

NIGERIAN DAYS – JACK CALDWELL

Interviewer: Colin Caldwell

You first went to Ibadan while you were in Ghana in early 1963. What did you find?

First I want to give a preamble because the course of Nigerian political life, the evolution of its university system and population census counts were all intricately related and I had close ties with three of the universities, those that taught demography. So first some potted history on the development of Nigeria's university system for context.

The pre-independence universities of Africa were the University Colleges of Ibadan (Nigeria), Khartoum (Sudan), Gold Coast (at Legon, and thereafter named the University of Ghana), Makerere (in Kampala, Uganda), and Dakar¹ (Senegal). All were affiliated with partner universities in the colonizing countries, either France or Britain. By establishing the links each of the University Colleges was provided administrative and curricular ties accompanied by a quality assurance system which sought to ensure that students achieved an educational standard comparable with that pertaining to their associated European university. Makerere, Legon, Khartoum and Ibadan were each established at about the same time, around 1948, and each was affiliated with the University of London. Dakar evolved progressively but was attached to the University of the Sorbonne and the University of Bordeaux in 1957. In the case of the British university colleges, the House of Commons' Asquith and the Elliot commissions recommended the establishment of the African university college system and recommended that they 'should aspire from the outset to academic standards equal to those of universities and university colleges in Britain.'²

The Ibadan University College was established as Nigeria's tertiary education institution with the purpose of educating an African elite capable of meeting the challenges of the future. Its

¹ Now known as now the Université Cheikh Anta Diop, at independence in 1960, it had an enrolment of 1,018 students, of whom only 39 per cent were Senegalese, with most of the rest being from other former French colonies. Of the five listed universities, it was the only university located in French West Africa.

² Fourah Bay College, in Freetown, Sierra Leone, has an older history. It was founded as a theological college in 1827 by the Church Missionary Society but became a tertiary education college affiliated with the Anglican-dominated Durham University (along with Codrington College in Barbados) in 1876. However, despite the affiliation, or perhaps because of it, the syllabus remained largely theological. The students sat examinations for, and received, Durham degrees. The arrangement lasted until 1968. It was important in the sense that it was the only university in West Africa that gave degrees and it, in effect, became the model for the post-World War 2 higher educational reforms. However, the scope of its degree was always limited and the number of graduates it educated before it gained autonomy was remarkably small. Its significance is that its students, coming from various parts of West Africa, became aware of their common African heritage and they remained in touch with each other thereafter. These friendships extended over their lifetimes and gave rise to the first African consciousness movements. Much of the subsequent rise in African nationalism can track its origins to the school friendships made at Fourah Bay. Its most famous graduates were:

- Samuel Crowther (1809 - 1891) the first African to be ordained an Anglican bishop in Nigeria (in 1864). He, his mother and sisters were released from a Portuguese slave ship by the Royal navy, disembarked in Freetown in 1821 and he then attended Fourah Bay mission school in the 1820s.
- Henry Carr (1863–1945), Nigerian-born, was the first graduate in honours at Fourah Bay College in 1882. Subsequently, he attended Lincoln's Inn and then joined the Colonial Civil Service in Lagos in 1888, ending up as chief inspector of schools of the Southern Provinces of Nigeria (1915-1928). He played an important role in formulating African education policy.

first principal was Dr Kenneth Mellamby (1948-1953) of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. He noted that 'the provision of teaching for our students and the prosecution of original research by our staff were our most important duties.' From its earliest days research on Africa was central to its purpose. He was followed by JT Saunders (1953-56) who was retiring from being Registrar of the University of Cambridge, thus establishing a Cambridge and CUP presence at Ibadan³.

By 1958 the College had a little over 1,000 students. It remained a college until 1962 but following Nigerian independence in 1960 the decision was taken by the newly established nation to establish four other universities in parallel to provide a regional balance, Ibadan was then granted full university status. By 1963 Ibadan University had over 2,000 students, of whom 64 students were undertaking graduate degrees.

As with Legon, the strong University of London presence and its standards assurance system, accompanied by a highly competitive student admissions process, gave considerable prestige to the university's degrees. Examination papers were generally marked in London. This allowed many graduates subsequently to undertake graduate courses overseas and later to take up academic positions, go into public administration or indeed to take up international positions. And, of course, since then it also has been immensely proud of educating both Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka, two of Africa's most famous authors.

However, it is equally well to note that there was a strong mutual advantage in the arrangement for the University of London itself. In those days especially the interaction generated between the various institutional components of the University of London and its African Colleges ensured that London was awash with intellectual vigour. It was a place of ideas where the peoples of the world met and ideas from all perspectives were enunciated and argued upon. As a result London was performing at the intellectual cutting edge in terms of advancing the social sciences of the world. It was an exciting place to visit, not least because it drew upon the intellectual refugees from not only the former Empire but also from the European exoduses of both World Wars. I owe a lot to LSE and the wider University of London but it in turn owes much to the international currents which it attracted.

OK, now back to your associations with Ibadan. You first visited Ibadan while you were at the University of Ghana in Legon. Is that right?

Yes. The family and I first travelled to Ibadan in April 1963. I wanted to meet with the noted Nigerian geographer Akin Mabogunje, then a relatively young and newly appointed lecturer, who subsequently became the first Nigerian professor of Geography and went on to become the first African president of the International Geographic Union.

We set out with entry visas for each country, secured because Pat taught embassy officers English from the two relevant Francophone countries that we had to pass through. So we drove by car from Ghana across the borders of Togo, Dahomey (as it was then called, but

³ The University of Cambridge Press established its West African office in Ibadan in 1957.

now 'Benin') and into Nigeria. Each but the first crossing, from Ghana to Togo, took about four hours which, in terms of Africa, was then regarded as a relatively easy passage. But to cross into Togo was a major feat. That night we retreated to Keta, in Ghana, to a rest house on a sand spit enclosing a large lagoon. Even in those days rising water levels were a problem and the town was being besieged from both sides with the road itself disappearing into sand or indeed into areas where the sand was being washed away. Temporary measures were taken to save the road by laying down thin twin planks of metal end to end which, with much faith and hope, I drove hoping to straddle the rails and to arrive at a destination. Finally we did. That night, while one of the paramount chiefs of the Ewe people quietly died, his passing was communicated to his people by the sound every five minutes of a loud, deeply reverberating and mournful gong played on huge drums scattered across the town and far away into the forests across the lagoon.



Keta, Ghana, in flood and our Land Rover in 1963

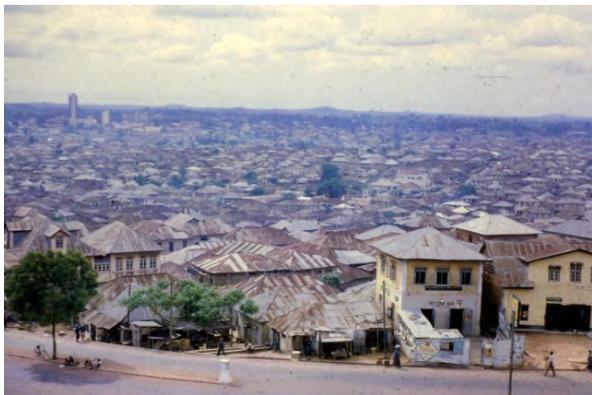
Next day we approached the border again but now the border patrol had advice that allowed me to enter temporarily and to take a taxi into central Lome (the border with Ghana protrudes deeply into the centre of Lome itself – this exemplifies the problem of many post-colonial borders) to meet the staff of the Ministry personally and to put my case. After being shuffled around I entered a room to be greeted by the Foreign Minister himself, a man clearly bored by his job, interested in my work, but he reminisced at length about his great fondness for the post-War Paris of his student days at the Sorbonne. Despite considerable tensions then with Ghana, at the end of the meeting he relented and granted us entry visas for Togo. I heard later, from Nick Evers, the Australian High Commissioner in Ghana at that time, that we had been the only travellers to travel successfully from Ghana to Nigeria by road in many months – the entire diplomatic community in Accra had taken note of this feat and were reading it, as with tea leaves, for signs of its significance.

Post-Independence Francophone West Africa still had close ties with France. Several heads of state in those countries that had been French colonies had served as members of the French National Assembly. Indeed, Félix Houphouët-Boigny, President of the Ivory Coast, had become the first African to be a minister in any European government when he was appointed Minister of Public Health and Population in the French Government on 6 November 1957. And Léopold Sédar Senghor, poet and future President of Senegal, also served in the French National Assembly⁴. The Francophone countries often followed French

⁴ Senghor was also the first African elected as a member of the *Académie Française*.

directions which brought them into diplomatic conflict with many of the radicalised ex-British colonies. The tensions involved with us getting into Togo stemmed partly from tensions due to Nkrumah's push for the Organisation of African Unity⁵ (which required the dismantling of the *Union Africaine et Malgache* (UAM)⁶) but also reflected their (and French) continuing anger with Nkrumah (and more generally, the ex-British colonies in Africa) over the handling of the Congo. These tensions resurfaced with French West African aid (as well as French aid) being given to Biafra in the course of the Nigerian Civil War.

Late that night, after more hiccoughs at border crossings, we finally reached Ibadan. Ibadan was founded on seven hills in Yorubaland and by 1963 it spilt over them all in an endless spreading of red lateritic swish walls⁷ and deeply corroded corrugated iron roofing as far as the eye could see. It epitomised the tropical African city hardly touched by the appearance of any modern infrastructure. In future years we would penetrate this traditional village-megopolis with survey teams but first impressions left me with a sense of awe.



Ibadan in 1963



Ibadan market

Ibadan is still the second largest city in Nigeria (although Kano might now dispute this claim) but in 1963 it was Sub-Saharan's largest city⁸ (and Africa's second largest after Cairo). It has

⁵ President Houphouët-Boigny of Ghana's immediate neighbour, the Ivory Coast, said to Nkrumah, when the latter was making a State Visit in 1957:

"Your experience is rather impressive ... But due to the human relationships between the French and the Africans, and because in the 20th century, people have become interdependent, we considered that it would perhaps be more interesting to try a new and different experience than yours and unique in itself, one of a Franco-African community based on equality and fraternity."

⁶ The UAM had developed out of the amalgamation of two French associations: The *Afrique occidentale française*, (AOF) covering the French West African colonies and the *Afrique équatoriale française* (AEF) which brought together the Central African countries. Despite the stated need to dismantle the UAM, this did not happen until 1985.

⁷ Swish is a type of adobe made from sun baked lateritic clay soil, mixed with water and built up in layers to form walls; as long as it is kept dry, with good overhang roofs, it makes a reasonably durable wall. If the builder can afford it, it can be significantly strengthened by the addition of some cement to the mix ('swishcrete').

⁸ While such comparisons are plagued by definitional issues, as late as 1970 Lagos was reported to have had 1.4 million inhabitants while Ibadan probably had over 2 million. What the population of Lagos actually was is itself a curious issue. At the time it was widely reported in the International press to be 1 ½ million. When I chased down the source for this it was ultimately found to be Bob Morgan of the Ford Foundation in Lagos. When I asked him for the source he looked at me with surprise and said "Why Jack, it was you. You said, when flying over Lagos, it looked like a city of 1 ½ million people and I thought, 'Well Jack knows his way around

been called the largest village in Africa (in the sense that a majority of its population was, in the 1970s, engaged in agrarian work or in trading in subsistence commodities). The area had become a British Protectorate in 1893. After the railway arrived from Lagos in 1901, the line was extended northward to Kano, reaching that city by 1912, making Ibadan an important commercial exchange and transshipment centre en route. It lies about 100 miles from the sea, on the boundary between the forests and the coastal swamps of southern Nigeria.

The talk in Ibadan when we arrived was all about politics. The thrust, vitality and perhaps even frenzied interest in politics in the then Western Region, centred on Ibadan, fully engaged the university, both its staff and students. The main party of the Yorubas was, at the federal level, in Opposition (but it was in government at the powerful regional level of government). They were campaigning against the precarious Federal coalition Government composed primarily of representatives of the Northern Region (centred on Kano) and the Eastern Region (centred on Enugu), but this was a coalition that was busily fracturing. The university in Ibadan was the only properly functioning university in Nigeria at that time so it was composed of students from all parts of Nigeria.

The issue of the day was the suppressed 1962 census (which had only very recently been suppressed) and the equally controversial follow-up, and at that stage still to be enumerated, 1963 Census. The claims then were that northern representation had been exaggerated in the 1953 census (upon which the then current parliamentary representation had been based) and eastern representation had been grossly exaggerated in the 1962 census (catching out both the northern Hausa-Fulani and the western Yoruba). In terms of Yorubaland, the results of the 1962 census demonstrated to all the level of incompetence of the Western Region's government and the pitfalls of its governing party (at regional level) being in Opposition at the federal level.

The government of the Western Region, while no doubt enjoying being in opposition at the federal level, was equally outraged by its lack of access to federal governmental largess. So it happened that when we were there the political party of the Yoruba was also disintegrating between those who opposed the Federal Government and those who wanted to deal themselves into the game.

On the censuses issue, the Ibos of the Eastern Region were outraged that their governing partners, the Hausas and the Fulani of the Northern Region, had suppressed the 1962 census (that favoured Eastern Region representation) and replaced it with what was expected to be an equally dubious 1963 census favouring the northerners instead. These issues caused a good deal of excitement in anticipation from which the university was far from being disinterested observers⁹. Eventually, the turmoil led to Civil War.

Africa. If anyone can have an idea of the size of Lagos, the best guesstimate would be by Jack', so I used it as my best estimate". So this is how truth comes to be written.

⁹ The oft-repeated claim, in respect of several censuses, was that enumeration was carried out by relatively educated officers and almost inevitably this meant from the Christian south. In the predominantly Moslem north they were regarded with suspicion by a population well aware that Parliamentary representation depended upon the Census results. They were also aware that enumerators could not require every household member to be sighted. The claim was that households identified, typically, or perhaps apocryphally, the household head, his three adult sons, three wives and 10 daughters. But the women and daughters were never sighted. The talk around demography circles was that very curious sex ratios were evident.

Can you explain that?

In this era both universities and demography – in the guise of censuses – were to play an important role in the evolution of Nigerian society in the sixties and seventies. At independence in 1960 Nigeria had three large regions, each based on a predominant tribe: the Ibo (or Igbo), which composed between 60–70 per cent of the population in the southeast (the Eastern Region); the Hausa and Fulani which formed about 65 per cent of the population of the Northern Region; and the Yoruba forming about 75 per cent of the population of the south-western part (the Western Region)¹⁰. This was further complicated by considerable movements of people to regions outside their native regions. While there were tensions within regions with respect to their tribal minorities, the main difficulty lay with the conflicting claims of each of the three regions and the inherent instability arising from any resolution with outcomes being achieved by a voting block of two against one of the regions.

The fuel to the debate lay in parliamentary representation. At independence, it reflected the results of the somewhat inadequate census of 1953, which favoured the northerners by giving the region an outright majority. More than likely this was never so. As it happened, in the lead-up to and upon Independence, the northerners governed with the support of the easterners.

These features were clearly evident in the evolution of Nigeria's university system. The University of Nigeria at Nsukka was founded as a full university in 1960, while Ibadan was technically still a College of the University of London. Nsukka was established by the Eastern Region government, partly as an Ibo response to the founding of Ibadan University College in Yoruba lands and partly as an assertion of Nigerian tertiary education independence from the University of London model¹¹. From the beginning there were conflicting intentions in terms of its founding. Its ceremonial opening coincided with Nigerian independence and, perhaps ironically, its foundation stone was laid by Princess Alexandra, as the representative of the Queen who was attending Nigerian Independence celebrations. In actuality it was not to become operational until 1962, and indeed after Ibadan had gained full autonomy.

Following independence, and to balance the Eastern Region's establishment of Nsukka, an additional three universities were established in 1962 in each of the other regions then composing the state of Nigeria: Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria in Northern Nigeria, the University of Lagos (in Lagos¹²) representing the South, and (somewhat reluctantly given that Ibadan already had the principal Nigerian university) another in the Western Region at Ile-Ife (which became the University of Ife). Ahmadu Bello, Nsukka, and Ife were each

¹⁰ Even these proportions depend upon the degree to which people identify with particular associated but dominant groups and allegiances can move.

¹¹ The University of Nigeria, Nsukka was founded by Nnamdi Azikwe, known universally as 'Zik', then Governor-general of Nigeria, and subsequently the First President of Nigeria. He was educated at Lincoln University, in Pennsylvania (as was Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah), and looked to replicate the American Land Grant model for the university. In this endeavour, he was supported by Michigan State University.

¹² Located in Lagos City (and not Lagos State which was only created after these events). At the time Lagos was a small Federal Territory encompassing the capital and so Lagos University was federally funded.

Regionally funded, Lagos and Ibadan were both being Federally funded¹³. So the university structure almost inevitably served the interests of the region in which it was located.

Nigeria, in terms of population, was a hugely large nation compared with the rest of West Africa. In the much disputed 1963 Census, the first unsuppressed census following independence, Nigeria had almost 56 million people. Of this, 54 per cent lived in the Northern Region, 22 per cent in the Eastern Region and 24 per cent in the Western Region. So the Eastern Region alone was larger than the rest of British West Africa, even after throwing in Liberia and Portuguese Guinea for good measure. The Northern Region too was larger than all of Francophone West Africa, including Chad. And then there was the Western Region besides¹⁴.

Apart from the three dominant tribal groups, Nigeria was also composed of about 250 other ethnic groups and there is also a north-south split along religious lines, with the north being predominantly Moslem and the south being largely Christian. The problem of numerical balance was exacerbated, in 1961, by the decision of the Moslem British Northern Cameroons to join Nigeria while the Southern, and Christian, British Cameroons voted to join the French Cameroons.

Nigeria's pre-independence regional stresses, fuelled by an underlying tribal competitive dynamic and aligned with the struggle for resources associated with attaining political power, was further amplified by perceptions of inequalities in economic circumstances and educational opportunity in each region. Where regional dominance determined a party's political power, and that in turn rested on population counts, almost inevitably census results would be an explosive issue. And so it came to pass. The 1962 Census was suppressed and a recount for 1963 was ordered.

The recount too met with considerable antagonism but preliminary results were published in 1968 in *The Population of Tropical Africa* (Longmans) by my joint editor for that book, Chukuka Okonjo. This was one of the papers that were given at the First African Population Conference, held at Ibadan in the first week of January 1966. Another paper, by R K Udo, provided estimates for the suppressed 1962 census (which showed that the Northern Region's population had fallen below 50 percent and thus making the northern party vulnerable to any potential coalition of the southern parties).

Now that you mention it, your first involvement with Nigeria was the conference you and Chukuka Okonjo arranged in Ibadan in January 1966. What led you to orienting your future towards Nigeria?

As with many aspects of living, there is a certain randomness associated with the events that shape one's life that you don't always see coming. They are shaped by the momentum

¹³ The creation of the new universities arose out of the Ashby Report.

¹⁴ While the reliability of censuses and population estimates might well be queried, and Nigeria's counts must always be treated sceptically, in general terms the relativities are largely correct. This count was based on the *Britannica Year Book* for 1965 and, alternatively, the estimates produced by the Economic Commission for Africa and announced at the Ibadan Population Conference in January 1966. Both series produce similar ratios of Nigeria's numerical dominance.

arising from previous events but these are best identified retrospectively. Having said that, the logic of focussing on Nigeria is compelling as it was easily the country with the largest population in Africa, and for that reason alone commands interest. But at the time this was not so immediately obvious.

On returning to Canberra from Ghana in 1964, having been appointed to a research fellowship at the Australian National University (ANU), I had been thinking of shifting my research effort back to South East Asia, perhaps Indonesia. But the Population Council had been keen to further their interest in African demography and the availability of funding rather influences one's career choices. However, I need to go back a little, to the lead-up to the Ibadan conference itself.

Parker Mauldin wished to take the Council further forward in Africa and he sought out my willingness to pursue a post with them that would help give shape to their aspirations. He was inclined to discount ANU as a suitable place to contribute. Ultimately, I suppose, he did get me to New York and perhaps achieved what he had wanted but the initial outcome was different. Early in my return to Canberra, he sought a paper that would outline the future directions that the Council might pursue in Sub-Saharan Africa, including proposals to achieve this. I suggested that the principal problem is that we, as a community of demographers, were grappling with our own individual problems, lacked an adequate awareness of the commonality of issues across Africa, needed to be aware of the specific situation in other African countries and to become more aware of techniques that had been trialled to address research concerns, and that this could be met by holding an African-wide conference about African demographic issues. No sooner received than it was agreed by the Council.

As preparation for the conference, I wrote to all Sub-Saharan African national leaders seeking information on their population policies. I also wrote to the Vice Chancellor of every university in Sub-Saharan Africa outlining that the primary task of the proposed conference would be to seek to define and analyse the population problems of tropical Africa. I also sought from them applications to host the conference, with the Population Council to provide much of the funding and provide organisational support. This brought in the Rockefeller Foundation representative in Africa, Dr Black, in Ibadan, who sought out Okonjo, who provided a detailed proposal. Okonjo was at the time, a senior lecturer in economics and Director of the Centre of Population Studies at the University of Ibadan¹⁵. But the conference would most likely have been held at Accra except that the University of Ghana failed, amidst much subsequent recrimination, to provide a response.

Ibadan had as its enthusiastic Vice Chancellor, the great African historian Kenneth Dike¹⁶, who lent his weight to the proposal. And Longmans also offered to publish a book, underwritten by the Council, from the papers that were to be contributed.

¹⁵ Chukwuka Okonjo subsequently became a brigadier in the Biafran army and then head of the Regional Institute for Population Studies (RIPS) in Legon. Since retirement, and after a successful legal challenge, he has become the Eze (King) of Ogwashi-Ukwu, being of a line of the one of the Igbo royal families. His daughter has twice been the Nigerian Minister for Finance.

¹⁶ Kenneth Dike (1917 – 1983) was the founder of the African nationalist school of history which held that Africa's history should be interpreted on its own merit without being unduly influenced by Eurocentric

The Conference and subsequent book ranged through descriptions of data collection systems to estimates of fertility, mortality, and migration and population growth. It sought to explore population growth and economic development issues, governmental population policies, family planning programs, and population studies in African universities and the role of technical assistance and external aid. *The Population of Tropical Africa* came out on virtually the same day as the Princeton group's report *The Demography of Tropical Africa* (Brass, Coale, Demeny, Heisel, Lorimer, Romaniuk and van de Walle), with each book contributing significantly to our knowledge of the field.

I almost didn't make it to the conference itself as, on one of our return flights from Africa while organising it, the aeroplane in which we were travelling (a 4 engine turboprop Douglas DC6B) lost power in one of the propeller engines and then as we turned back to Mauritius, another engine also failed. We more or less glided the remaining 300 miles back to the airport. I recall that in the last stages of the flight, we were so low that our passage was marked by turbulence (a wake!) forming in the Indian Ocean below us and then in the sugar cane fields getting ever closer below us. We landed between two rows of fire engines assembled on each side of the entire length of the runway. These were all the fire-engines of the island of Mauritius. Even hardened archbishops were praying by the end of the flight.

After the conference you opted to do research in Ife rather than Ibadan. Why?

It was not with any immediate intention; indeed in 1966 the University of Ife hardly existed. On taking up the position of African Regional Director in Demography in the Population Council in New York towards the end of 1967, I met with.....[interruption].



University of Ife campus in 1969

As an aside, why did you take up the position in New York?

I was seduced by the salary. I had several scholarship bonds to pay off as I was bonded to the New South Wales Education Department for scholarships covering various degrees. And I had a large family. But New York was also challenging and certainly interesting to live in.

considerations or perspectives. He was an undergraduate at Fourah Bay and subsequently attended Durham (where he graduated), Aberdeen and King's College, London. In 1956 he published his trailblazing book *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta: 1830-1885*. From 1960 to 1967 he was the Vice Chancellor of Ibadan. From 1967 to 1970 he was a roving ambassador for Biafra and in 1973 he became the first Mellon Professor of African History at Harvard University.

Besides, in taking the position, I had stipulated that it should entail the second year as being a posting in Sub-Saharan Africa (in a position within the Council designated as 'African Regional Representative in Demography') which would also allow me to undertake research. This gave me considerable research flexibility and allowed me to choose where to base myself. But more than that, by having a roving position the Africa-based position allowed me to seek out answers in virtually every Sub-Saharan country and to meet virtually all relevant players.

However, the position in New York had also opened up these opportunities even before heading back to Africa. I had done a couple of tours from New York meeting with Vice Chancellors and African heads of state (indeed, while visiting Senegal the man who was to replace Senghor as President, Abdou Diouf, on my first visit to Senegal, met me at the airport and insisted on carrying my bags; thereafter, on subsequent visits, he was proud to have done so despite his elevation and we were to become the best of friends).

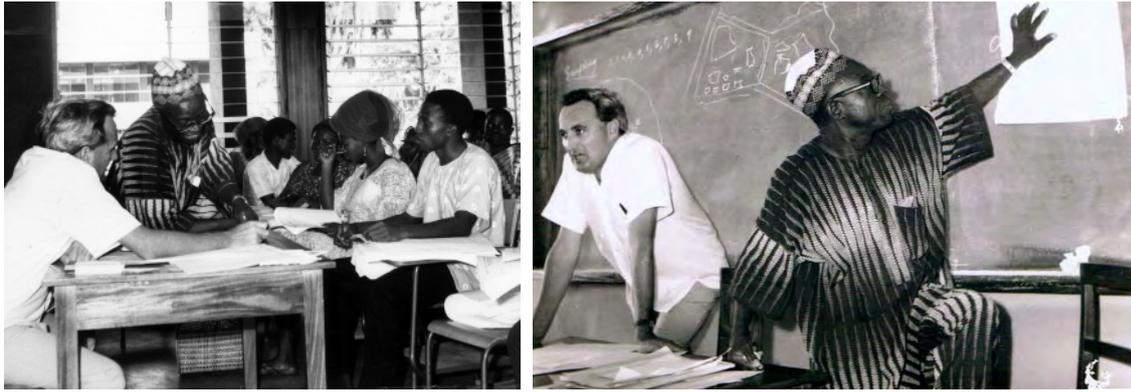
Much of my work for the Council was involved with setting up research and teaching capabilities in demography at the three University of East Africa campuses (Nairobi, Dar es Salaam and Makerere).

Although in 1969 I was primarily based in Ife – as it turned out – I also spent several months in Nairobi and got to know the world as best described by Lionel Shriver in her novel of 1994, *Game Control* (whose portrayal of absurdity, as seen from Nairobi, I am partly in sympathy with).

Now Ife, why Ife? We are talking about 1969 by then?

Yes, the end of 1968 through to September 1969 and thereafter in Nairobi. The Vice-Chancellor of Ife visited the Council in 1967 and sought to have its African operations based there. The proposal made sense simply in terms of Nigeria's size relative to other African countries and because Ife was prepared to provide support to a major Demographic program.

From its inception Ife had the Demographic Research and Training Unit which was subsequently enhanced to become the Institute of Population and Manpower Studies. The unit was to be headed by Adenola Igun ('Ade'), who until recently had been a doctoral student at Cornell under Striekos. Both the institutional arrangements and Ade's presence attracted me there.



Teaching in Ife in 1969 with Ade

In many ways Ife was less racked by the political winds than Ibadan and Nsukka was out of the question because of the civil war.

Yes indeed, the war was then raging. You have suggested that the censuses created tensions that might have led to the civil war. What actually happened to trigger it?

To some extent conflict was almost inevitable. With regional leaders protecting their privileges, the south suspicious of northern domination, and the north equally suspicious of the intentions of the southern elite (which as much as anything meant suspicion of a university education at Ibadan¹⁷) and with suspicion further fuelled in part along Muslim-Christian lines, the danger was palpable back in 1963. Then order collapsed in the west after the October 1965 federal election, which was widely perceived to have been fraudulent. By January 1966 a group of junior army officers attempted to overthrow the federal government. This initial abortive coup was followed immediately by a successful coup, which was thought to favour the Ibos (and indeed, there were accusations that the first abortive, but quite murderous, coup might have been a smoke screen for the successful one – as both were Ibo led coups). A second military coup occurred six months later, in July 1966, aimed at negating alleged Ibo dominance. Both coups, and the precipitating attempted coup, were unexpectedly bloody.

By 1966 some 1.3 million Easterners, mostly Ibos, were in the Northern Region, and about another 500,000 lived in the Western Region. The Ibos in the Western Region were assimilated into the general community but in the North they were explicitly segregated. This emphasised their difference from the local community.

However preceding the second coup, from June 1966 and continuing to October, pogroms in the Northern Region killed tens of thousands of Ibos and caused millions to flee to their homeland. Given the background of the second coup and its failure upon seizing power to curb northern violence, the governing alliance (whether within or outside the military) between Eastern and Northern Regions unravelled. In May 1967 the Military Governor of the Eastern Region, acting on decisions of the Eastern Regional Government, General Ojukwu, declared independence as the Republic of Biafra.

¹⁷ Frederick Forsyth, in his book *The Biafra Story*, points out that “the North's first university graduate qualified just nine years before independence”.

War began on 6 July 1967 when Nigerian Federal troops advanced in two columns on Biafra. Nsukka fell on 14 July. However, Biafra hit back, taking the oil-rich areas of the Niger delta and got within 150 kilometres of Lagos. The war raged and was not over until the final capitulation of the Biafran forces in January 1970.

During some of this time, in 1969, we were at Ife. The University of Nigeria, at Nsukka, had been crippled by the conflict, Nsukka itself fell early in the war and in consequence many of its staff and students had necessarily abandoned Nsukka and sought solace elsewhere, mostly in the other Nigerian universities. Many came to Ife. Throughout our time in Ife in 1969 the war raged and reports of Biafran starvation convulsed the world.

How was Ife to live in?

The University of Ife notionally had started in 1962 with five faculties and a student population of 244. For the first couple of years it was actually physically located in Ibadan, on the campus of the old Nigeria College of Arts, Science and Technology, which was folded into the University itself when the later was established. While located in Ibadan, the new campus was being built outside the town of Ile-Ife. By the time we arrived at Ife, it was operating out of its new campus with its very extensive grounds.

Ile-Ife is a town about 65 kilometres north-east of Ibadan, and was traditionally the royal centre for the Yoruba people and the home of the Yoruba people's ancestral deity, Oduduwa, their progenitor. Ile-Ife is famous for its ancient civilization, especially for the Ife bronze heads, the existence of which – along with the neighbouring Benin bronzes - revolutionised African awareness of its cultural achievements and rewrote the history of world art.



*Ife copper mask c. 1300 C.E.
(British Museum)*

Surely life was impossible in Ife during this period? Why did you stay?

Despite the war, life in Ife continued relatively peacefully. Of course it was difficult; there were road blocks everywhere with gun toting soldiers. And once guns get into conscripted soldiers hands on a large scale you have effectively armed large numbers of potentially lethal gangs working outside civil and social controls. Bruce and Grahame remember – still with some trepidation – the time when we picked up a soldier at a roadblock in the north who demonstrated with his cutlass what he would do to French mercenaries if he came

upon any. He used graphic swings with his blade while sitting between the two of them. And none of us were quite sure of his sobriety or indeed sanity.

That having been said, our surveying effort went remarkably smoothly without running into insurmountable difficulties. In terms of my own safety, foreigner academics were still given considerable respect. In terms of survey teams, the research undertaken by their own university was a thing to be proud of. And Ife, as a university, was an entity to itself. It was enclosed by protective, and magnificent, forest in which the strife of the outside world was largely kept at bay.

Under Ade's organisational skills, in March and April 1969 we surveyed 8,400 respondents in a stratified cross-section of Nigeria extending inland from Lagos for 500 miles into the savannah. Respondents of both sexes were interviewed to investigate their knowledge and use of anti-natal practices and the sources of that knowledge. Data were analysed by age cohorts and by the date of change in their knowledge or practice.

The War was more difficult for the ordinary Nigerian of course. We went to Irrua, in the then Midwest state, on one occasion to see a doctor who ran a hospital. He was the only civilian doctor for 250 000 people. He was doing operations by a hurricane lamp throughout the night. He had lots of twin children who were traditionally killed at birth but who he took into his hospital and raised. They were stunted from malnutrition. Later, on another trip, I asked about the very competent nurses that helped him and they turned out to be his former twins. Before the Civil War the doctor had been funded by an American church group but he lost this source of funding because of the war and distaste due to the well-publicised starvation in Biafra. Yet he claimed that he had been treating patients from both sides over time as the front oscillated. But it was indisputable that the medical care that he and his twins provided was invaluable at a time when war was punishing many ordinary victims.

But you weren't isolated in Ife? It was your operational base across Africa wasn't it?

That is largely correct. I was of course closely associated with the research effort and that took up much of my time but it is true that I also had a roving commission. Within the nine months I was there, and in the subsequent three months based in Nairobi, I travelled around much of Africa making contacts with almost every country.

To Ghana alone I travelled, usually by car, on several occasions, partly cementing the arrangements between the University of Ghana and the emerging Regional Institute for Population Studies (RIPS)¹⁸ (it being both part of the University, but separate to the Demographic Unit operating out of the Sociology Department that I had previously belonged to, and partly an autonomous agency under UNFPA funding) and in my role as external examiner of both the University and RIPS.

¹⁸ Regional Institute for Population Studies (RIPS) was established in 1972 jointly by the United Nations in partnership with the Government of Ghana and was located at the University of Ghana. It was the regional centre for the teaching and research training, at post-graduate level, of population studies for the English-speaking countries of Africa. The Institute received funding from UNFPA until 1999 when it withdrew.

I got to know Cotonou in Dahomey as well, partly as a stopover point to and from Ghana but mainly by having agreed to undertake a report on the country's population for the UN along with Etienne van de Walle. Various stays at the *Hotel de la Plage* in Cotonou, overlooking the Atlantic Ocean as it would if it were in Cannes or Nice, intrigued the kids as British West Africa never showed that flair for location that the French habitually display. But more than that, at the time mercy and munitions flights to Biafra operated out of Cotonou (and Fernando Po and Abidjan).

Cotonou, as might be expected, filled up with shadowy people and shadowy people almost invariably insist on staying in the best hotels in town. That way spies never really have much difficulty in keeping track of each other but you might have thought this would reduce the quality of their spy craft. Be that as it may, the hotel was intriguing for the kids who took to reading Graham Greene to keep up with the atmosphere. Not surprisingly, the hotel had also featured centrally in the filming of Graham Greene's book, *The Comedians* filmed there in 1967. The film's crucial scene, of the execution of the main character, occurred outside Bruce and Grahame's bedroom door. Supposedly based on Papa Doc's Haiti, Cotonou provided a rather suitable surrogate. By 1969 it had probably slid even further into paranoia, and was even closer to the Haiti it had stood-in for two years earlier.

On one particular night we and Etienne made our way across the border from Nigeria rather later than we had intended and it was after 10 pm when we crossed. It is not sensible to cross African borders at night as too many people are trigger happy and suspicious. On this occasion, after the usual difficulties we were let through. After we had pulled out, Etienne noted that the soldiers had said to each other in Africanised French that these whites were uncommonly brave people. While I tended to agree we thought nothing further of it. By midnight we were in Cotonou which was curiously empty. The Hotel too was ominously silent but eventually a head appeared from behind the desk and ushered us quickly in. Apparently a coup was underway. For the next two days we waited to see who emerged as the government. On the third day the old Minister of Health invited us to meet with him and nothing further was ever said of that particular coup attempt.

Intrigue in Cotonou had brought with it a motley crew of people, two of whom were a couple who were friends of Bruce Chatwin, the esteemed novelist and travel writer. But first, they had persuaded the film producers of *The Comedians* to use the *Hotel de la Plage* and Cotonou as the location for the filming of *Haiti*. Subsequently, they encouraged Chatwin to visit and they drew his attention to the cultural associations between slavery at Ouidah and the arrival of those slaves at Bahia in Brazil. It was upon this trade and the connections between each end that his book explores. In 1972 Chatwin visited Cotonou, its old slave port at Porto Novo and Ouidah, the Portuguese enclave, operating from 1721 (and it remained Portuguese until 1961 when, following the example of India with regard to Pondicherry and Goa, Dahomey was emboldened to overrun the Ouidah enclave). In 1980 Chatwin published his book, *The Viceroy of Ouidah*¹⁹, which in 1987 became the basis for Werner Herzog's film *Cobra Verde*.

¹⁹ The book was described by Nicholas Shakespeare, Chatwin's great friend and biographer, as 'a rococo piece of candyfloss.'

We visited Ouidah a few miles to the west of Cotonou and were intrigued that a museum had by then been set up to capture the experience of Ouidah and the slave trade. Incorporated into the exhibits was a sad old television set which had been dumped by the departing Portuguese upon their expulsion in 1961. They destroyed all their belongings on being evicted. The presence of the television though was curious as West Africa at that time had no television transmission. By 1961 Ouidah had been reduced to a mere five acres of land and had only two official residents. It was curious to think of them sitting in a room watching a dysfunctional television.

As with Ouidah, Porto Novo lies only a few miles from Cotonou but on the other side, a little inland, on the edge of a large lagoon in which ships sheltered. It is the official capital of Dahomey, now called Benin, where the national legislature sits, but all government activity actually takes place in Cotonou. Porto Novo was the old slave port for the French and before them the Portuguese. It was the seat of royalty for a tributary tribe of the Yorubas but subsequently was incorporated into the Kingdom of Dahomey. Even so, it continued to retain its claims to having an ongoing royal status until 1976. With the emancipation of slaves in Brazil, many freed slaves returned to Porto Novo to live (as also happened in Monrovia and Freetown with returning streams from the United States and Britain respectively). So today Porto Novo's architecture echoes Brazil, but is ageing, mouldy and enfeebled. It has every bit the feeling of decaying Portuguese colonialism.

Behind the ports of the Slave Coast lay the Kingdom of Dahomey, lying about 100 miles inland from the ports. Its palace was at Abomey with its slave prisons, royal tombs, torture chambers and above all, the Praetorian Guard, famous for being all female, the 'Dahomey Amazons'²⁰. It was ruled as a military state and opponents, especially their warring neighbours, when captured, were sold through Porto Novo or Ouidah to the slave traders. The old kingdom existed between 1695 and 1900 when the French annexed the territory. It is also said to be the ancestral heartland of Voodoo²¹.



With Mick and Norma at the Asian Population Conference, in Delhi, December 1962

²⁰ According to Sir Richard Burton, 'the officers were decidedly chosen for the size of their bottoms'.

²¹ However, the claim is somewhat dubious as the Kingdom of Dahomey actually shared the general *juju* beliefs that can be found in other West African countries, and Voodoo probably had more to do with the belief system of the Yoruba – who in actuality made up most of the slaves who were transmitted – than their captors and Voodoo was in reality an evolving belief system arising in the Caribbean, partly in conjunction with ideas derived from Christianity.

Then you went to Kenya for a couple of months. Then where?

Well, in early 1970 I returned to ANU and took up the position of head of the Demography Department. Mick Borrie had by then stood aside from being head of department (and, it is worth remembering, his position had been, upon creation, the first Chair of Demography anywhere in the world) to chair the National Population Inquiry (although he retained the designation of Professor of Demography until 1978). When I arrived back to take up the position Norma McArthur was the acting head.

At the end of 1971 you went to war torn Nsukka to give demography courses. Any observations?

I did not have much time. I was at this stage heading the Demography Department at ANU. But wanting to maintain connections with Nigeria, I agreed to teach a crash course in demography at Nsukka in November and December of 1971. Nsukka was then recovering from the civil war which had devastated the university. Nsukka had fallen early in the war but, in consequence, the staff and student body had either retreated with the Biafran forces further into the homeland or else, finding themselves on the Nigerian side of the offensive, had set off for safer environs elsewhere in Nigeria. As I noted earlier, many gravitated to Ibadan and some to Ife. Nsukka was struggling to re-establish itself or indeed to have staff who could teach some courses. Some eminent staff members were now drifting back to their positions at Nsukka. So courses struggled to be taught. To overcome some of these problems, in six weeks I covered a year's worth of courses on demography. Quite a high proportion of my students had been fighting previously on the Biafran side shortly before.

As well as that, in parallel, the Vice-Chancellor and I and a third member met most days to form an ongoing selection committee to regularise and appoint suitable staff to positions in the university to get it back on its feet.

Nsukka struggled with its legacy. It had been the hotbed of Ibo activism, virtually defining the idea of a breakaway Biafran nationalist state before the war. This spirit has been captured by the young Nigerian author, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in her novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* in which she describes the intellectual ferment at Nsukka leading up to the declaration of Ibo independence. At social gatherings in Nsukka in the early sixties her main character articulates:

"I am Nigerian because a white man created Nigeria and gave me that identity. I am black because the white man constructed black to be as different as possible from his white. But I was Igbo before the white man came."

Four years after Nsukka had passed into the hands of the Federal forces there were still many war damaged buildings at the university, not surprisingly given that the priority was the prosecution of the war itself rather than any repair effort. However, the damage extended to the infrastructure that was needed for people to be able to feed themselves. Nsukka lies close to the point where the forest gives way to the open plains and, as forest or as cleared land, it is dryer than appearance might suggest. In order for it to be settled

intensively it had needed to lay down a system of irrigation, much of it by piping water. In that sense forest cultivation is not the traditional subsistence farming that it is often presumed to be. Agriculture in the developing world is as innovative, in its own way, as it is in the developed world. This whole system collapsed during the war and could not be got to work. The house which we were provided was on cleared land of the campus, edged by forest – clearance delineating the campus – and the forest around seemed impenetrable. The university had received priority treatment and had in fact secured its own water supply but the peoples of the forest had not been so fortunate. In consequence, for domestic purposes as much as maintaining food crops, a surreptitious supply of people would endlessly sneak out of the forest with buckets and fill containers with water from our back garden tap. We hoped that this would help their recovery, but there were greater problems arising from war. To have a healthy harvest you need healthy seed stock but these were mostly eaten in desperation and they could not readily be replaced.

In the forest not very far from our house you could wander down forest paths into seeming emptiness only to find multitudes of people lurking and living everywhere. It was not an empty void. There too, hidden amongst the trees, were spiritualist totems or shrines to the traditionalist gods/spirits in a land which is astonishingly Christian in its beliefs and demonstrative in terms of its practice of Christianity. But these were active totems and they have not been superseded by Jehovah. Rather, they are part of the forest and still part of its people's lives, as indeed they always have been, and they sit comfortably alongside Christian beliefs.

During my stay at Nsukka, we headed into the heartland of what had been Biafra to get to Calabar on the coast. On the way there was considerable evidence of recent destruction, best exemplified by travelling down the highway towards Enugu where at one point the road was widened to accommodate the landing of aeroplanes from Sao Tome and Cotonou which sought to break the sanctions imposed by the Nigerian forces in the civil war. Travelling along this temporary airstrip brought back the war as wrecked aircraft littered the sides of our route as if we were in a Hollywood movie set. Now into the heart of the old Biafra, almost two years after the War had ended, we were reminded constantly of the human cost with many people, especially children, still very thin and displaying all the signs of malnourishment. And hardly a building escaped some firepower damage.

We arrived in Calabar, on New Year's Eve at the end of 1971, by a very large and ancient dugout canoe with a brand new outboard motor recently attached, wending our way through the channels and swamps of the Cross and Calabar River deltas. As far back as the 16th century, Calabar had been the traditional trading port of the Bay of Benin on the old Slave Coast, shipping both slaves and palm oil with equal enthusiasm. It was Britain's principal port and beachhead in Nigeria until the colonial administration was moved to Lagos in 1915. It was famous for its extraordinarily high European death rate before quinine was introduced. So high, it was said, that the average European lasted about six months. Malarial fever, yellow fever, diarrhoea and typhoid were ever present in the nineteenth century.

Into this stepped a young Scottish Presbyterian woman missionary of enormous zeal. She was Mary Slessor, born in 1848, started her working life as a Scottish factory girl, was girded

into missionary work by the death of Livingstone in 1874, and arrived in Calabar in 1876. She had red hair, blue eyes and a strong Dundee accent and, although petite, she stood out from the crowd. Here in Calabar there was always a shortage of missionaries as they so frequently perished. Being formidable, she did not. She survived, although suffering bouts of fever, and converted and trekked throughout lands of the Efik and Ibo changing their ways of life, until finally she met her death in 1915. But in the meantime, when southern Nigeria became a British Protectorate, she was made the first ever female Magistrate in the British Empire, thus allowing her to mix God's and the Queen's work seamlessly together. After a lifetime of devoted missionising, she was known as 'the White Queen of Calabar' and is still revered in southeast Nigeria today. She was perhaps more of an anthropologist than a missionary and always ate local food rather than imported missionary foodstuffs. Needless to say, in Calabar, I went in search of her grave which, from a commanding view, looks down upon Calabar and out across to the Cross River beyond.

Our return journey from Calabar that night was a moonlit boat ride back across the now silvery river channels wending their way through dense dark sweltering jungle and swamp, overhung with huge boughs, the shadows of which plunged us into complete darkness where only the eyes of the African crew could be discerned. In this heart of darkness, I suddenly felt deeply insecure about the considerable amount of research funds that I had secreted on my body. And indeed, on paying the boatman nervously, I dropped the wad of notes in the dark. But I scooped up the wad, which was apparently not noted, and my apprehension proved to be unfounded, and good cheer accompanied our departure for the return trip to Nsukka. While the journey into Calabar felt a little like *Sanders of the River*, the return trip had a wondrous sensory quality coupled with a somewhat Conradian metaphysical feel to it.

In late 1969, Chinua Achebe²² had returned to Nsukka, having toured the world on behalf of the Biafran cause, but was now confined to Nigeria by having his passport revoked. During our stay at Nsukka he was never actually present, however, I had occasion to attend the granting of an honorary doctorate to 'Zik'²³, the legendary first Governor-General of Nigeria

²² Chinua Achebe (1930 – 2013) was a Nigerian novelist, poet and critic whose first novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) is the most widely read book in modern African literature and appears on most lists of the world's great literature.

²³ Nnamdi Azikiwe (1904-1996). He was an Ibo of great note and carried forward, along with Nkrumah, the struggle for African independence. On the declaration of cession by Biafra he supported his own people but half way through the war changed sides to advocate a cessation to the hostilities. For this he was brought back into the fold and when hostilities ceased he was again greatly honoured for his role in creating the new unified Nigeria. He was showered with honorary degrees but that bestowed by the University of Lagos had considerable prestige as the full weight of the Federal Government was placed upon it, partly as a symbolic gesture of forgiveness to the Ibos. The nations of the world were invited to attend and considerable diplomatic pressure accompanied the invitations. At the ceremony I represented Australia and the High Commission's car collected the family in Nsukka and brought us to Lagos for the conferring. In the heat of the Lagos sun, for four hours we sat and paid our respects while soldiers, trigger happy with machine guns, maintained every semblance of order among the somewhat disgruntled students. Haile Selassie, Emperor of Ethiopia, Lion of Judah, Ras Tafari (to Rastafarians), direct descendant of the Queen of Sheba (from her liaison with King Solomon) was also conferred an honorary doctorate and gave a lengthy speech in Amharic – a language few present understood. But while his presence brought International prestige to the occasion, and no doubt the attendance of some extra guests, mainly from the Caribbean, his presence at the conferring ceremony was entirely secondary to that of Zik in the eyes of the Government and all Nigeria.

on Independence and thereafter its first largely ceremonial President on Nigeria becoming a republic. We stayed in the Ford Foundation Guest house on Ikoyi Island in Lagos. The only other guest was Achebe, so over meals we discussed what was wrong with *Mr Johnson* and what was racist about Joseph Conrad as he formulated his ideas. He was great fun and displayed an African passion that illuminated all his writings.

A final thought?

I should say something about travelling around the rest of Africa, East Africa, Central Africa and Southern Africa, particularly in 1969, while the Civil War was raging. However, it can wait for another occasion. I'll just say one thing, perhaps two things, as they bear on the experience of living in Nigeria.

East Africa, as seen mainly from Nairobi, lacked the confidence of Nigeria and for that matter, anywhere in West Africa. This was partly a question of race relations. Kenya was not far removed from the Mau Mau and its bitter struggle for Independence. And the colonising race was present in a way that was unimaginable in West Africa (and they retained much economic power despite the arrival of Independence). But this lack of confidence was also somewhat true of Uganda and Tanzania as well. All three countries had a further racial issue with the movement of Asians into those colonies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and this further complicated their politics.

However, the further south we went the more obvious the racial and political tensions were, and these impacted on our own interpersonal relations with people. There was always an underlying unease and wariness present. In those days, of course, Zimbabwe was still Southern Rhodesia and governed for the continuance of white dominance. South Africa was even more so. Zambia and Malawi remained very nervous of their neighbours²⁴. All these countries had been reading endlessly in their newspapers about the Nigerian Civil War and were astounded that we could continue to live in such conditions. But the truth was that Nigeria, even in the midst of the Civil War, was a much more comfortable society to live in than those countries with an unresolved politic revolving around the issues of race and self-determination. One very important element of that was that despite the genuine horrors of war, especially civil war, self-confidence remained high amongst the people and their leaders (and this had nothing to do with which side would be the eventual victor). Eventually, with the conclusion of the war, a consensus arose that was embraced by virtually all and thereafter there were relatively few unresolved tensions or bitterness remaining. This fundamental confidence, despite all else going on, gave Nigeria a sense of resilience, and lacking enmity, that ensured that it remained a comfortable country to live in.

My second observation is that the history of higher education in Tropical Africa almost entirely explains the degree of subsequent confidence. West Africa developed universities because it was a necessity to train some of its inhabitants to the point where they could

²⁴ As well they might. Both Zambia and Malawi had only gained Independence in 1964 amidst the breakup of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, in a step aimed at retaining white leverage in Southern Rhodesia (which led to Ian Smith declaring Unilateral Independence from Britain in 1965 and establishing a segregated state under white supremacist control).

administer their own countries. No doubt the Second World War helped shape the policy thinking of the Asquith Commission. But it is notable that university colleges, and later universities, succeeded because it was widely recognised that good tertiary level education was going to be a requirement for successful self-governing colonies leading on to Independence.

In East Africa there was never this amount of commitment. Apart from there being only Makerere (initially), the university college there did not lead to the robust nationalism that the West African colonies had through each having their own institution. The further south in Africa you travelled, the more determined were the colonial rulers to limit the quality, quantity and broadness of the education available so that in the Bantustans the curricula had to reflect the direct interests of the government. Its inadequacy was deliberate and it was not simply a matter of their colleges being segregated. To some degree West Africa succeeded because planning for self-determination arose earlier, was embraced more heartily and was geared to be of equivalent standard to that produced in Britain or France.