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Undercurrents of Anglo-American Collaboration: Funding, Training and Cold War Influences on the Theatre Studies Curriculum of Selected Nigerian Universities

Abstract

The Cold War played a crucial but often underestimated role in educational developments across the Third World. In these territories, the drama of decolonisation was often negotiated, scripted, and enacted through a range of initiatives championed by returning students whose activism in politics and academia converged with resistance movements of locally based actors to spur nationalist consciousness, which ultimately led to the triumph of independence across Africa in the 1960s.

This paper shall argue that Cold War politics allied with nationalist fervour to engender a deregulation of colonial higher education policies in West Africa, especially in Nigeria. The campaign for access to mass (university) education, the establishment of the University College of Ibadan (UCI) and later its School of Drama, opposition to its British elitist education heritage and the fear of communist infiltration were just some of the things that prompted Anglo-American collaborations in the Nigerian educational system, especially at the tertiary level, via funding, training, and support from institutions such as the Carnegie Corporation and the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations. By examining the curriculum of theatre studies in selected universities in the country, this paper shall advance that not only did sponsorship, funding, and training influence the trajectory of theatre practice and scholarship, but the legacy of colonialism and circulation of experts also played a crucial role in the battle for the future of the practice that manifested not only at Ibadan and Calabar but across theatre departments in most first and second generation institutions in the country.

Keywords

Funding, Training, Cold War, Theatre Studies, Curriculum, University

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Introduction

Of the many remarkable features of the Cold War, the most pertinent, especially as regards discourse on the Third World and Africa in particular, is that it coincided with and played a crucial role in decolonisation. As has been variously established, decolonisation in Africa took diverse forms and yielded different outcomes – from the largely peaceful transition to independence to a violent, bloody affair in various notable theatres around the continent.² The underlying, even unifying, element in the formation and activism of liberation movements across the continent was the heightened consciousness and experience of individuals exposed to western (university) education either in the colonies or in the metropolises of colonial empires. Although several organisations and movements interlinked under the umbrella of Pan-Africanism were instrumental in raising concerns and awareness about the exploitative tendencies of colonial governance on the continent and elsewhere, the end of World War II marked the beginnings of a new era in the struggle against colonisation and its inherent racialism. Not only was the tone and tenor of the struggle altered permanently from the rhetoric of gradualism to that of pragmatism, the formation of liberation movements across the continent made it such that mobilisation towards the end of colonial domination became inescapable. Central to these changes was the return of African students from across the mainly Euro-American metropolises who drew on their experience of racism, protest organisation and mobilisation, aligning with locally based elite actors to engineer multiple waves of mass protests and uprisings against colonial (mis)rule.

Even though the United States and the Soviet Union (later Russia) were not directly linked to the scramble for territories/colonies in Africa, the emerging dynamics of the Cold War, which were characterised by mutual suspicion and antagonism after 1945, meant that the struggle for liberation across Africa and much of the Third World became intertwined with the Cold War strategies of these competing forces as collaborations and strategic partnerships emerged. Nowhere were these collaborations and strategic partnerships more visible than in the educational sector, especially in the formation of the university system in these territories. In West Africa, for instance, the establishment and funding of universities and selected programmes provided fertile ground for Anglo-American collaborations as well as the consolidation of this influence, while the clamour against the elitist management of these institutions coincided with demands for access to mass

university education to accentuate nationalistic fervour and anti-colonial initiatives that culminated in the triumph of decolonisation on the continent in the 1960s.³

As communities for the production and propagation of universal knowledge, universities became sites where diverse knowledge forms and development models competed for recognition, supremacy, and adoption. In addition, they also provided a platform for awareness and experimentation with radical ideas while also serving as a veritable breeding ground for emergent national icons, social activists, political dissidents and radical revolutionaries. It is within the ambience of these convergent forces that the central assumption of this paper is located. This paper argues that not only did the vortex of Cold War politics comingle with nationalistic demands to spur a deregulation of British higher education policies in West Africa, especially in Nigeria, but also, given that it took intensive campaigning by nationalists for access to (mass) university education for the establishment of the University College of Ibadan (UCI), opposition to its British elitist education heritage and the fear of communist infiltration were just two of the factors that prompted Anglo-American collaborations in the Nigerian educational (university) system via funding, training, and support from institutions such as the Carnegie Corporation and the Rockefeller, and Ford Foundations. The construction of this collaboration along with the loopholes of hidden agendas and urgency of independence resulted in a plethora of missed opportunities in the planning of the higher education sector and, most especially, in the field of theatre studies as the exclusively western curriculum hindered effective collaboration and experimentation with theatrical idioms emanating from the East. To specifically situate this argument, the paper shall attempt an examination of the curriculum of theatre studies in selected universities in the country in order to show that not only did sponsorship, funding, and training influence the trajectory of theatre practice and scholarship, but also the legacy of colonialism and circulation of experts played a crucial role in the battle for the future of the practice that manifested not only at Ibadan and Calabar but across theatre departments in most first and second generation institutions in the country. However, before delving into this topic, I will first present a summative appraisal of the connections between the Cold War, nationalism, and education reforms in colonial Nigeria as well as a brief historicization of the establishment of the University College Ibadan and the network of funding that enabled the formation of its School of Drama in the 1960s.

Nationalism, Cold War, and the Politics of Educational Reforms in Nigeria

The narrative of nationalism in Nigeria is long and often fraught with conspicuous regional interpretations. The overwhelming evidence of this discourse tends to coalesce around the assumption that cites Southern Nigeria as the “birthplace of Nigerian nationalism”.⁴ This claim evinces that not only was the emergence of nationalism in the south an accidental episode emanating from the vagaries of contacts with foreigners and colonialism, but also its rise and growth was solely through (western) education since the idea of nationhood

and nation was introduced from the 'outside' by returning slaves and intellectuals.⁵ The roots of this claim are somewhat strengthened by the fact that southern Nigeria was one of the earliest landing places of European, mainly Portuguese explorers/traders, serving as an important base from which the growing network of European commercial interests expanded into the hinterlands.

Whilst it is common knowledge that, before the creation of what is now referred to as modern Nigeria, the territory was comprised of distinct but loosely organised kingdoms, ethnic and cultural groupings⁶, the enthronement of British colonialism by means of trade and Christian missionary activities brought the territory into the commonwealth of the British Empire as an appendage to its expanding commercial and political interests in the 1900s. With the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates into the colony of Nigeria in 1914 under the administration of Frederick Lugard, the seed for the protracted history of British influence over the emergent nation was sown. However, the actual governance structure of the colony, which was based on indirect rule, drew criticism and resistance from the natives and gradually fuelled the embers of nationalism that culminated in the country's independence in 1960.⁷

Politically, the colonial administration ran what has been described as a strong central government to enable it to unite the diverse ethnic and often opposing cultural elements of the country, with the territory divided into provinces and the provinces further subdivided into districts that were administered by a British officer. The economic policy operated by the colonial administration was largely laissez-faire with undue advantages granted to foreign firms over local enterprises. As a result of this and the fact the colonial administration did not establish any prominent industry in the country, there was a growing suspicion among nationalist elements that the British might not after all want Nigeria to become an industrial country, but instead to "serve as an overseas market for their manufactured goods".⁸ Interestingly, what proved to be the most controversial of the policies of the colonial government in Nigeria was the inconsistencies in its educational policy. While the Northern region was shielded from western influence and largely allowed to run its Quranic⁹ schools with little interference from the colonial government, Christian missions were given free rein in relation to education in the south, with the government content to provide grants to missions and carry out inspections. In fact, the earliest wave of nationalism manifested due to a combination of factors including the activism of the native church movement or "Ethiopianism", resistance to colonial taxation, criticism from a largely free and independent press and strong opposition to land tenure, but most importantly, it was a reaction to the curriculum of Christian mission schools.¹⁰ The type of Christian education provided at the time was mainly literary and religious and aimed at keeping the natives under western control, with elementary school the highest level of schooling available, since higher education did not feature in the purview of the church and very few African clergy were allowed access to college education. As such, the nationalists considered this type of education "poor, inadequate and inferior" and sought ways to address this using a variety of means, some constitutional, but mostly by means of civil disobedience, especially protests and riots. Although resistance to British colonialism was tempered or temporarily suspended during the war years, it re-emerged and gathered momentum in the inter-war period with the emergence of pressure groups, student unions, and political parties. The most prominent pressure groups and movements, student unions, and political parties that emerged during this time included the National Congress

of British West Africa (NCBWA) founded and led by Joseph Ephraim Caseley Hayford and Dr. R. A. Savage; the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) founded in 1922 by Herbert Macaulay; the West African Student Union (WASU) founded in 1925 by Ladipo Solanke; and the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) founded in the 1930s by a group of nationalists including Ernest Ikoli, J. C. Vaughan, Oba Samuel Akinsanya and H. O. Davis. Other pressure groups included tribal unions such as the Ibibio Welfare Union (later Ibibio State Union), Ibo Union, Egbe Omo Oduduwa, Mutena Arewa, and the Calabar Improvement League. Led by emerging elites who had studied in the metropolises and had been exposed to ideas from the Pan-African Congress movement under the leadership of William Edward Burkhardt DuBois (1836-1956), they lobbied and/or protested for better living standards and governance in the colonies.¹¹

One of the groups that emerged during this period and played a crucial role in the burgeoning nationalist movement not only in Nigeria but also across West Africa, especially in relation to educational development and reforms, was the West African Students' Union (WASU). Philip Garigue has shown that, despite the challenging circumstances that surrounded its formative years, WASU, while drawing on a network of collaborations and alliances from existing African student bodies in England at the time, grew to become one of the most influential and vocal in advocating changes in the governance and administration of African colonies.¹² What set WASU apart, according to Garigue, was its ability to attract membership from "a special group of West Africans who were more sensitive than the average to racial discrimination and colonial status, and who came together to protest against them".¹³ WASU's activism did not just begin and end in Britain; it founded a network of chapters across various important cities in British West Africa, including Accra, Cape Coast, Elmina, Sekondi, Nsawam, Freetown, Bo, Lagos, Kano, Jos, Ibadan, Enugu, Ile-Ife, Zaria, Abeokuta, Ago-Iwoye and Ijebu. These chapters, frequently led by ex-members, returning students or prominent educated elites, served not only as platforms for networking or channels for self-expression through organised educational and advocacy programmes, but also became conduits from which funds were generated and funnelled to support WASU hostels in England, while also promoting nationalistic agendas and providing leadership to emergent political movements across these territories. In Nigeria, for instance, this served as the foundations for the most sustained and effective wave of nationalism that, in alliance with Cold War politics, prompted collaborations and engendered higher education reforms from the 1950s onwards.

Although direct governmental intervention in education began in 1887 with the first Nigerian Education Ordinance, moves toward the establishment and regularization of higher education in the country were not formalised until the 1930s.¹⁴ Following the realization by colonial officials that there was a severe lack of African manpower in its services, the first seed towards the establishment of some form of higher education for the training of colonial subjects for service in the colonial administration was sown in 1932 when a 'higher college' with the aim of providing post-secondary training and education to Nigerians was proposed. The Yaba Higher College eventually became a reality in 1934. The plan was for it to begin as a "Higher College" but be built up gradually over time to attain the standards of a British University.¹⁵ However, the institution faced extensive criticism from nationalist movements which labelled it "inferior" since graduates from the college could only qualify for entry and lower-level jobs in the colonial government service and the

degrees awarded by the institution were valid only in Nigeria.¹⁶ Given that (higher) education was held in such high regard that it was considered the “key to the white man’s magic” and, thus, central not only to personal success, the nationalists envisioned the rate of educational growth as synonymous with the attainment of their goals – full participation in government, self-governance as well as rapid development and modernisation of the country.¹⁷ Whereas colonial officials linked training in higher education to the practical needs of the society and thus sought to control what they considered the rapid growth of nationalist sentiment in the country, the nationalists for their part viewed the localized and gradualist educational approach of the colonial government as a deliberate attempt to hamper the agenda of national progress. Furthermore, by demanding full-fledged universities offering standardized, professional, and competitive higher education with universally recognized degrees, the nationalists demonstrated an unwillingness to compromise that resulted in the constitution of the Walter Elliot Commission on Higher Education in West Africa in 1943 to study and submit an extensive “report on the organisation and facilities in the existing centres of Higher education in British West Africa, and to make recommendations regarding development in that area”.¹⁸ The formation of the commission marked an important milestone in response to the outpouring of nationalist agitation for reforms in the colonial educational system, while also signalling a major change of attitude from the colonial administration.

Of the myriad factors suggested to have prompted this change in attitude from Britain, the threat of communist infiltration and the need to securely weld the country to western influence as the Cold War emerged has been highlighted as the most paramount.¹⁹ This threat became glaring after 1945 when the Soviet Union made substantial in-roads into Africa and Nigeria specifically via a range of initiatives that included not only scholarship offers, technical training and education but also active support and sponsorship of trade unions, student movements and the widespread decolonization agenda of nationalist movements across the Third World.²⁰ As the clamour for university became a rallying cry for nationalists, the proliferation of these movements and their increasing alignment with a burgeoning community of communists prompted a multi-levelled response from the colonial government, which included an anti-communist crackdown and Anglo-American collaborations towards educational reforms across British West Africa.²¹ According to Anyanwu, the Second World War and Cold War politics played a crucial role in shaping Britain’s higher education policies, resulting in the establishment of the Elliot and Asquith commissions in 1943 to “examine the university question for Africa”.²² Although the Elliot and Asquith commissions were both set up and submitted their reports in the same years (in 1943 and 1945 respectively), their focus, composition, and outcomes were markedly different. Historians such as Stephen Ashton and Sarah Stockwell have shown that the Elliot Commission was planned as a direct response to the Yaba College controversy, whereas the Asquith Commission was a relatively late addition created to examine the wider (empire) contexts of the West African situation. Furthermore, while the term of reference for the Elliot Commission was limited and specifically directed at assessing the prospects and facilities for university education in West Africa and making corresponding recommendations, that of the Asquith Commission was to focus on evaluating and formulating primary guidelines for teaching and research in higher education as well as the development of university colleges across all the colonies in the British Empire.²³

Timothy Livsey's in-depth examination of the formation and work of the Elliot Commission has shown it was comprised of members drawn from across the spectrum of politics, civil service and academia, and also composed of African representatives from the colonies. Pursuant to its mandate, the Elliot Commission undertook a three-month tour of West Africa, held public meetings and collated petitions that helped guide the final report published in June 1945.²⁴ Scholars have noted that the commission was marred by internal wrangling, as seen in the dichotomy of reports submitted – the so-called majority and minority reports.²⁵ The majority report or 'trinitarian' camp, which drew support from J.R. Dickinson, James Duff, Walter Elliot, K.A. Korsah, Eveline Martin, Mouat Jones, Israel Ransome-Kuti, H.E. Taylor-Cummings and A.E. Truman, recommended the establishment of three universities based on the existing colleges in Nigeria, the Gold Coast and Sierra Leone. The minority report, on the other hand, which was supported by the 'unitary' camp comprising Creech Jones, Julian Huxley, Margaret Read, Geoffrey Evans and H.J. Channon, advocated the establishment of a single university college for the region in Ibadan in Nigeria. Beyond the split, the commission recognized and agreed with the fundamental argument of nationalists that the quality of higher education in the colonies should be equivalent and comparable to British standards.²⁶ Although the Colonial Office initially adopted the minority report for implementation, a mixture of both reports was eventually implemented after protests from the Gold Coast and Sierra Leone. This led to the emergence of University College Ibadan, the University of Gold Coast, Legon as well as a significant upgrade of the Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone.

The establishment of the University College Ibadan (UCI) in 1948, following the broad guidelines of the Asquith Commission and the specific recommendations of the Elliot Commission, was initially heralded as the fulfilment and culmination of nationalist agitation for higher education in the country. Nationalist projections were that the university would provide gold standard education as obtainable elsewhere in the British Empire, ensure ease of access to high-quality university education for the masses and that the contents of its curriculum would contribute to rapid modernisation and socio-economic development. However, in the years that followed, it gradually became apparent that UCI would not meet these nationalist aspirations as it struggled to cope with the enormous demand for higher education and the human resource needs of the country. Various challenges that contributed to UCI's failure in this regard include a lack of facilities, a narrow and unsuitable curriculum, and strict entrance requirements.²⁷ These challenges were largely subsumed in the university's founding philosophy and attracted renewed criticism from nationalists and campaigns for the expansion of access to the college. Expanded from the goal of creating 'useful' natives to training a 'well-educated class of African leaders', the mandate of UCI was to serve as one of the centres through which this goal would be achieved. For critics of the policy, such as Obafemi Awolowo and most specifically Nnamdi Azikiwe and his team of American-educated activist including Eyo Ita, Nwafor Orizu, and Mbonu Ojike, the form and direction of training was not only exclusionary in nature but also insufficient in terms of meeting the future development needs of the country.²⁸ The renewed campaign for mass university education and the unfolding Cold War situation provided the perfect opportunity for American intervention and extension of influence into Nigeria's higher education system. This came via American philanthropy led primarily by the Carnegie Corporation, whose goal of containing the

spread of communist ideas in Africa allied with on-going British efforts to suppress the threat of communism in Nigeria.

America's grand intervention in Africa, as exemplified in Carnegie's efforts at mediation in the university reform stand-off between the nationalists and the British colonial government, was considered strategic in the sense that, while, on the one hand, helping to forestall potential Soviet influence on the continent, it could, on the other hand, provide the opportunity to subtly challenge Britain's power base in Africa by offering "an alternative, more inclusive higher education system".²⁹ Along with the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations and other organisations engaged in the promotion and propagation of American values and interests internationally during this time, the Carnegie Corporation viewed the funding of education programmes through the prism of Cold War competition where the transfer of knowledge and skills imbued with the values, *modus operandi*, and institutions of the American/West would help secure not only robust socio-political and economic development in these territories, but would also bind them more securely to western influence.

In *The Politics of Access: University of Education and Nation-Building in Nigeria, 1948-2000*, Anyanwu has charted the depth of diplomatic networking and political manoeuvrings that helped secure British agreement and collaboration in the reform of British educational policy in Nigeria in the late 1950s. For instance, with the decision to intervene in Africa's educational development taken by the Carnegie Corporation officials on 11th May 1954 and the choice of Nigeria as a preferred destination of study, Alan Pifer began the somewhat onerous job of lobbying the British colonial establishment into accepting the corporation's proposal for reform by organising various conferences and meetings related to education in Africa, including the informal conference held between 16th and 18th June 1955 at the University College of West Indies, Jamaica to "re-evaluate the principle of elitism endorsed by the Asquith Commission".³⁰ It was at this conference that Pifer first pitched Carnegie's reform agenda, offering America's 'mass' university education as a possible model for British colonies in Africa. Even though this proposal was initially rebuffed, Pifer's continued push for Anglo-American collaboration in this area, Nigeria's looming independence, and Carnegie Corporation's readiness to finance the study on Nigeria's educational needs resulted in British acquiescence in 1958. Berman has noted that the primary reason for this acquiescence was the "ideological compatibility between the colonial office and the Carnegie Corporation and the necessity for joint Anglo-American cooperation in the face of the threat engendered by the Cold War."³¹

Consequently, the Greenbrier Conference held between 21st and 25th May 1958 at White Springs, West Virginia with participants drawn from universities, foundations, businesses, and government agencies across the UK and US was organised and sponsored by the corporation to devise programmes of common interests for African states with "political and economic viability, and friendship, or dependency on, the West".³² As noted variously by Berman, Anyanwu and Adamu, the Greenbrier Conference provided the impetus for the establishment of the Commission on Post-Secondary and Higher Education in Nigeria that became widely known as the Ashby Commission. Composed of three Britons, three Nigerians, and three Americans and with a grant of \$100,000 from the Carnegie Corporation, the commission commenced work on 4th May 1959. The activities of the commission included extensive research, meetings, and regional field trips, with the

specific mandate to conduct an “investigation into Nigeria’s needs in the field of post-secondary and higher education over the next twenty years, and in the light of the commission’s findings make recommendations as to how these needs can be met”.³³

The Ashby Commission is considered a watershed in the history of higher education reforms in Nigeria, not only because it provided an opportunity for the re-examination of the guiding philosophy of British higher education policies in Nigeria, helping to streamline the educational sector towards socio-economic and political relevance, but also because it provided the basis for national harmonization by way of a blueprint for the country’s post-independence educational agenda. Nevertheless, analysis of the background of the Ashby Commission shows the subtleties of Cold War politics that established the Anglo-American influence in Nigeria’s higher educational system that continues to this day. As Berman states:

Nigerians were led to believe that the study had really been their idea all along, when in reality the entire scheme was planned in conversations between Carnegie representatives and individuals from the Inter-University Council and the colonial office and presented to the Nigerians as a *fait accompli*, to accept or reject.³⁴

Furthermore, Carnegie’s sponsorship of the commission’s work ensured that it not only exerted influence over or, rather, shaped the recommendations of the Ashby Commission, but it also bought a permanent place for American concepts in Nigerian (African) education, while also providing a model for educational planning in which American influence and involvement became “almost obligatory”.³⁵

The Circulation of Theatre Experts in Nigeria: UCI and the School of Drama

As mentioned above, the establishment of the University College Ibadan (UCI) in 1948 was an outcome of the conflict between sustained nationalist agitation and the colonial government, mediated by the Walter Elliot Commission on Higher Education in West Africa. UCI was officially opened in January 1948 with Kenneth Mellanby emerging as its first principal. Unlike Yaba Higher College, the university was affiliated via a ‘special relationship’ with the University of London. This relationship meant that the university college endured a strict process of vetting on staffing, courses, curriculum, and examinations from London in order to merit the ‘gold standard’ degrees, equivalent to those obtainable in Britain, issued for its programmes. However, the challenge of maintaining this standard and the lack of facilities affected access to the college, with enrolment remaining limited even in the face of overwhelming demand for university education in the country, prompting a mixture of criticism, resentment, and activism for its expansion from leading nationalists. Thus, as the number of Nigerians studying abroad increased, the fervour of the campaign for reforms to ensure access to the college intensified, ultimately not only resulting in Carnegie Corporation’s intervention but also creating a pattern that was adopted by other major American philanthropic foundations, especially Rockefeller, in their funding of educational projects in the country.³⁶

In her archival study of the Rockefeller Foundation, Nic Leonhardt observed that there had been a “connection between philanthropic enterprise, theatre, and development since the end of the second World War” and that this connection yielded a ‘fruitful relationship’ that sometimes had ‘profound effects on the theatre practice and history of those years’.³⁷ It is also established that the scope of the foundation’s interest in drama and theatre from the 1930s to 1960s was not only rich and vast, but that its heterogeneity also meant that support or sponsorship for different individuals, theatre practitioners, academics, and authors on study trips and such projects within the US and overseas were contingent on support from institutions such as schools, departments, and colleges.³⁸ It is therefore not surprising that it was during this period that the foundation provided a grant for the establishment of the School of Drama at the University College Ibadan.

Furthermore, in the article “Building Theatrical Epistemic Communities in the Global South: Expert Network, Philanthropy and Theatre Studies in Nigeria, 1959-1962”, theatre historian Christopher Balme has mapped out not only how the contributions of the Rockefeller Foundation resulted in the establishment and growth of modern theatre studies in Nigeria, but also the transnational network that linked cultural and educational institutions as well as elite scholar-artists from the Third World to American Philanthropic funding.³⁹ Given that the Rockefeller’s grant of \$200,000 played a pivotal role in the formation of the School of Drama under the tutelage of Geoffrey Axworthy and Martin Banham, the UCI and indeed Ibadan occupied an enviable position by serving as a central hub for the production and circulation of artistic, cultural, and intellectual experts in various disciplines, particularly in theatre practice across the country, as the ‘massification’ of higher education began after independence in the 1960s. It could be argued that the model of Anglo-American collaboration that enabled the formation of the Ashby Commission also played a role in the establishment of the School of Drama at the University College Ibadan. American philanthropic funding backed leading British scholars or experts in employing like-minded local actors to join them in establishing an organisation or institution amenable to the propagation and perpetuation of Western ideological influence over a territory of interest. As can be seen in the training and access to funding provided to these experts for their careers and artistic projects, the goal was not only to prevent access to and the entrenchment of communist ideology in the institution and to bind these artist-scholars to the tail-coats of western ideological orbit, but also to project them as icons and ambassadors of this ideology in order to consolidate and disseminate this influence via teaching, artistic productions, and research.

A closer look at the staff associated with the School of Drama during this period, either as foundational scholars, fellows or later recruits, such as Joel Adedeji, Wole Soyinka, Demas Nwoko, Ebum Clark, Dapo Adelugba, Dexter Lyndersay, Bill Brown, Peggy Harper, Martin Banham, Geoffrey Axworthy, Kola Ogunmola, Funtayo Sowunmi, Betty Okotie, Bayo Oduneye, Yinka Adedeji, Uriel Paul Worika, Tunji Oyelana, Bode Sowande, and later Zulu Sofola, reveals a strong western influence.⁴⁰ Often, the itinerant career of these artist-scholars and the students they tutored ensured that this influence was successfully distributed across the locations where they subsequently worked as permanent, visiting, examining or research scholars or administrative or artistic personnel. In fact, a survey of the career of scholar-artists such as Wole Soyinka, Dapo Adelugba, Demas Nwoko, Peggy Harper, and even Dexter Lyndersay, would reveal that they have held numerous academic, research and administrative positions in various universities across Nigeria, and an

appraisal of their map of influence within the boundaries of theatre practice would reveal a network that extends beyond the shores of Africa. A brief overview of Wole Soyinka's career (in Nigeria), for instance, reads thus: Rockefeller Research Fellow in Drama, University of Ibadan, 1961-62; Lecturer in English, University of Ife, Ile-Ife, 1963-64; Senior Lecturer in English, University of Lagos, 1965-67; Head of the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Ibadan, 1969-72 (appointment made in 1967); Professor of Comparative Literature and Head of the Department of Dramatic Arts, University of Ife, 1975-85; Founding Director, 1960 Masks Theatre, 1960, Orisun Theatre, 1964, and University of Ife Guerrilla Theatre, Ile-Ife, 1978 amongst others.⁴¹ Hence, it is safe to say that as the first theatre studies department in Nigeria, the School of Drama at UCI laid the foundations and shaped the direction for theatre practice in the country in many ways, not least in terms of the curriculum and the circulation of theatre experts to theatre departments that emerged subsequently.

A Dichotomy of Direction: Undercurrents of Anglo-American Influence in Nigerian Theatre Education and Practice

As Balme rightly notes, the brand of theatre practice adopted in the School of Drama at UCI incorporated both the conservatory and academy approaches – a western modernist theatre tradition as practiced in both America and Britain.⁴² As expected, the overly western curriculum, while ignoring certain aspects of knowledge identifiable with the Soviet/Eastern bloc, emphasized the teaching of classical histories, close reading and interpretation of modern theorists, practitioners and texts, the staging of performances drawn from the theatrical milieu of western canons, and the adaptation, re-writing, re-interpretation and re-calibration of traditional performances into this mould of cultural production.⁴³ The range of courses on offer during this time covered a broad spectrum of western theatre pedagogies, including acting and movement, speech, voice and oral interpretation, mime, dramatic criticism, history of classical theatre, directing, playwriting and technical theatre, make-up, stage management, design, costume, publicity and business management, script interpretation and dance, with little or no courses adapted from the African performance idiom.⁴⁴ These were further expanded to include courses on radio, television and film production with experimentations aimed at incorporating African performance elements into the curriculum. Interestingly, these transmutations seemed to have occurred with the upgrade of the school's programme within the university system from a mere Diploma course in 1962/63 to a Bachelor of Arts degree (Single Honours) programme by 1969 and later a standard Department of the Theatre Arts with a functional theatre space in the 1970s.

Given that more universities were established post-independence in line with the 'massification' agenda, the success of the School of Drama and its position as the premiere university made its curriculum and theatre traditions the model for almost all subsequent theatre studies departments in the Nigerian universities that emerged after 1960.⁴⁵ In addition, the fact that scholars and graduates from Ibadan were almost always appointed to lead the emerging theatre studies departments as either pioneer staff, visiting scholars or examiners contributed to the wholesale adoption of the Ibadan example. This has

translated into the inheritance and replication of similar mistakes and challenges in other institutions. For instance, at the establishment of a theatre studies department in the University of Calabar in the 1970s, the bulk of its staff were Ibadan experts and graduates led by Dexter and Dani Lyndersay, Frank Speed, Kalu Uka, Edde Iji and Molinta Enendu. Not only was the overtly Anglo-American influenced theatre curriculum adopted with an almost identical set of courses, the experimental approach that fused a general educational orientation in the discipline with the acquisition of basic theatrical skills and the attempts to concomitantly run a fully professional performance company was also appropriated. As such, a gradual injection of African performative milieu via curriculum adjustments resulted in various complications that limited the effective management of these programmes due to the explosion of demand in the field and the lack of available facilities. Frequently, attempts at curriculum adjustments tend to result in what could be described as the dichotomy of direction i.e. the choice of whether to adopt a more theoretical research approach or a practical model of theatre training. Since most departments are delicately poised between these practice models, an attempt to make changes often leads to disagreements and clashes, stoking tensions and personal rivalries between faculties. As is often the case, this standoff usually results in other staff identifying with either side of the opposing camps depending on not only the individual model of training, but also the measure of influence the leading antagonists exert. These tensions have become a recurring theme in many theatre departments in first, second and even third generation universities.

Obviously, the consequences of the entrenchment of Anglo-American influence are manifest in what could be described as 'missed opportunities' in planning and moulding an independently robust higher educational system that researches, experiments and assimilates available knowledge idioms on its value from the on-set. From a theatrical perspective, a major consequence of the over-reliance on western theatre pedagogy and canon is that very little of the whole gamut of knowledge on theatrical practices and traditions from the Eastern bloc was available for assimilation and experimentation within the theatre space in Nigeria. One cannot but imagine what an intellectual minefield the practice of theatre would have become had a genuinely non-aligned mind-set of practice and engagement with knowledge idioms from the rich performative heritage of the East filtered through in the same frequency as western elements especially at the curricular level. The intermingling of these diverse theatrical idioms with the varied African performance culture would certainly have helped develop a more enriching legacy within the theatre space in the country. Granted, Soviet and Eastern bloc plays are increasingly being experimented on across the various educational theatres in the country; however, the overwhelming majority of these plays are those considered acceptable within the narrow confines of 'western' canons and only one optional course (Oriental Theatre) currently examines the trajectory of Russian, Chinese, Indian, Japanese and Korean performance spaces. Not even the current explosion of committed theatre activism can sufficiently assuage the sense of 'lost opportunity' that this lacuna represents and as the calls to decolonize the curriculum deepen, coupled with the emergence and expansion of more practice-oriented courses in film, television, artificial intelligence (AI) and digital humanities, the process of curriculum adjustment that has always been a source of conflict, generating directional dilemmas in many theatre studies department in the country may well become more divisive and controversial.

On the whole, funding and training played a crucial role in the triumph of Anglo-American collaboration over Soviet/Eastern bloc influences, especially in the formative years of theatre studies programmes in Nigeria. Not only did they enable communist ideas to be shut out of the Nigerian higher education system during the Cold War, they also created a subtle platform that, even though based on a broad western ideological foundation, has created avenues for tension, intellectual disruption, and rivalries between the constitutive elements that determine the theatre studies curriculum in the country. The frequent competition between scholar-artists and the mobilization of their training and networking power as weapons in the battle for control over the direction of the discipline, as well as manifestations of vested interest tend to stifle innovative practice while also limiting the pace of adapting and/or adopting new pedagogies into the teaching and learning processes of theatre programmes across many Nigerian universities.

Endnotes

- ¹ The research for this paper received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme (Grant Agreement No. 694559 – Developing Theatre).
- ² In countries such as Ghana, Nigeria etc. the processes that led to the transfer of power from colonialists to nationalists and eventual independence were a relatively peaceful exercise, whereas other countries such as Algeria, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Namibia and South Africa had to fight rebellious and often bloody revolutionary wars in order to gain their independence. See: Timothy Stapleton, *Africa: War and Conflict in the Twentieth Century*. (London: Routledge, 2018), 65; David Birmingham, *The Decolonization of Africa*. (London: University College of London, 1995); Anthony Clayton, *The French Wars of Decolonization*. (London: Longman, 1994); Toyin Falola, ed., *Africa 4: The End of Colonial Rule: Nationalism and Decolonization*. (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2002).
- ³ As predicted by a variety of critical and political sources, 1960 was indeed the 'Year of Africa' as a large number of African countries gained independence from colonial domination. It became a sort of reference point as the culmination of decolonisation on the continent. See: William Henry, "Africa's Year: The Problems and Possibilities of the Dark Continent will be Leading Discussion topics in 1960". *Wall Street Journal*, January 1, 1960, 10; Harold Macmillan, "The Wind of Change". Speech delivered to the Joint Meeting of the Union of South Africa Parliament on February 3, 1960, Available at: <http://www.africanrhetoric.org/pdf/JMacmillan-thewindofchange.pdf> Accessed on October 20th, 2020; Anthony Ratcliff, "Revolution at the End of a Pen: Writing Pan-African Politics of Cultural Struggle" (PhD diss., University of Massachusetts, 2009), 19.
- ⁴ Bassey Ekong, "Nigerian Nationalism: A Case Study in Southern Nigeria, 1885-1939". *Dissertation and Theses*, Paper 956, 1972. DOI: 10.15760/etd.956, 1.
- ⁵ Ekong, "Nigerian Nationalism", 1.
- ⁶ Christopher J. Kinnan, Daniel B. Gordon, Mark D. DeLong, Douglas W. Jacquash and Robert S. McAllum, "Failed State 2030: Nigeria – A Case Study". *Occasional Paper No. 67*, (Centre for Strategy and Technology, Air University, Alabama, 2011); Frank Aig-Imokhuede, ed., *A Handbook of Nigerian Culture*. (Lagos: The Department of Culture/Federal Ministry of Culture and Social Welfare, 1991); Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Nigeria Country Profile.
- ⁷ The term "indirect rule" describes a strategy of governance in which the state integrates pre-existing institutions at all administrative levels below the central government. In Nigeria, this entailed reliance on the structures of traditional rulership, such as the use of the Emirs in the North and Obas and Warrant Chiefs in the West and East respectively. See: Carl Müller-Cregon, Continuity or Change? (In)direct Rule in British and French Colonial Africa. *International Organisation*, (2020): 6; Obaro Ikime, "Reconsidering Indirect Rule: The Nigerian Example". *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 4, 3 (1968): 421-438.
- ⁸ Ekong, "Nigerian Nationalism", 10.
- ⁹ For an overview of the Islamic educational system as operated in Northern Nigeria, see: Lawrence Ndubisi Njoku, *Nigerian Educational Development and Need for Quality Sustenance*. (B.A. Thesis, School of

- Education, University of Iceland, 2016); C. U. Nkekelonye, *History of Education Ancient and Modern*. (Nsukka: University Trust Publishers, 2005), 1-11; Kola Babarinde, "Evolution, Development, Challenges and Prospects of Nigerian Higher Education System (NHES)". Paper presented at the AVCNU Consultative Policy Dialogue with TrustAfrica on the *Future and Relevance of Nigerian Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions: Towards Higher Education Transformation*. CVC Secretariat, Abuja, November, 6-7th, 2012.
- ¹⁰ Ethiopianism was a broad religious movement among sub-Saharan African Christian elites who campaigned for and supported the formation of independent African churches tailored to the specific needs of African natives by drawing a liturgical basis from African cultural milieus in protest against western worship idioms as well as the discrimination and racism exhibited by European church leaders. For a discourse on the role of the movement in shaping nationalist agenda across Africa, see: George Shepperson, "Ethiopianism and African Nationalism". *Phylon* 14, 1, (1953): 9-18. DOI: 10.2307/272419; Thomas Hodgkin, *Nationalism in Colonial Africa*. (New York: University Press, 1957); Badra Lahouel, "Ethiopianism and African Nationalism in South Africa before 1937." *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, 104, (1986): 681-688. In Nigeria, the movement was led by the likes of Rev. James Johnson, Mojola Agbebi and Moses Ladejo Stone and resulted in the foundation of the Native Baptist Church in 1888, the United Native African Church in 1891, the Bethel African Church in 1901 and the United African Methodist Church in 1917. See: E. A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria*. (London: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd, 1966). Furthermore, the consciousness raised by the press as well as objections to issues such as taxation and land tenures also contributed to the growth of nationalist movements in the country. See: Ekong, "Nigerian Nationalism", 23-49.
- ¹¹ See: Ekong, "Nigerian Nationalism", 50-77; Phillip Afaha, "The Role of Ibibio State Union in the Educational Development of the Calabar Province". *Sapha: A Journal of Historical Studies* 2, 1&2 (2011): 11-21; Audrey Smock, *Ibo Politics: The Role of Ethnic Unions in Eastern Nigeria*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971.
- ¹² The African student bodies already in existence in England during the time at which ideas for the formation of WASU coalesced included the African Progress Union, the Gold Coast Student's Union, and the Association of Students of African Descent. However, before the formation of WASU on 7th August 1925, Ladipo Solanke had help formed a new student association namely the Nigerian Progress Union. See: Garigue, Philip, "The West African Students' Union: A Study in Cultural Contact" *Africa*, 23, 1, (1953): 55-69, 56.
- ¹³ Garigue, "West African Student's Union", 68.
- ¹⁴ The Educational Ordinance underwent various changes and improvements over time. See: Babarinde, "Evolution, Development, Challenges and Prospects of Nigerian Higher Education System (NHES)", 8. Furthermore, it is worth noting that several forms of post-secondary school training centres had been in existence before the advent of Yaba Higher College as the first institution of higher learning in Nigeria. These pseudo-specialized institutions were set up in some government departments and included schools for Agriculture at Moon Plantation, Ibadan and Samaru (close to Zaria); Veterinary Science at Vom; and Engineering in Lagos. N. J. Okoli, L. Ogbondah and R. N. Ewor, "The History of Development of Public Universities in Nigeria since 1914", *International Journal of Education and Evaluation*, 2, 1, (2016): 60-73, 60.
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- ¹⁶ Kunbi Adefule, "First University (Tertiary) Institution in Nigeria". *The 234Project*. Available at: <https://the234project.com/history/nigeria/first-universit-tertiary-institution-in-nigeria/> Retrieved October 15th, 2020.
- ¹⁷ Victor C. Ferkiss, *Africa's Search for Identity*. (New York: Braziller, 1966), 190; Ade Fajana, "Colonial Control and Education: The Development of Higher Education in Nigeria, 1900-1950". *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* VI, 3 (1972): 323-340, 323; Ogechi Emmanuel Anyanwu, *Politics of Access: University Education and Nation-Building in Nigeria 1948-2000*, (Calgary, Alberta: University of Calgary Press, 2011), 1-2.
- ¹⁸ Babarinde, "Evolution, Development, Challenges and Prospects of Nigerian Higher Education System (NHES)", 8; Cornelius Olaleye Taiwo, *The Nigerian Education System: Past, Present, and Future*. (Lagos: Thomas Nelson, 1980).
- ¹⁹ Hakeemi Tijani, "Britain and the Foundation of Anti-Communist Policies in Nigeria, 1945-1960", *African and Asian Studies* 8 (2009): 47-66; Anyanwu, *Politics of Access*, 36.
- ²⁰ Constantin Katsakioris, "The Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and Africa in the Cold War", *Working Paper Series, SFB 1199 at the University of Leipzig*, 16 (April, 2019), 7; Hakeem Tijani, *Union Education in Nigeria: Labour, Empire, and Decolonization since 1945*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); John P. Dunbabin, *International Relations since 1945: The Cold War – The Great Powers and their Allies*.

- (London: Longman, 1994), 62; Roger Fieldhouse, "Cold War and Colonial Conflicts in British West African Adult Education, 1947-1953", *History of Education Quarterly*, 24, 3 (Autumn, 1984): 359-360; Central Intelligence Agency, "Soviet Academic and Technical Programs for Students of Less Developed Countries of the Free World", *Intelligence Report*, (Directorate of Intelligence/Office of Research and Reports, May, 1965), 11-14.
- ²¹ For a detailed analysis of the British government's strategies and countermeasures against the spread of communism in the colonies, see: Hakeem Tijani (2009) "Britain and the Foundation of Anti-Communist Policies in Nigeria, 1945-1960". *Journal of African and Asian Studies*, 8, 1-2, pp. 47-66; Hakeem I. Tijani, "McCarthyism in Colonial Nigeria: The Ban on the Employment of Communists," In Adebayo Oyebadé (Ed.), 2004. *The Foundations of Nigeria: Essays in Honour of Toyin Falola*. Trenton: Africa World Press, 647-668.
- ²² Anyanwu, *The Politics of Access*, 31-33.
- ²³ See: Stephen R. Ashton and Sarah Stockwell, "Introduction". In *British Documents on End of the Empire, Series A Volume 1: Imperial policy and colonial practice, 1925-1945, Part I: Metropolitan Reorganisation, Defence and Constitutional Relations, Political Change and Constitutional Reform*, edited by Stephen R. Ashton and Sarah Stonewall, xxiii-cii. (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1996), lxxx – lxxxi; Timothy Livsey, "Imagining an Imperial Modernity: Universities and the West African Roots of Colonial Development." *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 44, 6, (2016): 952-975. DOI: 10.1080/03086534.2016.1210305.
- ²⁴ See: Report of the Commission on Higher Education in West Africa, 1945, Cmd. 6655,ii, TNA; Livsey, "Imagining an Imperial Modernity", 962; Martin Kolinsky, "The Growth of Nigerian Universities 1948-1980: The British Share", *Minerva*, 23, 1 (1985): 29-61.
- ²⁵ See: Apollos Nwauwa, *Imperialism, Academe and Nationalism: Britain and University Education for Africans, 1860-1960*. (London: Frank Cass, 1997), 163-165; *Report of the Commission on Higher Education in West Africa*, 1945, Cmd. 6655,65, TNA; Livsey, "Imagining an Imperial Modernity", 965; Anyanwu, *Politics of Access*, 33.
- ²⁶ Livsey, "Imperial Modernity", 966.
- ²⁷ Anyanwu, *Politics of Access*, 54-35.
- ²⁸ See: Apollos Nwauwa, "The British Establishment of Universities in Tropical Africa, 1920-1948 : A Reaction against the Spread of American 'Radical' Influence". *Cahiers d'études Africaines* 33, 130 (1993): 247-274; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3406/cea.1993.1520>; Nnamdi Azikiwe, *Renascent Africa*. London: Cass, 1937.
- ²⁹ Anyanwu, *Politics of Access*, 48.
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- ³¹ Edward H. Berman, "American Philanthropy and African Education: Towards an Analysis", *African Studies Review*, 20, 1 (April, 1977): 71-85, 76.
- ³² Richard D. Heyman, "Carnegie Corporation of New York and African Education, 1925-1960", (Ed. D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1977), 177-178; Berman, "American Philanthropy", 79.
- ³³ Anyanwu, *Politics of Access*, 63.
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- ³⁵ *Ibid.*; Anyanwu, *Politics of Access*, 59; Jefferson E. Murphy, *Creative Philanthropy: Carnegie Corporation and Africa*, 1953-73, (New York: Teachers College Press, 1976), 89.
- ³⁶ An interesting statistic shows that out of 7,376 Nigerian university students between 1948 and 1953, the total number studying in UCI was 1,535 (20.8%), whereas the number of those studying abroad, especially in universities across the UK, USA and Canada, was 5,841 (79.2%). See: Anyanwu, *Politics of Access*, 36; Aliu Babatunde Fafunwa, *A History of Nigerian Higher Education*, (Yaba, Nigeria: Macmillan, 1971), 19-20.
- ³⁷ Nic Leonhardt, "The Rockefeller Roundabout of Funding: Severino Montano and the Development of Theatre in the Philippines in the 1950s", *Journal of Global Theatre Histories*, 3, 2 (2019): 19-33, 20.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.
- ³⁹ Christopher Balme, "Building Theatrical Epistemic Communities in the Global South: Expert Networks, Philanthropy and Theatre Studies in Nigeria", *Journal of Global Theatre History*, 3, 2 (2019): 3-18.
- ⁴⁰ Balme, "Building Theatrical Epistemic Communities", 12; Dapo Adelugba, "The Professional and Academic Theatre: A Twelve-Year Relationship at Ibadan 1963-1975", *Maske und Kothurn*, 30, 3-4 (December 1984): 342-345.
- ⁴¹ Biodun Jeyifo, *Wole Soyinka: Politics, Poetics and Postcolonialism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), xxv-xxxii. Like Soyinka, Kingsley William Dexter Lyndersay's career also shows an extensive spread of academic influence in many institutions across the country. Lyndersay was the leading technical theatre expert at the School of Drama, UCI, 1966-1972 (he also served as an acting head of the department from 1967-1969 when Soyinka was unable to assume the position due to imprisonment) and Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, 1972-1974. He was among the pioneer staff that set up the Theatre Department at the University of Calabar, Calabar, 1976-83, as well as the Centre for Cultural Studies at the University of Cross River State, Uyo, 1983-1985 (now University of Uyo) See: Duro Oni, *Stage Lighting Design: The Nigerian*

Perspective, (Lagos, Society of Nigerian Theatre Artists, 2004), 105; Ojo Abayomi Joseph, *The Emerging Trends in Nigerian Theatrical Lighting: A Study of Saro 'The Musical' and Crystal Slipper* (B.A. Thesis, University of Lagos, 2014), 37. Peggy Harper also worked for a variety of institutions in Nigeria from 1963-1978, including the School of Drama, UCI; Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan; and the University of Ife, Ile-Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) See: Bill Harpe, "Peggy Harper: Choreographer, Dancer and Devotee of West African Culture", *The Guardian* (July 16, 2009). Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2009/jul/16/obituary-peggy-harper> Accessed on September 5th, 2020.

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⁴³ It must not be forgotten that during this time the competing ideologies and philosophy of cultural productions within the arts, theatre, and literature were the modernist perspective of the West and socialist realism of the East. See: Boris Groys, "The Cold War Between the Medium and the Message: Western Modernism vs. Social Realism", *e-Flux Journal*, 104 (November, 2019), n. d. Retrieved from: http://worker01.e-flux.com/pdf/article_297103.pdf.

⁴⁴ Adelugba, "The Professional and Academic Theatre", 344-345.

⁴⁵ Julius- Adeoye Rantimi-Jays, "Nigerian Theatre Arts Curriculum and Events Management: Positioning the Theatre Profession for the New Millennium", *Nigerian Theatre Journal*, 10, 1 (2010): 129-141,131.

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