

Cuba, Mexico, Argentina, to mention just a few, are some of the constant reminders of the many injustices of history, which in our peculiar circumstances, we simply have to confront head-on, whatever the consequences. At another level, however, they affirm continuities that have finally emerged in the fanciful idiom of “globalization.”

I am supposed to be speaking this day on the historical and contemporary dimensions of the West African Students’ Union, often simply referred to as WASU. I have taken the liberty to modify the title of the original topic assigned me, partly to escape from the anticipated tautologies implicit in such a rehash of assigned topics, but more fundamentally, to locate our present dilemma within the general background of its founding fathers in the mid-1920s. My choice of title, “

by a sense of adventure and industry which, in the final analysis, are markers for the selfless human being whose personal self-abandonment often results in communal salvation—in whatever form it comes. Every WASU member is *Ojemba*, because many of us here could have been elsewhere acquiring resources for our personal aggrandizement. To this end, we remain, as the late musician, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, sang, essentially what we are: “*water no get enemy.*”

I have just mentioned the injustices of history. Was the West African passive in the midst of those moments of lunacy in the history of the black’s humanity? You all know the answer to this question. I do not want to embark on the populist mission of recounting the place of West Africans in the overthrow of apartheid: this would amount to nothing less than unbridled garrulousness. We do know, at least, that as early as 1921, one of the most influential sons of West Africa, Dr J. E. K. Aggrey of the then Gold Coast, had arrived in South Africa, during which period he gave some of the sanest propositions ever made for racial harmony on this side of the planet. Dr Aggrey at this time already had two doctoral degrees, after having studied and taught in universities in the United States of America for over twenty years. He was a darling of many black South Africans at the time, and we find evidence of this in the prodigious documentations of some black South African contemporaries, such as T. D. Mveli Skota, Sol. T. Plaatje, and much later in the work of the Dhlomo brothers.³ It is remarkable that when Dr Aggrey originally made attempts to secure a teaching position in South Africa, the then government of the “Union of South Africa” turned down his request. When he was later invited for the position, he politely declined the

Let me, at this point, take another little backward leap into the past. One recalls the immense efforts of African-American freedom fighters prior to, and since, the “Abolition” of slavery and the slave trade; the memories we have of names like Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. du Bois, Marcus Garvey, etc.,

The founding president of WASU in 1925, Ladepo Solanke, a Nigerian law student at the time, embraced the union with the utmost passion. Not only did he travel through West Africa to generate funds for the success of the organisation, he successfully mobilised West Africans at London University into cultural debates that anticipated the many transformations that were later witnessed in West Africa.

The nationalist and patriotic ethos of WASU is perceivable in its guiding philosophy. A member of the organisation at the time, another West African from Ghana, J. W. de Graft-Johnson, later published a book, *The Vanished Glory*, which highlights the romanticised nature of its conception of Africa. Ladepo Solanke and his

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our collective mentality, especially with such idiotic “requests” calling for the minutes of our private deliberations. It’s not done!

I suggest, however, that as a matter of urgency, we should immediately start the production of our journal, to be tentatively titled *Ojemba: The WASU Journal*, which will pursue our mission with marked doggedness. I suggest further, that we pursue our aspirations through this journal with the carriage of the triumphant sojourner—*Ojemba*—who, like