



My Quest for an Internet

In this, the 47th installment of our weekly series at emeagwali.com, we present an excerpt from Nigeria's 50th anniversary lecture at the Embassy of Nigeria, Paris.

AFRICA: Then, Now and Forever

– Part 1 of 5

By [Philip Emeagwali](http://emeagwali.com)

Excerpt from Nigeria's 50th anniversary lecture at the Embassy of Nigeria, Paris. Lecture video and audio are posted at

http://www.youtube.com/emeagwali#p/a/u/2/6_mrjx2UIO8

and emeagwali.com.



Nigerian children welcome Queen Elizabeth II to Lagos, Nigeria.

Walk with me in memory to one of the greatest celebrations, the end of the colonial era in Africa. The day: October 1, 1960. The place: British West Africa. The setting: a crowded stadium in the Atlantic coastal town of Sapele. School children are waving green and white flags in honor of the birth of

modern Nigeria, no longer part of the British Empire.

I was six years old and was in that stadium. I do not remember what was said because the concept of colonialism was abstract to me. But I vividly remember an incident that made me cry all that day. I was waving my flag in excitement

In 1884 [Berlin Conference], Africa was the agenda, but no African was at the table.

when a faceless bully snatched it away and disappeared into the crowd.



In far-away Lagos, the Union Jack was lowered. Nigeria's Head of State, the Queen of England, was dethroned and Nnamdi Azikiwe became Nigeria's first black leader.

Fifty years earlier, the Union Jack had cast its shadow across every global time zone, giving rise to the saying, "The sun never sets on the British Empire." We had showed our pride in being part of the empire by celebrating Empire Day on May 24th, Queen Victoria's birthday, with parades and sporting competitions. Later, Empire Day was renamed Commonwealth Day.

As a country, Nigeria has existed for 96 years, but it has only been independent for 50 years, for just over half that time. We must critically examine the 46 years of colonial rule over Nigeria and the scramble for Africa that began with the Berlin Conference of 1884, if we are to get insights into how to chart our nation's course for the next 50 years.

The Sankofa is a mythical bird of the Akan people of West Africa. It flies forward while looking backward, with an egg in its mouth to symbolize the future. In order to understand its history, to reclaim its past, and to enable its people to move forward into the 21st century, Africa must look back, back to the Berlin

Conference of 1884 and back to the Atlantic slave trade that spanned four continents and four centuries. This will allow us to understand how we came to be 54 nations instead of one.

Like the Sankofa bird, Africa must look to its past to predict its future. It must know how it evolved in order to understand how it can be recreated. Its people should know where their journey began in order to understand which direction to take to find their future.

The Berlin Conference is when Africa was divided into roughly 50 colonies, and 1884 was when the modern map of Africa was created. The Berlin Conference was the beginning of modern Africa. In 1884, Africa was the agenda, but no African was at the table.

This year, in 2010, 17 African nations are celebrating their 50th

anniversary of sovereignty and post-colonial rule. Nigeria's journey, like that of the other independent African nations, began at the Berlin Conference 126 years ago with no African in attendance. If colonial Africa could be created in Berlin, then a future

If colonial Africa
could be created
in Berlin, then a
future Africa
could be created
in Beijing.

Africa could be created in Beijing. Nations creating technological knowledge are reinventing the future and recreating Africa.

I believe that, by the end of this century, one in two Africans will live outside Africa. I was asked:

"Why did you live in exile from Africa for 37 years?" Put differently, "Why don't you deliver Nigeria's 50th anniversary lecture in Abuja, instead of in Paris?" I have never visited Abuja. But I am not at home in Washington, D.C., either.

I had an asymmetrical relationship with Africa and America, as well as with science and technology. I worked entirely outside the gates of science and as an outcast, with outsider status. I was honored, but will forever remain an outsider in America. I was honored for retelling the 330-year-old story of the Second Law of Motion: from the storyboard, to the blackboard, to the motherboard, by

reprogramming 65,000 sub-computers to compute as a supercomputer, and to communicate as an internet. I became my own ancestor in physics, my contemporary in mathematics, and descendant in internet science.

I experienced the usual in an unusual way. I was an ordinary person caught up in extraordinary circumstances. I decided to march forward, to come home to myself, not to someone else's home. I stayed in exile in America, feeling at home in my alienation from the white community. My 37 years of solitude allowed me to gather myself and to find my power.

[Philip Emeagwali](#) has been called "a father of the Internet" by [CNN](#) and [TIME](#), and extolled as a "Digital Giant" by [BBC](#) and as "one of the great minds of the Information Age" by former U.S. President [Bill Clinton](#).



[Philip Emeagwali](#) [[emeagwali.com](#)]



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philip@emeagwali.com

Date: 9/21/2006, 7:40 pm, GMT +6
Name: Samuel Kwelle <193.133.99.236>
Location: Port Harcourt, Nigeria
Number: 84

You are an inspiration to young African scientists, like me.

Your feat speaks of the limitless accomplishments still available to research in the modern world.

You are indeed a gift to the world of science

Date: 9/18/2006, 11:00 pm, GMT +6
Name: IGANDAN
OLASUNKANMI <64.201.33.215>
Location: LAGOS, NIGERIA
Number: 83

What will i say that has not been said, God has really made us to know that there is

nothing he can't do through his Creatures, he has done great things through u big brother. May him continue to lift u up. Watch out for my gift of love, it is little but it is my own little creative work, it's 4 u, all 4 u! IT IS ON THE WAY. U are great!!!!. God has made it so, and we are really grateful to him. Keep it up brother. MY GIFT IS ON THE WAY, WATCH OUT .SO LITTLE!!!

igandan olasunkanmi
p.o.box. 1122, ipaja lagos.

Date: 9/8/2006, 9:17 am, GMT +6
Name: Wilson Aiwuyor <67.82.253.127>
Location: NJ, USA
Number: 82

You are just too great an inspiration to a promising young black immigrant like me! God is using you to transform lives, even in your absence.

Date: 9/7/2006, 7:20 pm, GMT +6
Name: Ikeazor Anieto <83.229.100.244>
Location: Umannachi ,ANAMBRA
STATE,NIGERIA
Number: 81

GOOD DAY 2 YOU, EMEAGWALI,
WHAT DO U INTEND 2 DO 4 NIGERIA.
IF I AM TO BECOME THE PRESIDENT
OF NIGERIA I WILL MAKE U THE
MINISTER OF SCIENCE AND
TECHNOLOGY TO IMPROVE THE
COUNTRY. THANK U SO MUCH. LET
US MAKE A DEAL . GET ME ON THIS
DIAL 234 806 387 1875. HAVE A NICE
DAY

Date: 9/7/2006, 11:13 am, GMT +6
Name: Chukky King <75.28.148.224>
Location: Florida,U.S.A
Number: 80

DEAR PROF. EMEAGWALI, IF BIAFRA
 WAS ANNIHILATED WHILE YOU WERE
 THERE, WHO'D HAVE BEEN THE BABA
 OF THE INTERNET???

BRITAIN THINK! AMERICA STAND!!
 THE FREE WORLD HELP LIBERATE
 BIAFRA FOR THE BEST IS YET TO
 EMANATE FROM THE RISING SUN'S
 LAND!!!

BROS IN SHORT, BE GOOD AS ONU
 KWULU NJO G'EMESIA KWUO
 SEPT., 06 2006

NMA MGBE OGE RURU. YOUR
 BIAFRAN BROTHERS TREASURE YOUR
 DIVINEAPTITUDE.

NODI NMA.

A BU M NWA NNE GI, CHUKKY .

Date: 9/7/2006, 5:21 pm, GMT +6

Name: onwudinjo <62.128.160.179>

Location: awka

Number: 79

nwanne, we have graduated yet no job to. we have been roaming about. so what have you to do to help us

Date: 9/7/2006, 3:39 am, GMT +6

Name: Former Graduate Electrical Engineer from Minnesota <129.12.48.155>

Location: UK.

Number: 78

Dear Professor Emeagwali, though I have been constantly perusing your site, this is the first time I have posted in quite a long time. I have finished my Masters and starting a PhD. Like you, I had to leave Nigeria, specifically U.N.N. due to strike and as a result, will finish my PhD in my early thirties rather than earlier. However, like I had posted a while back, every time I have hit a wall, I come back here to get inspiration to continue. Your

words about geniuses is one that I definitely agree with and have observed. This has given me an optimistic outlook in that nothing fashioned by other human beings is impossible to learn. I have also learned that only true geniuses can really make anyone understand esoteric knowledge in basic terms as you have shown. I still mourn the true and just Biafrans that died for the struggle and those that are still suffering in Nigeria. I am trying to start a small unit of Nigerian experts that will help train the eager and bright young minds in Nigeria. After several years of information gathering, I believe that the best way to save the country and the continent is through immediate application of technical knowledge backed by a sound theory that produces visual results. I was wondering if you have ever initiated any such exercise and if so, what practical advice you can offer.

Dalu. Chukwu gozie gi na ndi be unu nile.

