

**THE PAINS AND PLEASURE OF PIONEERING: REFLECTIONS ON OGUN STATE
UNIVERSITY, AGO-IWOYE, 1984-87**

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My Lords Spiritual and Temporal, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Preamble

I am highly honoured to be invited to address this reunion meeting of alumni of the Ogun State University, Ago-Iwoye, now known as Olabisi Onabanjo University, where I started my career as a University teacher and researcher in 1984. I wish to thank Morakinyo Akinleye, who has been in touch with me for several years now, long after I left OSU, for facilitating my participation in this historic event. This is a delightful homecoming for me since we are assembled here to celebrate the great accomplishments of a pace-setting Nigerian University. Regrettably, but inevitably, we have lost a few of our colleagues, both staff and students. I request that we pause for a moment to honour their memory/ As we do so, those of us who are alive have cause to thank God for His mercies and grace. One benefit of this meeting is that old feuds and animosities can be resolved once and for all - because time may not heal all wounds – so we can turn the page and move on. While I nurse no animosities against any of my old colleagues and students, I plead that those who were offended by whatever I did or said while at OSU should find the grace to forgive now and for all time.

This presentation is largely but not entirely about my personal experience at OSU. As such, it is inevitable that constant reference will be made to my short but eventful stint there.

Paying Tribute: Personalities and Milestones

For the record, I assumed duty at OSU (then at the temporary site, Ago-Iwoye) on May 2, 1984, almost two years into my Doctoral programme at the University of Ibadan. I had been encouraged to start a career at OSU by my classmate, Robert Akintimehin, and our teacher in the M.A. Class of 1981/82, the late Professor J.A. Atanda. I am indebted to them, to the Heads of Department under whom I served, Mr. M.A. Kwamena-Poh and the late Dr. S.O. Babayemi, who became the *Olufi* of Gbogan in Osun State, and, indeed, all my former colleagues and students at Ijebu-Igbo for making my stay at OSU the generally nice time that it was. I am deeply grateful to my childhood friend, Francis Sunday Akinsola, for accommodating me for some months at Ijebu-Ode before I got my own apartment at Ijebu-Igbo.

My peaceful stay at Ijebu-Igbo, where our Faculty was domiciled from the 1984/85 session, was facilitated by the following persons – Bola Talabi, my student and friend, who introduced me to the late Alhaja Ariyalo Junaid, who in turn got her younger brother, the late Alhaji S.S. Olaiya Labaeka, to give me a furnished flat in his compound with free water and electricity supplies! I will always appreciate their great kindness and generosity. I made a number of great friends at OSU, including the young Dr. Lekan Oyegoke, pioneer editor of the Faculty journal, **Oye: Ogun Journal of Arts**, and, much later, Professor of English, Mrs Desola Akin-Alade (nee Afolabi), a strong moral influence at the time, who was a year behind me in graduate school at Ibadan, S.A. Tella (now Professor and former Vice-Chancellor, Crescent University), Jasiliu Are Kadiri, Mrs Dayo Adeeko, Mrs Moji Jayebo (nee Onadipe), Mrs Egun Oduwole (nee Womiloju), Akin Onigbinde, and other members of our Study Bank Group, Tunde Odunlami, and my students, especially the aforementioned Bola Talabi, Dipo Ogunbomehin (later Olubomehin), Muyiwa Okuseinde, Lanre Davies and J.M. Ilori. It was in Ilori's room that I read a book from which I got the title of my first journal article (on "class taxation"), which appeared in **Oye**, Volume 1, 1988, by which time I had left for the University of Lagos.

The Pains and Pleasant Memories of Pioneering

I have good memories of my days at Ijebu-Igbo, which was made the domicile of the Faculties of Arts and Social and Management Sciences (SMS) soon after I assumed duty in 1984. As members of the pioneering generation would recall, we were crammed into the back section of Abusi Odumare secondary school, with which we co-existed for the time I was there. We shared partitioned offices and our facilities were generally rudimentary. But the compensation was in the quality of staff and students, and the vibrant intellectual ambience. We certainly had the best possible crop of Professors and other senior lecturers, drawn from the older Universities – Ibadan, Ile-Ife and Lagos. We younger ones learnt at their feet. I recall that our Faculty, under the capable leadership of the late Professor Oyin Ogunba, held regular staff

seminars at which the then Segun Rufai (now a Pastor) and I presented three and two papers, respectively, within a space of two years. This was as much a reflection of the scholarly capability of the young lecturers as it was of the emphasis of the institution on research and academic publishing. I was promoted to the rank of Lecturer II in 1986 with two publications and secured the same rank with three publications at the University of Lagos only a year later. Most of us did not have the requisite PhD degree but some did earn the degree even before I left in 1987. But we were all engaged in one intellectual activity or another. There was no competition over the attire or quality of cars owned by any of us. We were young and idealistic, committed to scholarship and our careers. Indeed, a number of us from the two Faculties at Ijebu-Igbo and the Faculty of Education at Ago-Iwoye – under the coordinating leadership of Akin Onigbinde - established the Study Bank, a think tank on which platform we presented papers and discussed matters of common interest. The paper I presented on cultural nationalism was published in a journal in 1989, and was later revised and upgraded into a chapter in a book after I got to the University of Lagos. Meanwhile, I was involved in plans to establish a Faculty journal, which materialized after my departure. I am glad that my paper appeared in the maiden issue of the journal in 1988. Such was life at OSU, Ijebu-Igbo campus before I relocated in September 1987.

Let me highlight some of the enduring pleasures of my stint at the Ogun State University. First, I met and was inspired by people of high intellect and quality – most notably, Professors Oyin Ogunba and Layi Erinoso. Unfortunately, several of the pioneer staff have passed on – such as Jossy Achilike, M.I. Alawiye (both members of the Study Bank) and Professor E. Ade Odumuyiwa. Second, I imbibed the culture of writing academic papers for publication, which subsequently propelled me to great academic heights in later years. I left OSU with three publications in 1987 but became Professor with 30 in 1998, and now have over 100 in print. Third, I was blessed with a crop of bright students in History, who even then were my research assistants and intellectual critics. Muyiwa Okuseinde helped in collecting material from the archives in Kaduna during his national youth service. Lanre Davies did even more as my virtual collaborator on research projects in later years. Both of them and Dipo Olubomehin actually read and commented on my draft papers. In addition to those whose projects I supervised at OSU, Davies also completed his PhD at the University of Lagos under my supervision. In 2001, Olubomehin requested me to contribute a chapter in his book on Historiography, an assignment that I have not replicated for anyone of his generation but which I undertook because of the respect that I had and still have for his scholarship.

A Plea for Patriotic Intervention: Word for OSU Alumni

Life at OSU was not a bed of roses. We were all young and exuberant, and inevitably made moral and other mistakes. Happily, we have all moved on after life-transforming encounters. But the injury that

continues to fester is the unmistakable slide of OSU (or, OOU, as it is now called) since the 1990s. Reports of criminal activities by gangs of students in so-called cults, which intensified during the past decade, broke the hearts of lovers of that great institution. Please, recall that our Medical School and Law Faculty rated among the best in Nigeria in the late 1980s and early 1990s. We were known for our academic prowess and decorum. All that has been lost but the situation is not beyond redemption.

I commend the initiative of this or any other group of OSU alumni to salvage the reputation of the institution. Though I have some misgivings about the formation of social and pressure groups generally, I want to cast my lot with this initiative. I will only plead that organizers of this forum be driven by altruism and seek to make the group inclusive so that all hands can be on deck. Everyone should come together to find ways of intervening to combat the challenges facing your alma mater. There is no other school that you call your alma mater. I respectfully suggest that your intervention be collaborative and multi-pronged: at the levels of the Department, Faculty/College and the University. You would need to engage with **all** stakeholders to find a common ground for positive action. While you are at it, I will add the following admonitions. First, do not hide your identity or deny your alma mater. Do not dump her for the other schools, which are probably more renowned, where you acquired higher or more glamorous degrees. As an example, I am a UNN man first and last, despite obtaining the MA and PhD from UI. So, be proud of OSU/OOU and be ready to make the necessary sacrifice for her resurgence. Second, be a role model; let people know the school through your good works and reputation. To cite another personal example, I got to know Jesus Christ through the change that I perceived in a younger cousin. Third, consider nothing too much or too little to give or do to make OSU/OOU great again. Fourth, engage with your fellow alumni who are members of staff of the institution, not least the likes of Professor Wale Are Olaitan, the Vice-Chancellor, and Dr. Dipo Olubomehin, Dr. Lanre Davies and Dr. Wale Salami, all members of the historic 1986 set. Their insider perspective will enrich your joint efforts. Finally, remain positive and focused. Never give up!

I conclude by commending you all to God and pray that your labour will not be in vain. I wish everyone Merry Christmas and Happy New Year in advance.

Long live OSU/OOU Alumni! Long live OSU/OOU!! Long live the Federal Republic of Nigeria!!!

Thank you and God bless.