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INAUGURAL LECTURE
The University and
Development (With Particular
Reference to Cameroon)

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The Preconditions of Development in General

- **Development is purposive (teleological) growth, not mere evolution in space and time**
- **The first precondition of development is to have a clear and viable aim**
- **The second is to have a blueprint (a well-thought-out series of measures and procedures) for achieving the aim**
- **The third is to create an enabling (free, liberal and democratic) environment**

What is the purpose of University Education?

- [Bernard Fonlon (1978), *The Genuine Intellectual*, Yaounde: Buma Kor or “To Every African Freshman”, *ABBIA*, No. 26, 1972]
- Search for the True, the Good, the Beautiful and the Sublime?
- Acquisition of intellectual skills?
- Scientific and philosophical mind/spirit?
- A mind and spirit that questions, doubts, probes, searches and inquires: methodically, systematically
- Research, Teaching and Publishing?
- Formation of (genuine) intellectuals, thinker-scholars, scientist-philosophers?

Identification Marks of the Genuine Intellectual

- **Exclusion Criteria:**
- **Laying claim to omniscience or infallibility**
- **Assuming the posture of a sovereign pontiff, speaking ex cathedra and hurling anathemas at dissenters**
- **Becoming a poet laureate of the status quo**
- **Uncritically/unquestioningly executing policies handed down by political bosses**
- **Employing intelligence to justify ready-made but questionable policies and helping to make them work**
- **Being timid or apologetic**
- **Becoming a haughty, bigoted, self-styled prophet of doom**
- **Slave of or sophist-apologist of any established dogmatic system**
- **Mindless cog in the wheel of any establishment**

Identification Marks of the Genuine Intellectual

- **Inclusion Criteria:**
- **Mind and the scientific and philosophical spirit reign supreme**
- **Search for the Truth, Beauty and Goodness as main intellectual preoccupations**
- **Life-long diligent student**
- **Keen, calm, serene mind, above passion, bias and prejudice**
- **Unrelenting humble and persuasive searcher**
- **Humble open-mindedness and readiness to change mind and stand, in the face of countervailing facts/principles**

Identification Marks of the Genuine Intellectual

- **Inclusion Criteria (Continued):**
- **Gadfly and goad of society**
- **Intellectual and moral Independence**
- **Unrelenting war against the insidious seductions of power, allurements of wealth, enticements of pleasure**
- **Principled non-conformist**
- **Courage and a will of granite**
- **A warm heart concerned with the plight of fellow humans**

Other Ends of University Education?

- **Liberal Education?**
- **Training of public servants?**
- **Workers for the labour force of various sectors of the national economy?**
- **Ancillary (handmaid) of industry, commerce and technology?**

Blueprint for University Studies

- **Preliminary Considerations:**
- **The most valuable asset of any people (nation) is its human resources**
- **It is in the interest of every people/nation to ensure the highest and best education or training for its best talent**
- **Such talent is not lacking in any nation or amongst any people; is more or less randomly but evenly distributed in the population; and could be taken to constitute c.10% of any given population**
- **University education is thus a necessity (not a luxury) for any nation**
- **It requires substantial investment but should also yield substantial dividends**
- **Highly talented citizens should not be hampered in any way from accessing the highest education/training**

Blueprint for University Studies

- **Preliminary Considerations (Continued):**
- **Financial means will always be limited; hence at University level scholarships should be ensured for the most needy among the very best**
- **University education cannot be mass education; it is education for the best minds among the masses**
- **Mass education is appropriate and necessary from primary through secondary high school (literacy and general educated awareness)**
- **Non-University higher education (for the bulk of literate citizens) should be provided in Polytechnics, Teacher Training Colleges, Management Institutes, Vocational Institutions, etc.**
- **Should aim at training high level professionals, technicians, artisans and other practical persons indispensable to the life and economy of the country**
- **University education should aim at training intellectuals, scholar-scientists, basic researchers, critical thinkers**

Blueprint for University Studies

- **Meritocracy:**
- **One of the fundamental assumptions of a meritocratic system is the equality of all humans qua human**
- **All humans have a common defining characteristic – rational animality – and they are all free, purposive, limited, vulnerable, mortal beings**
- **In a meritocratic system every individual freely chooses what s/he feels best at doing and in turn derives a personal compensation commensurate with the overall value of such contribution to the community**
- **Meritocracy is one of the indispensable road companions of democracy and development**
- **Particularly important at all levels of the educational system whose achievements confer unquestioned merits/benefits**
- **Meritocracy should inform the University at all levels: admission, recruitment, remuneration, promotion, sponsorship, attestation, certification, etc.**
- **Criteria of Merit include: Education (formal/informal), performance, moral character/integrity**

Blueprint for University Studies

- **In a meritocracy, incorrigible subjective data, such as place of birth, parentage, tribe, province of origin, gender, religious, political or ideological affiliation, etc. do not count in any selection or reward system**

Blueprint for University Studies

- **Suggestion by way of Example:**
- **Given a well-funded University, with basic infrastructure and the Fonlonian indivisible trinity of library, bookshop and printing press, and taking only the GCE system**
- **A-5, B-4, C-3, D-2, E-1, F-0**
- **A cumulative grade point average of 7 should be the minimum entry requirement**
- **Candidates with 15 points and above should unconditionally automatically qualify for full government scholarship with bonding on graduation**
- **For the rest of the students, refundable loans and work-aid should be made available**

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

- **Liberal Democracy:**
- **Democracy is the horse that must be placed before the cart of development**
- **“Seek ye first the political kingdom...”**
- **A democracy is any system underpinned by the interconnected values of liberty and equality which permits change of leadership without bloodshed or violence**
- **The indispensable structures/indices of a democratic system include the rule of law, separation of powers, freedom of thought and association, freedom of expression, respect of human rights, broadly consensual rules for belonging to, living and operating within the collectivity (constitution) and clear agreed upon rules for accessing positions of power (electoral code)**
- **Democracy in Africa or elsewhere need not follow Western models, some of whose elements are only dubiously democratic**
- **Democracy is quite possible within a non-party or one party system**

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

- **African Dictatorships:**
- **Pure dictatorship (power without any internal controls, checks or balances) was planted in Africa by Western colonialism**
- **Before the colonial intervention most African governing systems were monarchies, many of which had struck a viable balance between autocracy and democracy**
- **Extensive powers were conceded to the monarch but only on trust and reciprocity**
- **There was strict control of power via ritual taboos, institutions/personalities of high moral integrity, such as kwifon, nwerong, takumbeng, nngang, priests/priestesses, sages, medicine wo(men), diviners, etc.**
- **Ritual safeguarding and protection were ensured for the land (kingdom) as distinct from the king, for the ordinary person, the departed ancestors and the unborn**
- **Such controls were an effective antidote against dictatorial or arbitrary abuse or misuse of power and authority**

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

- **African Dictatorships (Continued):**
- **In the traditional African setting, the privileges of power were balanced by its responsibilities, restrictions and dangers**
- **The monarch could publicly atone for a mistake, transgression or taboo wittingly or otherwise broken (Nga'a' Bifon III – 1983-1993 – in 1989)**
- **As an institution the king was often considered immortal, but as a person not only mortal but fragile – *kimforkir***
- **In some extreme cases when the monarch's continued rule was considered dangerous for the collectivity, s/he could be executed or forced to drink poison**

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

- **Contemporary Africa:**
- **Most post-independence ruling regimes in Africa are pure dictatorships**
- **Some African countries are worse off today than under full-blown colonialism and we have even heard calls for the return of the colonial masters**
- **Under Western pressures many African dictatorships are successfully masquerading behind democratic rhetoric and symbolism**
- **A genuine democratic system erected on firm democratic structures is an indispensable precondition for peaceful and enduring development**

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

- **Contemporary Africa (Continued):**
- **Multiparty-ism and democratic elections are not necessarily signs of a democratic system**
- **Elections alone, be they ever so democratic, may only help to replace one tyrant with another or more usually to confirm the incumbent tyrant in his autocratic office**
- **The problem is not with lack of democratic elections but rather with highly monocentric, centralized and authoritarian governing systems**
- **African countries which have laid the firm foundations of the democratic precondition to development or are convincingly in the process of doing so can be counted on the fingers of the hand: South Africa, Tanzania, Ghana, Kenya, Senegal? Nigeria? Benin?Cameroon??**

OVERARCHING ISSUES

- **Western Hegemony:**
- **Since the colonial intervention, formal education in Africa has been a victim of Western epistemological packaging and export, proselytization and catechesis**
- **African education has been modeled after Western educational institutions, intellectual and cultural ideals**
- **There has been little attempt at domestication and indigenization of this legacy**
- **This has led to a deep sense of alienation and an exogenously induced and internalized sense of inadequacy in Africans**
- **Resulting in a profound inferiority complex and a de facto self-devaluation of African initiatives, creativity, value systems and agency**
- **Africans have come to over-value and hanker after things Western, not because of their utility, suitability or efficacy, but simply for their foreignness – a pathological case of xenophilia**

OVERARCHING ISSUES

- **Western Hegemony (Continued):**
- **Western languages and ways of life have acquired a special status with us by being associated with civilization and enlightenment**
- **Western testimonials and other symbols of credentialization have been given exaggerated value (diplomania)**
- **Wealthy Africans uproot their kids and transplant them for nurturing in Western educational institutions, “like potted plants in green houses**
- **In the end, neither the children of the rich, schooled in Western ways and appetites, nor those of the poor majority, who cannot afford a xenophilic education and make do with the devalued home variant, can contribute in any meaningful way towards the solution of the problems of the bulk of the population**
- **In Cameroon we excel in what is locally unsuitable or irrelevant: wearing big coats and ties, drinking red wine and champagne, going home (France) whenever chanced**
- **No wonder we feel no sense of irony, given all our endowments, calling ourselves a “heavily indebted poor country”; we are brilliant graduates from the school of self-devaluation and inferiority complex**

OVERARCHING ISSUES

- **Western Hegemony (Continued):**
- **Our Universities may convincingly be African in terms of personnel but not yet in terms of pedagogical structures and the curriculum**
- **Some of our best dons have migrated to greener pastures and the non-migrating ones seem to have indefinitely postponed both academic excellence and material well-being**
- **International collaborative research is in vogue and gives some way out, but here the Western partner, armed with assumed theoretical sophistication and economic resources, sets the pace and tempore and dictates the tune**
- **The African partner is scarcely ever more than a research assistant, collector of raw material or data, which is processed or analyzed and then published elsewhere**
- **All this must change before we can meaningfully begin talking about the development of the University**

OVERARCHING ISSUES

- **Conceptual Decolonization:**
- **It is not enough for any group of people to be defined as inferior; they must be taught that definition, learn it, accept it, and internalize it**
- **We need to begin with a thorough conceptual decolonization, as the antidote to the sense of inadequacy, self-devaluation and inferiority complex**
- **Next we need to engage in a creative process of cultural restitution, domestication and indigenization of outside influences**
- **Then and only then can we meaningfully take part in the global conversation and collaboration of intellects, from our own perspective, on our own terms, with the interests and concerns of our own people as our guiding light and principle**

OVERARCHING ISSUES

- **Culture Matters:**
- **How Values Shape Human Progress (Harrison and Huntington 2002)**
- **“Does Africa Need a Cultural Adjustment Program?” (Daniel Etounga-Manguelle)**
- **Culture is a way of life of a people, underpinned by adaptation to a specific environment, shared values and historical experiences, shared common world-view of metaphysico-religious ideas, similar ways of thinking and acting, similar consolidated practices, attitudes and expectations**

OVERARCHING ISSUES

- **Culture Matters (Continued):**
- **The main underpinning pillars of Western culture include: possessive individualism, techno-science, colonialism (agents), evangelical extrovert-ism**
- **The main underpinning pillars of African culture include: communitarianism, variegated diversity, colonialism (patients), introvert-ism and live let live attitude**
- **Every culture is adaptable and changes over time, but no culture can jump out of itself**
- **No culture qua culture is superior/inferior to any other**
- **Wisdom is scattered in tinny little morsels throughout the world (Ulli Beier)**
- **Human cultures are dancing masquerades (Chinua Achebe)**

HOMework

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