



THE POLITICS OF ACCESS: UNIVERSITY EDUCATION AND NATION-BUILDING IN NIGERIA, 1948-2000

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Introduction

Background

Access to university education in Africa was inadequate during the colonial period. At independence, however, African countries departed from the elitist colonial education system by embarking on programs aimed at providing education to all, regardless of class, ethnicity, gender, or creed. Nowhere in Africa has the question of access to university education reached such a crescendo of concern and posed such a challenge to the polity than in Nigeria. This book constitutes a history of the policies and politics surrounding the push for mass university education (massification) in postcolonial Nigeria. The concept of massification as used in this study refers to Nigeria's postcolonial shift from elitist university educational system to mass education. As the most populous, oil-rich nation in Africa, with a protracted ethnic and religious conflict between the predominantly Muslim North and Christian South, the push for mass university education is central to understanding Nigeria's postcolonial socio-economic and political history. This book argues that the premise of building a modern Nigerian nation underscored the pursuit of mass university education policies by Nigeria's successive postcolonial governments. It shows the centrality of a vision of university education to the "nationalist project" in Nigeria and demonstrates that the move to mass university education

was an essential social imaginary for Nigeria's vision of itself as a modern, dynamic nation state.

Through analysis of the politics that drove the massification agenda, this study bridges and recasts scholarly understanding of the challenges of national integration and socio-economic development in Nigeria's pluralistic society. It accounts for, and provides new insights on, how internal religious and ethnic/regional politics in Nigeria coalesced with external interests to shape policy initiatives on mass university education and the shifts and outcomes of the country's education policies. In illuminating Nigeria's experiment with mass education, this book enhances our understanding of the difficulties of the country's postcolonial social engineering, as well as providing a valuable glimpse into some of the similar challenges facing African countries. If we are to grasp modern Nigeria, with its intractable tensions, as well as its political instability, we must understand the dynamics of higher education policies. Thus by exploring the nature, problems, and pitfalls of the shift towards a system of mass university education throughout its colonial configuration, the immediate postcolonial adjustments, and several years of transition of military, democratic, and neo-liberal leaderships, this book provides a window into the promise and problems of Nigeria itself.

The British establishment of the first university in Nigeria, the University College of Ibadan (UCI), in 1948 was a response to decades of nationalist demand for an institution of higher education in the country. Afraid of the potential threat that educated Africans would pose to the colonial system and mindful of the financial implications of establishing universities in the colonies, colonial authorities had opposed the idea of higher education training for colonial subjects. Charles Wood, president of the Board of Control (1853–55) and secretary of state of India (1859–66) set the tone for British colonial higher education policy. In a dispatch to F.J. Halliday, lieutenant governor of Bengal, Wood had bluntly delineated the logic that ultimately shaped British colonial higher education policy:

I do not see the advantage of rearing up a number of highly educated gentlemen at the expense of the State, whom you cannot employ, and who will naturally become depositories of discontent. If they choose to train themselves, well and good, but I

am against providing our own future detractors and opponents and grumblers.¹

The end of Second World War marked a turning point in the history of higher education in Nigeria. As part of its postwar reconstruction and development agenda, Britain came to regard university education as an important instrument, not only in the social development of her colonies, but also in training future African leaders. Thus British colonial authorities set up the Asquith and Elliot commissions to advise it on how to meet its new education vision. These commissions submitted their reports in 1945. Following the broad principles outlined by the Asquith Commission and the recommendations of the Elliot Commission, UCI was established. UCI, along with other colonial university colleges, was established based on a erroneous premise that what was suitable for Britain equally applied to the colonies. In *Universities: British, Indian, African: A Study in the Ecology of Higher Education*, Eric Ashby, a British historian, writes that

[the] underlying British enterprise in providing higher education for her people overseas was one massive assumption: that the pattern of university education appropriate for Manchester, Exeter and Hull was *ipso facto* appropriate for Ibadan, Kampala and Singapore. If we were going to export universities to our overseas dependencies they would of course be British universities, just as the cars we export there are British cars. As with cars, so with universities: we willingly made minor modifications to suit the climate, but we proposed no radical change in design; and we did not regard it as our business to inquire whether French or American models might be more suitable.²

Soon Nigerians were disappointed with Britain's wholesale exportation of their pattern of university education to Nigeria. With an annual intake of less than 130 students, a low rate of production of (admittedly) highly trained graduates for the public and private sectors, and a lopsided curriculum and enrolment, UCI failed to satisfy the higher education needs of most Nigerians. Nationalists such as Nnamdi Azikiwe and Obafemi Awolowo thus rejected the elitist and conservative traditions of UCI and

not only demanded changes in the institution's curriculum and admission policies but also intensified their push for decolonization. It was not surprising, therefore, that when Nigeria gained independence in 1960, policy-makers reconfigured university education to fulfill a new mission: the mission of nation-building and socio-economic development. Like in other African countries, colonial rule impoverished Nigeria, limiting social amenities, mobility, and economic opportunities, as well as deliberately creating discord in the country's pluralistic society. "The fundamental challenge facing universities in a postcolonial setting," as Oluwasanmi puts it, "is that of development, of bringing social and economic change rapidly into a situation which has been deprived for so long."³ Understanding these problems and proffering solutions to them became a new task for postcolonial African universities. This book argues that attempts to engage university education to promote nation-building and facilitate socio-economic development largely shaped the shifts towards mass university education in postcolonial Nigeria.

Unlike the colonial period, the driving force behind Nigeria's postcolonial university education was hinged on Robbins's principle that "courses of higher education should be available to all who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them and who wish to do so."⁴ Thus, the most dominant theme in the history of postcolonial university education in Nigeria is what Martin Trow, a sociologist, called the shift from elite to mass higher education.⁵ Conceptually, Nigeria's massification agenda was an amalgam of three broad policies instituted by the federal government and its component units to reorganize its university education system in response to the needs of postcolonial Nigeria. First, it involved the expansion of access to university education through the establishment of more universities, the diversification of university curriculum, the centralization of university control, and the involvement of the private sector in the supply of university education. The idea was to train the country's labour force, especially in the sciences, not only to fill the vacancies created by the departing Europeans, but also to help champion future economic development and national integration.

Second, massification involved the liberalization of access to university education through measures such as state control of admission process to eliminate admission bottlenecks, the revision of the rigid British entry

qualifications, the awarding of scholarships, and the granting of free university education. The purpose was to remove the historical and structural obstacles that had impeded access to university education in the colonial era. Third, massification involved the democratization of access through equal geographical distribution of universities and the introduction of an affirmative action policy (quotas) in university admission. The aim was to end the volatile and divisive educational disparity between the North and the South through equal representation of all ethnic groups in the existing institutions. The postcolonial policies of expansion, liberalization, and democratization aimed at mass university education. Although the goal of mass education was not met, these policies represented a radical departure from the elitist colonial system of higher education, which was inequitable and unrepresentative.

Education for Nation-Building

The philosophy of using mass university education to promote nation-building in Nigeria's pluralistic society was one that postcolonial governments embraced. They sought to create a nation in a society where ethnic/religious diversity, conflict, and competition had deprived it of a national identity. A nation can be viewed as a political arrangement and a cultural phenomenon aimed at developing the state. It is, according to Ernest Renan, "a soul and a spiritual principle," constituting both the past and the present, and renewing itself especially in the "present by a tangible deed: the approval, the desire, clearly expressed, to continue the communal life." For Renan, the "existence of a nation is an everyday plebiscite; it is, like the very existence of the individual, a perpetual affirmation of life."⁶ Nation-building was not a factor in formulating colonial educational policies. Independence, however, created new realities and needs. Transforming the British educational system thus became necessary to meet those needs. Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist, argued that "In order for people to feel at any particular moment in time the need to change its educational system, it is necessary that new ideas and needs have emerged in which the former system is no longer adequate."⁷ The broad framework for a shift in educational policy in Africa materialized in 1962 when a conference on

Development of Higher Education in Africa was held in Malagasy Republic between 3 and 12 September. Endorsing the role of universities in nation-building, the conference declared,

African institutions of higher learning have the duty of acting as instruments for the consolidation of national unity. This they can do by resolutely opposing the efforts of tribalism and encouraging exchanges, and by throwing open the university to all students who show capacity to benefit from a university education of internationally acceptable academic standards, and by resolutely ignoring ethnic or tribal origins and political and religious discrimination.⁸

According to Richard Sklar, nation-building is a process of creating “higher loyalties that supersede parochial loyalties to subnational communities, tribes, language groups, or regions.”⁹ Among other things, it involves “the progressive reduction of cultural and regional tensions and discontinuities on the horizontal plane in the process of creating a homogenous territorial political community.”¹⁰ Ethnicity is “the employment or mobilization of ethnic identity and difference to gain advantage in situations of competition, conflict or cooperation.”¹¹ Ethnicity has been “the most formidable barrier to national unity in Africa. Nearly every African state has at least one serious problem of ethnic or regional separatism.”¹² Nigeria’s multi-ethnic society presented a huge challenge and potential at its independence in 1960. The challenge was how to promote collective consciousness among its diverse groups in order to realize its great potentials. University education was identified as a force in uniting Nigerians in a common conscience. Durkheim stated that every society “considered at a given stage of development, has a system of education which exercises an irresistible influence on individuals.”¹³ Durkheim’s model of nation-building posits that a society consists of individuals who are united in a *collective conscience* through the common values, norms, and rules that are partly transmitted through school. As Durkheim further noted, “Society can survive only if there exists among its members a sufficient degree of homogeneity by fixing in the child, from the beginning, the essential similarity that collective life demands.”¹⁴ Nigerian universities in a postcolonial setting were meant

to reflect the nation-building process and equally contribute to it by supplying the knowledge that would constitute the basis for creating a national identity; for according to Durkheim, “it is the society as a whole and each particular social milieu that determine the ideal that education realizes.”¹⁵

One of the most common sources of conflict between the South and the North was the educational disparity between the two areas. This gap, which began to appear in the 1840s when Christian missionaries introduced Western education to the country, widened throughout the colonial period. Due to geographical, political, and religious factors, as discussed in chapter 1, the North fell behind in Western education. The statistics of regional enrolment at UCI during the colonial period favoured southerners. For instance, out of 939 students studying in the college between 1948 and 1959, southerners numbered 865 with only 74 northerners.¹⁶ As southerners continued to outnumber northerners in school enrolment, mutual suspicion intensified. The British resisted the northerner’s demand for an affirmative action policy that would help address the gap. Such an admission policy, as they believed, “might lower academic standards, not only in terms of quality of the student’s entry but in terms of the work of the staff and students throughout the college.”¹⁷

The North-South conflicts intensified in the 1950s when it became clear to the northern elite that the more educated southerners would likely dominate the political class after independence. As the editor of a northern newspaper, *Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwabo* decried, “In all the different departments of government it is the Southerner who has the power.”¹⁸ On the eve of independence, Nigerian nationalists saw higher education reforms as an opportunity to revise the elitist British higher education system by pushing not only for expansion of human resource training but also ways of addressing the volatile educational gap between the South and the North. Against the common tendency to examine Nigeria’s mass education experiment as largely designed to train human resources to fill vacancies left behind by departing European administrators, this book offers a perspective that shows that mass university education policies constituted a central element in the government’s policy of addressing the historical rivalries existing among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria.¹⁹ It reveals how the ethno-regional tensions generated by the educational disparity between the two areas defined Nigeria’s postcolonial higher education politics, making,

for instance, the policy of affirmative action in university admission an inevitable, attractive, yet controversial tool in the push for university expansion as well as in the promotion of national unity. Here, politics, religion, and education intersect, shedding light on Nigeria's turbulent march to nationhood. So when the viability of the idea and ideal of the Nigeria nation was tested during the Nigerian Civil War (1967–70), building “the nation anew,” as Gowon termed it, became the philosophical foundation for a renewed push for mass university education in the 1970s and 1980s.²⁰

Education for Development

Successive governments in Nigeria subscribed to the human capital theory as part of the nation-building project and thus embarked on an ambitious investment in educational expansion. The human capital theory gained popularity in the postwar era as policy-makers, educationists and economists increasingly accepted education as a productive investment. The theory posits that economic development of a country is contingent on capital formation achievable through investment in human beings. By improving the quality of a workforce through educational expansion, the theory argues, a country increases the productivity of citizens and thus lays the foundation for socio-economic development.²¹ According to Harbison, “Education does contribute to growth but growth also makes it possible to expand and develop education. It is both the flower and the seed of economic development.”²² As many scholars have shown, human capital theory presumes that investment in education is a prerequisite to both modernization and economic growth of any society.²³ The idea that investment in education is rewarding, explains, according to Fagerlind and Saha, large government expenditure on education in both developing and developed countries.²⁴ A country's human resources decide the nature and pace of its socio-economic development, and, as Psacharopoulos and Woodhall state, they constitute

the ultimate basis of wealth of nations. Capital and natural resources are passive factors of production, human beings are the active agencies who accumulate capital, exploit natural

resources, build social, economic and political organization, and carry forward national development.²⁵

Postcolonial African countries, including Nigeria, anchored their mission of university education partly on the theory of human capital. This mission departed significantly from the narrow, elitist vision that characterized European higher education policy during the colonial period.²⁶ Access to university education in Africa was inadequate during the colonial period. Colonial authorities accorded low priority to university education because they failed to see it as an investment.²⁷ They were afraid of the implications of widespread production of highly educated Africans and therefore focused on training few Africans who would assist them in administering their colonies as well as occupy leadership positions after independence. Thus the admission criteria were intentionally rigorous, and, as Ashby notes, it was “more exacting than those for the universities in Scotland and Ireland, and much more exacting than the entry requirements for universities in America, Canada, and Australia.”²⁸ To the disappointment of many Nigerians, between 1948 and 1959, only 939 students were in UCI while more than 1,911 Nigerians, who were considered unqualified by UCI standards, gained admission in American, Australian, European, and Canadian universities. The total graduates from UCI between 1950 and 1960 were only 615.²⁹ Worse still was the fact that course enrolment favoured liberal arts courses, neglecting courses closely aligned to the developmental needs of Nigerians, such as applied sciences, agriculture, and medical, technical, and vocational courses.³⁰

The Nigerian situation was not unique; other African countries experienced similar problems. At the time of independence, only about one quarter of all professional civil service positions were held by Africans while foreigners dominated trade and industry throughout the continent.³¹ Zambia, for instance, had only a hundred university graduates, while the University of East Africa that served Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda – with a combined population of 23 million – produced only ninety-nine university graduates. At its independence in 1960, the Democratic Republic of Congo, formerly known as Zaire, had no indigenous graduate engineers, lawyers, or doctors. Few Africans were trained in agricultural science, a field most relevant to a continent known for subsistence farming. French

colonies in Africa produced only four graduates in the field while there were 150 in English-speaking colonies.³²

Since colonial university education failed to produce enough human resources to champion socio-economic transformation of the continent, independence presented African political elite with an opportunity to reconfigure university education to serve that societal need. The broad framework for a policy shift was also articulated in the 1962 conference on *Development of Higher Education in Africa*. The early 1960s was a period when many new states were emerging in Africa and thus participants at the conference focused on the new role university education would play. Faced with the choice of allowing universities to merely fulfill the narrow role that they performed in colonial Africa or take additional roles that radically distinguished them from other European institutions, as well as fit them “for greater service to the African Society,” the conference declared that the “establishment and development of higher education facilities ... is basic to social and economic reconstruction of Africa.”³³ It further declared that “in order to provide the high-level manpower that [Africa] will require in the process of social and economic development [they] ... will need, in the next twenty years, to increase many times the number of students in their universities.”³⁴

The place of education in Africa’s socio-economic advancement is crucial and a host of scholars agree. In *Higher Education in Postcolonial Africa: Paradigms of Development, Decline and Dilemmas*, the authors “carefully packaged education as part of development, because this is what it really is.”³⁵ Ashby sees universities as “absolutely essential to the economy and to the very survival of nations.” He further notes that “under the patronage of modern governments, they are cultivated as intensive crops, heavily manured and expected to give a high yield to the nourishment of the state.”³⁶ To Ajayi, university education is “a mechanism by which society generates the knowledge necessary for its own survival and sustenance, and transmits this to future generations through processes of instruction to the youth.”³⁷ According to Chinweizu, African universities should “serve as finishing schools for those who have to lead and develop the traditions of a society.”³⁸

The expansion of university training had become crucial in Nigeria as early as 1957 when a constitutional conference in London established a national government and decided on 1 April 1960 as the tentative date

for the country's independence. As Nigeria approached independence with only 939 students (excluding about 1,000 who were studying overseas) in UCI in 1959, nationalists blamed the college for insufficient training of the high-level human resources needed to replace the departing Europeans as well as to advance economic development. Aja Nwachuku, the federal minister of education, expressed the federal government's concern when he stated in 1959:

If we are to approach independence with confidence and serenity, we must know that there will be adequate numbers of skilled technicians and of professional workers in all fields, who are aware and ready to accept the responsibilities attendant upon the attainment self-government.³⁹

The ethos of realigning university education to address the economic challenges facing that postcolonial Nigeria was one that not only the Nigerian political elite embraced but also officials of the Carnegie Corporation, a leading philanthropic organization in the United States. Largely due to the perceived dilemma with maintaining costs and high academic standards, the colonial government had consistently resisted fundamental changes until the late 1950s when the seeming threat of the Soviet Union in Africa and the suspicion that African nationalists would seek assistance from the communists in their fight for independence opened up colonial minds to the necessity of change. The "wind of change" in the British colonies in Africa was uncontrollably fast in the postwar years. Britain's chances of maintaining friendly relations with African countries after independence would have suffered if it failed to support Nigeria's university reform.⁴⁰ Although the British were initially reluctant, the Carnegie Corporation's subtle and sustained pressure helped get the British involved in reforming the colonial education system.

Following the Second World War, Carnegie leadership believed that "a search for a new balance of power to offset the expansion of Russian influence" was America's role in the world.⁴¹ The corporation's main mission therefore became "the effective propagation of the democratic and liberal ideals both in terms of its domestic and international connotations."⁴² Led by Alan Pifer, a staff of Carnegie's international program dubbed British

Dominions and Colonies Program, and identifying Nigeria as a potential giant of Africa, Carnegie took advantage of the Cold War to advocate an alternative education system based on American models and values as a tool in containing the spread of communism in Africa.⁴³ Rebuffing the existing status quo in the colonies, Pifer called for expansion of all types and levels of education for Africans, especially in “agricultural, technical, and medical education and teacher training.”⁴⁴ Although Pifer began his campaign in 1954, it was not until 1958 that Britain finally accepted a joint Nigerian-British-American commission to study Nigeria’s higher education needs. The corporation financed the commission, named after the chair, Eric Ashby. The Ashby Commission submitted its report at Nigeria’s independence in 1960; its far-reaching recommendations not only endorsed the link between university education and socio-economic development, but also provided Nigerian governments with a blueprint to guide their shift from an elite to a mass education system.⁴⁵

Various studies by J.F. Ade Ajayi, Lameck K.H. Goma, and G. Ampah Johnson, Eric Ashby, and Apollos Nwauwa have masterfully highlighted the nationalists’ demands for establishing institutions of higher learning in colonial Africa and the subsequent attempts to “Africanize” the inherited education system.⁴⁶ To extend these works, this book links a discussion of how the politics of postwar decolonization movements and the Cold War shifted Britain’s long objections to higher education reform in Nigeria to attempts by nationalists to redesign the country’s university system to serve the postcolonial need for rapid societal transformation. It shows how the domestic and international politics of the 1950s led to the coalescence of the interests of the Carnegie Corporation, Britain, and Nigeria, thereby laying the groundwork for Nigeria’s future commitment to mass education.

Postcolonial commitment to socio-economic development facilitated university expansion not only in Nigeria but also in virtually all African countries. Demand for access to universities escalated. Enrolment surged. Financial resources were strained.⁴⁷ From less than a hundred thousand in the 1960s, students in higher education institutions in Africa increased to about 3.5 million in 2000.⁴⁸ Egypt tops the list with an enrolment figure of 1.5 million, representing an enrolment ratio of 5 per cent for the 18–22 age group. Nigeria comes second, followed by South Africa with total enrolment of about 1 million and half a million, respectively.⁴⁹ In 2009,

sub-Saharan Africa alone had 4 million tertiary students. This growth, according to the World Bank, “represents one of the highest regional growth rates in the world for tertiary enrolments, averaging 8.7 per cent a year.”⁵⁰ Inspired by the desire to promote economic development and often motivated by the country’s oil wealth, successive Nigerian governments between 1960 and 2000 embarked on an unprecedented expansion of university education in that every four to five years in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, enrolment in all the universities doubled (but slowed down in the 1990s due to economic decline).⁵¹ Yet, the gross enrolment ratio for the 18–25 age group was approximately 5 per cent, slightly above the overall average enrolment ratio in Africa, which was 3 per cent.⁵²

As this book demonstrates, the overall context of Nigerian economy and politics dictated continuities, discontinuities, and outcomes of mass university education policies. The need for rapid modernization of the economy shaped the emphasis on science and technology since independence, particularly from the 1960s to the early 1980s. This found expression in many official pronouncements. For instance, in his address at UCI (now University of Ibadan) in 1970, Yakubu Gowon, Nigeria’s head of state, 1966–75, posed this challenge to Nigerian universities: “It is perhaps not too much to hope ... that if it ever becomes necessary for the human race to transfer en masse to some other planets, like Mars, our scientists and technologists would be ready with the necessary means of transport for Nigerian citizens!”⁵³ While the sudden oil wealth of the 1970s and 1980s facilitated the proliferation of universities, official corruption, mismanagement of resources, and politicization of university education combined to truncate not only university expansion but also economic development.⁵⁴ Thus, the economic decline and political crisis of the late 1980s and 1990s diverted interests in university expansion as well as occasioned efforts by the military regimes to consolidate power at all cost while pursuing IMF/World Bank-sanctioned rationalization policies.

Organization

This book consists of seven chapters. Chapter 1 discusses the aims and objectives of Western education as conceived by the British colonial

authorities, highlighting the multi-ethnic and religious settings in which Nigeria's quest for mass education emerged. It examines the forces responsible for the successful demand for the establishment of UCI in 1948, as well as the struggle to increase enrolment at the college. This chapter also gives a sense of how the disparities in school entrance between the South and the North exacerbated the existing regional tensions and rivalries, thereby making future consideration of affirmative action both unavoidable and contentious in Nigeria's nation-building project.

Due to their disappointment with the unmet demand for university education, nationalists, largely inspired by regional loyalties, campaigned for mass education and a reform of the elitist British higher education policies in Nigeria. Their demand received a boost from Carnegie Corporation officials, who campaigned for reforming the elitist British system of university education as a means of extending America's influence in Africa's emerging nations.

Chapter 2 shows how a combination of domestic and external forces resulted in the setting up of the Ashby Commission whose recommendations directed postcolonial Nigerian governments in their efforts to achieve national integration and socio-economic development in Nigeria through university expansion. As this chapter reveals, the coalescence of the interests of Carnegie, Britain, and Nigeria formed not only the cornerstone of a new era in Anglo-American collaboration in Nigerian higher education reform but also a prelude to Nigeria's postcolonial program to engage mass university education policies in the service of societal transformation.

Based on the recommendations of the Ashby Commission for "massive" and "unconventional" expansion of university education, the newly independent government, led by Alhaji Tafawa Balewa and with assistance from various international donors, embarked on the first push for mass university education, 1960–70. During this period, student enrolment in all the Nigerian universities jumped from 939 students to 9,695 students.⁵⁵ Chapter 3 discusses the aims and objectives of higher education as conceived by policy-makers during the first decade of Nigeria's independence, the expansion of facilities and access, and the ways in which regional rivalries, flawed admission policies, and the Nigerian civil war (1967–70) truncated university expansion.

In order to satisfy the rising demand for university education as well as to advance national unity after the civil war, the federal government, under the successive military regimes of Yakubu Gowon, Murtala Mohammed, and Olusegun Obasanjo, effectively took control of all the universities, federal and regional, in order to achieve uniform development. Chapter 4 shows how Nigeria's oil-rich economy and post-civil war reconciliatory mood shaped the unprecedented expansion of university education during the second push for mass education, 1970–79.

After thirteen years of military rule, a democratic government under President Shehu Shagari came to power in 1979. Eager to fulfill their electoral promises and keep Nigerians united, the newly elected officials at the federal and state levels, as chapter 5 shows, pushed for the liberalization and democratization of university education. In keeping with the vision of socio-economic development and nation-building, the Shagari administration established universities of science and technology, introduced free education and affirmative action, initiated the National Open University scheme, and allowed states to participate in educational expansion. Some of these policies were ambitious and in some ways controversial. They were made with the hopes that the increase in oil revenue will continue to generate revenue to fund these social programs. But the mismanagement of the economy and rampant corruption not only compromised mass education attempts but also threatened nation-building and economic development during the third attempt at mass university education, 1979–83.

Chapter 6 examines how the depressed economy inherited by the military regimes of Mohammed Buhari and Ibrahim Babangida required them to rethink educational expansion. Here, the premise of mass university education for nation-building and economic development faded, despite official government pronouncements to the contrary. Repositioning university education to aid economic recovery assumed great importance. This chapter shows how the involvement of the World Bank and the IMF in Nigeria's economic policies constrained the government to implement the highly consequential policy of rationalization during the fourth attempt at cautious massification, 1984–90.

After seven years of underfunding for the universities, Nigeria's oil revenue improved dramatically in 1990 because of the first Gulf War. Yet, efforts to address the question of mass university education, as chapter 7

demonstrates, were overshadowed by echoes of political instability and frequent changes of governments in the 1990s, coupled with the mismanagement of oil revenue during the fifth push for massification, 1990–2000. As the military governments wrestled with the tension generated by the surge in demand for university education, the radicalization of labour unions in the universities, and the controversy surrounding affirmative action, the deregulation of the university system seemed logical and attractive. Given the short supply of university places, the establishment of private universities, earlier resisted by various regimes in Nigeria, became “a normal and commendable supply response to a huge and growing demand for university education.”⁵⁶ This chapter demonstrates that the emergence of private university education not only underscores the problems of public universities and the short supply of university education but also represents a new direction in the push for mass university education.

Faced with the challenge of promoting nation-building and socio-economic development, successive postcolonial governments in Nigeria had affirmed their commitment to mass university education. Still, there was a wide gulf between what was stated and what was practised and achieved. Although Nigerian governments often claimed success in the midst of policy failure, the 5 per cent enrolment ratio for the 18–22 age group in 2000, the sustained deterioration of universities facilities, the prevailing crisis of nationhood and economic development, the radicalization of anti-government academic unions in the universities, and the consequent instability in the system, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, eloquently shows that mass university education program failed to produce the intended outcomes. This work presents a picture of complex interlocking relationships between politics, economics and education in the push and outcomes of mass university education policies in postcolonial Nigeria. It is a compendium of useful information and insights into the many policy shifts and turns in the optimism and betrayal of Nigerian education. More importantly, it provides valuable insight into the challenges of nation-building in Nigeria’s pluralistic society.