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Higher Education as an African Public Sphere and the University as a Site of Resistance and Claim of Ownership for the National Project

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Abstract

Throughout the African continent, albeit a product of imperial domination, every state at independence conceived a national project, which aimed at building a nation-state with a clearly articulated development agenda. Education as a social institution was considered requisite toward the actualisation of the national project. The sub-sector of higher education, and particularly the university, appeared as an indispensable agency. Given the general colonial policy of exclusion of Africans from university education, the right of African states to build their national/public universities epitomised self-determination at independence. The independence movements in the 1950s-1960s coincided also with the regained popularity of human capital theory that stipulated that education, especially the highest levels, constituted an investment for individual socio-economic attainment and social mobility as well as national and structural development. From its inception, the Western style of university that was conceived out of the colonial experience represented a special site for contention and affirmation of the Africans to realize their national projects. In the context of globalisation, international organisations and programmes such as the World Bank and General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) have emerged as proxies of the old colonial powers with the same goal of influencing the policies that restrict or shape higher education in African countries. Key constituencies of African universities, namely students and teaching staff, have resisted such infringement on Africans' rights to university education and autonomy in determining their domestic policies.

The main objective of this article is to analyse the evolution of the African university as a site for the continued struggle for self-determination. It will be argued that, in spite of the history of a few institutions

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in a handful of countries, the African university in the 21st Century reflects essentially the colonial relations. Thus, for instance, the new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and distance learning programmes, and the emerging private universities in the context of liberalisation mantra, will also be analysed in the framework of the liberalisation policies that have been promoted by the global colonial proxies. In this article, the public mission of the university, be it public or private, will be examined. The approach will be basically historical, assessing the actors and their transformations and mutations within the same reality of the structural inequality of power in the global system and various African responses through continued resistance and affirmation. It will address the fundamental question of the search for the public university or the university with a public mission for the production of relevant knowledge in the various disciplines, critical thinking and new paradigms, and methodologies to promote social progress amidst the challenges of the dominant liberal globalisation and the objective conditions of the African States, societies, and people.

Résumé

Partout sur le continent africainchaque État à l'indépendance a conçu un projet national – bien que ce soit un produit de la domination impériale – visant l'édification d'un État-nation avec un agenda de développement clairement articulé. En tant qu'institution sociale, l'éducation était considérée comme nécessaire en vue de l'actualisation du projet national. Le sous-secteur de l'enseignement supérieur, et en particulier l'université, est apparu comme une agence indispensable. Etant donné la politique coloniale générale d'exclusion des Africains de l'enseignement universitaire, le droit des États africains de construire leurs propres universités nationales/publiques représentait l'autodétermination à l'indépendance. Les mouvements d'indépendance des années 1950-1960 coïncidaient également avec le regain de popularité de la théorie du capital humain qui stipulait que l'éducation, surtout aux niveaux supérieurs, constituait un investissement pour la réalisation socioéconomique et la mobilité sociale de l'individu, ainsi que le développement national et structurel. Depuis sa création, l'université de style occidental, qui avait été conçue à partir de l'expérience coloniale, représentait un site spécial de contestation et d'affirmation des africains pour la réalisation de leurs projets nationaux. Dans le contexte de la mondialisation, des organisations internationales comme la Banque mondiale et des programmes internationaux tels que l'Accord général sur le commerce de services (AGCS ou GATS en anglais pour General Agreement on Trade in Services) sont apparues comme des mandataires des anciennes puissances coloniales avec le même objectif : influencer les politiques qui restreignent ou déterminent l'enseignement supérieur dans les pays africains. Les principaux mandants des universités africaines, à savoir les étudiants et

le personnel enseignant, ont résisté à de telles violations des droits des africains à l'enseignement universitaire et à l'autonomie dans la détermination de leurs politiques nationales.

L'objectif principal de cet article est d'analyser l'évolution de l'université africaine en tant que site de la lutte continue pour l'autodétermination. Nous soutiendrons que malgré l'histoire de quelques institutions dans un petit nombre de pays, l'université africaine au XXIe siècle est essentiellement le reflet des rapports coloniaux. Ainsi, par exemple, les nouveaux programmes de Technologies de l'Information et de la Communication (TIC) et d'enseignement à distance, et les universités privées émergentes dans le contexte du mantra de la libéralisation, seront également analysés dans le cadre des politiques de libéralisation qui ont été promues par les mandataires coloniaux mondiaux. Dans cet article, la mission publique de l'université, qu'elle soit publique ou privée, sera examinée. Nous adopterons une démarche fondamentalement historique, évaluant les acteurs et leurs transformations et mutations dans la même réalité de l'inégalité structurelle de pouvoir dans le système mondial, et diverses réponses africaines à travers la résistance et l'affirmation continues. Nous traiterons la question fondamentale de la recherche de l'université publique ou de l'université ayant une mission publique pour la production de connaissances pertinentes dans les diverses disciplines, la pensée critique et les nouveaux paradigmes, ainsi que les méthodologies visant à promouvoir le progrès social au milieu des défis de la mondialisation libérale dominante et des conditions objectives des États, des sociétés et des peuples africains.

Introduction

Throughout the African continent, albeit a product of imperial domination, every state at independence conceived a national project, which aimed to build a nation-state with a clearly articulated development agenda. Education as a social institution was considered requisite toward the actualisation of the national project. The sub-sector of higher education, and particularly the university, with all its academic functions and social mission, appeared as an indispensable agency in promoting social and human development and securing the foundation for sustainable pace of continued social progress. Given the general colonial policy of exclusion of Africans from higher education, especially university education, at independence the rights of African states to build their national/public universities epitomised self-determination.

In addition, the independence movements in the 1950s-1960s also coincided with the regained popularity of the human capital theory that stipulated that education, especially the highest levels, constituted an investment for individual socio-economic attainment and social mobility as

well as national and structural development. At the same time, from its inception, in essence the Western style of university that was conceived out of the colonial experience represented a special site for contention, contestation, resistance, and affirmation of the Africans to realize their respective national projects. In the context of globalisation, international organisations and programmes such as the World Bank, through its interventionist Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) and more recently General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), have acted as global proxies of the old colonial powers with the same goal, and even emboldened power, to influence policies that define or shape higher education in African countries. Key constituencies of African universities, namely students and teaching staff, have resisted such infringement on Africans' rights to university education and autonomy in determining domestic policies of African states.

This article aims to analyze the evolution of the African university as a site for the articulation of local and global internal contradictions and the continued struggle for self-determination. Although in a handful of African countries, a few institutions of higher learning preceded European colonial rule by several centuries, the African university in the 21st Century reflects essentially colonial legacy and ongoing channels of skewed relations at the global level. Thus, for instance, the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and distance learning programmes, and the emerging private universities in the context of liberalisation mantra, are also analyzed in the framework of the liberalisation policies that have been promoted by the old imperial powers and their global colonial proxies of the contemporary period.

The approach is basically historical, assessing the actors, their transformations and mutations within the same reality of the structural inequality of power in the global system and various African responses marked by continued resistance and affirmation. The article addresses the fundamental question of the struggle for the public university or any university, regardless of its legal status, with a public mission in the production of relevant knowledge, critical thinking and new paradigms, and methodologies to promote social progress. This continued struggle takes place amidst the challenges presented by the dominance of liberal globalisation and the objective conditions of the African States, societies and people.

This article is articulated under three main headings. The first section locates the idea of 'Development University' at the inception of the African public institutions of higher learning at the historical juncture of the transition from formal colonial rule to post-independence era. The second section examines the patterns of growth in African higher education, especially the

universities, the level of their funding as indicator of their relative importance, the context of the economic crisis and the role of international financial institutions in African education domestic policies in the 1970s and 1980s. In this section, the issue of the assault on the African state through the SAPs and the resistance waged by some of the interest groups of African education are discussed. The third section examines the new stage in the international influence on higher education in Africa in the context of accelerated neo-liberalism and globalisation, and their agenda of promoting further the state's disengagement through their prescriptions for resource allocation and the implications for African higher education. This section also articulates a call for renewed engagement of the State in the pursuit of actualising the public mission of African higher education as a sine qua non for social progress.

The conclusion summarises the arguments articulated and points to the new challenges and opportunities that the economic and financial crises that have shaken the capitalist system with its liberal framework present to African leaders, policymakers, educators, and the interest groups that put up the fight from the SAPs to the present.

Conceptualisation and Policy Significance of the Development University

In spite of their common African attributes and colonial and post-colonial history, African countries offer a multiplicity and complexity of national contexts in which educational institutions are created, evolved and function in carrying out policies that derive from the national agendas. The guiding thread is the analysis of development paradigms in Africa with higher education conceptualised as a core institutional instrument toward the actualisation of the development agendas of African states.

Regardless of its relation to the colonial system and legacy, the public university in Africa was conceived as ontologically imbedded in the developmental state. There was a genuine belief that it would be part of the African state and would play a critical role in promoting socio-economic development. Therefore, it is important to analyse the evolution of the public university and the roles of external agencies in setting African national priorities, the perceived and actual comparative importance of the sub-sectors conceived in binary or comprehensive and complementary terms in dealing with basic/primary, secondary, higher and vocational education, technical and academic education of secondary or tertiary levels as viewed by African states in resource allocation.

In the beginning of the colonial conquest, Africans unequivocally rejected European education, whether it was offered through the European Christian

religious congregations in the countries colonised by the British and Belgians and to a certain extent the Portuguese, or the state, as was the case in the countries colonised by the French. However, by the time the independence process started, African families in many corners of the continent wanted to enrol their offspring. The post-colonial state declared education 'the priority of all priorities' as it was considered an investment for the state to deliver national development. Thus, the state was willing to fund public education at all levels. Furthermore, higher education, and more specifically the university, was deemed of special importance, both for individuals to meet the optimal level of qualifications required for the labour market, and for the state to produce and utilise through job offers competent experts to help implement the agendas of national development's grand projects. The willingness to allocate large shares of small national budgets to education, with a considerable proportion for higher education, was an eloquent statement of the value of higher education in general, and especially the university, regardless of the validity of the arguments, later in their process, about subsequent over-representation of the elites' offspring in the education system.

It was against the background of the colonial policies of reserving only a weakened primary/basic education that post-colonial African universities were created. In principle, the development university was conceived to eradicate the spirit of perpetual servitude to the colonialists and replace it with the spirit of self-respect and dignified standing in a free state engaged resolutely in the struggle to promote socio-economic development and social progress. Thus, the university was the basis of nation building (or rebuilding) and national development, the engine of development within the continent, a place to train Africans to take over the professions hitherto occupied by the Europeans in the context of formal colonisation and fill new positions with highly specialised Africans for the national development project.

The university education envisioned by the Africans in post-colonial Africa was intended to contribute to the development of the continent, improve the living conditions of, not just an emerging westernised elite, but also the ordinary citizens in urban centres and rural communities precisely related to the elite through a complex web of extended family relations and whose well-being is of vital importance to the elite. It was intended to produce the most capable intelligentsia to carry on research and continue to develop human capabilities. While most of the countries had to build new universities after independence, a few reformed the education systems of the existing higher education institutions inherited from the colonialists. The difference in the focus between colonial higher education institutions and post-colonial universities was in the sense of the determination with which new

governments tried to create institutions that would carry forward their national development projects. The quality of higher education was considered crucial (Aina 1995). It ought to be relevant to the needs of Africa, especially focusing on the social and economic development (ADEA Working Group on Higher Education Report 1998) and, more broadly, social progress of the continent.

At the time of independence of the respective African countries, universities were mainly public. In the immediate post-colonial period, there were very few exceptions. In fact, for the various stakeholders, including the families, students/youth, civil society and government, the university meant public university. For the young people, working hard and aspiring to pursue their education to the university was at the same time a personal investment in the future for themselves and their respective families in terms of private returns and nearly a duty toward the states and countries in the struggle to combat underdevelopment. It was considered a duty and a contribution to build resolutely post-colonial societies engaged on the path of social progress. Access to a public university was considered not a privilege but a right toward the highest and most desirable educational achievement and a prerequisite for socio-economic attainment. In the context of building the new public administration and embryonic industrial sector, the State was the main employer and could unequivocally deliver on the promise of employment for the educationally qualified citizenry. The effort to Africanise the labour force was an eloquent incentive for the very fortunate few among the youth to pursue their education to university level. Logically, education offered in the public university was fully funded by public money and managed by public administration. It was considered at the service of the greater society.

The Association of African Universities (AAU) addressed many issues relevant to the university and social development in its seminar and subsequent book entitled *Creating the African University: Emerging Issues of the 1970s* (Yesufu 1973). In this meeting, the participants, who were all the products of higher education, although in most cases it was received in institutions of the former colonial powers, debated five topics, namely setting the priorities, defining the programmes and curricula, Africanising the university faculty and staff, designing research, life-long learning and other innovative functions. They conceptualised and conceived the design of the university as the state's institutional apparatus for knowledge acquisition and production not for knowledge's sake, but to rather produce the scientific and technical knowledge for the conceptualisation, design and implementation of policies toward improved living conditions of the African people and achieving sustainable development of African societies. The state had a right and duty to make it work for the greater good. The conception of the African university and

development of African societies were two sides of the same coin. Thus, it was considered critical to define the university to properly guide the African academic community. In the aforementioned seminar, as Yesufu (1973:39-40) stated:

> … it was felt necessary to re-examine the whole idea or concept of university as it applies, or should apply, to Africa, before there could be any meaningful consideration of its role and priorities. In the traditional view, a university was a citadel of learning, an institution for the pursuit of knowledge, very often for its own sake, helping the initiated individual student to development his intellect to the highest possible extent, and claiming the freedom to do research and teach, guided principally, if not entirely, by its own light and in its own wisdom. … The truly African university must be one that draws its inspiration from its environment, not a transplanted tree, but growing from a seed that is planted and nurtured in the African soil.

This conception of the African university implies agency, autonomy, and responsibility to identify from within the needs of the African societies and make the university work toward the solution of the societal problems.

Regarding the structure and location of the public university within the government and the national educational system, there have been variations according to the types and structures of the governments and the educational traditions inherited from the former colonial powers and that are emulated by African states in the post-colonial era. In terms of their administrative structures, some of the public universities have been organised as a sub-sector within the ministry of education conceived as a state agency, while others have been under the purview of a separate ministry of higher education (and scientific research), in centralised as well as decentralised systems.

The African political elites of a wide range of ideological spectrum, who held leadership positions in the immediate post-colonial contexts, committed themselves to consolidating the state powers and building unitary or Pan-African nation-states. Higher education was viewed and treated as a key facilitating institutional structure. Even the most notorious dictators who connived immediately or later with the relentless and brutal colonial systems to hinder the interest of the African people, in their own and respective ways, emphasized the importance of strong publicly-controlled higher education officially articulated as public good. It is important to note that this control involved the decision of the political elite to contain students and teaching staff and their critical perspectives and their pressure to pursue the independence struggle. However, there were also elements of different interpretations of the university as an instrument to guide the national project

of development. Thus, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, where some of the few African experiences with private higher education took place, a policy of nationalisation of higher education was adopted in the 1970s although the move was motivated by policies that undermined the actualisation of the national project.

The overwhelming majority of African universities were created from scratch following political independence, which began in the late 1950s with a peak in 1960 for British, French and Belgian colonies, and continued through the 1970s for the Portuguese colonies, 1980 for Zimbabwe, 1990 for Namibia and the special case of majority rule since 1994 in South Africa. Even countries that were not independent at the time of the historic Addis Ababa *Conference of African States on the Development of Education in Africa* (UNESCO 1961) joined in a unanimous call for investment in education. At this conference it was planned that by 1980, African countries would eliminate inequality at the primary education level by achieving universal enrolment, significantly increase the transition rate to secondary education, and ultimately produce at the higher education level academic, scientific and administrative cadres who would help implement the national development project. Indeed, more broadly, this meeting was organised to define the educational needs for Africa toward its socio-economic development. Thus, as indicated above, education having been conceived as the defining social sector, it was funded accordingly, receiving the highest share of the countries' gross national product (GNP) and public expenditures.

Commenting on encouraging progress made by the early 1970s regarding the goals of universal primary enrolment as determined at this Addis Ababa Conference a decade later, the then President of Zambia, Kenneth Kaunda, confidently stated that by 1980, universal primary enrolment would be achieved and the next stage would be to achieve 'universality in secondary and technical education. We have the will-power and determination in abundant proportions, and with the necessary financial and other capital resources being available, success should not be too elusive a goal' (Makulu 1971:xi).

Anticipated success in reaching universal secondary education was accompanied by the commitment to increase enrolment at the higher education level, especially considering that this was the most prized and targeted level of education for the development agenda. Indeed, the increase in the higher education enrolment was not conceived as a mere trickle-up process whereby graduates from the primary and secondary levels move on to the upper levels. Rather, the expansion of the university was the result of an articulated national development policy need for the decades to come, positioning well the African states and people for the 21st century.

Post-Independence Patterns of Expansion, External Influence on Finance and Ground for Resistance

An analysis of educational enrolment rates in Africa reveals patterns of unprecedented growth, most spectacularly observed in higher education with low or no enrolment at the time many countries acquired their respective independence. For the countries that became independent in 1960, the decades of the 1960s and 1970s were characterised by steady increase of enrolment growth rates. However, most countries did not reach universal primary enrolment during those two decades and not even in the 1980s, as targeted at the 1961 Addis Ababa conference. Furthermore, the 1980s were characterised by significant stagnation and even decline in enrolment rates at all levels of the education systems in many African countries. Thus, this new and unanticipated phenomenon was in sharp contrast to the educational expansion of the two previous decades of the 1960s and 1970s. The stagnation and decline in the 1980s were experienced even in countries such as those in the Sahelian sub-region that had barely reached enrolment of half of the school-age population of the primary level.

This downward trend of the 1980s caught many specialists by surprise as, based in part on historical experiences from other regions of the world and on the African performance of the 1960s and 1970s, the positive patterns in all the levels were expected to continue until universal primary attendance was achieved and the compulsory attendance was legally or de facto fully implemented.

Following the economic crisis of the 1970s and 1980s, stagnant or negative balance of trade, and the subsequent decline in African governments' autonomous financial capacity to meet their budgetary needs, they relied more on external 'assistance' in the form of grants from industrial countries including former colonial powers, on bilateral and multilateral bases. Furthermore, they resorted to borrowing increasing amount of money from international financial institutions, primarily the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The pivotal roles of these institutions in the economic affairs of Africa became an instrumental mechanism for them to intervene in African domestic decision-making in determining the priorities and the corresponding expenditures. Thus, some African countries were obliged to devote more money to paying the interest on their loans from these external creditors than the resources for social sectors such as education, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Debt Service and Education Expenditure in African Countries where Interest Payments Exceed 15% of Government Expenditure

Country (year)	Debt interest/total expenditure%	Education/total expenditure%
Cameroon (1999)	19.3	12.0
Côte d'Ivoire (1998)	23.4	..
Ethiopia (1996)	18.8	16.0
Ghana (1993)	16.4	22.0
Guinea (1999)	20.6	..
Kenya (1998)	22.0	25.6
Sierra Leone (1999)	27.7	..
Zimbabwe (1997)	20.1	24.2

Source: Roberts 2003, adapted from Table 11, p. 37.

African governments also treated the different levels of the education sector accordingly. While larger sums were allocated directly to build higher education and especially the university, policies of tuition-free basic and secondary education were adopted. However, in the context of economic crises and African countries' reliance on loans from external institutions, this dependence relationship constituted the process through which these institutions increased their interference with Africa's domestic policies. Given these institutions' interests and vision, they declared primary education as more important and little importance was attached to tertiary education, especially the university. Consequently, there was reduction in the total expenditure on tertiary education.

Bloom et al. (2006) point out that following the Jomtien World Education Conference in 1990, the World Bank reduced tertiary education expenditure to 7 per cent between 1995 and 1999, from 17 per cent between 1985 and 1989. The reduction in expenditure on higher education crippled productivity in universities as noted in the examples of Malawi and Mozambique below.[1]

In its Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, the Government of Malawi reports difficulties with inadequate boarding facilities, weak links to industry that lead to high graduate unemployment, and inefficient use of resources by the University of Malawi (p. 4). … Mozambique reports few places for students and poor quality of courses. The high cost of tertiary schooling means that many potential candidates cannot attend. As a result, less than 3 per cent of the national public administration staff has received higher education (p. 5).

Nevertheless, after the brief episode of decline in several countries in the 1980s as indicated above, demand for higher education resumed its persistent and upward trend, and it has remained high over the years. In analysing the

relentless demand for higher education, it is worth recalling that most decisions made by social actors are guided by their respective utility function, given their socialisation, social origin, major personal and social characteristics, aspirations and expectations. The actual or perceived returns of alternative choices are instrumental in the decision-making process. In this case, if the educational 'consumers' of the 1980s in many African countries that experienced the decline in enrolments had reversed their preference for education shown in the 1960s and 1970s, it could be hypothesized that they must have found better alternatives to education to fulfil their pursuit for upward mobility and, more generally, socio-economic attainment.

Whether education is considered consumption or investment has been a topic of debate in economics of education. It is difficult to identify a clear threshold on the continuum. Given the magnitude of the phenomenon of the sudden decline in the 1980s, in countries like Togo with a sharp and simultaneous decrease in primary, secondary and higher education registered, political and policy-making leadership, educators, administrators, and scholars were asking pressing questions including the following: Did African parents/students find more attractive alternatives to education? If so, as the declining enrolment rates were recorded simultaneously at all levels, the next question was whether the youth and their families had identified viable and more attractive alternatives in these three levels at the same time.

However, it was revealed soon that for the overwhelming majority of the youth and their families, a combination of critical and negative factors were influencing their decisions that translated into the declining enrolment rates. These factors were all related to the economic crisis and the SAP policies and conditionalities, namely: 1) the institution of user fees to attend school, from the elementary level to the university; 2) the powerful disincentive of the policy prescription of the World Bank requiring that African governments reduce the number of employees on government payroll, to freeze salaries, and even adopt policies of two scales of salaries for the same professions as it was implemented in Côte d'Ivoire for the teaching staff, and to simply stop hiring new job seekers.

Empirical studies (Assie-Lumumba 1991, Lange 1999) demonstrated that in general, demand for education by families (parents and students) decreased significantly only when their economic resources diminished. Indeed, at the private level, affordability of education has been the major determining factor. In the absence of valuable alternatives to education, as was the case in the 1980s and even in the beginning of the 21st century, the major explanatory factor for any lower demand of education has been unequivocally the

increasing cost while the ability to pay declined. In the 1980s, these factors were compounded by the economic crisis, the rising unemployment and the bleak prospects on the labour market. In this context, as indicated above, only the absence of alternatives could motivate needy students and families to make extreme sacrifice to pay for education – then a more risky investment. Hence the renewed increase in the demand after the episode of the stagnation and decline of the 1980s.

According Johnstone (2004:12), the renewed high and increasing demand in the specific sub-sector of higher education is due to the rising birth rate as well as increases in the number of young people completing secondary school. The increase is quite remarkable considering the shift from full government support to more of the direct cost borne by students and their families.

The persistent demand has led to some erroneous interpretations and misleading conclusions about possible 'massification'. Any use of the notion of 'massification' in reference to the simple crowding of African universities is erroneous, enrolment rates in higher education in Africa in general remains very low. Indeed, in addition to the fact that most countries have not achieved universal enrolment even at the primary level, there is the persistently high attrition rates problem at the primary and secondary levels. Also, unlike in the early post-colonial period when a secondary diploma was a sufficient criterion for admission in higher education, SAP policies of *numerus clausus* were introduced and consist in reducing enrolment (irrespective of qualification) by means of competition tests. Thus, only a small proportion of those who enter the system can reach and enter the higher education level, especially the university. In fact, Africa has the lowest higher education enrolment rates in comparison to other regions of the world. Indeed as Bloom, Canning and Chan (2006:3) rightly point out:

> Enrollment rates in higher education in sub-Saharan Africa are by far the lowest in the world. Although the gross enrolment ratio (GER) has increased in the past 40 years – it was just 1 per cent in 1965 – it still stands at only 5 per cent. … [Statistical evidence] shows that …the absolute gap by which it lags behind other regions has increased rapidly. The region's present enrolment ratio is in the same range as that of other developing regions 40 years ago. Moreover, gender disparities have traditionally been wide and remain so.

Objectively, tertiary education is expensive and cost-intensive, both in terms of infrastructure and resource needs to set fully functional institutions. To build institutions and, at the same time, support the needs of the offspring of the impoverished segments of the population requires significant public funding.

Table 2: Gross Enrolment Ratio as Percentage of Total Eligible Population for Higher Education

	Gross Enrolment Ratio, higher education (percentage)
1965	0.8
1970	1.0
1975	1.7
1980	2.4
1985	2.9
1990	3.8
1995	4.8
1996	3.8
1997	2.3
2000	2.5

Source: Africa Database, World Bank 2002.

Until the economic crisis and the beginning of the adoption of various versions and schemes of SAPs by different countries in the 1980s, by any standards African countries allocated relatively large proportions of their revenues to education. In the second half of the 1970s the proportion of public expenditure on education had increased greatly. For instance, it increased from 3.4 in 1975 to 5.2 per cent in 1980, while the trend for all Third World countries combined showed clear signs of stagnation, with 3.3 per cent in 1975 and 3.9 per cent in 1980.

Johnstone and Marcucci (2007) argue that although African governments had taken on the financing of higher education immediately after attaining their independence, the rising cost of educating a student, as well as the increasing number of enrolments, have left the governments unable to bear this responsibility. As a result, they argue, the cost of educating tertiary education students is now being spread over to the students themselves (and the people responsible for paying their tuition). They state:

> The financing of higher education throughout the world has seen dramatic – and also intellectually, ideologically, and politically contested – changes in the last decades of the 20th and the first decade of the 21st centuries. In the main, these changes in financing are responses to a worldwide phenomenon of higher educational costs tending to rise at rates considerably in excess of the corresponding rates of increase of available revenues, especially those revenues that are dependent on taxation (p. 1).

With the prolonged economic and financial crises with new global dimensions since 2008 and their impacts, African governments are increasingly

failing to cope with the high demand for tertiary education. As more students graduate from secondary education, ironically in part as a result of externally-driven policies of emphasizing access to basic education in the 1980s and 1990s, more of these graduates of the lower levels of the systems therefore enrol or aspire to enrol for higher education. Thus, there are constraints on the financial, physical, and human resources available especially the teaching staff and infrastructures. Students and their families are also expected to contribute more and pay their own tuition where such expenses were once the responsibility of governments.

Thus, during the 1980s, the trends of higher allocation of public expenditures were reversed. They were characterised by a steady decline that could already be observed as shown in Table 3.

Following the economic crisis and, according to the World Bank's own data and the unquestionably devastating SAPs, public expenditure per higher education student declined drastically, from $6,300 to $1,500 and then $1,000 in real terms (World Bank 1994).

Table 3: Percentage of Public Expenditures and GNP Allocated to Education

YEAR	Public Expenditures	GNP
1970	16.7	4.1
1980	16.2	5.5
1983	11.9	4.3

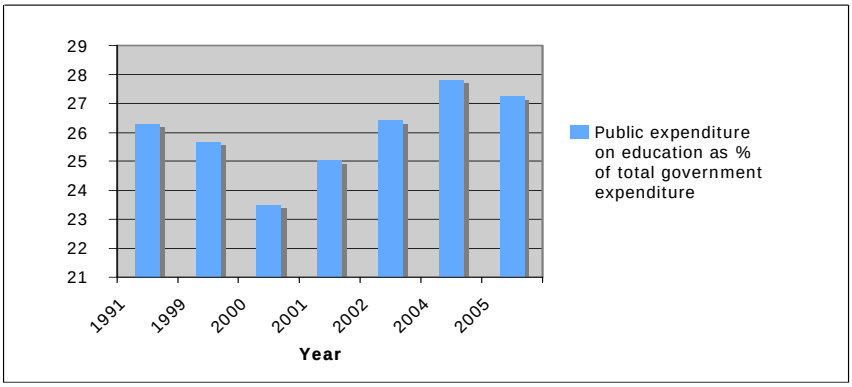
Source: World Bank, Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Strategy for Adjustment, Revitalization and Expansion, Washington, D.C., 1988.

At the same time, generally speaking, African countries continued some of their initial post-independence public education finance policies consisting of allocation of large proportions of their GNP and public expenditure to education, with a larger (yet insufficient) share for higher education. The decline from 1980 to 1983 shown in Table 3 was followed by stagnation continued throughout the 1980s until the middle of the 1990s.

The public expenditure on education on the whole as a percentage of GDP in Sub-Saharan Africa is 3.7, 3.4, 3.5, 2.9, 3.4, 4.2, and 3.6 for 1970, 19975, 1980, 1985, 1990, and 1998, respectively (Roberts 2003:17). It is significant to note the lowest percentage in 1985. However, while these figures capture the continental patterns, there were sub-regional and national variations.

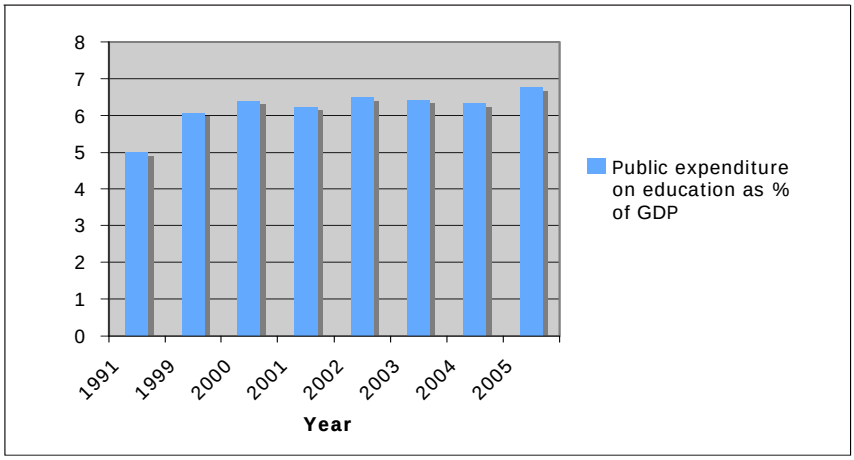
For instance, in 1995, the public expenditure on education as a percentage of total public expenditure varied form the lowest with 7.1 in Zambia and 11.5 in Nigeria (11.5) to the highest with 28.8 in Côte d'Ivoire and 33.1 in Senegal (Roberts 2003:18).

Figure 1: Public Expenditure on Education as % of Total Government Expenditure: Morocco



Source: Data used from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics

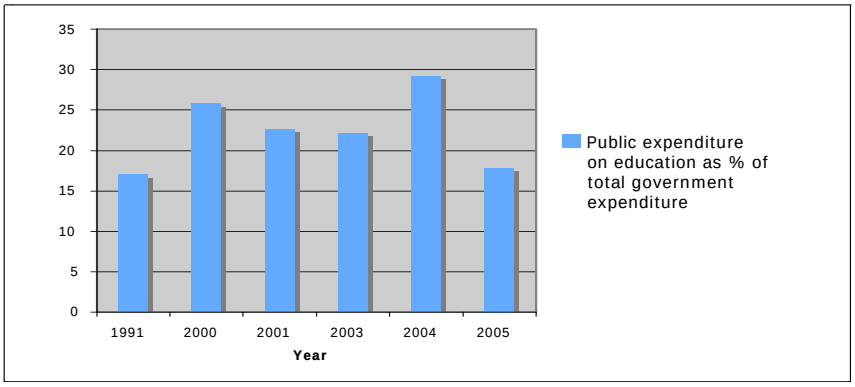
Figure 2: Public Expenditure on Education as % of GDP – Morocco



Source: Data used from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics

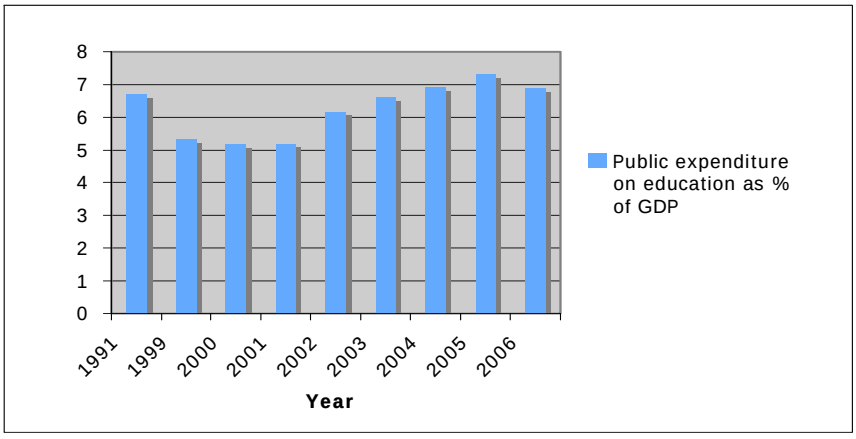
Generally, in terms of sub-regional variations, by and large North African countries sustained relatively higher proportions of their public expenditures and GNP allocated to education than other sub-regions of the continent. Figures 1 and 2 on Morocco illustrate this comparatively positive picture. The situation was even more stable in Tunisia.

Figure 3: Public Expenditure on Education as % of Total Government Expenditure – Kenya



Source: Data used from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics

Figure 4: Public Expenditure on Education as % of GDP – Kenya



Source: Data used from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics

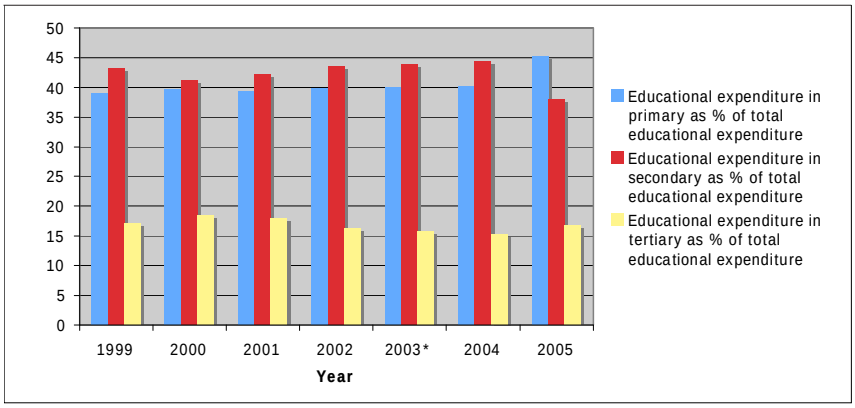
The recent statistics in the figures indicate that since the end of the 1990s, there have been variable trends in different countries with a tendency toward either only a slight increase or even stagnation. That is to say that the economic crisis is still a burden. Yet, it can be argued that given the needs of an

overwhelmingly poor population and the heavy responsibility of a few members of extended families who have jobs of variable security and the sheer need for expanding the capacity of the higher education infrastructures, it would have been socially and politically untenable if there had been additional constraints restricting access to higher education. Also, in the African countries, the proportions of their GNP and public expenditures allocated to education, especially higher education, reached rock bottom in the 1980s with the economic crisis of the SAPs policies. Thus, these countries could only stabilise and increase, albeit timidly, their support for higher education, given the internal pressure to expand institutional capacity, in spite of the external pressures to push the African states to further disengagement.

In some studies, it has been articulated that ability to pay is not positively related to the demand of education (Berstecher and Carr-Hill 1990). However, refined analysis of the situation suggests that regardless of the means of families, the assurance that the state would provide additional resources needed could constitute a determinant of demand for education.

One of the visible and lasting impacts of the SAPs has been the distribution of public resources to the different levels (i.e, basic/primary, secondary, tertiary) within the education sector. Indeed, one of the most striking conditionalities of the SAPs and areas of intrusions of international agencies in the domestic decision of African countries was the sharing of the public funds to these levels. In the 1980s, at the worse moment of the economic crises, when African countries felt compelled to request/accept loans from the World Bank, the latter was unambiguous about its resource allocation prescription: lower the share for higher education and increase the proportion allocated to basic education. In the ensuing disagreement between external prescriptions seemingly favouring basic education and national voices for the support for higher education, especially the university, the secondary education as a key and in fact indispensable intermediary level lost its actual importance and thus the two battlegrounds were artificially framed in terms of mutually exclusive parts rather than dynamically related components of a national educational system set for a national development project.

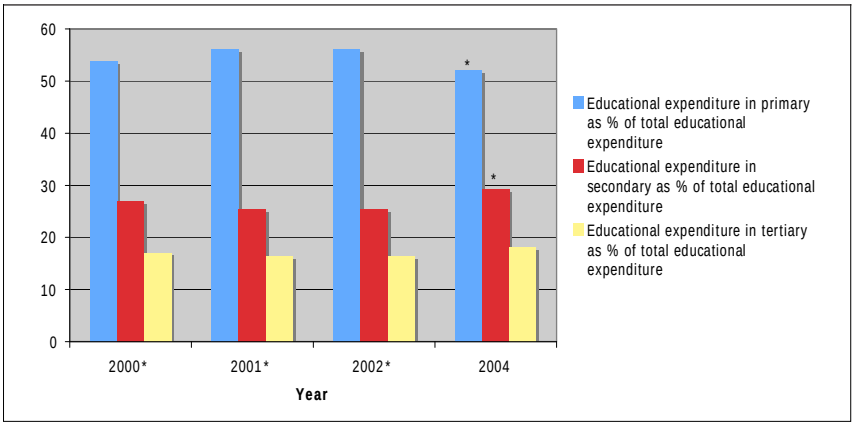
Figure 5: Educational Expenditure by Level – Morocco



*UIS Estimation

Source: Data used from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics

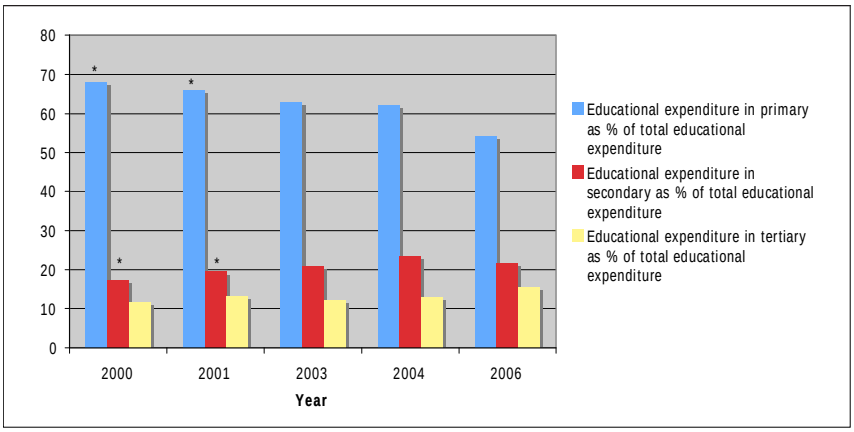
Figure 6: Educational Expenditure by Level – Benin



*UIS Estimation

Source: Data used from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics

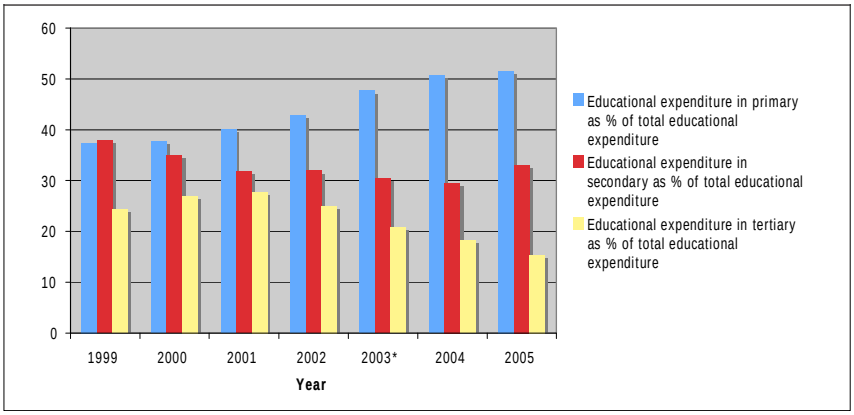
Figure 7: Educational Expenditure by Level – Kenya



*UIS Estimation

Source: Data used from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics

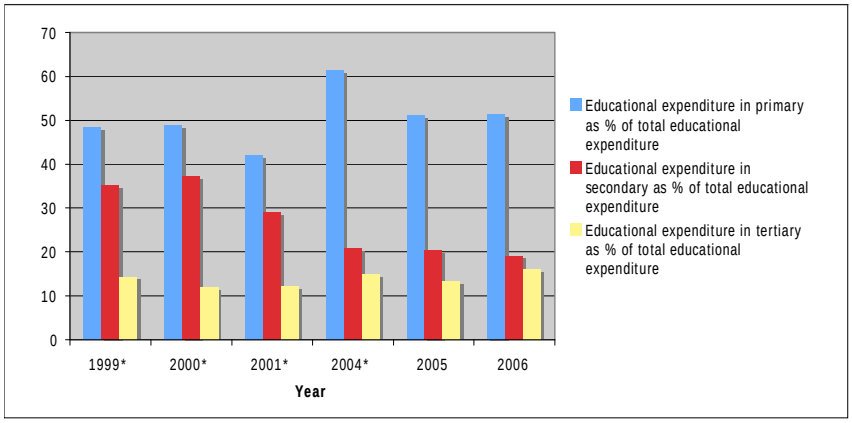
Figure 8: Educational Expenditure by Level – Burundi



*UIS Estimation

Source: Data used from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics

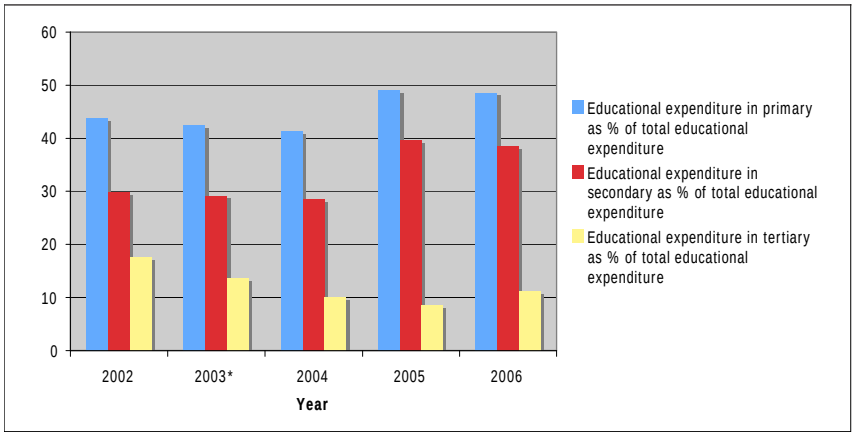
Figure 9: Educational Expenditure by Level – Madagascar



*UIS Estimation

Source: Data used from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics

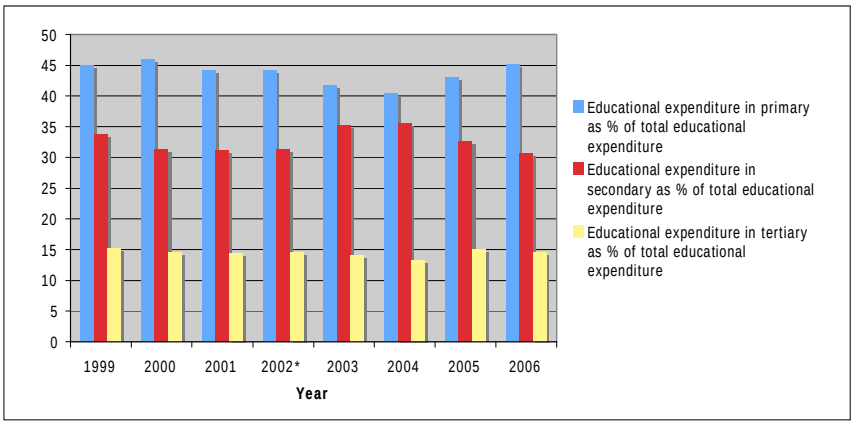
Figure 10: Educational Expenditure by Level – Cape Verde



*UIS Estimation

Source: Data used from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics

Figure 11: Educational Expenditure by Level – South Africa



*UIS Estimation

Source: Data used from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics

The universities of post-colonial Africa were designed to operate in African regional/cross-national or individual settings with nationalistic missions and the discourse of autonomy to implement these missions. Certainly, in terms of their internal daily organisation and financial management, African institutions, like others, developed their respective massive structures and processes that give them a sense of autonomy. In reality, this autonomy was challenged by internal factors related to the ideology and actions/policies of the ruling class/state, because higher education has been part of the state apparatus that was a colonial creation. Universities did not enjoy an autonomy that could guarantee academic freedom and nurture critical thinking as a necessary asset in conceiving, formulating, and implementing autonomous development agendas that the states had envisioned in the beginning. Thus, the newly designed institutions contained the seeds of major contradictions from their inception. Indeed, they were modelled after, and depended on, the institutions of the former colonial powers for their curriculum development, administrative style of management minus efficiency, and conferring of diplomas. A twisted interpretation of the full provision of funding by the state evolved as another dimension of the limited autonomy. Thus, the state and weak, uncommitted, unprincipled, and often brutal heads of state could freely accept external policies, even the ones that were philosophically and obviously in contradiction with their own stated engagement for building higher education for socio-economic development. The adoption of the SAPs constituted an example of this contradiction. Academic freedom was curtailed

internally, especially in the context of Cold War politics and the roles of selected African watchdogs of world powers. The struggle and resistance against internal and external systems of oppression were the same. However, the emphasis of this article is the external agencies.

The Global Dynamics: A New Arena for Resistance and the Call for Renewed Engagement

In the conception of higher education designed according to a narrow interpretation of human capital theory, critical thinking did not receive particular consideration as part of the most obvious and directly needed skills to be acquired by the formally and highly educated Africans as an output of the university education. Rather, the emphasis was being placed on acquisition of technical skills. Indeed, throughout Africa, the idea embedded in the classical conception of the development university emphasised the production of highly qualified 'manpower', human capital, and human resources in general. The educated Africans of the post-colonial era were expected to apply technical savoir-faire to programmes and projects in the African development process. Yet, as Kaunda (Makulu 1971:x) stated:

> governments should … avoid seeing in the university academics and their students potential enemies waiting in the wing to pounce on the stage and assume the reins of power! They must reassure the universities that they are an essential and integral part of the national development process and not a dissident minority committed to the course of destructive criticism.

Ironically, the critical mind was not only essential for the appropriate conceptualisation, design and implementation of the national development envisioned as necessitated by the colonial legacy and unequal structure of the world system. It became indispensable in the struggle that had to be waged every time the institutions of higher learning had been under siege. Under the Native Law, colonial power made it impossible for the Africans to have access to higher education in the continent or metropolis. Thus, the struggle for decolonisation included the fight to acquire the rights to education of any type and level.

Since then, there have been various forms of policies working against Africans' aim to build and maintain thriving and autonomous institutions of higher learning. These hindering policies range from the subtle but effective neo-colonial framework of control embedded in multilateral and bilateral economic 'assistance' to the direct and destructive policies of the SAPs in the 1980s and the ongoing global grip of the GATS in this period of the beginning of the 21st century. Yet, national and autonomous institutions remain

necessary for the grand idea of development that constituted the raison d'être of the newly created universities at the time of independence.

In the absence of other means of political expression of dissent until the multiparty system was legally established in the 1990s in many countries, the university tended to be the main space for political opposition. There have been latent and often open conflicts between the governments, which unconditionally want national consensus and cohesion even under oppressive regimes, and the academic communities which, even with representation of the regime within their ranks, have tended to value debate and criticism; the latter want to exercise the right to reject external policies such as the SAPs that are visibly destructive to Africa's intellectual community. In the case of Côte d'Ivoire where the former opposition was formed mainly of higher education teaching staff that were in power from 2000 to 2010 without any democratic framework for governance, the behaviour and performance of the state has not changed. Thus, it is the behaviour of the political regimes that sustains the absence of possibilities for change and social progress. Therefore, the powers, forces, and entities against which resistance is formulated and waged from the site of the university are both internal and external with their respective agents that often work with concerted efforts of mutual profit from the status quo.

These internal and external forces have evolved since the beginning of the independence process. The African states, even those that have been headed by notorious dictators, initially had some commitment for the provision of social services that was reflected in their disposition toward the funding of education. With the liberalisation process, the state has been undergoing a process of disempowerment and deliberate weakening engineered by the colonial proxies and their global policies with specific local targets. In the same vein, these same colonial proxies, composed by the international financial institutions, with former colonial powers that are still direct actors, have increased their influence and imposed monopolies in the political and economic systems of governance and production through liberalism and globalization. The corollaries of these global agencies have been the new definitions of the roles of the African states and the nature of African institutions of higher learning. The elusive yet destructive 'colonial agreement' constituted the ground for colonially dominating and exploiting the 'natives', reorienting and restructuring the economies of African societies redesigned into newly carved states to provide cheap raw materials for the industrialisation of colonial power. Likewise, policies of SAPs and GATS have recently covered all levels and types of education and constitute the framework of the functioning of African states and their institutions as defined by these external powers.

In spite of the magnitude of economic and financial challenges that the creation of any institution of higher learning has involved, especially the development of the public university, the African countries have treated this institution as a national honor and symbol of sovereignty, pride and irrefutable rights. These sentiments have been expressed from the government to the non-formally educated peasants and urban dwellers, even those who are at the peripheries of the cities. They are equally engaged in the quest for producing and using the highest level of knowledge and human resources as national treasure. It is associated with the principle of sovereignty of each state to articulate its autonomy through the creation of a public university, not as a mere source of simple vanity. It is a site for the production of critical human resources with technical competence and critical minds.

Public funding of the university is necessary in African contexts. Indeed, the benevolent and caring state can meet Africa's needs for services, considering its objective conditions, especially as the largest proportion of the population is still overwhelmingly impoverished and is struggling against the overpowering global liberalisation with its mantra of relentless, merciless and essentially unjust system of competition. Their struggle is an uphill battle against a faceless and impersonal system that works against their efforts to set themselves free from the poverty trap. Unlike the former colonial powers and other industrial countries, African societies have not yet produced an industrial base or major alternative sources free of conditionalities that would make it possible to provide quality university education. Even the industrial countries, especially in Northern Europe, and even Western European countries among which are the former colonial powers, continue to provide higher education free of charge (Negrao 1995). In France for instance, university is synonymous with public university. Africa has even more compelling reasons to renew a commitment for public-funded higher education. Indeed, in addition to the legendary peasants, new sites of needy population segments have been created in small towns and major cities.

Because of increased hardship and hopelessness in the countryside across the African continent, people have been attracted to the cities with their actual, but also misleading, signs of opportunities. They congregate in major slums, most of which do not offer better living conditions than many rural communities. It is safe to argue that for many of these populations, especially their aspiring youth, the social distance between them and university education has become longer than the hitherto distance between rural communities and the institutions of higher learning concentrated in the capital cities and other urban centres.

With these increased challenges amidst the liberalisation and global competitive world, the role of a caring state must be unequivocally paramount in protecting basic needs, creating institutions and possibilities, and providing services that can harness people's potentials. The increasing globalisation calls powerfully for a renewed and unprecedented commitment to lift the impoverished and trigger a process for sustainable development and substantive social progress. The global pressure and prescription of generic private sector solutions can only exacerbate the situation unless private initiatives are integrated in a clearly articulated and monitored public and people-centred national development agenda.

In a workshop on 'The Implications of WTO/ GATS for Higher Education in Africa' which was organized on 27 - 29 April 2004 by the Association of African Universities (AAU, 2004) in Accra, Ghana, it was articulated that in keeping with the theme of creating post-colonial universities that are in sync with the needs and aspirations of the African people, post-independence tertiary education in Africa was a major form of resistance to the dictates of former colonialists. As noted below, African countries that were fortunate to have institutions of higher learning under colonial rule moved from having one university in the country to creating numerous universities after they acquired independence. During a plenary session in the workshop, Nyagura (AAU 2004) of the University of Zimbabwe highlighted the disparities in the colonial education systems in colonial Zimbabwe:

> British rule from 1890-1979 had a number of consequences on education in Zimbabwe. During that time education was on racial basis – one system for blacks and another for Europeans and Asians; hence the curricula and examinations were different. There was only one university as at 1975, but immediately after independence enrolment expanded tremendously with the number of secondary schools increasing from 69 in1980 to over 2000 in 1985 (AAU 2004:17-18).

Nyagura further argued that Zimbabwe went on to establish a second university in the country in 1992 in an attempt to cope with the escalating demand for tertiary education. This, as he pointed out, was against the advice of both the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (AAU 2004:18). Chilundo (AAU 2004) argued that Mozambique, like Zimbabwe, had one university at independence, and more universities were created after independence (AAU: 19). Despite this situation, demand for higher education remained higher than the supply and, added Chilundo:

> In Mozambique, education is seen as an important tool for development, hence its percentage of GDP rose from 3.2% in 1999 to 6.4% in 2002. Both national and international providers are welcome, provided they abide by national regulations on higher education (AAU:19).

In these examples of Mozambique and Zimbabwe, they experienced situations that other African countries that acquired their independence in the 1950s and 1960s went through earlier. Thus, they are not unique; rather, they reflect the rest of the continent. The setting up of several universities after independence was an attempt by the peoples of Africa to set the pace for the development of the continent. An important factor in the establishment of these universities was that there was need to answer to the demands of the continent, hence the education system was expected to cater for the needs of individual countries and the continent as a whole. According to the Accra 2004 workshop, 'The revitalization of African higher education to produce knowledge and high quality graduates for the social reconstruction and development of Africa is a priority agenda' (AAU 2004:34).

While through its co-sponsored report, *Higher education in developing countries: Peril and promise* (Task Force on Higher Education and Society-TFHES 2000), the World Bank claimed to have rediscovered the importance of higher education, in reality the policy substance and goals of the global proxies have not changed.

In *Power, Politics and Higher Education in Southern Africa: International Regimes, Local Governments, and Educational Autonomy*, Cossa (2008) articulates the mechanisms through which what he refers to as 'global agencies', which continue to effectively facilitate the perpetuation of the colonial system, strengthen and widen the global structure of the domination of African spaces of official sovereignty with higher education as a major target. He argues that these global proxies of the old colonial systems created the SAPs, WTO, GATS and the like, which have immediate and predictable future impact on the African higher education systems. These African institutions are targeted for integration into the global systems with their 'binding obligations' and barely disguised effort to coerce African countries to accept their prescribed 'liberalisation' framework that inevitably leads to empowering further external forces and weakening the internal agencies.

One instrument that, using the desperately high but unmet demand, has been used to lure African countries to accept external control is technology, specifically the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Given Africans' dire need to increase possibilities for access to higher education enrolment, and satisfy the persistent demand, the option of ICTs tends to be presented as a panacea. In *Harnessing Distance Learning and ICT for Higher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: an Examination of Experiences Useful for the Design of Widespread and Effective Tertiary Education in Sub-Saharan Africa,* Till (2003:35) argues that there is evidence of 'some successes ... and [that] recent ICT innovations are making a significant

difference in enabling new approaches and in helping existing approaches to work better'. However, he also points out that:

> Where the architects and developers are external, they have found it difficult to adapt approaches to African cultural realities and resource constraints and to properly identify and define the needs of end users. Internal/African-led projects have fared no better in terms of meeting end-user needs, with fundamental problems in materials quality and support structures. Client governments and institutions – and their advisers – have understandably inconsistent views on needs and priorities with the desire for early and scalable success using imported content sometimes more appealing than slower capacity building approaches (Till 2003).

In 'Marketizing Higher Education: Neo-liberal Strategies and Counter-Strategies', Levidow (2001) also warns against the potential entrapment embedded in the neoliberal strategies that aim to marketise higher education on a global scale. Based on his observation of the global trends, Levidow contends that '[T]he World Bank "reform agenda" for the self-financing of higher education constitutes the biggest threat for 'Africa, where higher education is being forcibly marketized and standardized through financial dependence' (Levidow 2001:2).

In 'The African Renaissance and Technology Transfer', Fourie (2000) points out that Africa has obvious technological needs, but also warns against the naive belief that would view technological transfer as:

> an ever-benevolent panacea for our developmental ills. In fact, some transfers of technology can do more harm than good. Technology needs to be appropriate to the context into which it is transferred, and appropriate technological application is dependent upon a multitude of factors … [such as], 1. the absorptive capacity of the technology recipient [with] ... technicians, scientists and engineers to indiginize the new knowledge... 2. considerations such as the prioritization of national sovereignty [by anticipating and addressing the challenge of] some technology suppliers such as multinational corporations might only donate or sell technologies in order to gain a foot in new markets and to monopolize economic sectors, and 3. the question [of] whether the imported technology is compatible with local cultural and economic conditions (eg. will local resources be utilised and will concurrent industrial pollution disrupt the local environment?) (Fourie 2000:2-3).

Education is the process through which technical skills, values and ability for critical thinking are provided to the present and future generations of a society based on carefully identified internal needs. One of the dangers in technology is to reduce knowledge to technical and piecemeal delivery. Indeed, critical knowledge must be carefully conceived, delivered and monitored as

part of the national system. Furthermore, technology can be instrumental in promoting, figuratively and literally, a remote-controlled higher education that curtails African agency.

Being permanently critical and alert about the assumed neutrality of technology is crucial in the struggle. Indeed, whatever the versions and means of higher education, it must remain an arena for resistance especially as long as Africa remains the target of exploitation and policies from internal and/or external systems and their respective agents that stand in the way of social progress in Africa. Even when the state renews support, the university must be an arena for developing the critical minds.

Conclusion

The public university in Africa was a corollary of, and dialectically related to, the national development project. It was conceived to be a public institution with a public mission in addressing with effectiveness the challenges of the development process.

Based on people's aspirations to development, dynamic expressions of democracies, and tangible world resources, it is possible to boost higher education. But based on the realities and the expectations for real chances for a better life, the exercises of critical reflection can only conclude that there will not be generous financial support devoid of interest. Given the urgency to fix the global imbalance of development and the role of education in general, and higher education in particular, there is legitimacy in the call to search for integrative solutions for sustainable global development. Indeed, the legitimacy of the global system itself and its agencies should depend on their capacities and the dynamics of their philosophical foundation to promote and sustain equality in higher education. This equality is also a requirement for a developmental project in which education plays a central role.

By and large, through various mechanisms, private institutions rely on considerable indirect and direct subsidies from the state to function. The public mission of higher education must include private institutions as part of a national agenda. While any dogmatic rejection of non-governmental initiatives may not be helpful or realistic, as private African and well-meaning external contribution must be encouraged, it is indispensable to include them in the national development plans.

However, the future of African development in the knowledge economy cannot afford any more spare-part projects with external global agents in the driver seat. Social progress calls for a renewal of an engaged and caring state.

It is ironic that, in the ongoing global financial crisis that has been showing some features since 2008, the responses from the same industrial countries

and the Bretton Woods institutions have reached a consensus on the indispensable intervention of the state. Thus, there is a vindication of African countries and educational interest groups that have been waging resistance against destructive privatisation policies and alienation of members of the population that require public assistance to pursue their education at the higher level. More importantly, African states should feel invigorated in the pursuit of building and maintaining public institutions to respond to demand.

Note

1. The examples of Malawi and Mozambique taken from Bloom et al. (2006) were derived from the respective countries' Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers.

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