation and social justice before, during and after colonialism.

Many women who played significant roles in the history of Nigerian independence were immortalized through the naming of many public school hostels after them. Such names like Moremi, Amina, Emotan, Funmilayo Kuti, and Gambo Sawaba were sources of feminist inspiration to the many young women on campuses.

The 80s was the later part of the second wave of feminism globally and it was focused on; reproductive rights, protection of women and girls from domestic and sexual violence, workplace and employment rights. Organizing the trend in women's participation in the liberation struggle and state of the women as members of the society, Women In Nigeria, a feminist group was founded in 1982 largely by a group of women and some men in the academia. Though WIN focused on women's liberation, equality, social justice and human rights, it believed that the oppression and exploitation of women is inextricably linked to class exploitation and oppression in the society. It would therefore draw a pool of membership beyond the academia to the media, workers and the students' body.

It's presence on the campuses was a huge inspiration to female students and soon became part of the mobilisation front for other progressive organizations such as YUSSAN, MPN, MASS and other active Students Unions. At the same time these progressive organizations also served to mobilize membership into WIN such that it was almost an oddity to be a progressive student activist and not be a member of WIN or be a member of WIN and not associate with other progressive groups on the campus.

### **Women's participation and patriarchal control**

In spite of the strength and intellectual quality of the women in WIN and other progressive groups in terms of number outside the WIN men had advantage. Much as the women became recognized and appreciated for their participation in the student union movement, defining their roles and responsibilities took a patriarchal position either due to a disadvantage in number or depth in polemics and Marxist political education.

Herein laid the contradiction that also affected the role the women played in the student union politics. Women members of WIN and student activists were not necessarily Marxist but more of feminist who believed in women's rights and protection against socio-cultural abuses. On the other hand most male members of WIN and especially cadres in the progressive groups claimed Marxism and were more educated on Marxism-Leninism.

So, the Patriotic Youth Movement of Nigeria PYMN, Socialist Congress of Nigeria SCON, Socialist Revolutionary Vanguard SRV, Peoples' Liberation Movement PLM etc were dominated by men who were deeper in Marxist-Leninist literature and thus debates in this context were more dominant and often more radical but not usually more popular especially among the women. I was personally nominated as the General Secretary of YUSSAN and the secretary of MPN with the voices of the men even if the action was ideologically strategic. However, I was 'directed' to step down as a candidate to contest for the position of student union President in ABU for a male counterpart by a male dominated marxists core and told to contest for the position of a treasurer. Was I duly consulted, was it ideologically strategic,

and did I think it was right? I may have accepted the decision based on organizational commitment and principle.

So, women were easily mobilized to join protests and to campaign for Student union candidate, however, women were often 'given' the position of treasurer, ex-officio, welfare and assistant secretaries. This tradition would later be resisted at some point by liberal feminism because it would be regarded as a patriarchal domination and control.

One however cannot rule out the influence of the strength of patriarchal psychological orientation through which the women and men's lives have been conditioned. There were deliberate attempt and the consciousness to practice gender equality, however, the subconscious mind worked in such way that often created a different outcome.

The state of women's participation in student union politics today is a reflection of the general deterioration first in the academia, the national politics and global governance system.

## **Conclusion**

Nigerian students have played a significant role in the process of national development and in the history of the struggle for a just society. From fighting against colonialism, to post independent struggle for democracy, accountability and social justice, the young men and women have been very strong. The students have also been very active in regional and global solidarity action against all forms of oppression whether political, economic or social.

There has been many and there are continuous attempts to re-organize the students' union movement in the shape that it was before its ideological bankruptcy from the late 90s till date. My take is that we need to understand that the calamity that befell the students' union movement is a part of an organized global war of capitalism against socialism, against people's power and against collective struggle.

The Nigerian state has been captured by the agents of capitalism such as the IMF, World Bank, the WTO and the whole concept of globalization as promoted by these organizations and facilitated by the monopolistic control of technology and finance. While the socio-economic condition that ignited the ideological passion to struggle is perhaps more critical, the impact of the psychological warfare that poverty, lack of access and diminished opportunities have left on our minds are quite impactful. Today the level of inequality and fierce aggression with which primitive accumulation is taking place is not only scary but that in the midst of increasing abject poverty, the ordinary human impulse is about immediate survival of the self.

Communalism has therefore been reduced to individualism, hope reduced to hopelessness and collective struggle reduced to opportunism for survival. In all these, the opportunity for reorganizing is even more apt, however, we will require strategic reorganizing that recognizes and appreciates the current global dilemma, yet find a way to weave in modern reality rather than an outright rejection. In other words, we will require a gradual shift, a mix and as we go forward a systemic shift that strategically remodel and reorganize the mindset and manages expectation.

Recent experience in trying to re-organize the left movement shows a lot of disconnection, skepticism and many retarded hopes and fears. How we manage these changing dynamics will require our very sincere and absolute self-appraisal. And as a starting point are we really ready to organize, are we ready to purge ourselves of the many years of acquired new culture amidst denials?

Very importantly too are we ready to accommodate the evolving new world and provide critical assessment of the changing reality and of course mobilize and organize around alternative narratives and policies?

One cannot over-emphasize the need for a general overhaul of our general value orientation on how we see our-selves and how we perceive our current socio-economic state which requires a holistic approach.

1. While advocating for an overhaul of the education content, we must begin to collaborate to contribute to infusing critical debates and learning circles in our secondary and tertiary institutions
2. We should be pragmatic and not believe that there is only one way to reaching *Uhuru*. There is no one way, there is no one method and there is no one group indeed we must strategically think through a mix of methods and approaches.
3. As the world becomes globalised, student activism must reach beyond the narrow focus of local interests. Instead, increased energy must be directed towards global issues – issues that address our commonality the world over as humankind and which have effects on our well-being and those of future generations.
4. Such issues include; climate change, migration, trafficking in people, afrocentricism and free market, governance, democracy, gender and inclusions. In other words, Nigerian student activists must become global development activists; an active pressure group on national and international development matters.
5. Leveraging on the powers of information and communication technology to educate, inform, energize, mobilize capacity to function as effective watchdogs of the Nigerian state and its activities in the global political scene

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6. Personal notes and discussions with some old student union leaders

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### STUDENT CADRES AND LAWYERS OF MERCI - *ONYEISI* *CHIEMEKE*

Every process of struggle is determined by many factors, and the struggle of this period also wore the garb of many of those factors. We have seen narratives of how the students' unions in most of the tertiary institutions and theatres of conflicts had looked the authorities of the schools and successive governments eyeball to eyeballs and the system buckled and caved in to the demands of the students, or out rightly refused to meet those demands. The latter had in such circumstances worsened the conflicts and the school authorities have most times wielded the big stick, leaving the students in the cold. These have resulted into many forms of punishments ranging from rustications to expulsions. In most times when these happened, families were the last to come to the aids of their wards for the simple reasons that such wards were not sent to school to become activists or by way of challenging policies of school authorities or the ruling elites of such a state. Such punishments were emotional strains on the families, then to add the burden of the cost of litigations against university system would have been overkill on the families.

Sometimes, it had even been depressive to go home with a tale of such punishment, not to talk of asking for support to become part of or be involved in a legal process against such authorities. And because of the fact that most of the unions were unions of undergraduates, such structures, such as legal defence teams did not necessarily exist. Most times, the leaders of the union had run to law firms that may assist such members by way of *pro bono services*. Not every law firm has the philosophical empathy to understand the dynamics of some of those cases, and not every law firm was also willing to offer such legal services without being paid. But some did take up such cases and rendered the services without much hassle. Of note here were the law firms of Chief Gani Fawehinmi, Alao Aka-Bashorun and by extension, Femi Falana.

In the late 1970s, particularly in the period of the “*Ali Must Go protest*,” it did appear as if the military regime particularly that of Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo more or less took the responsibility of enforcing the discipline of the students in moment of conflicts in tertiary institutions. He practically did not wait for

the universities to take the front seat in the punishment of the students, but more or less took a direct action in such punishment, leaving the university with the mere responsibility of enforcing such punishment. Two cases come to mind in this regard. The cases of Segun Okeowo vs. University of Lagos and Olori Magege vs. University of Benin, the factual circumstances of these two cases buttress the point we are making above.

The fact for the case of Segun Okeowo is that;

“The Applicant, President of the National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS), formerly Secretary-General and later President *Adeyemi College Students’ Union, Ondo*, and President, *University of Lagos Students’ Union (ULSU)* - an Undergraduate of University of Lagos was arrested on May 2nd 1978 and taken into custody by security agents of the General Olusegun Obasanjo - led Federal Military Government. The arrest was sequel to a nation-wide “save education” Protest staged by Nigerian students between 18th and 20th of April 1978. Upon arrest, the Applicant was detained by the Police at their Lion Building, Lagos. On the 5th day of May, 1978, the Applicant was admitted into Ikoyi Prisons by the order of the Inspector-General of police.

Following his detention, the Applicant filed this application under a *Writ of Habeas Corpus Ad Subjiciendum*, seeking his release from unlawful Custody.” Also in the case of Olori Magege that:

“On the 11th of May 1976, there was a students’ unrest in the University of Benin. Sequel to the said unrest, the Senate of the University of Benin and the Provisional Council of the University set up in May 1976 a committee with specific terms of reference “to make recommendation on appropriate measures of discipline or restitution in respect of any person or body of persons found to have been guilty of any act of indiscipline or other forms of misconduct, arising out of or in connection with the disturbances”. The said committee met and reported to the Provisional Council of the University through the Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of the Council in June 1976. The recommendations of the committee were to the effect that the Plaintiff, the President of the Students’ Union, should be debarred from holding any Students’ Union office for the rest of his stay in the University and that he

should not be re-admitted until May 1977 and when he is re-admitted, he should not be considered for hostel accommodation were approved by the Provisional Council of the University.”

The secondary fact of Magege’s case is that the panel for University of Benin had the imprimatur of the then Federal Commissioner for Education Col Ahmadu Ali. This is as evidenced by the letter below.

15<sup>th</sup> May, 1976

**Col. A. A. Ali**

The Federal Commissioner for Education  
Federal Ministry of Education  
Lagos.

My dear Commissioner:

Students Disturbances

.....

.....

With the University regrettably closed down, the University has set up a joint Council and Senate Committee to investigate and report fully on the disturbances and any associated matters. The terms of reference are contained in the notice attached (Annexure 1). While seemingly rather wide, the terms of reference indicate the seriousness with which the University views the matter. The membership of the Investigation Panel is as follows:

- (1) Mr. Alex. O. Orakwusi Legal Practitioner and Member of Council —  
Chairman
- (2) Col. Garba Duba, Commander 4th Infantry Brigade Nigerian ArTny  
Benin City

- (3) The Permanent Secretary Federal Ministry of Education Lagos
- (4) Professor C. O. Orangun Faculty of Engineering University of Benin
- (5) Dr. Ayo Binitie Associate Professor of Psychiatry College of Medical Sciences University of Benin
- (6) Dr. S. E. Chukwujekwu Senior Lecturer Faculty of Engineering University of Benin.

Perhaps by the circumstances of the outcome of these two cases of universities becoming intellectual outpost for the military regime, the universities started to acculturate and took up the role of the direct interface being enforced by the military whenever there is opposition to the programme of the government in power, or on a lesser note, the policy of a particular tertiary institution. By a combination of policies, universities were losing their autonomy.

These crises did not abate even under the civilian regime of Alhaji Shehu Shagari, but worsened under the regimes of General Muhammadu Buhari and General Ibrahim Babangida. Babangida came and started working hands in gloves with university authorities to;

- i. Undermine university autonomy.
- ii. Change the philosophical narrative of what a university should be.

The Bretton Wood institutions advisories had started yielding autocrats within the university system. This autocratic tendency generated high level of conflicts that some vice chancellors hopelessly mismanaged. In the spirit of this mismanagement, where some of the vice chancellors who abandoned even the laws of their own universities and the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and dished out punishments to students in reckless abandon. Of particular note was the incident that emanated from the University of Maiduguri where Professor Jubril Aminu who later became President Ibrahim Babangida's minister of education was its vice chancellor. This case, in the jurisprudence of fundamental human rights is in the top echelon. The case is called *Aliyu Garba vs. University of Maiduguri*. Its importance in the student movement cannot be overemphasized, and these are basically for its

jurisprudential and methodological approach on the issue of discipline and punishing of students, particularly in tertiary institutions. This case opened boundaries beyond what was contemplated in enhancing students' rights and curbing of arbitrariness on the part of university authorities. We can safely call Aliyu Garba Vs University of Maidugiri (Supra) is the *locus classicus* on students' rights. It had been such that previous cases had been argued and anchored on the principles of *habeas corpus* and *mandamus*. Prior to this case, most university authorities had relied on the popular case of *Akintemi vs. Onwumechili* to ride roughshod on students' union leaders in various campuses. The core argument in *Akintemi vs. Onwumechili* was that a student could not go to court on the mere basis of anticipated punishment without exhausting the internal mechanism of the university for dispute resolution, or on a mere assumption that a punishment had been imposed by the language of a communication between the student and the university authority. But *Aliyu Garba vs. University of Maiduguri* redefined this position and dug deeper into *Chapter IV of the 1979 Constitution* which dealt with the question of fundamental human rights and the anticipated of violation of such rights. This case was litigated from the High Court of Borno State sitting in Maidugiri to the Supreme Court of Nigeria. The Supreme Court then was populated, if we may paraphrase Professor Itse Sagay by persons deemed to be in the best moments of the Supreme Court. Beyond that, was that this case became one of the pinnacles of the legal battles between Chief Rotimi Williams and Chief Gani Fawehinmi. Much as Chief Williams stretched *Akintemi vs. Onwumechili's* case to squeeze out blood so that the old order would remain, Chief Fawehinmi redefined and limited the import of *Akintemi vs. Onwumechili's* case urging His Lordships to look at new possibilities in order to enhance the question of human rights within the Nigerian universities, and the Supreme Court in many *orbita* agreed with him and made some far reaching pronouncements that we can quote one or two here.

**The provisions of the Constitution are to be given liberal construction so as to best carry out the intentions of the founding fathers. Their construction is not to be guided by the construction of other constitution in other common law jurisdictions unless similar provisions in *pari materia* were in question. The Supreme Court will not give to any provision of**

**the Constitution a construction, which will defeat its obvious intention. [Nafiu Rabiu v. The State (1981) 2 NCLR 293; The Attorney-General of Bendel State v. The Attorney-General of Federation and Others (1983) 3 NCLR 1; Senator Adesanya v. The President of the Federal Republic & Another (1981) 5 SC 112], referred to, applied and followed. (P. 133 – P. 134, paras G – A).**

**Per Obaseki, JSC:**

**It therefore appears to me that the provisions of Section 33 (1) and (4) of the Constitution have to be construed as they stand in our statute book and in the context of their objective which is to ensure that justice is available to all and sundry in our courts or other tribunals. (P. 134, paras. B-C)**

**Per Eso, JSC:**

**Indeed, having regard’ to what I termed in *Ariori v. Elemo (supra)* as the nascence of our Constitution, the comparative educational backwardness, the socio-economic background of the people and the reliance that is being placed and necessarily have to be placed, as a result of this backwardness on the courts, it would be safer for the courts in this country to err on the side of liberalism whenever it comes to the interpretation of the fundamental provisions in the Constitution than to import some restrictive interpretation. (Pp. 157 -158, paras. H – A).**

**Per Obaseki, JSC:**

**Learned Counsel for the Respondent had submitted that the protection afforded by (Section 33 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1979) only avails against the State to limit the powers of the judiciary, the legislature and the executive and not to provide protection against private conduct.....I cannot on close examination of the text of Section 33 (1) & (4) of the Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1979, discover any limitation of the protection granted to protection of the freedom from unfair hearing against the action of the State unless every person or authority performing *quasi-judicial* function is regarded**

**as the State. Private prosecutions and state prosecutions of criminal cases are not unknown under our law. Similarly, institution of civil actions is not confined to private persons. Governments and other authorities are known to file civil claims in our Courts, Indeed, the judicial powers vested in the courts by Section 6 of the Constitution has been defined in Sub-Section 6 (b) as extending to all matters between persons, or between government or authority and any person in Nigeria and to all actions and proceedings relating thereto for the determination of any questions as to the civil rights and obligations of that person. (P. 133 – P. 134) P. 133 para. C, P. 134 paras, C – F).**

What this case did was that it brought a fresh insight into the question of the modalities for the disciplining of students, and increased the capacity of the students to understand the requisite things to be done when it concerned their rights. The case was like a broad sheet that covered many aspects of the question of human rights, and from that moment onwards, the school lost their key argument of over reliance on the theory of *forum domesticum*. It was not as if the school did not win some cases after the decision of the Supreme Court in *Aliyu Garba vs. University of Maiduguri*. A good example was the case of *Andrew Adekunle vs. University of Benin*. Even if the school won in this case, there was a lot of distinction made from the case of *Akintemi vs. Onwumechili* and *Andrew Adekunle vs. University of Benin* relying on the new vista provided by the case of *Aliyu Garba vs. University of Maiduguri*.

By the time in 1985 when Chief Gani Fawehinmi achieved success with *Aliyu Garba vs. University of Maiduguri*, the Nigerian university witnessed an upsurge in varying crises across the universities ranging from ABU massacre in 1986 to the Military Tribunal to try the students of University of Nigeria, Nsukka and various mini conflicts that may not be of same magnitudes as the above mentioned conflicts, but they were also impacting on the rights of Nigerians students across the country.

This is a sketch of Chief Fawehinmi's biography by Ekimogun ....*Chief Gani Fawehinmi was born on Friday 22nd day of April 1938 at his family home in Okedasa Street, Ondo Town. His father, late Chief Saheed Tugbobo*

*Fawehinmi, a successful Timber Magnate, Philanthropist, Seriki Musulumi of Ondo and one of the famous Son of Late High Lisa Alujannu Fawehinmi of Ondo Kingdom. Gani's mother, Alhaja Muniratu Fawehinmi-Iya Olori Egbe Adini of Ondo Central Mosque, daughter of late Chief Yesufu & Madam Rabiatu Akinnibosun. Chief Gani Fawehinmi attended Ansar-ud-deen Primary School, Yemoja in Ondo from 1947-1953, Victory College, Ikare from 1954-1958 and University of London from 1961-1964 as an External Student for Law Course and Graduated in 1964. Chief Gani Fawehinmi return to Nigeria in 1964 and started working in the Law Office of Hon. Justice Rasheed Fawehinmi. He was call to the Nigeria Bar on 15th of January 1965 and established his own Law Practice in Lagos same year. Gani Fawehinmi became a holder of the highest national legal title in September 2001 as Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN).”*

Kola Ibrahim upon Gani's death had this to say of Fawehinmi and we believe this encomion encapsulated the essentials of him;

*“Gani is not just another important personality that will be celebrated for just few days and then forgotten. Gani Fawehinmi represented an idea of change which exploration is vital for the future of the millions of people he represented and defended in his lifetime, in Nigeria and Africa. To the Nigerian ruling class, their apologists and hanger-on, who represented what Gani fiercely fought against, the burial of Gani was a big relief. To the fake political heirs to Gani, debate must end with a call for “masses to fight for their rights”. But to his teeming millions of fans and supporters, who constitute the poor working masses of Nigeria and Africa, Gani was a Revolutionary Working Class Tribune, therefore, exploration of his life is vital for the working class activists and youth seeking to defeat capitalism, especially in this era of neo-liberal madness and utter failure of Nigeria's and indeed Africa's backward ruling class.”*

These conflicts increased the spate of reprisals and resistance, and that meant that a single law firm may not be able to fight these conflicts. Interestingly, there was the law firm of Alao Aka-Bashorun which had recruited a group of radical young lawyers like Femi Falana, Yinka Orokoto, Sola Ebiseni and others. At the forefront of this generation was Femi Falana who had at some

point been the Public Relation Officer of the University of Ife Students' Union. Therefore, there was some sense of comfort in the fact that he understood the issues haven been in the field as a students' union activist and had a greater reach with various radical movements in Nigeria. The boss of the firm Alao Aka-Bashorun had a rich history as well of students' union politics, as he was active in the formation of West African Students' Union (WASU), an anti-imperialist group in London. Kanyama Chiume, the former Malawian minister of foreign affairs under Kamuzu Banda before he was sacked in his Panaf Autobiography, was full of praises for Alao Aka-Bashorun when he met him in London in the 1950s as one of the organizers of the West African Students' Union (WASU).

As said, Femi Falana was very active with this new project and traversed various Nigerian campuses that had become center of conflicts protecting the rights of students. Some of such cases included the military tribunal trial of the protesting students of University of Nigeria, Nsukka, **Andrew Adekunle vs. University of Benin, Opeyemi Bamidele & Ors. vs. University of Benin.** These are cases that the lawyers at some point became not just a lawyer, but an agitator stemming from the passion and tension surrounding these cases.

*Femi Falana was born on 20 May 1958 in Ilawe, Ekiti State. He was educated at St. Michael's Primary School, Ilawe, 1963-1968; Sacred Heart Catholic Seminary, 1971-1975.*

*Falana gained admission to the University of Ife – now Obafemi Awolowo University – to study English 1977-1981 but changed to Law after the first year, his reason being his contact with radical literature which illustrated how some historical figures who were lawyers changed their society.*

*This angle of the world of Femi Falana is only a fraction of the whole. Yet, it's one of the cases where seeing a little of the whole leads you into the whole. The centre of gravity of the lawyer's universe is the condition of the vulnerable. To understand society, you must look, not at the gluttonous and greedy grandeur of its leaders' lifestyle, (although this may*

*come into consideration later), but at the poverty levels of the majority. So, for Femi Falana, the legitimate and legal pursuit of the defence of the harassed and humiliated hoi polloi, wherever he can locate them, in his own profession, among journalists, in officialdom, in schools, in marketplaces, in entertainment circles, in organised private sector, in religious centres etc., is his lifetime preoccupation. He has used his law practice to try to attain the goal.*

It was not a project for few lawyers as we mentioned above, but a project that involved many lawyers not limited to the persons mentioned, but we referenced these men for the passion and dedication they brought to the cause of the Nigerian students' movement, particularly of the period under reference. Sometimes, the solution in some of these crises did not involve going to court, but personal interventions of some of these men under consideration. We will cite some examples, when Ogaga Ifowodo got to the Nigerian Law School in 1989 for his compulsory legal education, it was discovered that the authorities of the University of Benin had written a secret report against Ogaga Ifowodo to the effect that he was a person of suspicion that should not be admitted to the Law School, and the law school authority refused to process his admission on the strength of the report by the University of Benin. The same thing happened to Uche Onyeaguocha with a similar report from the Rivers State University of Science and Technology. It took the personal intervention of Alao Aka-Bashorun to have them admitted to the Nigeria Law School. The same fate befell Mahmud Aminu, but with the intervention of Kanmi Ishola-Osobu, the protest was dismissed and Mahmud was allowed to register for his programme.

As we said, some of these legal interventions saved many careers; otherwise without such legal interventions that were done on *pro bono* basis, a couple of things would have happened. One of them would have been that a good number of the student activists may not have graduated from the universities or other tertiary institutions. The ancillary to this was that lack of such interventions as these would have been a great dampener as in line with the African saying that; ***“an albino who witnessed the mode of the burial of his***

***fellow albino would decipher how he would be buried upon his or her own death.***” This is because the multiplier effect of such solidarity only left one indelible impression that cadres fighting in the streets were not going to be left stranded because of incapacity to fund cases involving the enforcement of their legal rights. Group solidarity is essential for every fighting organization and its members. And as the death of Nigerian Students’ Union movement began to occur when some of these strands of solidarity began to weaken and the shout of to your tent O Israel began to sound loud. One tragic consequence was that many of the students caught in these situations began to run to Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and the NGOs began to incubate them and turned them into human rights activists. Men and women who went in search of solutions to their problems didn’t know when they abandoned the history of their problems, and got enmeshed in the ways of the hunters.



# PART 4



## **CHAPTER SIXTEEN**

### **ALUTA CONTINUA: PICKING THE SNAILS**

Even before the crisis of 1994, there were signs that the state had become extremely desperate to decimate NANS, but the lucky charm that warded it off was the PYMN. There were signs that cadres were no longer maintaining the level of discipline that will warrant a strong union. Three examples would be cited starting with the Opeyemi Bamidele's leadership of NANS, particularly at the dying embers of his leadership.

Sometime in 1990, there was an approach from Prof. Jerry Gana, the Director General of Mass Mobilization for Social Justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER). The meeting held sometime in the month of July in Abuja, and the sole agenda of that meeting was how NANS can work with the leadership of MAMSER for the purposes of social mobilization, particularly of the youth and student strata of the Nigerian populace with a view of ensuring peace and stability in the country. At the meeting, it became clear that the nebulous concept of peace, stability and justice was a Trojan fodder to support President Babangida's transition program. This did not sit well with the NANS leadership present at the meeting. Those at the meeting were Opeyemi Bamidele (NANS President), Luke Aghanenu (Secretary General), Fola Odidi (PRO), Biodun Ogunade (NANS Vice President South-West) and Onyeisi Chiemeké. After that meeting, everybody bade each other farewell without any agreement of any working relationship between MAMSER and NANS. It was subsequently gathered that the NANS leadership without the PYMN on its way back from the NANS Senate meeting at Bayero University Kano, veered off at Abuja without the consent of the PYMN and met with the MAMSER leadership. This meeting was hushed and it was months after, after Opeyemi Bamidele's NANS leadership had left that it emerged that there was a meeting between the MAMSER leadership and NANS. MAMSER trying to be smart; offered transport fare to the NANS leadership, the transport fare that was offered was far and above the cost of road transport fare during that period. It was a gratuitous way of offering bribe to the NANS leadership. Some wanted to accept the money, while others refused. A section of that leadership developed a secret relationship with Prof. Gana's MAMSER and began to seek ways and means to participate in the Babangida's transition program. As

at that time, NANS was opposed to the Babangida's transition program but unknown to NANS and PYMN, some of the NANS leadership were working to be part of the Babangida's transition program. It was not surprising that by the month of March 1991, Opeyemi Bamidele and few others were card carrying members of Social Democratic Party (SDP). Was it then surprising when Opeyemi Bamidele was arrested accidentally with Bola Aidi, a cadre from the UNIBEN movement by the State Security Service (SSS)? They were quickly released, while a bulk of other NANS leadership were detained for more than four months. To be fair, the argument for their release was that they were no longer part of the new NANS leadership, but this argument is duplicitous, as Salihu Lukman who was succeeded by Opeyemi Bamidele was detained as part of the haul of persons detained under the period being discussed.

With respect to this detention, there were signs that the Babangida's regime was going to go more vicious against the Mahmud Aminu's led leadership of NANS. The first sign was that at the first inaugural press conference of the new leadership, the campuses became hostile and were reporting every activity to the government while those in Lagos were taking steps to prevent the holding of the press conference on their campuses. This was with particular reference to UNILAG. Some friendly comrades in the media then decided to make available the Nigeria Union of Journalist (NUJ) secretariat at Victoria Island, Lagos. Outside the NANS officials of Mahmud Aminu and Sylvester Odion-Akhaine, both President and Publicity Secretary of NANS, Onyeisi Chiemeké joined them on the high table for the purpose of moderating the press conference. In actual fact, Onyeisi Chiemeké came from the Law School on that day. Hardly had the press conference started when a batch of policemen, led by Sunday Arase stormed the venue of the press conference, and in a hollering voice, ordered the press conference to stop, and started struggling to seize the text of the press conference. After lots of protest by the NUJ officials that they had a right to make their facility to us to do a press program at their secretariat, a compromise was reached that NANS officials depart the conference venue, while the police officers too would leave.

A few days after the press conference incident at the NUJ Lighthouse Victoria

Island an incident occurred at the Law School Victoria Island Lagos State. At about 1:30 pm, Opeyemi Bamidele rushed towards us, the *us* in this sense were; Onyeisi Chiemekwe, Luke Aghanenu and Bola Aidi that the SSS officials were at the Law School premises to arrest him. The Law School had a lot of archaic culture that were against any form of student union activism. Faced with the prospect of Opeyemi Bamidele being whisked away that afternoon, the cadres from UNIBEN decided to use muscle tactics against the SSS officials particularly the one that was identified. We gave him a couple of knocks, and he disappeared from the Law School premises with his acolytes, and we took the opportunity that lecture had not resumed, and Opeyemi Bamidele in impromptu address, addressed the students that the SSS officials were on the Law School premises, trying to arrest some former student union leaders. To validate the point we are making above about the Law School conservatism, the then Director General of the Nigerian Law School, Babatunde Ibrinke SAN came to address the students and mentioned the facts of the earlier incident, warning that the Law School is not a place for persons who want to engage in student union activism. It may even be correct to infer that Mr. Ibrinke may have called somebody upstairs that the officials leave the Law School premises and do whatever they want to do outside.

Based on what happened that afternoon, we tried to persuade Opeyemi Bamidele and Bola Aidi, Bamidele in particular not to go to his place of resident somewhere at Charity, Oshodi, Lagos that night to sleep. We could not say how much Opeyemi Bamidele took this advice, which had to do with his security. This was because Luke Aghanenu offered to accommodate them in the interim since he was leaving in a boy's quarters at Ikeja GRA, Lagos. They didn't take the offer, but left with a promise that they will take precaution. At 9:00 pm, the Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) in its primetime news, made the appearance of Chief Alex Akinyele the major news of the night. Chief Akinyele was the Minister of Information to the Babangida's regime. Chief Akinyele with gusto, tweaking his moustache informed the nation that some persons under the leadership of NANS was planning to levy terror against the Babangida regime, but that he was confident that they were going to pick up the persons involved like snails. It was worrying watching him speaking with such confidence, bearing in mind the earlier encounter of the day, and

the fact that NANS has had the success of not making its officials easy prey by state security officials. For those of us in the business, we thought Chief Akinyele's statement was an illusion fueled by Dutch courage, but we didn't know that we were the ones in delusion, as that night became the night of picking the snails with incredible success.

This writer was called by Luke Aghanenu at about 9:40pm that Opeyemi Bamidele and Bola Aidi had been arrested. In the same breath of that NTA News at 9:00pm, Bola Ajimuda surfaced on national television that NANS had suspended any action planned against the Babangida's regime. Seeing him on national television, you could see a scared rat with rays of light in his eyes. What has happened? It soon emerged that Bola Ajimuda was earlier that same day arrested by the SSS, and that was what informed Chief Alex Akinyele's confidence that the leaders of the protest will be picked like snails, and in truth was that they were picked across the country with such ease as Akinyele said. It took a long time for the facts to be pieced together how these young cadres were arrested with such ease, as it has never happened before. It soon emerged that the source of the whole arrest was Bola Ajimuda. From the account of the comrades from OSUA, Bola Ajimuda ought not to have been part of the movement at OSUA, if the movement was diligent and followed the correct principles of the recruitment of a cadre. For instance in his rascality he disobeyed a directive of the movement that cadres must not leave the campus because of the potential possibility of a crackdown by the Babangida's regime. The State security agents arrested him at a far distance outside the state and he started talking like a parrot.

There is a reason why across the country most campus movements operated a frontline organization. The reason, to borrow from Comrade John Odah;

***The pattern of leadership recruitment on the campuses by then was that the movement looked around for people who manifested certain qualities at one level or the other. Individual aspiration to be president or Secretary-General or whatever positions was a sure factor for being bypassed. At the University of Jos, Chris Abashi and Festus Okoye***

***were never party to the decision in MAAS that they should contest. That was a Central Committee decision of MAAS or debates upon debates on the floor of the PYMN which was the national umbrella of the progressive platforms spread across the campuses – universities, polytechnics, Colleges of Education and such other tertiary institutions.***

When a movement neglects some of this little hubris in the recruitment of a cadre or cadres, a day shall come when it will bite the entire organization. It is not sectarian; the idea is to ensure that cadres do not begin to see themselves as bigger than the organization, but that they can be disciplined by the organization. Where they feel superior to the organization, and the organization fails to assert its strength, the organization has already opened itself to indiscipline. Let us take the privilege to cite an example in this regard. There was an incident at UNIBEN arising from Hall Elections. Onyeisi Chiemeké had run into a lady familiar to the movement in the general sense, and the lady informed him that the then NANS President, Opeyemi Bamidele had chosen her as the next chairperson for Hall 2. Chiemeké did not say anything to her as she wallowed in her confidence. A few days after, the movement conveyed its weekly movement meeting and Chiemeké was presiding as the general secretary of the movement. As the secretary, he raised the issue of what the lady said, and Opeyemi Bamidele tried to justify it that much as the decision was not deliberately made, but as NANS President, he should be given the concession for that nomination. It was the decision of the movement that he had no power to make that promise or decision to anybody. The movement to shield itself from the indiscretion of the NANS President asked him to go back to the lady and inform her that he could not deliver on the promise and that was the end of the matter. In the end, the movement fielded its own candidate in respect of the chairperson election for that hall, and its candidate defeated the lady in question. The lady was later to find out that there were forces opposed to her, but it wasn't the job of the movement to engage in gossips, since there is a mafia saying; *never show your hand if it can be hidden.*

It was this increasing intimidation by the state and innocuous cracks within some movements on the campuses that began to play as catalyst in the

sequence of events that culminated in NANS becoming an organization for anybody. It was the PYMN that ran NANS as an organization, and the moment it became unable to run it because of its own internal contradiction and external destabilization, NANS became a tourist bus carrying all manner of 'deplorables'.

## CONCLUSION

The accounts in this work are not a tale of roses. Even if they are a tale of roses, let us also concede that roses do have thorns. There is a certain sense of nostalgia among comrades who wrote and spoke about their experiences of the student movement with regard to the period under review. But in this nostalgia, lies an incubus of a time that was troubled in our view by lack of capacity at transformational processes with regard to the question of power. It has been a conflicting debate about the factors responsible for this change in fortune but we can hazard some guesses if we must speak truth to our situation. It is our contention that three issues are key in looking at what happened to the progress and stunting of the products of students' movement in consolidation and transitioning to the man seeking for power. Those three factors in our opinion are:

- The impact of the collapse of the Campaign for Democracy (CD) and Patriotic Youth Movement of Nigeria (PYMN)/ National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS)
- Lagos as a cesspool
- The human rights ideology

The Campaign for Democracy (CD) and Patriotic Youth Movement of Nigeria (PYMN) / National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS)

In 1992, a broad organization known as the Campaign for Democracy (CD) rose from the ashes of the National Consultative Forum. The CD was made up of different civil society organizations including NANS, and after the annulment of the June 12, 1993 General Election by the regime of Babangida, it became the central organization that championed the cause for the deannulment of the June 12, 1993 General Election. It works in the major streets of Nigeria in 1993 led to the abdication of power by Gen. Ibrahim Babangida on the 27th of August, 1993. The history of the CD has been documented in the book; *June 12 Election: Campaign for Democracy and the Implosion of the Nigerian Left* by Onyeisi Chiemeké.

The National Consultative Forum (NCF) in similar imitation of the emergent pro-democracy movement in Africa, fighting against military dictatorship and

one party system of government, had launched a campaign in Nigeria for the convocation of a Sovereign National Conference. This is with the aim of drawing up alternate program to the Ibrahim Babangida's transition program, based on the fact that the Babangida's transition program had been full of promises, but short on deliverance. There was an ample evidence to show that the Babangida's transition program had suffered many distortions on the part of Babangida himself by constant changing of the rules of engagement of the said transition program. This failure of promises led to the formation of the NCF, and its subsequent agenda of a Sovereign National Conference. The NCF led by Philip Asiodu and Alao Aka-Bashorun canvassed for support from various movement in the Nigerian society, one of them being NANS.

Before the issue of NANS support for the NCF, despite informal meeting between the two organizations, the PYMN met in Bayero University, (Kano) (BUK), a day to NANS senate meeting to discuss the NCF alliance. Opinions were divided, but in the end, it was agreed that the movement will support the Sovereign National Conference agenda by the NCF. This meeting was in early second quarter of 1990. One of those dividing opinions was the capacity or otherwise of the NCF to convene a Sovereign National Conference. Even if in the end NANS supported the NCF, the NCF was not able to pull off the Sovereign National Conference for the lack of its capacity to mobilize forces for such enterprise. In typical Nigerian style, the NCF far before the advent of TV, Radio and newspaper activism was more or less an Ikoyi Club type of an organization. It did not have root to achieve what such pro-democracy movements in such countries as Zambia, Zaire (DRC Congo), Benin Republic had achieved. It was a flip-flop imitation of its African counterparts such that when Ibrahim Babangida locked up the gate of the National Arts Theatre, Igamma the venue of the conference, NCF floundered to death like an ill-fated eagle. As said, from the ashes of the NCF emerged the CD in 1992.

This organization, upon its formation in 1992, doddered on the wings of the political situation in Nigeria without any reasonable impact until most of the cadres of the period under consideration started taking positions inside it. Luckily, after the June 12, 1993 General Elections and its annulment by Gen. Ibrahim Babangida, the Nigerian ruling elites in the two political parties;

Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Congress (NRC), at the sight of Ibrahim Babangida were like a bunch of shepherdess sheep at the sight of a lion. They dug into their holes like scared warthogs, unable to confront the regime. It was here that the CD decided to challenge the Ibrahim Babangida's regime over the annulment of the election and other issues. Luckily for it, it had an influx of young cadres fresh out of the universities and within the university system, who were very grounded in the acts of street protest. It was this army that pursued an aggressive campaign against the regime of Ibrahim Babangida leading to its fall on 27th August, 1993. These cadres became the Nigeria's new hope, but how to manage their success at transition became a problem. The problem tethered into the new year of 1994, and cadres took positions according to their convictions and what will be profitable to them. To paraphrase John Pepper Clark in his poem; *Casualties*, sometimes, casualties are not those who died at war, but those fragmented by wars. The crisis in the CD fragmented the PYMN, and once the PYMN was fragmented, it became a matter of time before NANS would die at the altar of the intrigues of the movement. We are not sure that deep down people have been able to do internal cleansing of their souls in order to see themselves with others working as a group.

### **Lagos as a Cesspool**

One of the hidden truths about cities is that they aspire to breakup human solidarity. All the comrades came from campuses and there was that hope and possibility that the minimum, each can reach the other because of proximity. In such reaching of the others, the movement meets, not as automated machines, but as a linkage of persons who felt the impact of the living conditions of each other. The socialization of ideas ensured that people did not stray from the fundamental beliefs of the organization. But once they gathered in a city like Lagos without soul as any other city, cadres began to struggle with other ideas in their heads, such that for instance, cadres that levitated within the fringe of atheism started seeing visions, and began to embrace Christianity. This Christianity is not of the progressive form of liberation theology, but the American variant of Pentecostalism. A cadre, who was supposed to be attending a movement meeting on Sundays or within the week, was on his

way to supplicate before a miracle prosperity pastor, or observing vigil. Once one principle is compromised, there is a higher tendency that all principles will be compromised. It is our belief that the conversion of cadres to Pentecostal Christianity, particularly those in the Lagos axis, imparted on their works and philosophical understanding of the society. Let us drop a caveat that we are not saying that all cadres must be atheist or whatever to be effective in their work, but when cadres embrace the most retrogressive form of Christianity which is Pentecostalism, it is fair to say that they have denounced Marxist-Leninist philosophical thoughts and embraced Spiritism. Pentecostalism is retrograde form of Christianity, nurtured and funded by American capitalism for the sole purpose of weaning souls for questioning the unjust nature of their existence, it is drama without education. It is that cesspool of cultural environment that many cadres drifted towards in the period of the 90s till date.

### **The Human Rights Ideology**

At the tail end of the 1980s, the first group of Human Rights Organizations began to surface in Nigeria. Of such first groups were the Civil Liberties Organization (CLO) founded by Olisa Agbakogba, Clement Nwankwo and few others. Olisa Agbakogba who was a young lawyer then was having a stint at the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) Victoria Island Lagos. The institute, though an agency of the Nigeria government was conceived and funded by the Americans. The other one was the Committee for Defence of Human Rights (CDHR). Later, Clement Nwankwo broke away from the CLO and founded the Constitutional Rights Projects (CRP). While the CLO and CDHR were membership based organizations, the CRP was a non-membership organization. We will come back to how this little detail imparted on the cadres under review and the successive cadres after that.

CLO and CDHR in the late 1980s made sporadic public appearances at some of the campuses, speaking a language not coherent, but appealing in understanding society. It is the fluency of the appeal, seemingly innocuous that as we moved into the 1990s began to appeal to the cadres of the left.

The language promoted universal values of human rights, rule of law and social

justice. The effectiveness of the language was that it may seem to be against the turgidity of the language of the left. What seemed to have an additional impetus in the spread of the human rights ideology were the collapse of the Soviet Union and the retreat of the Marxist-Leninist ideology as a consequence of that collapse. This is because many cadres bred on the campuses and schooled in the Soviet type left wing ideology had no straw to hold on to, but saw their dream evaporated into nothing in their minds. This we can blame on the lack of clarity of thoughts and over complication of ignorance. This is because Marxism dealt essentially with the exploitation of the working class, but other variants of thoughts within that ideological thoughts were able to navigate that principal thought of the exploitation of the working-class, but broadened it to include the question of the peasantry as we found in Asian context of China, Vietnam, North Korea and Latin America.

In this drift, cadres began to shift focus innocuously and consciously to the human rights groups. In short, many of those cadres first places of work were the human rights groups, such that cadres like Emma Ezeazu, Lanre Ehonwa, Chima Ubani became the foundation staff of CLO and others like Salihu Lukman and others went to work at the CDHR. In a place like the CLO, staffs were divided along ideological lines. Olisa Agbkogba seemed to have understood the game and began to populate the place with persons that held on to inchoate right wing ideas. It was in this subtle employment of persons with right-wing ideas that cadres corruption started. Working in the human rights organizations with its fluidity of language and behavior did not seem to be a problem to the ordinary eye, but latent in it, as the acculturation into the human rights belief, thought and practices continued, cadres began to absorb by some form of osmotic processes, the ideas that had been alien to them while in the university or out of the university in their early days. For instance, human rights works entailed a lot of travelling, both locally and internationally, also the possibility of scholarships. The eyes do not walk blindly into it, but the eyes are blinded inside it. For example, a cadre of the left in the 1980s to the early 1990s who has the unfortunate privilege to attend a program organized by the United States Department or at the States Department would be expelled immediately from the organization because he would have been viewed as a CIA agent. But a time came when cadres began to flaunt their

certificate of award from the American State Department. What changed? James Petras provided an answer in an article titled; ***the Metamorphosis of the Latin American Intellectuals***

*“An apocryphal episode occurred during my visit to Chile. A director of a research centre invited his mother from the provinces to visit him in Santiago. He drove to the airport in his new Peugeot to pick her up. “Where did you get this beautiful car”, she exclaimed as she observed all the gadgets on the dashboard. “The institute financed it. I need it for my research to overthrow the dictatorship”, he answered. When they arrived at the suburban home, the mother gazed with wonder. “Where did you get this beautiful house?” “The institute financed it. I need it for my research to overthrow the dictatorship”. They entered the dining room, where dinner was waiting: a table covered with shellfish, fowl, salads, fruits and wine. Eating heartily, she asked, “Where did you get such an elaborate meal?” “The institute financed it. I need it for my research to overthrow the dictatorship”. At this point, his mother plucked his ear and whispered, “Be careful they don’t overthrow the dictator and you lose everything”.*

It is this subtle enticement that began to occur to left cadres without them being able to resist what was happening, and there were many things that happened, and we can imagine them. For instance, there you have a young African lady or man catapulted from a rustic rural area in faraway Delta State in Nigeria without electricity or portable water, but with a university degree surfaced in Lagos and for reasons of his/her radical views was employed in the human rights organization in Lagos State. As he/she trodded to work on a daily basis he/she gets to work and was informed by the boss that there is a flight ticket for him/her to go to the nation’s capital to attend a seminar or conference. Upon arrival, he/she is ensconced in a room where everything is working, and the sheets are as pure as white. He/she has never taken a plane ride, slept in such a conducive atmosphere before in his/her life. In the night, he/she began to dream of a repetition of such an experience. Then at the conference,

is a white boy/girl smiling into his/her face, and in a little conversation, the white boy or girl lets him/her know that he/she could take him/her fantasy to a greater height by being in a conference in New York, Brussel or Berne. It is a new experience, but a dangerous experience. To take it further, the white boy or girl informs him/her that he/she does not necessarily have to work in a membership based human rights organization, but can actually work in a non-membership based human rights organization. He/she wonders in his/her mind how that is possible, but there is a ready answer to the effect that CRP is a non-membership organization and there are other such human rights groups like the CRP.

Let us not underrate this encounter between the white boy/white girl versus black boy/black girl. This is because we all know the mind catharsis as Frantz Fanon noted in his book; **Black Skin, White Mask** that the black man/woman plunges him/herself in a moment of encounter with the Whiteman/white woman. It is such as Fanon noted that such encounter results to what he regarded as the liberatory feeling by the Blackman that he has regained his being as a human being. We have seen this point with the NGO community where the sight of the funder, particularly if it is a Whiteman, induces a genuflective disorder among human rights workers, especially if there is a portfolio with funds to be dispensed. There is a struggle to become white to the extent that intonations are changed in arrant supplication.

We all know that power is coveted by all, and in such non-membership based organization, he/she accounts to only one person. In this regard, the funder, with a well cultivated relationship between him/her funding his/her project in a membership organization that he/she belongs and possibly encouraged by his/her new friends, all that he needs to do is to like a black widow grow into his project and run with it to form his/her own non-membership based organization. As he progresses in his/her new role, the same project in his or her parent organization, journeys on his/her own route to death.

Beyond the language of human rights which titillates for it nonsense is the possibility of human material enticement which induces an influx in the creation of new human rights groups nurtured by cadres playing on the same

space and theme. As the saying goes, the kid of the mother goat eats the same leaves as its mother. The young cadres following the old assume that the only radical work to be done is as defined by the human rights groups. There is no attempt at interrogation of the causes of the variables being campaigned against. Outside the CLO, CDHR and Community Action for Popular Participation (CAPP), it did appear that the human rights phenomenon in Nigeria deviated from the membership based idea and process, and became dominated by non-membership human rights groups. This model fostered a new culture of individuals running such groups and deepened the urge by more persons to set up their own human rights groups. Such groups continued to emerge and widened their control of various aspects of the society. This is to the extent that there is no social or political problem confronting man in the Nigerian context that these groups do not have a say in, this ranged from poverty, democracy, good governance, rule of law, penal issues, health and maternal mortality etc.

The danger of this fragmentation of issues by the human rights groups is the assumption that each issue stands on its own and there is no interlinking connection between issues one and two in terms of probable solutions. The reason for this approach is that each group pitches its tent in concord with the funders' programme. This is dangerous because it creates disconnect between the social forces behind such problems and the integrative narrative towards their solutions. Some people may quarrel with what they call the binary modular for the analysis of issues by the old cadres in Nigeria, but such thoughts are mischievous because no cadre worth his salt will be fixated on such binary narrative, because in the first place, Marxist dialectics deals with the recognition of man in constant motion.

Further to the fact that the human rights organizations have spread in such a way that they have become part of every narrative is the attempt to appropriate the notion of civil society. This has created the Orwellian narrative of *which is which?* Because of this, the cadre resilience and growth have diminished greatly, as there is a loss of focus in what the NGOs should be doing or what a left movement should be doing.

The NGOs usurped the civil society space by claiming that they are the civil society. They may be civil society in a sense but they are not the *set* of civil society. The reason is that, the correct idea of civil society is; of forces who occupy the opposite space from those in power, they are the constituent of what should be known as civil society. The notion of civil society is about hegemony and power. As Petras noted; *the phrase-mongering about civil society is an exercise in vacuity. Civil society is not a unitary virtuous entity-it is made up classes probably more profoundly divided as ever in this century... By talking about civil society NGOers obscure the profound class divisions, class exploitation and class struggle that polarize contemporary civil society.* In essence, it is not a matter of fact that since all opposition is on one side, every opposition is the same. Each opposition should be determined by the agenda it pursues, the quality of its thoughts, the quality and the history of its members. It is not a village market square process where because of the babel of haggling and dresses you may not be able to make a distinction. It is fair then to say that, NGOs and its allies in Nigeria are then wrong to appropriate exclusively the title of civil society; this is because it forecloses the right of others to come under the canopy and pursue motives different from the NGOs. It may be correct to say or argue that the NGOs like the biblical lean cows in the occupation of the civil society's space had and have been choking life out of other tendencies in the civil society spectrum. The failure of the left cadres who were a product of the student movement to walk on their own separate ideological lane succeeded in getting then entangled in a process that they did not know the beginning or rather can they confidently claim that they know how it will metamorphose. The only road to take where possible is to remain on the track suggested by James Petras:

*It involves intellectuals who write and speak for the social movements in struggle, committed to sharing the same political consequences. The concept of solidarity is linked to "organic" intellectuals who are basically part of the movement - the resource people providing analysis and education for class struggle and taking the same political risks in direct action. In contrast, the NGOers are embedded in the world of institutions, academic seminars, foreign*

*foundations, international conferences speaking a language understood only by those “initiated” into the subjectivist cult of essentialist identities. The Marxists view solidarity as sharing the risks of the movements, not being outside commentators who raise questions and defend nothing. For the NGOers the main object is “getting” the foreign funding for the “project.” The main issue, for the Marxist is the process of political struggle and education in securing social transformation. The movement was everything the objective was important in raising consciousness for societal change: constructing political power to transform the general condition of the great majority. “Solidarity” for the NGOers is divorced from the general object of liberation; it is merely a way of bringing people together to attend a job retraining seminar, to build a latrine. For the Marxists the solidarity of a collective struggle contains the seeds of the future democratic collectivist society. The larger vision or its absence is what gives the different conceptions of solidarity their distinct meaning.*

It is only when a group works in solidarity of their beliefs that they can achieve their goals. The truth was that group solidarity died and in its place came, the kingdoms of kings without thrones.