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**Breaking Barriers: Pioneer Women Elite at University College, Ibadan,  
1948–1960**

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**Breaking Barriers: Pioneer Women Elite at University College, Ibadan,  
1948–1960**

**by**

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## **Dedication**

For Andrew and Elliot.

## **Abstract**

### **Breaking Barriers: Pioneer Women Elite at University College, Ibadan, 1948–1960**

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Between 1948 and 1960, less than one hundred women attended Nigeria's first degree-granting university, then called University College, Ibadan. Women's access to the school was dictated by both their class and gender. Conversely, women's access to an elite education impacted conceptions of class and gender. In terms of class formation, the university setting reinforced the distinction between elite and the everyday woman in Nigeria. With regards to gender ideology, the colonial university became a site of epistemological confluence where women mediated multiple and shifting expectations of womanhood. This paper highlights the lives and work of some of these women pioneers at University College, Ibadan. It begins to trace the nature of the spaces in which the women operated and the people with whom they may have come into contact. These experiences and encounters shaped the lives of the women themselves, as well as impacting the nature of women's leadership in early independent Nigeria. Ultimately, the women's time at

University College, Ibadan, facilitated a changing relationship between elite womanhood and knowledge production on the eve of Nigerian independence.

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## **Chapter 1: Breaking Barriers: Pioneer Women Elite at University College, Ibadan, 1948–1960**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Class and gender dictated access to tertiary education in colonial Nigeria, thereby impacting women's experiences in the Nigerian school system. Only a select few women had access to Nigeria's first university, then called University College, Ibadan (UCI), between 1948 and 1960. Those select few came into contact with a group of people, spaces, and ideas, the combination of which constituted a unique education. Conversely, tertiary education impacted conceptions of class and gender. In terms of class formation, the university space reinforced the distinction between the elite and the everyday woman in Nigeria. With regards to gender ideology, the colonial university was a site of epistemological confluence where women mediated multiple and shifting expectations of womanhood, those both culturally-inherited and colonially-imposed. Ultimately, the women's experiences helped facilitate a changing relationship between elite womanhood and knowledge production on the eve of Nigerian independence.

In the colonial university space, students were uniquely poised to negotiate the value of Western institutionalized forms of knowledge. In his seminal essay, "On Violence", Frantz Fanon argues: "In order to assimilate the culture of the oppressor and venture into his fold, the colonized subject has had to pawn some of his own intellectual possessions. For instance, one of the things he has had to assimilate is the way the



colonialist bourgeoisie thinks.”<sup>1</sup> This notion of intellectual possession and dispossession is elaborated in Cheikh Hamidou Kane’s novel, *L’Aventure ambiguë* (1961). The novel asks, “[C]an one learn *this* without forgetting *that*, and is what one learns worth what one forgets?”<sup>2</sup> The university space at Ibadan may not have induced as dramatic an epistemological rupture as the above quotes suggest; yet, the history of education in West Africa, and Nigeria specifically, reveals the extent to which English epistemology pervaded the colonial space, especially within elite circles. The rare privilege that was access to the production of such knowledge in the university space gave one early woman student at Ibadan the impression that she was “rubbing minds with the best brains in the world.”<sup>3</sup> Her impression of intellectual and cultural exchange—that minds were “rubbing”, rather than engaging in stark departure from indigenous forms of knowledge in exchange for colonial modes of thought—proves a helpful illustration of the experience and outcome of university education among the early woman students at University College, Ibadan.

Examining one Ibadan student Mabel Segun’s memoirs, written as children’s stories in *My Father’s Daughter* (1965) and *My Mother’s Daughter* (1987), can reveal the extent to which graduates of Ibadan selectively retained their native intellectual culture while also imbibing the useful elements of the colonialists’. Where scientific knowledge,

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<sup>1</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 13.

<sup>2</sup> Cheikh Hamidou Kane, *Ambiguous Adventure*, trans. Katherine Woods (London: Heinemann, 1972), 34. For making me aware of this novel and its central questions, I am indebted to Professor Malami Buba and his keynote address, “Literature, Language and the Pursuit of Knowledge”, presented at the conference *Conceptualizing African Epistemologies: Subaltern and Vernacular Ways of Knowing*, October 3, 2015, The University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>3</sup> Adetowun Ogunseye, “Reminiscences of a Foundation Student/Foundation Staff of a Department”, in *Ibadan at Fifty*, 375.

for instance, provides a more dispassionate explanation for natural occurrences or illnesses and has greater potential to protect against bodily harm, mythological interpretations of nature nonetheless offer an opportunity to cultivate a collective moral compass by which members of a community can relate to one another. Through her memoirs, Segun helps her readers reflect on the value of these different epistemological approaches. While Segun's memoirs represent the thoughts and efforts of only one of the early women students at University College, Ibadan, Segun shared her time at the school with several dozen other women of comparable background. Recorded interviews, written reports, and published histories of University College, Ibadan, written from the perspective of its students, faculty, and founders, reveal a diversity of experiences at Ibadan. Even so, it becomes apparent that, like alumnus Registrar Samuel J. Okudu so eloquently expresses in his recollections of Ibadan, as students passed through the university college, so too did the university college pass through them.<sup>4</sup>

### **PIONEER WOMEN ELITE**

In 1942, the colonial territory of Nigeria had an estimated population of 28 million. Of that 28 million, there were a reported 7472 boys and 638 girls attending formal secondary schools.<sup>5</sup> Despite low numbers of students in these schools, there was a demand for a university in Nigeria among the educated elite. The colonial government founded

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<sup>4</sup> S. J. Okudu, "Diary of an Alumnus Registrar", in *Ibadan Voices*, edited by T. N. Tamuno (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1981), 170.

<sup>5</sup> John T. Saunders, *University College Ibadan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960) 39, 40.

Nigeria's first university, then known as University College, Ibadan, in 1948. Between 1948 and 1959, Ibadan had admitted a reported 1575 young men and 68 young women.<sup>6</sup> These young women came from Nigeria's most elite families—often those who could afford to send not only their boy children through primary, secondary, and tertiary schools but also their girl children.<sup>7</sup> Commonly, the women's parents themselves had advanced through mission or colonial schools. Many had undertaken secondary or tertiary education at elite schools in Nigeria or abroad and returned to fill enviable positions as colonial agents and teachers in mission and colonial schools. In an interview with Robert Wren (1985), Flora Nwapa, explained:

For the four years I spent there [at UCI] we had just 28 women undergraduates. At the time, it was only those advanced set families who thought it wise and beneficial to send their daughters to school [...] My aunt, whom I've been talking about went to Glasgow University in Scotland. It was just obvious that I should take to her footsteps. Other girls from the eastern part of Nigeria had educated parents.<sup>8</sup>

Nwapa's aunt had returned from Scotland to teach at Archdeacon Crowder Memorial Girl's School near Port Harcourt, one of the most prestigious boarding schools available to girls at the time. Nwapa did indeed follow her aunt's example, eventually graduating from

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<sup>6</sup> These numbers may not be exact. In "Appendix V: Register of Undergraduates", Saunders published a list of students who attended Ibadan between 1948 and 1960. For every woman student, there is a note by her name to signify gender, either "(Miss)" or "(Mrs)". However, there is at least one instance in which a woman student is listed without a note by her name: "F. M. N. Nwapa" (most likely Flora Nwapa, who attended Ibadan during this time and is not listed elsewhere in Saunders' list). Nonetheless, the numbers reflect a real disparity between women and men students at Ibadan, as well as between university students and the general population in Nigeria more broadly. Saunders, *University College Ibadan*, 195 – 206.

<sup>7</sup> McIntosh, *Yoruba Women*, 69. See also Mann, *Marrying Well*.

<sup>8</sup> Flora Nwapa, quoted in Wren, *Magical Years*, 75.

Edinburgh University, becoming an educationist, and earning recognition as Nigeria's first woman novelist published in Britain.

Before enrolling at University College, Ibadan, Nwapa had attended Archdeacon Crowder Memorial Girl's School, or Elelenwa Girl's School for short. The school boasted several distinguished women faculty, including British and Nigerian women who had been educated abroad at Oxford, Cambridge, Achimota College in Ghana, and more locally at United Missionary College, Ibadan. Other women who attended University College, Ibadan, between 1948 and 1960 hailed from similarly noteworthy families. Minji Karibo (later Mrs. Ateli) came from a well-educated family in Old Port Harcourt and attended what was at the time Nigeria's best secondary school for girls, Queen's College, Lagos. Her father before her had attended King's College, Lagos, an exclusive secondary school established for the sons of Nigerian elite. The advanced curriculum at Queen's College allowed Karibo to bypass the preliminary course upon her enrollment at University College, Ibadan—an opportunity not afforded many of the men students who had attended less prestigious secondary schools. Wren suggests of Karibo: “If she was typical of the hundred women who lived at Queen Elizabeth Hall [women's dormitory on Ibadan's campus], then she proves, even better than Flora Nwapa, the class differentiation Obiachina had told me about.”<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, Mabel Segun (née Imoukheude), Yetunde Esan (later Chief Mrs. Omisade), and Abiodun Omolara Ogundipe (later Professor Molaria Ogundipe) enjoyed

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<sup>9</sup> Notably, Chinua Achebe, Elechi Amadi, John Ekwerre, and J. P. Clark were among the names listed by Wren as “village boys”, whose “bush” schools did not enable them to bypass the compulsory first-year course. Wren, *Magical Years*, 87.

access to distinguished secondary education. Segun graduated from the oldest girl's school in Nigeria, C.M.S. Girls' School, Lagos, before proceeding to become one of the most prominent women students of her generation at University College, Ibadan. Esan arrived at Ibadan with the support of a particularly distinguished family. Her grandfather had been fifth in line for the position of *Olubadan* (king) of Ibadan, her grandmother a self-made businesswoman popularly referred to among Ibadan Yoruba as *Iya Gbogbo* (Mother of All).<sup>10</sup> Esan's mother was Wuraola Esan, a distinguished teacher, political activist, and later *Iyalode* (woman chief) of Ibadan, whose primary ambition was to improve education, literacy, and opportunities for women and girls.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, Ogundipe's mother was a teacher's college professor, whom Ogundipe described as "a practitioner of many of the radical ideas of the Victorian period about women [...] Her politics can be described in terms of her commitment to the emancipation of women within a patriarchal context."<sup>12</sup>

Felicia Adetowun Ogunseye (née Banjo), likewise, had attained a high level of education before enrolling at the University College. She attended Yaba Higher College in Lagos along with three other women. Yaba was the only higher education available in Nigeria prior to 1948. When UCI opened its doors, Ogunseye was invited to become one of Ibadan's "foundation students", along with her Yaba women peers, Wura Sodipe and Grace Yoloye. They joined two other women students at Ibadan to become the first five

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<sup>10</sup> Adeoti, "Wuraola Esan", 82–83.

<sup>11</sup> Adeoti, "Wuraola Esan", 84–85; McIntosh, *Yoruba Women*, 225, 235, 238; Ighodaro, *A Life of Service*, 95.

<sup>12</sup> Molara Ogundipe, quoted in "Desiree Lewis talks to Molara Ogundipe", *Feminist Africa*.

female enrollees.<sup>13</sup> Ogunseye describes her father as a “very well-informed civil servant”, whom she “worked hard to please [...] and prove that a female student could survive and hold her own there [at Yaba].”<sup>14</sup> Her father’s position in the colonial government and his regard for formal education served as a springboard for her access to and efforts at the University College. Shortly after leaving UCI to attend Cambridge University, Ogunseye returned to the university college as wife of Ayo Ogunseye, the newly appointed Deputy Director of Extramural Studies of the university college in 1953. She herself became a member of the staff in 1958, when she was tasked by the school’s librarian to organize the library map collection and later design the program for the budding Library School.<sup>15</sup> She became the school’s first Nigerian woman professor when she was appointed to the faculty of the Department of Library Studies in 1970 and later the first Nigerian woman Dean of Education in 1975.

From millions of Nigerians, these women and their select few peers were certainly set apart by their educational achievements and their position as students at the colonial territory’s first university. Their years at the school, the method of education they encountered, the expatriate staff, the intellectual opportunities, and the cultural milieu developed within its walls served to solidify the barrier between the women of UCI and those of the rest of the country. It would also position them to become leaders in a new Nigeria upon its independence in 1960.

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<sup>13</sup> Ogunseye, “Reminiscences of a Foundation Student/Foundation Staff of a Department”, in *Ibadan at Fifty*, 368-269.

<sup>14</sup> Ogunseye, “Reminiscences”, 368.

<sup>15</sup> Ogunseye, “Reminiscences”, 380.

## EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

The women enrolled at University College, Ibadan, during a period of rapid growth for girls' education. In the early colonial years, parents had little incentive to enroll their daughters in school. The costs of education were often high, the curriculum focused on domestic training, and the expectation was that girls would become good Christian wives and mothers.<sup>16</sup> By the early 20th-century, Victorian domestic ideology had permeated elite society and dictated a division of labor between men (public) and women (domestic). Therefore, parents confronted with high school fees would be more inclined to send their boys to school, anticipating that the boys would become the income earners for their family.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, an early survey of girl's education in Nigeria conducted by Nigerian Association of University Women found that "the dropout rate was higher for girls than boys because of domestic chores," even after the establishment of tuition-free universal primary education in Western Nigeria.<sup>18</sup>

Nonetheless, with the end of World War II, colonial primary and secondary schools became better equipped to train girls for either paid work outside the home or enrollment at institutions of higher education—opportunities that were becoming more readily available in anticipation of Nigerian independence.<sup>19</sup> Especially with the introduction of universal primary education in the Western Region of Nigeria in 1955, the number of girls

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<sup>16</sup> McIntosh, *Yoruba Women*, 68–78.

<sup>17</sup> McIntosh, *Yoruba Women*, 69. See also Mann, *Marrying Well*.

<sup>18</sup> Ighodaro, *A Life of Service*, 109, summarizing the findings of the survey conducted in 1963.

<sup>19</sup> Callaway, *Gender, Culture, and Empire*, 115–116.

attending school increased dramatically. To accommodate the increase in students, both the government budget for education and the number of primary school teachers doubled in the region from 1954 to 1955.<sup>20</sup> Two years later in 1957, Lagos also introduced universal primary education at the responsibility of the Lagos town council. During this time, much of the paid work available to women school graduates in Nigeria was still concentrated in teaching, nursing, and working as store clerks, especially in shops marketed toward women. Still, the elite women at University College, Ibadan, benefitted from both their families' wealth or status and the burgeoning value of girls' formal education more broadly.

In addition to the growth of girls' education, the women at University College, Ibadan, arrived at the school during a period of Nigerianization, both of classroom education and political administration generally. In fact, the universalization of primary school education in the Western Region can be attributed in part to the efforts of two newly appointed Nigerian government officials: Chief Obafemi Awolowo, elected to the Western House of Assembly in 1952, and Chief S. O. Awokoya, West Minister of Education.<sup>21</sup> Remarking on their efforts to bolster education in the region, Fafunwa suggests that following the directives of these two men "the boldest and perhaps the most unprecedented educational scheme in Africa south of the Sahara was launched by an indigenous government as a meaningful demonstration of its commitment to the vital interests of the

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<sup>20</sup> Fafunwa, *Education in Nigeria*, 168.

<sup>21</sup> Fafunwa, *Education in Nigeria*, 167–170.



people it governed.”<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, in the wake of the global economic depression and later World War II, the British colonial government had begun addressing financial and staffing shortages in education by training greater numbers of Nigerians as teachers and educationists. The establishment of Yaba Higher College in Lagos (later absorbed into University College, Ibadan) and the Nigerian Union of Teachers were fruits of these efforts.<sup>23</sup>

Whatever the number of Nigerians in education, however, the curriculum at mission and colonial schools largely failed to acknowledge the social and cultural heritage of Nigeria. Particularly, the curriculum disregarded the history of women in the region as critical economic producers and political leaders.<sup>24</sup> Nigerianization in numbers of colonial employees did not translate to Nigerianization in subject matter or methods of instruction at colonial schools. Laying the foundations for classroom education in Nigeria, early mission schools had imported subjects popular among British Grammar Schools. Their overarching intentions were moral instruction and character training.<sup>25</sup> Colonial schools similarly pulled from British institutions. Education scholar Rosita Okekenwa Igwe summarizes: “[T]he British educated indigenous people to become semi-literate citizens who supported British colonialism [...] The content of the subjects was essentially foreign, written in English.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Fafunwa, *Education in Nigeria*, 168.

<sup>23</sup> Fafunwa, *Education in Nigeria*, 164.

<sup>24</sup> Callaway, *Gender, Culture and Empire*, 111.

<sup>25</sup> Igwe, “Curriculum Studies”, 353.

<sup>26</sup> Igwe, “Curriculum Studies,” 353, 354.

Mabel Segun describes her early school years in her memoir *My Mother's Daughter*. While she was living with an uncle for a time after her father died, Segun attended St. David's School in Akure, Nigeria. The school offered the "usual" English subjects, with the addition of nature study (farming) and domestic science. Segun recalls, "Though we girls shared farmwork with the boys, when it came to domestic science, we were left alone [...] It was natural for girls in those days to do housework while the boys went scot free."<sup>27</sup> The girls' cooking lessons reflected the context in which they were taught: Segun learned to prepare indigenous dishes like vegetable stew, *apon*, *akara*, beans, *moinmoin*, and *dodo*. Other domestic science lessons, however, taught imported techniques of house cleaning, furniture polishing, and laundering. Segun explains, "The laundry methods our teachers taught us were well in advance of the methods employed by the local women." Not only did the students learn different washing techniques, but they also ironed their clothing—a process not required when laundering the woven cloth of local fashion.<sup>28</sup> Demonstrating the potential impact this curriculum could have on girl students' expectations and practices, Segun concludes, "I don't know what effect our domestic science lessons had on my classmates but I know that they taught me such a high standard of cleanliness that in later years, I insisted on washing all my own clothes myself even when I had two housemaids."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Segun, *My Mother's Daughter*, 64.

<sup>28</sup> Segun, *My Mother's Daughter*, 68.

<sup>29</sup> Segun, *My Mother's Daughter*, 69.

A survey of the preexisting, informal education system in Nigeria demonstrates the foreign nature of mission and colonial schooling imposed on the West African context. Expanding the definition of education beyond classroom walls, Fafunwa theorizes,

[E]ducation is the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult develops the abilities, attitudes, and other forms of behavior which are of positive value to the society in which he lives; that is to say, it is a process for transmitting culture in terms of continuity and growth and for disseminating knowledge either to ensure social control or to guarantee rational direction of the society or both.<sup>30</sup>

Similarly, Igwe suggests that the “aims of traditional education [in Nigeria] were to preserve the cultural heritage of the extended family, clan, and tribe.”<sup>31</sup> Some of the educational forms indigenous to Nigeria included intellectual training through oral storytelling, occupational training through apprenticeship in farming, cooking, and weaving, and recreational training in wrestling, drumming, and acrobatics.<sup>32</sup> Indigenous schooling paid particular attention to cultural and moral instruction and character building on behalf of the community as a whole. Contrary to the individualism of education introduced by colonial elite institutions, indigenous education was a collective project of Nigerian communities.

Indigenous education embodied expectations of women and womanhood different from those of mission and colonial schools. At an early age, both male and female children

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<sup>30</sup> Fafunwa, *History of Education*, 17.

<sup>31</sup> Igwe, “Curriculum Studies,” 351.

<sup>32</sup> Igwe, “Curriculum Studies,” 351.

were educated primarily by their mother, who would spend more time with them than the rest of the community. By the time a child was old enough to begin learning his or her family trade, however, the community accepted responsibility.<sup>33</sup> Oyewumi suggests that, at least among the Yoruba of Nigeria, a child's eventual occupation depended more on his or her age and lineage than gender. For example, she explains that a girl from a family of hunters would be more likely to become a hunter than a boy from a non-hunting family, despite Western stereotypes that hunting is a man's profession.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, both boys and girls of similar family and community backgrounds in Nigeria often had access to similar forms of indigenous education and knowledge-production. On the contrary, as mentioned above, mission and colonial education was more popular among boy children because of the gendered expectation that they would learn skills necessary to perform paid, public work. The expected domestic lives of girl children did not require high levels of institutionalized education.<sup>35</sup>

#### **UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, IBADAN**

The curriculum at University College, Ibadan, perpetuated the colonial trend of transferring British educational traditions to the Nigerian context. In his history of University College, Ibadan, the university's second president John T. Saunders described educational development in Nigeria as "the spread of Western European learning and

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<sup>33</sup> Fafunwa, *History of Education*, 18.

<sup>34</sup> Oyewumi, *Invention of Women*, 69.

<sup>35</sup> Oyewumi, *Invention of Women*, 134.

ideas.”<sup>36</sup> The president paid lip service to the importance of developing curriculum relevant to the West African context; he suggested,

At present education in British West Africa has followed the pattern of education that has developed in England. It does not necessarily follow that this pattern is the best one for West Africa; modifications can be made to suit West African conditions and here the Institute [of Education] can play its part in indicating the changes that might with advantage be adopted.<sup>37</sup>

In practice, however, University College, Ibadan, upheld British ideas about education and knowledge production, neglecting the history and modes of informal education in the region. The curriculum at the university was widely criticized for being elitist and irrelevant to West Africa.<sup>38</sup>

The university college was exceptional in West Africa in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. After Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone, the school was only the second tertiary degree-granting institution in West Africa upon its founding in 1948. Prior to its establishment, Nigerian elite had no option but to go abroad for higher education, either to Fourah Bay or to Great Britain and the United States. Following World War II, Nigerian elite (among other West Africans) increasingly advocated for the development of university institutions closer to home, and University College, Ibadan, became the fruit of these efforts. Professor of History and former Vice-Chancellor at the school, Omoniyi Adewoye suggests that two

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<sup>36</sup> Saunders, *University College*, 1.

<sup>37</sup> Saunders, *University College*, 165–166.

<sup>38</sup> Fafunwa, *History of Education*, 151.

primary motivations underlay Nigerian cries for higher education: first, as changes in the colonial relationship loomed large and inevitable, Nigerian elite recognized a need for practical training. Government posts, as well as commercial and civic responsibilities, once dominated by British colonialists would undoubtedly be transferred to indigenous hands. Hence the urgency for a more accessible institution for training “qualified men”. Second, many Nigerian elite begrudged the colonial government’s tendency to privilege vocational training over intellectual training in the schools established on the continent up to that point. While vocational training of West Africans bolstered the colonial state and maintained the subordination of the colonial subject, intellectual training was seen by African nationalists as a primary means for “mental emancipation”—a necessary step toward independence and “the elevation of the black race”.<sup>39</sup>

Like their West African counterparts, colonial officials began considering more seriously after World War II the inevitability of African self-governance. To prepare for the transition, the British administration coordinated two commissions to assess the existing state of education in West Africa and recommend a course of development for higher education. The Elliot Commission (formally the Commission on Higher Education in West Africa), whose report was submitted in June 1945, included three leading West African nationalists at the time: I. O. S. Ransome-Kuti (representing Nigeria), K. A. Korsah (Ghana), and E. H. Talor-Cummings (Sierra Leone). The Commission designated the city of Ibadan as the site for West Africa’s new university college—a location meant to serve

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<sup>39</sup> Adewoye, Omoniyi, “The Antecedents”, in *The University of Ibadan, 1948-1973*, 5-9; reprinted as “Higher Education in Nigeria: The Birth of an Idea”, in *Ibadan at Fifty*, 7-10. For more on the development of University College, Ibadan, see Fafunwa, *History of Education*, and Tamuno, ed., *Ibadan Voices*.

all of West Africa. In order to promote high educational standards at the school, University College, Ibadan, would enter into what was commonly referred to as a “special relationship” with the University of London. Practically this meant that the University of London helped determine staff and faculty appointments, admission requirements, and student examinations. The two schools cooperated via academic boards and the Senate of the University of London. Because of this relationship, students were ultimately awarded degrees by the University of London until the university college achieved its autonomy in 1962, becoming the University of Ibadan. The Asquith Commission, also submitting their report in 1945, conceded much of the earlier commission’s findings and recommendations. Additionally, this second report proposed the creation of the Inter-University Council for Higher Education, which would oversee the university college’s development and academic appointments. Like the “special relationship”, the Council was meant to guarantee academic standards akin to those upheld at British institutions.

The school was initially intended to produce administrators, specialists, and researchers, as well as field and executive officers, who could fill roles in the colonial hierarchy. Knowledge production was largely limited to that which would be productive within the hegemonic social order.<sup>40</sup> These intentions on the part of colonial administrators were met with criticism on the part of Nigerian elite and other West African leaders. Many Nigerian elite recognized the limits placed on intellectual training at University College, Ibadan, as they had regarding the school’s predecessor, Yaba Higher College. Founded in

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<sup>40</sup> Saunders, *University College*, 46; For a more elaborate discussion on hegemonic knowledge versus subjugated knowledges, see Foucault, “Two Lectures”, in *Power/Knowledge*, 78–108.

1932, Yaba had been the fruit of decades of agitation by Nigerian intelligentsia to promote higher education and literacy among West Africans as a counter to centuries of subjugation by European imperialists. Rather than realizing the aspirations of West African elite, however, Yaba served only to produce middle-level manpower for the colonial system. J.A. Iluyomade, in his short essay on University College, Ibadan, and the education system of early-twentieth century colonial Nigeria, laments that after four to six years at Yaba, its graduates would qualify only for positions as “‘assistant’ medical officer, ‘assistant’ engineer, ‘assistant’ education officer or secondary school teacher”.<sup>41</sup> As Nigerian independence loomed, the new university college was meant to respond to the as-yet-unsatisfied demands by the elite for a full university close to home.

While some West African elite celebrated the British promise of a Nigerian university<sup>42</sup>, others remained skeptical following the disappointment that was Yaba Higher College. Adewoye suggests that there remained a “deep-seated suspicion among the intelligentsia about the intentions of the colonial government in matters of higher education.”<sup>43</sup> As the school was developed, many found that while the university college was willing to produce leaders for independent Nigeria as opposed to mere assistants, the school nonetheless neglected any ambitions for development beyond the purview of British educationists and imperialists. The “special relationship” with London, for instance, limited the extent to which the curriculum at Ibadan could make itself relevant to Nigeria,

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<sup>41</sup> J.A. Iluyomade, “The Good Old Days”, in *Ibadan at Fifty*, 390.

<sup>42</sup> Iluyomade, “The Good Old Days”, 391.

<sup>43</sup> Adewoye, “Antecedents”, 21.



even though in theory the relationship gave the university college flexibility to adapt its courses to the West African context. Classics and British literature were privileged over research in African literary traditions. Until 1961, an honors degree in History required only one (and no more than two) papers out of ten to be written on African history. Courses in agricultural science, while relevant to West Africa, were given in place of geology and therefore confined education and training to that which benefited British trade interests more so than Nigerian independence and self-management of its resources.<sup>44</sup> The school was popularly referred to by Nigerian elite, and especially by leading Nigerian nationalists educated in the United States, as the colonial government's "million-dollar baby", exhausting financial resources without producing the kind of opportunities for Nigeria craved by the elite.<sup>45</sup>

Students themselves at University College, Ibadan, tended to defend their education. In a published "diary" of his time at the school, S. J. Okudu recalls: "Politicians criticize us and our British teachers. But they also stream into campus to court the 'future leaders'". Okudu believed jealousy to be at the heart of elite critiques, considering himself lucky to be positioned to lead the new Nigeria thanks to the high standards of his British-style education.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, Ogunseye was aware of the nationalists' critiques of the school but nonetheless found value in her exclusive education. She recalls fondly the British

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<sup>44</sup> John O. O. Abiri, "The Making of the University of Ibadan, 1957-1962", in *The University of Ibadan, 1948-73*, 49-68.

<sup>45</sup> See, for instance, Ogunseye, "Reminiscences", 372, 374; Olumuyiwa Awe, "Ibadan: Recollections and Reflections", in *Ibadan Voices*, 78; and S. J. Okudu, "Diary of an Alumnus Registrar", in *Ibadan Voices*, 173.

<sup>46</sup> Okudu, "Diary", 173. For defense of University College, Ibadan, see also Ogunseye, "Reminiscences", 372.

cultural and intellectual training she received at Ibadan, including lessons in Western philosophy, “English table manners”, and “good English [phonetics and elocution]”. She explains, “[Students] considered themselves future leaders, who would take over from the colonialists. We did not mind being patronized and pampered by them. We must have become insufferable young students full of our own importance as future leaders, a role we accepted with a solemn sense of responsibility.”<sup>47</sup>

Contrary to the students’ high opinions of their position, the school began humbly. When facilities were transferred from Yaba to lay the foundation for the university college, they were brought to a temporary site along Eleiyele Road in Ibadan—what was formerly the 56<sup>th</sup> General Military Hospital built during World War II. Ogunseye describes the site as being “still all bush”.<sup>48</sup> Wooden barracks were converted to classrooms, libraries, laboratories, and dormitories for the men students. The five original women students were housed across the street alongside the senior staff in shared chalets. In her “Reminiscences”, Ogunseye describes crossing from the “more civilized side of the road” to attend lectures in the converted army barracks along with the men.<sup>49</sup> The school offered only a handful of courses in the Arts and Sciences during the first academic session, with Medicine added by 1949, and Agriculture, Veterinary Science, and Engineering added by 1950.<sup>50</sup> Though pre-medical students transferred from Yaba were among the foundation

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<sup>47</sup> Ogunseye, “Reminiscences”, 372. For other defenses of University College, Ibadan, see Olumuyiwa Awe, “Ibadan: Recollections and Reflections”, in *Ibadan Voices*, 78; and John Abiri, “The Making of the University of Ibadan, 1957-62”, 65.

<sup>48</sup> Ogunseye, “Reminiscences”, 369.

<sup>49</sup> Ogunseye, “Reminiscences,” 369.

<sup>50</sup> “Appendix 1: University of Ibadan Distribution of Students by Faculties/Courses, 1948-1972/73”, in *The University of Ibadan, 1948-73*, 282-83.

students at Ibadan, the university college offered no teaching hospital until 1957. Pre-medical students therefore continued to transfer to universities in England to complete their degrees. One foundation staff member, Assistant Registrar of Finance Harold Preston, recalls, “At first, it was strange to envisage a new, but thriving, University College in such heterogenous surroundings. Temporary buildings, of all shapes and sizes, were in use [...] Electricity was available, but was frequently disrupted by power failures [...]”<sup>51</sup> Over the following five years, permanent buildings were built and facilities transferred to the site that is now the University of Ibadan. Construction at the new location began in 1949, with agriculture and pre-medical facilities moved to the permanent site in 1951 and the first permanent men’s dormitories (Mellanby and Tedder Hall) completed by 1953.

The later 1950s continued to see an energetic growth in the physical campus, as well as in its student and staff population. This growth coincided with what John O. O. Abiri calls “rapid indigenization”.<sup>52</sup> The number of students enrolled during this period increased from 338 in 1952 to 1,136 in 1960.<sup>53</sup> New courses of study were offered, especially in the school of education, where degree options ranged from a certificate in Education or Child Study, a Higher Degree in Education, or a post-graduate degree in Education, whereas prior to the mid-1950s the only degree option available was a First Degree in Education.<sup>54</sup> Contents of courses gradually became more relevant to the West African context, especially in the departments of economics and political science, where

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<sup>51</sup> Harold Preston, “My Era at Ibadan: Experience, Recollections and Views”, in *Ibadan Voices*, 37.

<sup>52</sup> Abiri, “The Making of the University of Ibadan, 1957-62”, 51.

<sup>53</sup> Abiri, “The Making of the University of Ibadan, 1957-62”, 64.

<sup>54</sup> “Appendix 1: University of Ibadan Distribution of Students by Faculties/Courses, 1948-1972/73”.

students could take courses in the economic history of Nigeria and Nigerian government (though dramatic changes in course content would not be realized until after the university college separated completely from the University of London in 1962).<sup>55</sup> In anticipation of the school's independence from the University of London, the number of Nigerian academic and administrative staff more than quadrupled by 1958, though Nigerian staff still remained at less than one-fourth the total, with expatriate faculty and administrators continuing to dominate the school's employment rosters.<sup>56</sup> By 1960, University College, Ibadan, had appointed its first Nigerian president, Dr. Kenneth O. Dike.<sup>57</sup>

The composition of university faculty and administrative staff—most were British, some American, and only a few African—shaped the atmosphere at the university college, especially in its earliest years. By 1952, the school employed only ten Nigerian senior staff out of ninety-nine total; in 1953, those numbers were fifteen out of 105; by 1958, forty-four out of 180.<sup>58</sup> Ogunseye describes how the constitution of the staff affected the intellectual and cultural atmosphere in the early years of the university college. She writes:

The expatriate staff, largely British, were in the majority in 1953. They therefore set the tone for the social environment. Whatever you may think about their motives, they did try to give us the best of their culture. The intellectual climate was as rigorous as Cambridge, Oxford and London.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Abiri, "The Making of the University of Ibadan, 1957-62", 63.

<sup>56</sup> "Table I: Nigerian Senior Staff, 1952-58", in Tekena N. Tamuno, "The Formative Years, 1947-56", in *The University of Ibadan, 1948-73*, 39.

<sup>57</sup> "Appendix II: Principle Officers of the University, 1948-73", in *The University of Ibadan, 1948-73*, 284.

<sup>58</sup> "Table I: Nigerian Senior Staff, 1952-58".

<sup>59</sup> Ogunseye, "Reminiscences", 378.

Expatriate staff prized those early years, during which time students and staff regularly shared formal dinners and informal gatherings at faculty houses. Harold Preston attributes student success during the school's first five years in part to the intimacy shared among campus residents. "In the list of students from those early Eleiyele years," he explains, "there is hardly a name that is not well known today—the list contains vice-chancellors, university professors and administrators, lawyers, bankers, politicians, diplomats, senior civil servants and the higher echelons of the military."<sup>60</sup> Later generations of students, Preston laments, did not enjoy the same contact with school faculty, which impacted the potential of their education. Students during the first decade of the school's existence also recognized the privileges of attending a small university college. Each student lived in a private room, where cleaners were employed to maintain the bedrooms and the laundry. High table dinners were offered every evening, until a cafeteria system was introduced in 1959 (a change resented by the early generation of students). Obaro Ikime, himself a member of that first generation, describes the group of students as "thoroughly a spoilt one which, because the university undergraduate was still in a relatively small élite group at the time, had an extremely exaggerated idea about itself."<sup>61</sup>

Even among the Nigerian administration and faculty, Ibadan nurtured a sense of exclusivity. The few African staff and lecturers had mostly been educated abroad in British and American schools. One of the staff, Saburi O. Biobaku, writes about his time at the university college in his memoir, *When We Were No Longer Young*. He had been educated

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<sup>60</sup> Preston, "My Era at Ibadan", 41.

<sup>61</sup> Obaro Ikime, "Problems of Student Welfare", in *The University of Ibadan, 1948-73*, 244-45.

at Cambridge and upon his return was asked to serve as the school's first African Registrar. Interestingly, Biobaku explains that his wife's qualifications and potential as an "ideal hostess for the Registrar's receptions" also helped earn him the position.<sup>62</sup> (Biobaku is not critical of this assessment of his wife, revealing the extent to which British expectations of womanhood had been imbibed by many West African elite at the time.) While Registrar, he maintained one foot in England as he would return often for holidays, visiting English friends or attending examiner's meetings as part of his responsibilities. In Ibadan, Biobaku was relied upon by the school's second president, J. T. Saunders, for "the Nigerian angle to any question."<sup>63</sup> This included the Nigerianization of the staff. Biobaku played a great role in appointing new African staff members; though, those he helped appoint had been selected largely on the basis of their educational backgrounds—most had been educated at highly reputable universities abroad.<sup>64</sup> Thus, the Nigerianization of faculty and staff at University College, Ibadan, nonetheless perpetuated the trend of epistemological Westernization.

Another memoir, Titus Oluseye Ejiwunmi's *Full Colors*, details a Nigerian faculty member's experience at University College, Ibadan, highlighting the tension that could develop between African and European employees. Ejiwunmi was one of only three indigenous lecturers at the school's inception. When much of Yaba Higher College was moved to form the university college, the former Yaba science teacher facilitated the

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<sup>62</sup> Biobaku, *When We Were No Longer Young*, 16.

<sup>63</sup> Biobaku, *When We Were No Longer Young*, 21.

<sup>64</sup> Biobaku, *When We Were No Longer Young*, 23-24.

transfer of his laboratory materials to the new campus. He then accepted a position at Ibadan as a lecturer of Physics, but stayed for only a year. Given his short time at the school, it is no surprise that his memoir devotes only a few pages to the experience.

Aside from a few sentences regarding his involvement coaching sports, Ejiwunmi spends the bulk of a short chapter on his time at Ibadan describing a moment in which he felt undermined by the school's British President. The moment clearly left its mark. Ejiwunmi was used to expecting Nigerian students to stand as the lecturer entered the classroom; it was a sign of respect that had been practiced at Yaba Higher College. Upon visiting Ejiwunmi's classroom and seeing the students rise, however, President Mellanby instructed them to stay seated. Later, Ejiwunmi attempted to discipline a student for not standing upon his entering the classroom. The students quickly protested before Mellanby. Ejiwunmi describes the outcome in this way:

When Dr. Mellanby made the students to understand that the kind of discipline we were trying to give the students did not become gentlemen, I told him in a private discussion that he should not have tried to expose the students to the type of pride whose value they might not appreciate [...] It was not that I was not used to students sitting down when a lecturer came into the class. Back in London we did not have to stand up in class when a lecturer came in.<sup>65</sup>

This encounter suggests that Mellanby prized that quintessentially English quality of being a "gentleman" and assumed responsibility for its importation to Nigeria. Meanwhile,

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<sup>65</sup> Ejiwunmi, *Full Colors*, 38-39.

Ejiwunmi recognized that behavior in the British context might differ from that expected in the Nigerian context. Upon returning to Nigeria, he held fast to the practice common to West Africa of respecting one's elders and avoiding an unwarrantedly prideful posture. The tension between the president and this early faculty member illuminates just one set of differing cultural expectations that the women students would have had to navigate during their years on campus.

Not all interactions between expatriate and indigenous staff were marked by tension. Ogunseye, one of the first West African woman staff members, recalls with nostalgia her early years employed by the university library during the 1950s. In her "Reminiscences", she describes with admiration the expatriate staff, who "were dedicated and gave students their time and devotion in and out of classes."<sup>66</sup> Personally, Ogunseye was supported by John Mellanby (brother of first-president, Kenneth Mellanby) and his wife, Ruth, with whom she had developed a relationship during her years at Cambridge. She also credits her university career in many ways to the opportunities given her by the school librarian, John Harris. Harris, she believes, was "one of the people who made the college a credible center of learning", thanks to his achievements in developing the library collections.<sup>67</sup> In addition to the congenial relationships she developed with fellow staff, Ogunseye also recalls the "enduring friendships" fostered by the university college's Town and Gown Society, which would hold regular dinner parties and musical concerts for school staff and community leaders. Summarizing her early years at Ibadan, she writes,

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<sup>66</sup> Ogunseye, "Reminiscences", 378.

<sup>67</sup> Ogunseye, "Reminiscences", 377.



“The quality of life on campus was high and idyllic [...] It was in this pleasant, highly challenging and exhilarating atmosphere that I started my University career in 1958.”<sup>68</sup> In an unabashed celebration of University College, Ibadan, over its independent descendant, the University of Ibadan, Ogunseye suggests that in order for the Nigerian university to realize its potential as a leader of independent Nigeria, the “Ivory Tower must be put back in place, so that it can continue to lead the nation as a center of excellence in knowledge and ideas.”<sup>69</sup> She sees little need to critically assess and differentiate whose knowledge and ideas those ought to be.

In addition to the university college’s imported curriculum and faculty, the school’s geographical location within Nigeria reinforced the women students’ elite status. The university was situated at what became a leading site of intellectual development leading up to the country’s independence: the city of Ibadan. Former Ibadan Professor of Classics, John Ferguson, suggests that “Ibadan was one of the more intellectually exciting places in the world [in the 1950s]. It could hardly be otherwise.”<sup>70</sup> Irene Ighodaro, a community leader originally from Sierra Leone who had been educated abroad in England as one of West Africa’s first women medical doctors, describes in her autobiography the atmosphere at Ibadan as “cosmopolitan”.<sup>71</sup> She recalls participating in discussions among university and community leaders, which covered a variety of topics from philosophy and farming to national politics and Nigerian art.<sup>72</sup> For students and faculty at Ibadan, these discussions

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<sup>68</sup> Ogunseye, “Reminiscences”, 380.

<sup>69</sup> Ogunseye, “Reminiscences”, 387-88.

<sup>70</sup> John Ferguson, “Ibadan 1956-66”, in *Ibadan Voices*, 124.

<sup>71</sup> Ighodaro, *A Life of Service*, 101.

<sup>72</sup> Ighodaro, *A Life of Service*, 102.

were the fruits of “town and gown” relationships, through which the budding intelligentsia would engage with the elite community beyond the university walls. Students and faculty would meet with local administrators, leading politicians, and Western Region government officials and civil servants.<sup>73</sup> The school itself would play host to some of Nigeria’s most prominent political and intellectual leaders, especially during convocation ceremonies.<sup>74</sup> In memoirs and interviews, students often recall their interactions with leading Nigerian political and community figures at the time. John Pepper Clark explains that “at the political level, we were very aware of what was happening in the country at large. It was people we knew who were in the seat of government [...]”<sup>75</sup> Martin Banham, a British faculty member at Ibadan, described the general student body as “politically conscious and politically involved with local and national politics”.<sup>76</sup>

At the heart of cosmopolitan Ibadan, the university space itself reinforced definitions of education as centralized, institutionalized, and Europeanized spaces of intellectual development. The architects who designed the permanent campus mimicked the site plans of the colleges at Oxford and Cambridge, even while they made efforts to vernacularize building material and aesthetics in order to alleviate the discomfort of the West African climate through an adapted “modern style of architecture”.<sup>77</sup> Because of the school’s material appearance, in addition to its intellectual orientation, the university

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<sup>73</sup> Ogunseye, “Reminiscences”, 374, 378.

<sup>74</sup> Ighodaro, *A Life of Service*, 104.

<sup>75</sup> John Pepper Clark, interview by Wren, *Those Magical Years*, 111.

<sup>76</sup> Martin Banham, interview by Wren, *Those Magical Years*, 32.

<sup>77</sup> Saunders, *University College*, 62–75.

college garnered the nickname “the Oxbridge of Nigeria”.<sup>78</sup> The boundaries of the university space thus provided both a physical and an epistemological separation between the women elite and the everyday Nigerian living beyond the university gate.

## **EXPERIENCES AND ENCOUNTERS**

It was from within this dynamic context that the women students confronted various expectations of womanhood at University College, Ibadan. Their small numbers relative to those of the men students and faculty uniquely impacted their experiences. Ibadan, like Yaba Higher College before it, could be described in many ways as an “exclusive male club”.<sup>79</sup> The women arrived at Ibadan from privileged backgrounds, but they nonetheless felt pressure to succeed for the sake of other women who might one day attend the school. Grace Olufunmilayo Nzegwu (née Yoloye) recalls this of her time at Yaba Higher College, though she might have made the same remark about her years at Ibadan: “We knew we had to perform well to encourage admission of more girls into the college and this onus on us plus the self-satisfaction of passing our examinations made us work very hard, perhaps too hard for us to enjoy the frivolities of life.”<sup>80</sup> The women’s underrepresentation at the university college meant that many of their experiences were shaped by men (and a handful of women) faculty and staff, as well as by their men student peers. Their experiences helped inform the women’s sense of place and purpose at the school and also within the nearly-

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<sup>78</sup> See, for example, Ighodaro, *A Life of Service*, 101. See also many of the essays included in the volumes *Ibadan at Fifty*, *The University of Ibadan, 1948–73*, and *Ibadan Voices*.

<sup>79</sup> Grace Olufunmilayo Nzegwu, “Reminiscences of an Ibadan Alumna”, in *Ibadan Voices*, 30.

<sup>80</sup> Nzegwu, “Reminiscences of an Ibadan Alumna”, 30-31.

independent Nigeria more broadly. Upon visiting the school in 1956, former Lady Superintendent of Education Sylvia Leith-Ross noted a disconnect between students and staff. She remarked, “It was the air of unreality that struck me most, as if the students had no comprehension of the nature of a University and as if the members of the staff (of course there were exceptions) had no comprehension of the nature of the African.”<sup>81</sup> While student and staff interviews, memoirs, and essays suggest more mutual understanding of one another than Leith-Ross seems to have observed, her comment nonetheless points to the coexistence and persistence at Ibadan of multiple epistemologies and cultural traditions.

As the university college imported British traditions of education, European women professors and staff imported and embodied particular gender ideologies. Many of the women students attending University College, Ibadan, between 1948 and 1960, would have encountered two sets of women whose lifestyles constructed certain expectations of womanhood: the Domestic Warden and Queen Elizabeth II. A Domestic Warden was assigned to each residence hall to manage the cooking, cleaning, and domestic arrangements. Saunders explains that the Warden was “usually a woman with a training in domestic economy.”<sup>82</sup> The warden and the students maintained regular contact, meeting often with the students to discuss meal plans and other dormitory matters. One former Ibadan student, Victoria Onafowokan, described her warden as “motherly and matronly.”<sup>83</sup> The Queen’s arrival at Ibadan in 1956 introduced an entirely different way of life. Queen

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<sup>81</sup> Leith-Ross, *Stepping Stones*, 153–154.

<sup>82</sup> Saunders, *University College*, 129. Though according to Saunders the Domestic Warden was often a woman, other essays detailing experiences in the men’s dorms describe male Domestic Wardens and Hall Masters.

<sup>83</sup> Salako, ed., *Our U.I.*, 45.

Elizabeth II was the first reigning British monarch to visit British West Africa. Extensive preparations were made in anticipation of her arrival. Saunders explained, “Such rehearsals no doubt precede every royal visit but here [at Ibadan] it was necessary to show how sophisticated the College was, how truly European [...]”.<sup>84</sup> Whereas in England upon the occasion of a royal visit students would largely be ignored, Saunders records how anxious the Ibadan students were for an audience with the royal family. Their pressure for a meeting was rewarded when “[t]he Queen made for a group of women students and talked with them, while the Prince, after entering into vigorous conversation with those nearest the door, soon appeared to be swallowed up by the students.”<sup>85</sup> During her visit, the Queen agreed to allow the women’s residence hall to take her name and also signed a portrait of herself, which was subsequently left on display in the large Trenchard Hall.<sup>86</sup>

Other expatriate women at the university college with whom the students would have been in contact included administrative assistants and a few faculty and staff, namely Dr. Beatrice M. Jolly as Chair of Surgery as early as the school’s founding and Dr. Molly Mahood, head of English from 1954 to 1963. Mahood seems to have had a particular impact on the early generation of students at Ibadan. Among the students, Mahood was considered a “dragon”.<sup>87</sup> She was ruthless in her pursuit of literary excellence and had taken on the mantle of developing the literary tradition at Ibadan. She celebrated Anglo-Irish poetry and literature, and provided intellectual and material support to student

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<sup>84</sup> Saunders, *University College*, 142.

<sup>85</sup> Saunders, *University College*, 145.

<sup>86</sup> Saunders, *University College*, 144, 145.

<sup>87</sup> Wren, *Magical Years*, 22.

initiatives, like the literary journal *The Horn*.<sup>88</sup> In general, faculty made a point of fraternizing with the students, especially during the early years of the university college. At the Eleiyele site, where classroom space was limited, lecturers might hold small classes in their own dining rooms.<sup>89</sup> Even after facilities were moved to the permanent site, Victoria Onafowokan recalls her female lecturers inviting the women students to tea, “to introduce us to the ‘Oyinbo’ standard of living”.<sup>90</sup> G. O. Oguntomisin explains that these kinds of get-togethers, both formal and informal, were encouraged by staff and administration, including first-President Mellanby, who would dine with students at formal dinners. After the cafeteria system was introduced in the late 1950s, staff and faculty continued to join students at ceremonies and dinners organized by student clubs, and Hall Wardens continued to invite their residents to their houses for meals, though interest in cultivating student-staff relationships certainly seems to have waned as school enrollment numbers increased.<sup>91</sup>

At least as impactful as their interactions with women professors and staff, the women students’ experiences at Ibadan were profoundly shaped by their relationships with their male counterparts. There were both amiability and antagonism between men and women students as the men articulated and expressed ideas about their women colleagues through literary production and their interactions in dorms, at dances, and as members of

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<sup>88</sup> Wren, *Magical Years*, 22, 115–116.

<sup>89</sup> Tamuno, “The Formative Years, 1947-56”, in *The University of Ibadan, 1948-73*, 25.

<sup>90</sup> Salako, ed., *Our U.I.*, 45.

<sup>91</sup> G. O. Oguntomisin, “Community Life”, in *Ibadan at Fifty*, 252, 260; Obaro Ikime, “Problems of Student Welfare”, in *The University of Ibadan, 1948-75*, 247, and H. Preston, “My Era at Ibadan: Experience, Recollections and Views”, in *Ibadan Voices*, 41.

the student union. Amiability would become especially evident at dances. Even when busloads of other young women were brought to the dances from the neighboring nurses' and teachers' colleges (United Missionary College, St. Theresa's and St. Anne's schools, and Eleiyele School of Nursing), women students were still greatly outnumbered and therefore seldom left without a partner. Olumuyiwa Awe explains,

With the injection of this large but still inadequate number of female partners, the male population of the Dancing Club became polarized into two groups—those who dared, and those who couldn't dare to ask the female partners for dances. Among those who dared were the more competent dancers, but some of those who were anything but competent would not allow a small matter like this to blight their hopes for establishing a more cordial relationship with some of the female partners.<sup>92</sup>

Antipathy, on the other hand, could stem from both class-based and gender-based tension. From an interview with Ibadan student Emmanuel Obiachina, Wren gathered that “sexual battles on campus were sharp in [Obiachina's] day. The reason was intellectual and social jealousy. In his day, female students were selected from a far more specialized group of schools than the men; they came, not from the villages, but from a more sophisticated environment.”<sup>93</sup>

Some of this tension was played out in the cartoon section of the student newspaper, *The Bug*. As there were so few women students, the men students used *The Bug* to poke

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<sup>92</sup> Olumuyiwa Awe, “Ibadan: Recollections and Reflections”, in *Ibadan Voices*, 70-71.

<sup>93</sup> Wren, *Magical Years*, 74.

fun at and mock the women students. As part of the edited volume, *Our U.I.*, all three women students who attended the school before 1960 and who contributed brief reminiscences of their time on campus recalled unpleasant encounters with *The Bug*. Segun explained that she bore the brunt of the mockery, since she was the most “visible” woman student on campus. (She was heavily involved in extracurricular activities on campus, including many sports.) Latifat Okunno described the paper as “foul”, yet “designed to keep society in order”.<sup>94</sup> If a woman student was involved in anything remotely salacious, she might expect to find herself featured in *The Bug*. Victoria Onafowokan explained that she “got hurt” by the jokes, but “took everything in good faith”.<sup>95</sup> The *Bug* nicknamed women “buses”, while their romantic partners would be referred to as “drivers”.<sup>96</sup> “Buses” would be differentiated by qualifying adjectives—“presidential bus” or “owner-driven bus”, for example—while drivers might be referred to as “licensed” or “unlicensed”.<sup>97</sup> Other nicknames were created, too, and often took the place of proper names: Appian Way, Giffy, Mumps, Who goes there?, Young’s Modulus, Hercules, Pawpaw.<sup>98</sup> The list goes on. While the women students tend to downplay the effects of the *Bug* in their published reminiscences, Olumuyiwa Awe suggests that in reality the women feared the publication and its slanderous potential.<sup>99</sup> Either way, it becomes clear that the few women students on

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<sup>94</sup> Salako, ed., *Our U.I.*, 111.

<sup>95</sup> Salako, ed., *Our U.I.*, 46.

<sup>96</sup> Awe, “Ibadan: Recollections and Reflections”, 71.

<sup>97</sup> Emmanuel Ayotunde Yoloye, “Reminiscences off an Ibadan Alumnus”, in *Ibadan Voices*, 60.

<sup>98</sup> Francis J. Ellah, “My Era at Ibadan”, in *Ibadan Voices*, 18; Awe, “Ibadan: Recollections and Reflections”, 75.

<sup>99</sup> Awe, “Ibadan: Recollections and Reflections”, 75.



Ibadan's campus garnered a disproportionate level of attention from their men peers merely because of their sex.

The men students disagreed over the best way to approach interactions and relationships with their women peers. On one hand, some early students formed an informal Society for the Study of Sex. The men would gather together to discuss methods of flirting—students from rural areas of West Africa sought to gain from the “experience” of those from Lagos. The group developed their own vernacular for discussing their tactics toward women: the “Theory of the 5Fs” summarized the phases of a relationship with a woman, including the first step, “Find a woman”, and the final step, “Forget her”. Meanwhile, the “confusion apparatus” was used “to sweep the girl off her feet” by wooing her with cookies and other small gifts.<sup>100</sup> In his published reflections, Olumuyiwa Awe considers the society a means of “attaining maturity” through informal sex education.<sup>101</sup> Other students, however, were revolted by the “rather ungentlemanly manner” in which their fellow men pursued their sexual interests and exploits.<sup>102</sup> One of these students, a young man by the name of Takon, wrote an article in the *Bug* encouraging his peers to stand when women entered the room, assist in their carrying of luggage, and otherwise perform in such a “gentlemanly” way as had been learned, presumably, from a gendered British sense of propriety. His manners, which Emmanuel Yoloje describes as going “so much against the grain of student behavior”, became known as Takonism.<sup>103</sup> In response

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<sup>100</sup>100 Awe, “Ibadan: Recollections and Reflections”, 71.

<sup>101</sup> Awe, “Ibadan: Recollections and Reflections”, 70.

<sup>102</sup> Yoloje, “Reminiscences of an Ibadan Alumnus”, 59.

<sup>103</sup> Yoloje, “Reminiscences of an Ibadan Alumnus”, 59.

to Takon's article in the *Bug*, the publication printed a cartoon shaming the perceived submissiveness of men who behaved in this "gentlemanly" way. In the cartoon, a Takonist juggles five large pieces of a woman's luggage "with all pleasure", while an empty-handed Takonita (woman student) reminds the Takonist of a sixth piece of luggage he had left behind.<sup>104</sup> Awe explains that in "the climate of that era, to be called a 'Takonist' was a form of abuse."<sup>105</sup>

Men and women students also confronted one another in the student union, disagreeing over the constitution and the proper distribution of leadership roles between men and women. At one point, the women students campaigned to assign the vice-presidency to a woman.<sup>106</sup> The men prevented the vote, and in return, J.P. Clark recalls a woman student hitting him on the head with a glass bottle at a school dance. He ended up needing stitches. The conflict as recorded in Nigerian tabloids produced a new vocabulary among the students, both men and women students asking, "Are we safe?"<sup>107</sup> It's difficult to tell from the interview if this concern for safety was actually serious or if the papers dramatized the situation. Regardless, the tension between men and women students on campus made the local news. (Ultimately, Bisi Fagbenle won the position of Vice-President in 1955, becoming the first woman student to do so. After her tragic death the

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<sup>104</sup> Yoloye Cartoon, in "Reminiscences of an Ibadan Alumnus", 61.

<sup>105</sup> Awe, "Ibadan" Recollections and Reflections", 75.

<sup>106</sup> Wren, *Magical Years*, 102.

<sup>107</sup> Wren, *Magical Years*, 103.

following year, the position was dominated by men students until 1963, when T. Omotayo Oyediran accepted the post.)<sup>108</sup>

More intimate interactions could exacerbate tensions and a sense of division between the men and women. Recalling his relationship with student Christine Clinton (later Mrs. Obiachina), for instance, J.P. Clark called her is “primary passion”:

Our relationship was the Beauty and the Beast kind of thing [...] She was a very highly sophisticated girl. Very aware we were, up country, and took putting down a little on our part. She didn't have the courage really to accept me in the open, and her very good friend Mrs. Vincent Ike was my contemporary, too, a leader of the girls, with great influence over Christine, who she thought too good for me.<sup>109</sup>

Clark seems to have strained relations between men and women students at Ibadan with his long poem, *Ivbie*. While he would describe his poem as a critique on colonialism, Minji Karibo recalls the poem's unpopularity among the women students because of its attempts to explore intimate women's issues. She explained, “I don't remember a public reading of J.P. Clark's *Ivbie*, but I do remember, when it became public, that certain sections of it were very unwelcome at Queen Elizabeth Hall: they were too explicit.”<sup>110</sup> In 1956, one of the most harrowing of intimate encounters between a man and woman student took place, when Student Union Vice-President Bisi Fagbenle died from an attempted abortion in the men's dormitory, Mellanby Hall. The abortion was performed by the Student Union's then-

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<sup>108</sup> “Appendix 32: Members of the Students' Union Executive Committee, 1948–1980”, in *Ibadan Voices*, 388–400.

<sup>109</sup> Clark, quoted in Wren, *Magical Years*, 102.

<sup>110</sup> Wren, *Magical Years*, 88.

President and Fagbenle's lover, Ben Obumsele. Fagbenle, described by Samuel Okudu posthumously as "a lady of admirable gait, eloquence and candour"<sup>111</sup>, had been the first and only woman Student Union Vice-President of the University College, Ibadan. This moment in the school's history was not easily forgotten by students in attendance at the time; many allude to the tragic event in their reminiscences published years later.

### **THE MEMOIRS OF MABEL SEGUN**

As mentioned above, Mabel Segun became one of the most visible woman students at Ibadan during her four years as an undergraduate student. She attended the school between 1949 and 1953—prior to the main thrust of Nigerianization—as one of a dozen or fewer woman students on campus in a given year. Because of her prolific involvement in campus athletics and student organizations, her peer Emmanuel Ayotunde Yoloje has described her as an "odddity".<sup>112</sup> In other words, though Segun shared a similar elite background with her women peers, her exceptional involvement at Ibadan put her into contact with men faculty and peers in a unique way. After first becoming interested in athletics at C.M.S. Girl's School in Lagos, Segun carried that interest to Ibadan, where she continued to play sports and ultimately became Nigeria's first woman professional table tennis player and member of the Western Nigeria Table Tennis Association.<sup>113</sup> In addition to being active in campus sports, she helped found the Mbari Writers' and Artists' Club at

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<sup>111</sup> Okudu, "Diary of an Alumnus Registrar", 177.

<sup>112</sup> Yoloje, "Reminiscences of an Ibadan Alumnus", 64.

<sup>113</sup> McIntosh, *Yoruba Women*, 214.

Ibadan alongside professor Ulli Beier, Ibadan student writers Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo, and J.P. Clark, and South African literary artist and activist Ezekiel Mphahlele. She also served for a time as advertising manager for the *University Herald*, a student publication, alongside its editor Chinua Achebe and other noteworthy members of the editorial board.<sup>114</sup> Reflecting her years in sports and writing clubs, she has produced a set of published memoirs: *My Mother's Daughter*, *My Father's Daughter*, and *Ping Pong: Twenty-Five Years of Table Tennis* (1989), the latter of which records her experiences and success in the sport.

From her memoirs, we get a glimpse of the ways in which the early life of one Ibadan woman student set her apart from the everyday Nigerian even prior to her arrival at the university college. Of the two books, the first memoir, *My Father's Daughter*, best demonstrates Segun's exceptional standing in Nigerian society. Published in 1965, the memoir was produced as part of a children's series by African University Press (a subset of Pilgrim Books Limited), called the *African Readers Library*. We learn that Segun was raised on a parish as a clergyman's daughter in a quiet village in western Nigeria (near Ede and Ife). In the opening chapter of the book, Segun suggests that she lived as part of "civilization": "To [the other villagers] the outside world was Ife and Ede, and civilization meant Father and the Mission Compound."<sup>115</sup> Her father's position and her resulting access to education on the mission compound separated her from the "uncultured" and "illiterate"

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<sup>114</sup> Segun, "Reminiscences about Ibadan University", 401.

<sup>115</sup> Segun, *My Father's Daughter*, 6.

townspeople.<sup>116</sup> Her family's religious beliefs and practices also distinguished them from their "pagan" neighbors. Segun summarizes, "I was a privileged person in those days, being 'pastor's daughter', and normal rules did not apply to me."<sup>117</sup> It becomes apparent through her books that to the extent to which she was set apart from the everyday Nigerian, she felt uniquely positioned her to perform the function of teacher to the new Nigeria. After passing through the university college, she accepted the mantle of spearheading the development of independent Nigeria and shaping its intellectual and cultural values. Indeed, she sees her stories as giving young readers "heroes more important than themselves whom they can love and respect".<sup>118</sup> Subtly through her literature, she instructs readers in the importance of a strong work ethic, selflessness, and loving relationships, and she aims to develop children's creativity.<sup>119</sup>

The structure of her memoirs reflects Segun's impetus to teach. She writes both *My Father's Daughter* and *My Mother's Daughter* in English (presumably to appeal to a wide audience<sup>120</sup>), while unquestionably gearing her narratives toward West African adolescent readers. Her books become a version of the moral storytelling of Nigerian traditional education in that she uses anecdotes, especially personal life lessons, to teach moral values. At one point in *My Mother's Daughter*, for example, she narrates her experience teaching

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<sup>116</sup> Segun, *My Father's Daughter*, 8.

<sup>117</sup> Segun, *My Father's Daughter*, 32.

<sup>118</sup> Mabel Segun, "Problems and Prospects of Children's Literature in Africa", keynote address given at the International Conference on African Literature and the English Language, University of Calabar, 1991, reprinted in *Children and Literature in Africa*, edited by Chidi Ikonne, Emelia Oko, and Peter Onwudinjo (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria) Plc, 1992), 34.

<sup>119</sup> Segun, "Problems and Prospects of Children's Literature in Africa", 32.

<sup>120</sup> See her discussion of language and children's literature in Africa, in Segun, "Problems and Prospects of Children's Literature in Africa", 34-35.

herself to ride a bicycle. When she becomes too confident, rides the bicycle too quickly, and crashes into a herd of sheep, she learns to “be more careful”. She explains, “This was a literal case of pride going before a fall.”<sup>121</sup> Using proverb and narration, Segun thus instructs her readers to be cautious and not overly confident. Even more obviously attesting to her intentions to teach through literature are the questions Segun includes at the end of each chapter in *My Mother’s Daughter*. The questions are meant to encourage young readers to develop reading comprehension skills and highlight the most important take-aways from the many memories and anecdotes included in the text. For example, in a chapter titled “The School”, Segun demonstrates what she considers the value of (institutionalized) education. At the end of the chapter, she asks her readers, “What did the schoolchildren gain from their farming, domestic science and physical education lessons?” and she instructs her readers to “Compare the crude methods of those days [the early 20<sup>th</sup> century] with modern farming, laundry and cookery methods.”<sup>122</sup> Her memoir thus becomes a textbook on what Segun calls “the ‘why’ and ‘how’ of everyday living”.<sup>123</sup>

Both memoirs begin to reveal the extent to which English epistemology and customs were imbibed by one of the early students at Ibadan, as well as the extent to which her native culture and values persevered despite her education. For example, Segun considers traditional legends and magical practices mere superstition, if one takes into account “scientific explanation”. Considering the phenomena thunder and lightning, she

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<sup>121</sup> Segun, *My Mother’s Daughter*, 86.

<sup>122</sup> Segun, *My Mother’s Daughter*, 69.

<sup>123</sup> Segun, “Problems and Prospects of Children’s Literature in Africa”, 33.

offers her readers a rudimentary overview of the science underlying their occurrences. At the same time, the West African mythological explanations “appeal most to [her] imagination”. The legend of Sango, traditionally used to explain thunderstorms among the Yoruba, possess a creative value unrivaled by scientific facts. The mythology also reflects the worthy intention of protecting children from the potential dangers of lightning strikes. Furthermore, summarizing vividly the myth used to explain thunder and lightning, Segun intends to revive for posterity significant cultural elements of West African life.<sup>124</sup> In this way, Segun negotiates the value of different forms of knowledge as she writes.

Like her retelling of the legend of Sango, Segun also includes elaborate descriptions of the Yoruba customs in which she participated or which she observed as a child in western Nigeria. She details annual festivals, such as the New Yam, Egungun, Ogun, Oro, and Sango Festivals for reasons beyond simple literary entertainment. In a keynote address given at the International Conference on African Literature and the English Language in 1991, she explained, “Good literature can [...] give a child personal identity in a continent which has been subjected to cultural imperialism through mass importation of foreign literature which Achebe calls ‘poison’.”<sup>125</sup> So, while the nature of her texts recall the tradition of written and published literature introduced to West Africa by European colonizers, the intention and content of her memoirs maintains one foot in a rich Nigerian soil. Segun herself has admitted to having at times a “colonial mentality”, which influences

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<sup>124</sup> Segun, *My Mother's Daughter*, 108.

<sup>125</sup> Segun, “Problems and Prospects of Children's Literature in Africa”, 32.



her tastes and values.<sup>126</sup> Nonetheless, the interplay in the memoirs between English literary practices and Nigerian storytelling, Western scientific knowledge and Nigerian context demonstrates Segun's active negotiation of two distinct intellectual and cultural traditions. No doubt this dialectic impacted the lives of each of the early women students at University College, Ibadan.

## CONCLUSION

Given that the women enrolled at University College, Ibadan, comprised an exiguous minority of Nigeria's population, their access to and experiences in tertiary education reinforced their elite status. Like their male counterparts, the women graduates of University College, Ibadan, were able to position themselves as leaders of the newly independent Nigeria. Several, like Flora Nwapa, Minji Karibo, and Yetunde Esan, became notable poets and writers. Karibo also served as Librarian at Port Harcourt College of Education, while Nwapa became a pioneer of African feminism and "a literary foremother for succeeding generations of African women writers".<sup>127</sup> Much of her published writing focused on the lives of Igbo and West African women; her works include *Efuru* (1966), *Idu* (1970), *Wives at War and Other Stories* (1980), along with several other novels, short stories, and children's books. When asked by an American Fulbright scholar in Nigeria why she wrote, Nwapa responded: "Flora Nwapa writes stories about women because these stories are familiar to her...If I'm trying to prove something, it is that women are first and

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<sup>126</sup> Mabel Segun, "Reminiscences about Ibadan University", in *Ibadan at Fifty*, 415.

<sup>127</sup> Wren, *Magical Years*, 87–88; Wilentz, "Flora Nwapa", 8.

foremost human beings!”<sup>128</sup> Nwapa continued her literary career by becoming the first Nigerian woman to found a publishing house, Tana Press and the Flora Nwapa Company.<sup>129</sup> Esan, meanwhile, eventually gained her mother’s title *Iyalode*.

Molara Ogundipe went on to graduate from the University of London and earn a doctorate from Leiden University. Like Nwapa, she has become one of West Africa’s leading feminist theorists and social critics. Among her publications is *Re-creating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformations* (1994). She continues to this day writing, teaching, and critiquing the work of her men contemporaries in essays such as “Beyond Hearsay and Academic Journalism: The Black Woman and Ali Mazrui” (1993) and “The Representation of Women: The Example of Soyinka’s Ake” (1994).<sup>130</sup> She is perhaps most widely known for her conceptualization of Stiwanism, or Social Transformations in Africa Including Women. Meanwhile, Mabel Segun became a prominent educator, radio broadcaster, singer and pianist, copywriter and editor, as well as an esteemed poet and writer, known especially for her efforts in children’s literature and research.<sup>131</sup>

McIntosh has suggested that, “However one evaluates its impact, formal education was among the most significant components of colonialism for women.”<sup>132</sup> One of the most glaring impacts of colonial education was the transformation of women’s relationship to one form of knowledge production—that of the colonial university space. The relationship

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<sup>128</sup> Wilentz, “Flora Nwapa”, 8.

<sup>129</sup> Busby, *Daughters of Africa*, 399.

<sup>130</sup> Ogundipe-Leslie, “Beyond Hearsay”; Ogundipe-Leslie, *Re-Creating Ourselves*.

<sup>131</sup> Busby, *Daughters of Africa*, 372.

<sup>132</sup> McIntosh, *Yoruba Women*, 78.

was mediated by class and gender ideologies, as well as indigenous and colonial traditions of education. When asked about literacy, elitism, and the exclusivity of literary art in an interview with Dapo Adelugba (1978), Molaria Ogundipe made a distinction between economic and epistemological class. While economic class may have offered her access to university-produced knowledge, Ogundipe suggested that the resulting social distinction between University College, Ibadan, graduates and the majority of the illiterate and semi-illiterate population of colonial and early post-colonial Nigeria could be attributed more to intellectual differentiation.<sup>133</sup>

Part of the intellectual transformation induced by women's experiences at the university was a new expectation of Nigerian womanhood—one that combined both indigenous and colonial conceptions of gender. Hence Ogundipe's synthesis of white feminist movements, the history of gender ideology and social organization in Africa, and recent African women's conceptualizations of women's empowerment and significance in the African context. That synthesis, given the name Stiwanism, addresses "the needs of African women today in the tradition of the spaces and strategies provided in our indigenous cultures for the social being of women. My thesis has always been that indigenous feminisms also existed in Africa and we are busy researching them and bringing them to the fore now."<sup>134</sup> As exemplified by Ogundipe, women at University College, Ibadan, carried with them into the university space indigenous knowledges and then negotiated conceptions of gender and womanhood. Ultimately, these women pioneers

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<sup>133</sup> "An Interview with Ms. Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie", 35–70.

<sup>134</sup> Ogundipe-Leslie, *Re-Creating Ourselves*, 230, 207–241.

paved the way for subsequent generations of women scholars at Nigerian universities and sparked for debate alternate expressions of women's place in late colonial and early independent Nigeria.

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