Philosophy of Higher Education in Britain and Transplantation in British West African Colonies 1947- 1951

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The 1930s and 1940s witnessed in Britain a growing philosophical debate on education in general and on the role of university institutions in particular; which was to have an impact on the kind of higher education to establish in British colonial West Africa during the post war period. Though educational transfer was not new by the 1940s, a revised conception of colonial higher education led to the direct involvement of British universities within the framework of the official policy of "colonial development of welfare". This paper attempts to examine such a philosophy and enquire into the reasons, ways and conditions for direct involvement and transplantation of British institutions in West African higher education.

Background of University Institutions

University education in England had been under the control of the Church of England which excluded Protestant dissenters and Roman Catholics from Cambridge and Oxford. The latter remained conservative and aristocratic and remained the preserve of the upper classes. But as a result of industrial development, the emergence of a powerful middle class, the political reforms of 1832, and the inability of the two old English universities to meet new demands, there was an attempt to found a new kind of institution of higher education more accessible to the middle class than Oxford and Cambridge. By 1825 leading non conformist personalities suggested the creation of London University which was to provide courses in scientific subjects and in Arts as well, however cheaper and non residential.

The foundation of London University constituted a threat to the established order, namely the prominence of Oxford and Cambridge. In response to this independent initiative from non conformists, the Duke of Wellington, together with the Archbishop of Canterbury and York opened King's College on an Anglican basis in 1831. But neither college had the right to confer degrees for the two old universities challenged any move from London institutions in this direction. It was not until 1836 that the University of London was incorporated as an examining body, and in 1850, it received a charter.

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During the same period a church-sponsored institution was established in Durham in 1832.

Given the expansion of industrial development and the increasing strength of the middle class, other colleges were opened in the industrial and commercial centres: Owens' College in Manchester in 1851, in Exeter and Southampton in the 1860s, in Leeds, Bristol, and Newcastle during the following decades. Their establishment as specialised institutions was an expression of the division of labour in the English society. Their development from colleges into universities, independent of any state control, though financed from public funds, was a pattern which the colonial university institution was to adopt. The number of English university institutions rose from two in 1828 to eleven universities and four university colleges in 1944; from one university and four university colleges in Wales; from one to three in Ireland, but reduced to 4 in Scotland (1)

There is an agreement as to the classification of the universities into different categories: Oxbridge and Redbrick, but J. Irvine made a distinction between the Old Universities (including the Scottish ones), London University with its complex organisation and unique relation with the external students, and the provincial English universities (2). The general classification in the dichotomy of Oxbridge and Redbrick was regarded by RE Bell, Lecturer in Education, (Open University), as meaningless, because it ignored the common characteristics which Oxford and Cambridge shared with the older institutions (such as Durham as a residential college), with Manchester as a centre of elitist research, and with London as part of Metropolitan culture (3). The general classification of the British universities could be related to the respective distinctive features of their organisation, and association with the various kinds of elite. While Oxbridge could be identified with the interests of the upper classes, the provincial and the Scottish were less elitist. This situation was to change as a result of major debates over education.

By 1944 a greater involvement of the State in secondary education was made possible by abolishing fees in secondary schools making them therefore free for all. But universities remained out the scope of the 1944 Education Act, thus preserving their independence from any state intervention, though largely financed from public funds. The debate on educational objectives of the institutions expressed a degree of crisis in a world of 'insecurity'. In other words, this crisis was a lack of adequate adjustment to the new relations of production. The debate on educational change in general and higher educational reforms in particular was inscribed in a wider framework. This implied that educational institutions were not simply to be concerned with the training of a 'type' of individual, but were also to be related to the whole

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economic, political, socio-cultural system in general. Definition of the latter was a prerequisite for the definition of the function of the educational institutions. Generally speaking, British academics avoided committing themselves, with the exception of a few, to any declared ideology as a basis for educational reconstruction.

Professor F. Clarke, (Director of Education, London University 1936-1945), regarded education as an instrument of social control and transformation, and believed that "the existing educational system should undergo changes, if the traditions it embodies are to be re-evaluated so as to preserve and enhance social cohesion" (4). K. Manheim, (sociologist in the London School of Economics), was of opinion that education was a means of 'influencing ways of living and thinking, and should 'aim at social adjustment and achieve a recognized type of development'. Though he underlined the necessity for planning fort the future, he insisted on preserving individual freedom. This approach to education in terms of personal growth and self- realisation, social adjustment and cohesion was supported by others like Prof TP Nunn, (former Director of London Institute of Education); MVC Jeffrey, (Professor of Education, Birmingham University); A Lowe and C. Dent whose conceptions of the social functions of education were to conserve, transmit, and renew culture (5).

While most educationists agreed on the preservation and transmission of culture, they differed about the extent of its renewal. HC Dent regarded the existing public school system as 'maintaining an indefensible system of obsolete nepotism'; he then called for a democratic system towards common aims (6). A. Lowe warned against increasing the number of students because of the possible political dangers resulting from the unemployment of graduates. The general feeling during that period was to reintegrate the university institutions in post war planning; most educationists, including W.Moberly, insisted that their planning should be based on the practical needs of the changing world (7).

The need for planning not only put into question the pretence and falsity of academic freedom, but also required a definition of the educational, socio-cultural functions of the university institutions. By 1944 the Association of University Teachers laid down four guiding principles. The first stipulated that 'academic freedom of enquiry or pursuit of knowledge should not be controlled or dominated by any private or corporate interests. The second aimed at the dissemination of knowledge or culture. The third was to make university responsible to society that is to say training for particular tasks whereas the fourth regarded university as 'a school of corporate living in which development of students as individuals was equally important' (8).

But Prof Peers criticized this order of priority, which he considered as a dangerous doctrine because it presented an idea of the university out of focus (9) He viewed university as 'a corporation or society which devoted itself to a search after knowledge for the sake of its own intrinsic values'. In his opinion, the two principal functions, research, cultivation of the spirit of discovery, and teaching would aim at the formation of character (10).

In general, British academics agreed on principles, but they differed in emphasis on priorities and ways to achieve them: Prof Mac Murray regarded university as being primarily a centre for cultural life and progress with an international outlook, the main task of which would be cultural leadership. This could be achieved, according to him, provided that three main functions were combined and integrated within the university: the first would include provision, maintenance, and diffusion of culture in the country; the second would involve the carrying out of research in all branches of university; and the third would focus on the education of undergraduate students (11). The stress on cultural synthesis was between traditions and modern requirements; in other terms the need to create a balance in university education was essential for the formation of character and acquisition of wisdom. Most of the educationist agreed on the importance of moral education and moral integrity which W. Moberly believed was lacking in the modern university. What was required was not simply a trained doctor or engineer, but an educated doctor, engineer, etc in order to assume wisely social responsibilities and leadership.

Colonial Higher Education

This elitist conception had been stressed by Channon's Colonial Office Education Sub committee of 1941 whose membership consisted mostly of Oxbridge graduates (12). It was also reproduced in the 1945 reports: the Asquith Commission of Higher Education in the Colonies and Elliot Commission on Higher Education in West Africa. (13) The latter presented two reports for the development of British West African University institutions: a majority report and a minority one. While the former recommended the establishment of a university college in each of Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast and Nigeria, the latter strongly stressed the creation of one University College in Nigeria to serve British West Africa. The second proposal was adopted by the Colonial Office under the leadership of Creech Jones, himself a member of the minority report.

As a result of colonial pressure, the Colonial Office had to change its colonial policy of higher education in West Africa of 1946 and had to concede the right for both the Gold Coast and Sierra Leone to have some provision of

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university education in their respective territories. Consequently, planning within the framework of Colonial Development and Welfare (14) as regards higher education in British West Africa had to be revised. It was to include the establishment of a university college and a regional college in each of the Gold Coast and Nigeria, together with a university department within Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone. This change had administrative and financial implications and might have affected Colonial Office policy over the means of controlling educated Africans in West Africa. Subsequently the planners had necessarily to give priority to more practical problems of finance and staff structure. This required the establishment of machinery to deal with such colonial university institutions. It was simply a British model to be transplanted to the colonial conditions.

The Asquith Commission recommended the setting up of a body independent of the Colonial Office's control, which should deal with secondment, and recruitment of staff, advise on the constitution of the colleges and on their syllabus, and might take over the work performed by the Universities Bureau of the British Empire in respect of selection for appointments to the colonial university institutions. By February 1946, the terms of reference of the Inter-University Council were drawn up and included seventeen representatives of UK universities, three from the Colonial university institutions and the Educational Adviser of the Colonial Office and a secretary. The second machinery which was to give effect to the principles enunciated by the Asquith Commission was London University because of its tradition and experience in colonial education and examinations as well as in its capacity to develop the colleges into universities in UK. The third boy concerned with colonial university education was concerned with finance, a body similar to the University Grants Committee in Britain, known as the Colonial University Grants Committee.

The immediate post-war colonial pressure and the demand for more education did not affect the declared principles of colonial education but rather the rate of its progress. In fact, when Cohen (C.O), Adams (IUC) were asked to prepare a memo on education policy for the 1947 and 1948 African Conferences, that of the African Colonial Governors, and of the African representatives respectively, they were primarily concerned with the question of where the emphasis should be laid down on educational development, and with considering the means of securing a more rapid and effective development of educational services. In this memo, three objectives were stated: the spread of education as widely as possible, the training of as many Africans as possible for the higher posts, and the strengthening and development of cultural links between Britain and the African territories. But in the light of the existing inadequacies of educational facilities in the various parts of the educa-

tional structure on the one hand, and the post war constraints whether human material and financial, on the other, the Colonial Office official had to reformulate short term priorities in connection with the declared objectives.

The officials were of opinion that the main effort should be directed towards the higher levels of education from secondary school upwards including technical, vocational and teacher training; because the increase and improvement in secondary education and teacher training would provide more and better teachers and students for the primary and universities respectively. Concentration on higher education would secure the supply of qualified Africans for the higher posts and would develop new channels through which British ideas could flow into Africa. Despite the shortages of staff and financial resources, the officials maintained that 'it was only with skilled personnel and experience of universities and teaching professions that African territories could hope to establish higher, technical and secondary institutions of necessary quality' (15). This could indicate the degree of dependence of African development on UK, and the strong cultural penetration in the post war period.

Staff and finance

The two major priorities which the Advisory machinery had to examine after the departure from the Minority Report of the Elliot Commission concerned staff recruitment and financial allocation to the colonial institution.
As regards staff, the Asquith Commission suggested a departure from the old pattern under which the colonial governments seconded their officers to the educational institutions; but they insisted on maintaining it for the purpose of co-operation in part-time teaching and research. It also recommended the recruitment of full-time members with appropriate training and experience of university life. But given the insufficiency of the existing human potential, W. Moberly (chairman of the University Grants Committee) reported to J. Irvine, (the chairman of the Inter University Council), that this committee could not view the scheme for temporary secondment from UK universities with favour; for the need for augmented staff was very urgent. In his opinion, those universities would unlikely be able to help the colonial institutions to any appreciable degree until their own needs were largely met (16). J. Irvine estimated that 200 new appointments of the status of senior lecturer and higher would be required for the colonial universities and university colleges over the following ten years. This would mean the secondment of 50 at a time, if the suggestion of the Asquith Commission was to be carried out (17).

Because of this shortage, the terms or conditions of service were to constitute a determinant factor in the recruitment of the academic staff. The Asquith Commission recommended that they should be related to those in practice in British universities, because the offer of higher salaries, the participation in the Federated Superannuation Scheme of the Universities of Great Britain and the liberal provision for free passages would remove the barriers to recruitment. Actually, the question of salaries and that of the expatriate allowance in particular, had been estimated at various instances by colonial officials: J.F. Pedler in 1938-40;
C. Jeffries in 1944-45; A. Burns in 1943; W. Harragin in 1945-46. It should be remembered that this question of salaries constituted a controversial matter in local colonial legislatures. In the opinion of the Inter University Council, a scheme of expatriate allowance, as pensionable emolument, was essential to the development of colonial higher education. It suggested that up to 50 % of the basic salary or one third of the total emoluments could form the expatriate allowance. By 1947, the Colonial Office felt that grants from its sources to individual institutions rather than allocated directly or thought the colonial governments could be arranged for that purpose (18).

The second priority was the apportionment of the financial allocation earmarked for higher education under C.D.W, and which amounted to £4.5 million. The Colonial University Grants Committee needed statistical data concerning the national incomes of the colonial territories, the output of their secondary schools, which would altogether enable it to decide on the distribution of the £4.5 million. By 1944 already Lord Hailey had suggested that the financial estimates formed by the West Indies Committees could form a basis of the allocations. Those included £1.130.000 for capital costs, and £139.690 for recurrent expenditure. However, it was expected that a greater amount would be needed for West Africa. In fact, the Elliot Commission estimated the capital cost at £1.530.000 and the recurrent expenditure at £258.000 (19).

When the Inter-University Council and the Colonial University Grants Committee had to reconsider in November 1946 the relative assessment of the various claims on academic and financial grounds of the colonial institutions, they took note of both the existing financial sources and the moral commitments of the Colonial Office. These financial sources under C.D.W. included: £8.5 million allocated for research; £1 million for scholarships; a Reserve of £3 million for the Central Schemes and the £11 million of the General Reserve. Only a fraction of these could, in the last resort, be made available for higher educational programmes. The moral commitments of the Colonial Office, which the Colonial Secretary expressed in his various despatches, concerned the allocation of money to cover the expenses of the

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Principal designate, the Secretary of the Provisional council of the West African University College; the financial assistance in the initial stages for the development of technical education (20) and the qualification of the Regional colleges, together with some recurrent expenditure for Sierra Leone (21)

When the Inter University Council attempted to present an assessment of the probable financial requirements on academic grounds, they realised that the total of £8.650.000 was nearly double the money available (22). This wide gap between requirements and available finance put the advisory machinery in a difficult position, in which it had to discover ways to reduce the figure or the total without jeopardizing standards. So, it had to set an order of priority aiming, in the first place, at assisting the institutions either of university status or moving towards it, and secondly, at meeting the claims of Palestine, Mauritius, Fiji, Cyprus and Central Africa, and the Regional colleges in West Africa.

Despite different attempts, the Inter University Council came to the conclusion that it was difficult and even impossible to reach a reasonable judgement between the requirements and the available finances, unless a smaller addition could be made to the existing allocation for higher education, but only to cover the projects of first priority. Subsequently, Adams reported to the Chairman of the Colonial University Grants Committee that Creech Jones, then Secretary of State for the Colonies, appreciated the insufficiency of the £4.5 million, and was willing to take £2 million from the Central Reserves, making thus a total of £6.5 million which should cover the finances of the Regional Colleges as well. But the Grants Committee preferred to retain £1.5 million, leaving the remaining £0.5 million for the Regional Colleges with which it was not concerned. Then, in view of this increase, the Inter University Council attempted to readjust the distribution of the money on academic grounds. Still, the revised total of the claims was around £6.5 million and £6.555.000, these estimates being those of the IUC and the Colonial Grants Committee (CGC) respectively.

Both the IUC and CGC recognised that both Nigeria and the Gold Coast were equally important from the academic point of view; but they agreed that the money available for West Africa under C.D.W. should be allocated to Ibadan (Nigeria), since the Gold Coast people made it clear that they would finance their own University College. However, the IUC decided to offer the Gold Coast a grant of no less than £100.000 on the grounds that the College was going to provide courses to serve West Africa (23). As to the claims of Sierra Leone, they were considered by a Joint –Standing Committee grouping members from the Inter University Council, the Advisory

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Committee of Colonial Education (Colonial Office), and later by the Colonial Advisory Committee on Colonial Colleges of Arts, Science and Technology (COCAST).

The primacy of British interest safeguarded by monopolistic practices, Colonial Development Policy programmes (1940, 1945-55), preferential tariffs and high salaries for British staff affected the growth of educational expansion. On the other hand the incapacity of British universities to meet the needs of colonial students in the post war period together with the need to keep them away from what officials regarded as subversive and political dangerous ideologies (left wing), required that colonial requirement should be met by higher educational planning in the colonial dependencies. British academics and officials had to balance what was educationally desirable with what was politically impossible.

Notes

1. By the 19th century there were five university institutions: St Andrews (1411), Glasgow (1451), Aberdeen King's College (1494), Edinburgh (1582), Marshall (1593). King's College and Marshall became united.

2. J.Irvine, *Past and Future of British Universities,* in Obligation of Universities to the Social Order, Address at a Conference of Universities under the Auspices of New York University, November 1932.

3. R.E. Bell; Youngson (ed), *The growth of the Modern University,* in Present and Future in Higher Education, P;13

4. F.Clarke, *Education and Social Change*, p 48

5. A.Lowe, *Universities and Social Change*, p.1

6. AC.Dent, *A New Order in English Education*, p 33

7. W. Moberly, *Crisis in the University*, p.71.

8. Report of the Association of University Teachers on *University Development,* Journal of Education, April 1944, p. 157

9. B.Truscot, *The University and Its Region*, Political Quarterly, Vol. 15, 1944, p.298.

10. B.Truscot, *Redbrick University*, p.45-48.

11. J. Mac Murray, *The Function of a University*, Political Quarterly, Vol. 15, 1942, p.277.

12. Channon's Sub committee consisted of: Channon (Chairman), Members: B.Mouat Jones, J.Huxley, Miss Perham, M.W. Macmillan, J. Hussey, and CMW. Cox.

13. The appointment of the two commissions came as a result of discussions among the members of the Colonial Office Advisory Committee on Colonial Education in the early 1940s. While the first was concerned with considering the principles which should guide the development of colonial university institutions, the second was requested to enquire into the organisation and facilities in West Africa.

14. Colonial Development and Welfare policy replaced that of CD Fund of 1929. Its aim was to 'protect and advance the interest of the inhabitants of the colonies... to further active development of the natural resources of the various so as to provide their people with improved standard of life' Cmd 6174, 1940 '*Statement of Policy CD.W*'

15. C.O 847/ 37/ 47242/ 1947, Conference of African Governors, Education Policy, pp 14.

16. CO 859/ 86/ 12041/ 1947. Chairman IUC to all Vice-chancellors of Universities in UK.

17. According to the Asquith Commission, seconded staff should not constitute more than a half of the total staff.

18. IUC archives 405/ 3/ 1947 expatriate allowance for members of staff of colonial universities and university colleges.

19. Elliot report: Nigeria £1,310.000; the Gold Coast £120.000; Sierra Leone £100.000.

20. Recurrent expenditure: Nigeria: £171.000; the Gold Coast £73.000; Sierra Leone £14.000.

21. Despatch, July 1946, pp12, 14.

22. Despatch, August 1947, pp 14

23. C.O 554/ 147/ 33599/ 13/ 1947-48, CUGAC meeting 27.9. 1947.

24. IUC archives 405/ 1947, Adams to Thompson, 27.9.1947

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