Africa Development, Vol. XXII, No. 2, 1997

Book Reviews

Struggle for the University
A Review Article

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The African Experience with Higher Education, by J. F. Ade Ajayi, Lameck K. H. Goma, and G. Ampah Johnson, Accra, The Association of African Universities, 1996, p.xii+276; *The African University and Its Mission*, by Emanuel Ngara, Lesotho, The Institute of Southern African Studies, 1994, p.xviii+194; *Towards a Commonwealth of Scholars: A New Vision for the Nineties*, by Lalage Bown, ed., London, Commonwealth Secretariat, 1994, p.xii+245; and *The State of Academic Freedom in Africa 1995*, by CODESRIA, Dakar, CODESRIA, 1996, p.189.

The educational achievements of independent Africa are as impressive as the challenges are intimidating. More schools and universities were established in the first twenty-five years after colonialism than in a century of imperial rule. In 1960, the putative year of African independence, only 9 per cent of the African population was literate, rising to about 50 per cent three decades later. The rapid expansion of education not only led to a massive improvement in the African human capital stock, it also laid the institutional basis for the social production of African intellectual capacities, communities, and commitments. But the constraints, contradictions, and confusions of African education remained daunting, indeed, they deepened as one country after another reeled from the recessions of development and democracy, conditions that were exacerbated by the imposition of draconian structural adjustment programmes, which threatened to decompose the social fruits of *uhuru*.

As with other social phenomena, the educational enterprise in Africa is, therefore, a tale of triumph, trials, and tribulations, a stirring and searing story of perpetual struggle punctuated by sporadic successes and setbacks. From the 1980s, the setbacks outweighed the successes, as the struggles for the reproduction, regulation, and relevance of university education faced

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unprecedented challenges which were, simultaneously, institutional and intellectual, political and pecuniary, and moral and managerial. These are the issues discussed in the four books by some of Africa's leading university administrators and intellectuals. Perceptive and prescriptive in their analyses, they are written with profound and passionate urgency, about university governance and finance, autonomy and accountability, mission and responsibility. They should be compulsory reading for all those who oversee, fund, run, teach, study in, and are committed to the future of, African universities.

The African Experience with Higher Education is an ambitious and detailed overview of the development of university education in Africa, its past accomplishments, present agonies, and future possibilities. Its analysis is as thorough as its recommendations are thoughtful. It is compelling reading. It takes the story from the beginning, tracing the origins and development of Africa's complex and diverse traditions of education. Among those examined are indigenous education, Alexandrian and early Christian education, and Islamic education. The latter gave Africa and the world, the first universities, those of Karawiyyin, founded in the Old City of Fez in 859, and Al-Azhar founded in Cairo in 969, followed centuries later in West Africa by the establishment of the University of Timbuktu. In the meantime, Christian education continued to grow in Coptic Egypt and Christian Ethiopia. And during the era of the Atlantic slave trade, Western education began to make its impact felt along the West African coast, especially in the settler colonies of Sierra Leone and Liberia, and was promoted by the aspiring modernisers of nineteenth century Egypt and Madagascar. Quite fascinating is the debate in Freetown in the 1870s between radical African intellectuals, such as Edward Blyden and Africanus Horton, and patronising European missionaries about the establishment of Fourah Bay College. Debated were issues of the college's relevance, autonomy, and mission in reforming and reinvigorating African society, questions that were to become central in twentieth century African developmentalist discourses.

Fourah Bay remained the only university institution in West Africa until 1948. In fact, it was barely tolerated. Educated 'natives' were despised as uppity and feared as saboteurs of the colonial project, which was not about the modernisation of African society, as it was about its manualisation, turning African men and women into vast armies of underpaid producers for the colonial export economy. In response to the African hunger for education, for liberation from the manual order, and the needs of the colonial bureaucracy for 'native' ventriloquists, a few schools, mostly at the primary level, were established, usually by missionaries. Secondary schools were introduced grudgingly and sparingly. The European colonial empires sought to shield their subjects from the

plague of university education, except, ironically, in the internal settler colonialism of South Africa, where Fort Hare was founded in 1916. The adventurous 'natives' trekked overseas, usually to the imperial metropoles, and increasingly to North America, and sometimes India.

After the Second World War, the manualisation project of colonialism began to crumble in the face of internal social and spatial differentiations, partly spawned by colonial capitalism itself, and the rising tide of nationalist militancy. The African elites wanted the class certification of degrees for themselves and their children, while the beleaguered colonial officials embraced African modernity as the salvation, not of colonialism, but capitalism, as they increasingly came to understand that modernisation could not be realised within the antiquated cultural confines of the colonial system. And so it was that in the twilight years of colonial rule, in the transition to independence, the first universities in British, French, and Belgian Africa were established, each tailored to the traditions of the metropole. For their part, the autonomous states of Liberia and Ethiopia also set up universities, so did the recalcitrant settlers of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, while their southern neighbours plunged deeper into the illusions and blight of apartheid education.

The university entered independent Africa in chains, on the one hand firmly tethered to the academic gold standard of western intellectual currency, conventions, and concerns, and on the other pulled by the unyielding demands of nationalism and developmentalism. The explosion in the number of universities in the 1960s and 1970s was accompanied by increasingly cantankerous calls for autonomy, authenticity, and accountability, pitting against each other the new governments committed to rapid change and the universities wedded to the unhurried pursuit of knowledge; expatriates guarding their privileges and indigenous staff seeking acceptance; between the advocates of the university as an ivory tower of research and publications and those who saw it as a factory of teaching and manpower training. The competing institutional identities of African universities reflected their promiscuous multilaterisation and partial domestication: colonial models were supplanted by imports from the United States, the Soviet Union, and elsewhere, and superficially grafted on inchoate yearnings for indigenisation. The manifestation of these processes of course varied from one region and one country to another, and the strength of this book lies in its ability to draw out the particularities from the tapestry of general trends.

The 1970s witnessed profound changes in the structure and governance of African universities. First, inter-territorial universities, such as the University of East Africa, and the University of Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland were

broken up into national universities. Regional university systems in Francophone Africa were similarly dissolved. This led to a proliferation of national universities, and in the case of Nigeria, the creation of an extensive federal and state university system. Within a period of seven years, during the oil boom years of 1975-1982, for example, Nigeria built 22 new universities, raising the total from 6 to 28. Second, expansion was followed by the Africanisation of personnel and curriculum, and the increasing devaluation of the western academic gold standard; indeed, by attempts to forge an African equivalent through the creation of the Association of African Universities and other regional agencies. The work of these organisations, however, was too limited to counter the growing trend towards the nationalisation, often leading to the parochialisation, of African universities. This, in turn, facilitated, and was spawned by, the growing power and proclivity of the state to impose its autocratic will, while at the same time it was reducing its financial responsibilities, which reflected both its growing fiscal crisis and the declining need for bureaucratic manpower. The universities had succeeded only too well in fulfilling the limited mission of decolonisation: they had trained and supplied the required educated labour for the Africanisation of state apparatuses. They were now almost irrelevant to many a ruling elite that worshipped state power and were averse to the rigors of private capitalist accumulation and the insatiable needs of the wider society for sustainable development, and who could reproduce their class position through the blood ties of patronage and the costly privileges of foreign education for their children.

The struggle for the university entered a particularly difficult phase in the 1980s. While newer universities continued to be established in such countries as Nigeria and Kenya, including private ones, and student numbers rose rapidly, the crisis of higher education in Africa became more evident. Diminishing financial resources, combined with mounting state tyranny, led to deterioration of research, teaching, and physical infrastructures, demoralisation of faculty and students, and the social devaluation in the status of academics and the scholarly enterprise. The result was widespread 'brain drain' and 'brain haemorrhage' as academics fled from the universities to other sectors at home or universities abroad, or turned into consultancy hustlers and informal sector hawkers. The crisis of African economies and higher education was exacerbated by ill-conceived structural adjustment programmes imposed by the Bretton Woods twins, the World Bank and IMF. The Bank's misguided neo-classical gospel was imposed on the universities, which were told to adjust through cuts in programmes, hikes in student fees, and financial diversification. Universities were implored to become more entrepreneurial and turn their begging bowls

away from the strained state coffers to the miserly pockets of an often anaemic domestic private sector, itself reeling from liberalisation.

Ajayi and his colleagues examine these issues with admirable clarity. In the last section of the book, Chapters 8-11, they focus their penetrating and pragmatic gaze on special issues that confront African universities and what ought to be done to restructure and revitalise them. They discuss many pertinent issues. First, the importance of upholding academic freedom, not as an exclusionary privilege, as expatriates in the 1960s and the white universities in South Africa construed it to be, but as an essential condition for the advancement, transmission, and application of knowledge. Academic freedom and university autonomy, they insist, must be accompanied by social accountability. Universities must revise their colonial and postcolonial nationalist and developmentalist missions, and unflinchingly commit and confine themselves to providing higher education guided by the pursuit of excellence, creativity, and relevance, not as dictated by the state or reactionary popular elements, but by the enlightened aspirations of society. Mediocrity, whether of students or teaching staff, has no place in a university, which must be centres and beacons of excellence. They cannot achieve these goals without managerial efficiency, democratic governance, and the promotion of gender equity. They close the book with an impassioned plea that the continent and its scholars need vibrant, self-referential intellectual communities that dominate and are on the cutting edge of knowledge production on Africa.

Ngara's prescriptive package differs in matters of detail and depth. *The African University and Its Mission* offers little historical analysis, but plenty of philosophical and pedagogical counsel on reforming and improving African universities. In the first two chapters the author revisits the questions of academic freedom and the mission of the university. He endorses CODESRIA's comprehensive and highly nuanced *Kampala Declaration on Academic Freedom and Social Responsibility*, and seeks to redefine the traditionally accepted three-fold mission of universities — teaching, research and service — although little is said that is original. This is followed by rather prosaic discussions of learning theories, teaching methods, and curriculum content and degree structure in Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

The structural model proposed in Chapter 6 for improving the delivery capacity of the African university focuses mostly on the university's research mission and offers pertinent suggestions on the need for developing effective research management structures to promote a vibrant research culture and improve university research performance. Called for is the establishment of a Research and Development Centre which would be responsible for formulating

the university's research and publication policies, proposing research priorities, developing instruments for measuring the quality and quantity of research, conducting research training programmes for junior staff, students and other interested researchers, and promoting linkages between the university researchers and the community and cooperation with other universities. The Centre would be headed by a Dean and overseen by a committee composed of key university officials and outstanding scholars. In order to raise funds and service the public and private sectors, and to coordinate and oversee the use of university facilities in consultancy work, universities are encouraged to set up a separate Consultancy, Service and Production Centre headed by a Director who is an experienced and astute business manager. In short, universities should 'make a distinction between activities aimed at promoting excellence in fundamental, applied and developmental research on the one hand, and on the other, legitimate activities directed at both producing knowledge for the sake of solving the problems of particular industries and agencies and generating funds for the university' (p.124).

Debates about university management are raised in Chapter 7, and the argument made that old styles of administration must give way to new corporate management styles tailored to the university's mission. Senior university administrative officers should be highly accomplished scholars and men and women of vision and leadership qualities, not supervisory hacks imposed by the state, and should seek to promote collegiality, efficiency and productivity, strategic planning, and periodic evaluations, or institutional self-analysis, as the author calls it.

The last chapter examines the special challenges and prospects of transforming university education in post-apartheid South Africa. The much-publicised 'transition blues' at the University of Witwatersrand in the last few years poignantly capture the immense difficulties faced by the country's political and academic leaders as they seek to overcome the apartheid legacies of uneven distribution and access to university resources and other opportunity structures among the country's races, classes, genders, and regions, and as they strive to pluralise the privileges of academic freedom and define university autonomy in the new dispensation; to reconcile the demands for excellence and equity, institutional democratisation and intellectual rigor; and to channel the politics of struggle into struggles for relevance that can wean South Africa from its debilitating Eurocentric delusions that it is an outpost of western civilisation on the 'Dark Continent'.

South African universities and intellectuals have a lot to learn from, and contribute to, the experiences and future of other African universities. Indeed,

universities everywhere need the incessant intellectual infusion of internationalisation, more so than ever in this era of globalisation. This is the subject examined in *Towards a Commonwealth of Scholars*. The various papers, originally presented at a Commonwealth workshop in Singapore, outline the strategies and mechanisms for developing, maintaining, and expanding intellectual exchanges, especially of students. While much is known of student flows from the South to the North, this collection analyses and advocates the far less developed practice of student migration from the North to the South and within the South. In the introductory chapter the editor summarises the complex array of academic and non-academic factors that influence student mobility and other scholarly exchanges. They include the policy commitments of sending and receiving institutions and countries; the quality and currency of academic programmes and qualifications; cost and cultural factors; and the availability of such support structures as information and publicity, congenial immigration procedures, accommodation facilities, and guidance and counselling services. A series of models developed to facilitate student exchange are assessed: award schemes, establishment of bilateral and multilateral inter-university link schemes, direct student exchange, offering courses targeted to students from elsewhere, and organisation of regional curriculum consortia and centres of excellence.

As the imperial bonds of the Commonwealth have loosened, intra-commonwealth student mobility has declined. Flows to the four industrialised Commonwealth countries — Australia, Britain, Canada, and New Zealand — fell by over 10 per cent between 1977 and 1987, largely due to the introduction of high fee regimes in these countries and the sharp currency depreciations experienced by the Commonwealth countries of the South. In the meantime, new regional affiliations emerged as Britain petulantly turned its fate to Europe, Canada to North America, Australia and New Zealand to the Pacific rim, while the postcolonial states of Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean groped for new regional integration schemes, or anxiously sought to herd their students away from the snobbish tutorial rooms of Oxbridge to the industrious professional schools of the United States. These trends are examined in Part Two of the book.

The cases of Britain and Canada are followed up in specific chapters in Part Four. As befitting an imperial metropole, albeit a languishing one, there is little official interest in Britain for encouraging students to study in its old colonies of the South. The key problems as seen by British universities are funding and quality assurance. In contrast, there is greater interest in internationalisation in Canada, so much that this objective was integrated into the mission statements of more than half the country's universities by 1991. Despite rising official and

student interest in studying in the developing countries, Canadian students overwhelmingly trek to Western Europe and the United States.

It stands to reason that there are considerable postcolonial variations in the policies and patterns of educational internationalisation. Several chapters examine India, Malaysia, and Singapore. India boasts the largest number of foreign students among the Commonwealth countries of the South, thanks to its relatively large, low-cost, and sophisticated system of higher education. Also, there is considerable support for internationalisation from the national and state governments, and the universities themselves. However, administrative, academic, and socio-cultural barriers to mobility and entry still remain. Malaysia's case is notable because its higher education is conducted in Bahasa Malaysia rather than English. This limits the flow of foreign students, which is further exacerbated by heavy unmet local demand, so that over 52,000 Malaysian students were enrolled abroad in 1990. The small numbers of foreign students who make it are mostly from the member countries of ASEAN. Singapore has developed one of the most aggressive and coordinated programmes of student exchange as part of its rapid modernisation drive in which human resource development and international competitiveness are seen as key. Consequently, up to 20 per cent of first year places at its two universities are reserved for foreign students, who made up 17 per cent by 1991.

Nigeria also has a set quota for foreign students, earmarked at five per cent of its total annual higher education enrolment, 40 per cent of whom should come from other Commonwealth countries. But the gap between the quota and actual enrolment is much higher than in Singapore. In 1989-90 there were only 678 foreign students out of a quota target of 8,600. Between 60 to 70 per cent of the students came from Cameroon, and others trickled from other African countries, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Very few were from the developed countries. The shortfall between generous policy and meagre results can be attributed to the deterioration of Nigerian universities and the political fallout of military misrule. Kenya has been able to attract more students from the North, especially the United States, because of reciprocal and mutually beneficial exchange linkages its universities, principally the University of Nairobi, have managed to establish with foreign counterparts. Zimbabwe, in contrast, has not been as successful, partly because of its small capacity to absorb foreign students and government ambivalence to the benefits of internationalisation.

The issues discussed in this book are quite important. Certainly African universities need to take the question of internationalisation seriously insofar as their economies, cultures, politics, and prospects are irretrievably tied to a highly competitive and increasingly integrated global order. Internationalisation does

not, of course, simply mean linkages to the North, but must encompass South-South and intra-African exchanges of intellectual concerns and institutional capacities, of ideas and interests, people and programmes, research and resources, technology and trade. But this is not likely to happen if the universities are deprived of funds and freedom. Unfortunately, most of the contributions do not examine the political contexts in which the universities in Africa and elsewhere currently operate, so that they read like prescriptive pies in the air.

CODESRIA's *The State of Academic Freedom in Africa 1995* is a sobering survey of the conditions under which African universities and intellectuals survive and struggle for autonomy, accountability, and authenticity, for relevance and self-reproduction. CODESRIA should be commended for starting annual reports on academic freedom in Africa. If the current issue is anything to go by, these reports will constitute invaluable and indispensable witnesses and weapons in the struggles for a more enlightened and energetic intellectual order in the continent. Divided into three parts, it contains powerful, penetrating, and profoundly moving studies, notes, and briefings on the material and intellectual assaults against universities and academics by the state, elements from the academy itself, and groups within civil society. But it does more than chronicle the tribulations: it celebrates the struggles and the occasional victories. The stories may be grim, the scale of state authoritarianism and fiscal austerity gruesome, but these are narratives and analyses animated by a firm commitment to a more democratic and generous future.

Opening the report is Busia's erudite exegesis of the legal framework of academic freedom as embodied in human rights jurisprudence, specifically the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, which represents regional human rights norms. While the Charter does not exactly provide for 'academic freedom', it stipulates certain rights which are protective of academic freedom, such as the rights on freedom of expression, freedom of association, freedom of movement, right to education, and right to self-determination. Despite its merits, especially in the placing of economic and social rights on the same legal footing as civil and political rights, the Charter is littered with clawback clauses which subjects the exercise of the civil and political rights to restrictive duties and responsibilities. These rights are supposed to be exercised as 'provided by the law', or 'in accordance with the law, or within the law', without clearly stipulating which law, national law or international human rights law. Given the fact that the laws of dictatorial regimes often conflict with international human rights laws, to which they are usually signatory, this is not a moot legal point, but a question of utmost political significance. For example, the restriction that in exercising the right to freedom of expression the individual must show

responsibility to 'public morality' or to respect 'public order'; not to engage in any advocacy of national, ethnic, racial or religious hatred; not to publish anything that may be defamatory; and not to compromise the security of the state is often used by autocratic states as a blank check to censure all forms of criticism and dissent. Notwithstanding these constraints, Busia advises that insofar as the African Commission which is entrusted with the function of implementing the Charter has yet to develop its own jurisprudence, academic institutions and individuals should take advantage of that and place academic freedom high on the African human rights agenda by making regular representations to the Commission when violations occur and by seeking Observer Status with the Commission.

The rest of the contributions in Part One look at the situations in Algeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, and Nigeria. It is chilling reading. These cases demonstrate that authoritarianism wears different faces. In Algeria it is religious fundamentalism that constitutes the main threat to academic freedom, in Côte d'Ivoire it is unbridled developmentalism, in Kenya civilian despotism, and Nigeria military dictatorship. In an exceptionally insightful paper, El Kenz unravels the process by which state oppression gave way to religious persecution, and detentions were replaced by assassinations. Once acclaimed as a model of Third World socialist development, Algeria was rocked by riots in 1988 once the flow of petrodollars, which has sustained the bureaucratic system, slumped and the shell of autocracy cracked. The future, it seemed, belonged to the popular movement, to democracy. The intellectuals were a cheerful lot. But their 'epistemological optimism' soon turned sour. Obsessed with state violence and violations of freedom, they failed to see and scrutinise the tyrannical impulses of the Islamicists. In fact, both they and the state authorities were taken by surprise. To the state, it was the left, the activist intellectuals, who posed a threat, and so it concentrated its terror and surveillance on them; indeed, it promoted the expansion of religious activity as a counterbalance and an outlet for mounting social and political discontent. Using their vast network of mosques, educational and charitable associations, the Islamicists seized more public and rhetorical space, turning popular discourse from the economic and social to the religious and moral. For them conquest of state power was only part of the journey towards the systematic transformation of society, of its representations and values. They wanted a cultural revolution. Secular intellectuals, as bearers of a contrary cultural formation, as masters of competing social meanings, endangered the hegemonic ambition of the Islamicists and became their prime targets.

In Côte d'Ivoire the enemy of academic freedom is still largely perceived as the state. In this case, academic freedom is guaranteed by law. Indeed, many of

the rules and principles governing universities relating to academic freedom are entrenched in the constitution. But constitutional proclamations, argues Dégni-Ségui, mean little as they are not respected and enforced. He demonstrates that over time the Ivorien state has breached the territorial and personal freedoms of universities and academics with growing impunity. Interventions on campuses by the security forces, mostly unrequested, increased until 1992-93 when they became a permanent presence. Academics have also been subject to intimidation and arrests, and student and staff organisations have been suspended or dissolved. Justifying its actions in the name of economic development and national unity, the state has also taken advantage of the ignorance of academics of their rights, their fear of reprisals, and opportunistic complicity. Academics who become government ministers are renowned for being particularly contemptuous and abusive of academic freedom.

Mutunga and Kiai outline the state of academic freedom in Kenya between 1992 and 1994. They provide adequate background, noting that the postcolonial state inherited much of its authoritarian apparatus and ardour from the colonial state. The turn of the 1990s marked a watershed, as growing internal and external opposition, in which academics and students played an important role, forced the Moi regime to concede multi-party politics. But the pluralisation of politics has not been followed by the extension of civil liberties and human rights, including academic freedom. They catalogue the abuses of academic freedom, such as continuing closures of universities and expulsions of students, arbitrary arrests and detentions, harassment and dismissal of activists, denial of academic staff to unionise and students to organise, censorship and proscription of publications, and discrimination against women. Uncowered students have responded through boycotts, sit-ins, and riots, and in November 1993 the academic staff of all the public universities went on an unprecedented strike that lasted as long as ten months at the University of Nairobi.

The tradition of student and staff struggles against military tyranny and material deprivation in Nigeria is even more impressive. Mustapha shows these struggles intensified from the 1980s as the bankruptcy of the economy and the military became more evident, and the tentacles of pauperisation and persecution clutched the petty-bourgeois shoulders of students and academics. As conditions deteriorated, student fees were raised, the appointment of university administrators became more erratic, arbitrary arrests, sackings, and compulsory retirements increased, and closures became more frequent. The result is that strikes, boycotts, and court battles became a staple feature of Nigerian university life. Particularly widespread was the opposition to the mean-spirited World Bank university sector loan of US$120 million. More often than not the courts have aided the cause of academic freedom by upholding the rights of the academic

community. But this is not a united or homogeneous community. Funding for the universities is differentiated according to generation and location, and the whims of divide and rule and political favouritism. And opportunists have only too gladly sold their intellectual souls for dirty pieces of silver.

It can be seen that the specificities of violations of academic freedom and struggles against its perpetrators, vary from one country to another. This becomes more evident in the shorter 'notes' and 'briefings' in Parts Two and Three, which describe the state of academic freedom in ten other countries (Cameroon, Congo, Egypt, Guinea, Sudan, Zaire, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Liberia, and Zambia). But the underlying message is the same: abuses against academic freedom, whatever form they take, are unacceptable, and African scholars are determined to fight until they achieve their full professional and political rights as intellectuals and citizens. Theirs are not simply struggles for the university, but for democratisation, for gone are the days when university students and academics lived in the splendid isolation of colonial ivory towers. Privation and persecution have bonded them to the masses hungry for the promised fruits of the 'first independence': development, democracy, and self-determination. In fighting for the 'second independence', however, intellectuals must always remember their vocation as creative and critical thinkers, and rededicate themselves to intellectual excellence, to the goal of turning their universities and institutions into great centres of research and reflection, teaching and talent, able to compete with the very best anywhere in the world. That is where their lasting contribution to the African struggle lies.