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Higher Education, the State and the Marketplace*

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Abstract

This essay is an overview of the historical development of higher education through three different periods – colonial, nationalist and neoliberal – as well as an argument for the strategic importance of higher education. In contrast to the World Bank's attempt to marginalize higher education as an elitist preoccupation, it argues that higher education is where teachers are trained, where curricula are developed, where the range of leadership of an independent country is cultivated, and where research is located. In sum, higher education is where we develop the range of choices which make democracy meaningful in different spheres of life. Higher education is the strategic heart of education; those who wish to transform general education must begin with higher education. The essay closes with a critical discussion of two paradigmatic reform experiences in higher education in tropical Africa – developmentalist reform at the University of Dar-es-Salaam in the 1970s and market-based reform at Makerere University in the 1990s – so as to draw lessons from a half century of experience.

Résumé

Cet essai est un aperçu de l'évolution historique de l'enseignement supérieur à travers trois périodes différentes – coloniale, nationaliste et néolibérale – et en même temps un plaidoyer pour une importance stratégique de l'enseignement supérieur. Contrairement à la tentative de la Banque Mondiale de marginaliser l'enseignement supérieur comme une préoccupation élitiste, il soutient que l'enseignement supérieur est le lieu de formation des enseignants, de développement des programmes, où le leadership des pays indépendants se cultive ainsi que le creuset de la recherche. En somme, l'enseignement supérieur est le lieu où nous développons la gamme des choix pour une démocratie significative dans les diffé-

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rentes sphères de la vie. L'enseignement supérieur étant le centre stratégique de l'éducation pourquoi donc ceux-là qui souhaitent transformer l'enseignement général doivent-ils commencer par l'enseignement supérieur? L'essai se termine sur une discussion critique sur deux expériences de réformes paradigmatiques de l'enseignement supérieur en Afrique tropicale – la réforme expansionniste à l'Université de Dar-es-Salaam dans les années 1970 et la réforme libérale à l'Université de Makerere dans les années 1990 – afin de tirer les leçons d'un demi-siècle d'expérience.

Introduction

I am honoured to have been invited to speak to this august body, partly because your mandate includes the entire gamut of education, from primary to tertiary, and partly because any group that meets once in three years has no choice but to focus on matters of strategic significance. I will begin with some thoughts on the Commonwealth, and then proceed to the question of education.

We all know the history of the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth came out of an empire, with both the former imperial power and its now independent subjects as members. What did this project stand for? Was it a graceful way of saying farewell to an empire, and of dismantling its memory? Or was it a project of redress, a way of making amends? As the Minister from Scotland has just said, how does one deal with a past of injustice and oppression? Is it enough to say let bygones be bygones, or do we need to recognize that a measure of justice is necessary for reconciliation to take place?

In this talk, I want to suggest three propositions. First, a meaningful role for the Commonwealth today would have to include reparations or restitution – making amends – for past injuries. Second, these amends would need to be made to the most aggrieved. Finally, I have some thoughts on who are the most aggrieved when it comes to higher education.

My focus will be on higher education, and perhaps that requires a word of explanation in an era when higher education is often discussed as an elitist alternative to primary education. Most of our students are in general education; so why choose to speak of higher education? For one reason: higher education is where teachers are trained; it is where curricula are developed; more than likely, it is also where the range of leadership of an independent country is cultivated; finally, because it is where research is located, higher education is where we develop the range of choices which make democracy meaningful in different spheres of life. If your objective is to transform general education, you have to begin with higher education. For higher education is the strategic heart of education.

I will adopt a historical approach in my discussion of higher education, focusing on three periods: the colonial, the nationalist and, finally, the period of neo-liberal reform.

Colonialism and Education

All except one member of the Commonwealth are former colonies. It is commonplace to observe that not all colonies have fared equally badly. What accounts for the difference in performance between former colonies? Of many factors, some primary and others secondary, I would like to advance one: the nature of the colonial experience.

I teach a course at Columbia University, titled 'The Modern State and the Colonial Subject.' It is a course in comparative colonialism, about the technology of rule. I ask questions like: How does a self-conscious minority rule a majority? When it comes to the British Empire, what lessons did this minority draw from centuries of experience? When these lessons were put into practice, what key changes did it effect in ways of ruling?

To answer this question in the case of the British Empire, I distinguish between two main periods in its history, so as to highlight key shifts in the technology of rule from one period to another. The first period was that of a confident colonialism that was conscious of itself as a civilizing influence on the world. That confidence was thrown into doubt by two uprisings at two ends of the Empire in the middle of the 19th century: the Indian Uprising of 1857 and the Morant Bay Uprising in Jamaica a few years later.

There were two debates on the Indian Uprising, one in India and the other in Britain. In the Indian debate, the British claimed that the Uprising stemmed from superstition, from anxieties about modernity, because Indian soldiers, both Hindus and Muslims, objected to using bullets greased with cow and pig fat. In the debate in Britain, particularly in the House of Commons, members asked why religious prejudices did not prevent soldiers from using the same bullets to kill British soldiers and civilians.

After 1857, Parliament took over from company rule. Queen Victoria announced that Britain would no longer interfere in religion, and would in fact respect it, for religion belonged to the private sphere. But the reality proved to be otherwise. Following the announcement, the colonial state undertook to define the boundaries that should not be violated, the true religion that should not be interfered with, and the true authorities who should define the boundaries of the true religion. Thus began a period of the greatest interference by the colonial state in the religions of India.

Thus began a new phase of colonialism. The colonial state no longer claimed to do away with tradition and implement a civilizing mission. It now claimed to

conserve tradition, which it proceeded to define. That tradition was defined as religious in India, but as ethnic in the African colonies that Britain conquered at the end of the 19th century. If the first period in which Britain claimed to be a civilizing mission was known as direct rule, then the second period in which it reversed claims, now championing tradition, was known as indirect rule.

What had changed in the transition from direct to indirect rule? First and most obviously, there was a change in the language of rule, from a language of bringing civilization to one of conserving tradition. Second, there was a change in the local mediators of foreign rule. Direct rule was mediated through the educated strata, which were trained in Western schools and institutions of learning that were built as so many temples and monuments to the civilizing mission. The proliferation of English-speaking strata, from lawyers to clerks, was said to be a visible benefit of colonial rule. In the era of indirect rule, however, the British looked with suspicion on the educated strata and with favour on traditional chiefs.

The point was made explicit by Lord Lugard, a former colonial official in India and Burma, then a fortune-hunting ivory merchant in equatorial Africa, and later part of the staff of the Imperial British East Africa Company. Lugard became a pioneer of indirect rule, the one who systematized its practice in northern Nigeria, and then wrote about it in *The Dual Mandate*. Britain, said Lord Lugard, must avoid 'the Indian disease.' Now, what was 'the Indian disease'? For Lugard, it was a reference to the educated classes being highly susceptible to catching the virus of nationalism.

Anyone studying the modern history of higher education in the colonies will be able to distinguish between two periods. The first was that of the 18th and mid-19th centuries when a triumphant and confident empire placed a high premium on civilizing the colonies, and universities had a pride of place in this mission. But once challenged in the mid-19th century, the Empire went on the defensive. Clipping its modernist ambitions, it opted for order rather than modernity, and higher education fell by the wayside.

My first point is that this student of the modern history of higher education would notice a sharp contrast between the emphasis on higher education in early and robust colonialism, the period of direct rule, and its near boycott in the period of indirect rule that followed the upsurge of anti-colonial resistance in mid-19th century. Not surprisingly, the colonies that suffered most in the sphere of higher education were mainly those that were colonized last, as the 20th century opened. These were the colonies of middle Africa, the Africa between the Sahara and the Kalahari. Many will remember that world media in the decade of the 1960s was full of stories of how one African colony after another – Tanganyika,

Congo, Nyasaland, Northern Rhodesia – was about to become independent with no more than a handful of university graduates in the population.

The colonies of middle Africa were divided into two groups. Most colonies had no universities as they approached independence. When they became independent, just as sure as the national anthem, the national flag, and the national currency, a national university too became an obligatory sign of real independence. Then there was a minority of countries, a few, which had one university during the colonial period. This was usually a university meant to serve an entire region, such as Makerere University in Kampala.

Higher education in middle Africa really only began in any meaningful sense with independence, not colonialism. Take the example of Nigeria. One statistic is sufficient to make my point. Colonial Nigeria had one university with 1,000 students in 1961. Thirty years later, in 1991, independent Nigeria had 41 universities with 131,000 students. And Nigeria was not an exception.

The Developmentalist University – the University of Dar-es-Salaam

If higher education in middle Africa was a fruit of nationalism, nationalist governments built the developmentalist university, a university whose mission was defined as 'development.' The university that symbolized the promise of the nationalist era was the University of Dar-es-Salaam, where I held my first full-time teaching job, from 1973 to 1979.

The key achievement of the University of Dar-es-Salaam can be summed up in one word: decolonization. At the most superficial level, this was the decolonization of personnel, which went in line with the policy of Africanization that swept through one former colony after another in this continent. At a deeper level, this was decolonization of the curriculum. The transformation of curriculum cut across disciplines. It was spearheaded by inter-disciplinary teams of academics who designed inter-disciplinary courses meant to pioneer the study of development as part of a broader historical study of imperial expansion since the 15th century. Every student was required to take a full year course in Development Studies for the entire duration of the three year undergraduate programme. The object was to historicize economic poverty and social backwardness as 'under-development', that is, as the outcome of modern colonialism rather than a pre-colonial legacy. The University of Dar-es-Salaam became the home of the new science of nationalism, political economy.

But there were also problems. The main problem in the exercise that sought to decolonize curriculum was that its historical vision was limited to that of the colonial period. Ironically, those who criticised the colonial period came to share its time horizon. Studies in political economy treated pre-colonialism more as a point of departure than as an object of study. No wonder the point of

departure often lacked depth, texture, and dynamism; in short, history. Second, political economy was preoccupied with objective processes. The three-year program ended with a blueprint on 'development' in the third year. As an off-the-shelf blueprint, it claimed validity for every newly independent colony; there was little room for particularity or subjectivity, or differences in local capacity, whether defined by organization or vision. Finally, the discussion on colonizing curriculum seldom touched the question of language. Could one decolonize curriculum without reference to the language in which it was taught? This led to a curious development in Tanzania. Whereas Kiswahili was the medium of instruction in primary and secondary schools, it had the status of a foreign language in the university, where it was the object of special study at the Institute of Swahili Research. In the university curriculum, there was little or no interest in the experience of countries with multiple languages or where the national language was not an imperial language (such as the Scandinavian countries, China, Korea, Japan, etc.). The unintended effect was that students entering university came with insufficient preparation for English-medium studies. As a consequence, those who could afford to began to send their children to private English-medium schools, and those who could not increased pressure for English-medium education in public schools.

Besides this, there was little discussion of questions such as governance and funding. All assumed that the university would be run as a state apparatus, a parastatal, and the state would continue to be the sole funder of the university.

The crisis of the developmentalist university was part of the larger crisis of nationalism. The more nationalism turned into a state project, the more there were pressures on the developmentalist university to implement a state-determined agenda. The more this happened, the more critical thought was taken as subversive of the national project. The university was, of course, an incubator of both critical thought and of a counter-elite, whose critique sometimes veiled ambition. The more professors sounded like Ministers-in-waiting and sometimes even Presidents-in-waiting, the more their critique began to sound self-serving. In a single party context, the university began to take on the veneer of an opposition party, giving rise to confrontations that often led to strikes and shutdowns.

My second point is that the relationship between higher education and nationalism in middle Africa was contradictory. On the one hand, higher education was a fruit of nationalism; on the other hand, nationalist power tended to stifle critical thought. Nationalists were seldom willing democrats. From George Washington to Indira Gandhi to Robert Mugabe, they tended to see opposition as evidence of factionalism and betrayal. Not surprisingly, by the 1990s, the question of university autonomy was on the agenda. To win autonomy, however, the university needed allies in society and alternate sources of funding.

CODESRIA organized an all-Africa conference on 'Academic Freedom and the Social Responsibility of the Intellectual' in 1991 in Kampala. But the discussion on autonomy was just beginning.

Bretton Woods Institutions and the Assault on the Developmentalist University

The assault on the developmentalist university came from the new global development bureaucracy, particularly the Bretton Woods institutions. They were home to a radically different developmentalism. To understand the difference, we need to take two factors into account.

For a start, think of the end of colonialism which led to the unemployment of a large number of colonial bureaucrats. Many were seconded to the bureaucracies of the new multilateral institutions. I have no idea how many, if any, came to staff the Commonwealth Secretariat. But I have in mind the World Bank.

The World Bank began with a frontal assault on African universities at a conference of Vice Chancellors of African universities that it called in Harare in 1986. There, it advised the VCs that it would make economic sense to close universities in independent Africa and have its human resource needs trained in universities in the West. Unable to convince the VCs to do themselves out of a job, the Bank changed tack, and followed with a different strategy, that of conditional aid.

The second line of attack too the form of 'technical assistance,' leading to the inflow of expatriate staff from donor countries as technical experts, their salaries and perks paid from the component of 'aid' known as 'technical assistance.' The counterpart of this 'technical assistance' was the 'brain drain,' the outflow of national intellectuals, most taking up jobs in the West.

Do excuse me one bit of speculation here. Given the obvious difference between incoming expatriates who were securing jobs under monopolistic conditions and nationals who had to compete in open markets, economists are likely to tell us that those who succeed under free market conditions are likely to be of a superior quality than those who shelter under monopolies. The World Bank estimated recently that roughly a half of university graduates of universities in independent Africa had left for overseas since independence. Sandwiched between international donors and critical intellectuals at home, national governments sadly acquiesced in the marginalization of national intellectuals.

The Bank had a substantial critique of the developmentalist university, and it needs to be disaggregated to distinguish the positive from the negative. The positive part resonated with wider audiences and earned the Bank much support during its initial call for market-oriented reform of universities. The first part of the Bank's critique was that the developmentalist university was duplicating an

expensive colonial model for training a narrow and privileged elite. Other parts talked of the need for greater university autonomy, and for a much needed broadening of the financial base for higher education.

Then there was the negative side, which in many ways summed up the core of the Bank's agenda, and had a deadly effect on the future of higher education in middle Africa. Two ideas need particular mention. Bank studies claimed to show that the rate of return on investment in higher education was much lower than that in secondary or primary education, and that the benefit was mainly private. The Bank drew two conclusions from this: one, that the beneficiaries should share a significant part of the cost of higher education; and, two, that the state should reduce funding to higher education. Overall, the Bank framed a debate in which the private and the public, the market and the state, were seen more as alternatives rather than complementaries between which there needed to be appropriate relations.

The bank was completely wrong on this question. Empirically, several researchers have raised doubts about the calculations on which Bank officials based their claim about the low rate of return on investment in higher education. Conceptually, however, the Bank's understanding of benefits as exclusively individual ignores the institutional benefits involved: for higher education, as I have already argued, is the heart of education. It is where teachers are trained and curricula developed. Without research in higher education to develop curricula for the entire education system, all curricula will be as an off-the-shelf imported facility, with little relevance to the circumstances of the student.

The Bank proposal with the most corrosive impact on higher education was that for financial decentralization. The Bank called for financial autonomy for revenue-earning units inside universities so they may have an incentive to function as so many driving forces on the ground.

The Bank's Model for Market-Driven Reform – Makerere University

Makerere University is currently the Bank's model for market-driven reform. I taught at Makerere in the 1980s and the early 90s, and then returned a few years ago to study the impact of Bank-supported reforms. There were two main reforms at Makerere in the mid-1990s. I call them privatization and commercialization. Privatization amounted to the entry of privately sponsored students fee-paying into the university. Commercialization was a product of financial decentralization which gave substantial resource control to revenue-generating faculties, departments and institutes. At the start of the reform in 1993, individual units were encouraged to bring in as many private students as possible by allowing them to retain as much as 90 percent of fees paid by them. A decade later, as much as 60 percent was still retained. The immediate consequence was

that there ceased to be a single university budget as separate faculty budgets replaced separate faculty votes in the university budget.

As faculties began to compete for students, they rushed to devise programs that would attract private students. The turf war between faculties was around the most lucrative programs: human rights, conflict resolution, secretarial studies, environmental management, and so on. The turf war developed around two questions: *Who* had the right to teach? And *what* did they have the right to teach?

Let us begin with the second question first. The more relations between faculties became commercialized, the more revenue-earning faculties demanded the right to teach a program simply because they had come up with it. It was akin to a right of discovery. Previously, of course, each faculty had a defined mandate and anything beyond its mandate was taught as a 'service' course by another faculty. Now, faculties began to substitute 'service' courses with 'domesticated' courses by hiring adjunct staff to teach it. The selection of that staff too was decided by financial rather than academic considerations.

Now, the first question: who had the right to teach? In a decade, two parallel universities have developed at Makerere. One is the official university in which academic staff are hired on a permanent basis by officially appointed bodies observing official procedures and rules that require teaching staff to have at least a doctorate to continue to teach. The other is the informal university in which the teaching staff is hired by unit administrators on an informal and short-term basis, where someone can teach for over ten years without a formal letter of appointment. The 'reformed' Makerere is an informal university where questions of quality have been thrown by the wayside and where fee paying students receive a low-level vocational education in an expensive campus setting.

The changes have been dramatic over a decade. The number of students expanded from 3,000 to over 30,000 in a decade. The academic staff got two payments: the first a minimum as salary, and the second a supplementary payment over and above the minimum. This supplementary payment was variable and was calculated by the hour. As academic staff began to be paid by the hour taught, the average teaching load increased from 6 hours a week to over 20 hours a week. The result was a dramatic decline in quality of teaching and in research carried out. The most successful programmes were the BA in Tourism in the Department of Geography or another in Secretarial Studies in the Institute of Linguistics, and so on.

What will happen if the World Bank is able to reform higher education in Africa according to the Makerere model, so that local universities focus on teaching to the exclusion of research? What will happen if we see knowledge production as mainly an external process, to be imported? Both problems, and solutions, will then come to resemble ideologically-defined, off-the-shelf offers. Those

interested in research or dissatisfied with an externally-driven process of knowledge production will begin to move to overseas research centres or simply out of the university. The tendency will be to fill the university with mimic men and women, those who are prone to think of knowledge as something produced elsewhere.

My third point is that research needs to be an integral component of higher education, particularly in countries with a recent colonial past, for the simple reason that without a capacity for research we will not be in a position to define meaningful choices. Even the imparting of a meaningful general education requires the development of a curriculum that is responsive to local contexts and local needs, something that cannot simply be picked off the shelf.

The Commonwealth and Higher Education

There is a debate in higher education. One side claims that higher education is a luxury for small and poor countries. The other side points out that without an institutional base for research, we will not be in a position to define any meaningful choices.

It may be that only those countries with a dense network of higher education institutions, like South Africa and Nigeria in this continent, can afford to have a national research university. If so, others – small countries like Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania – will need to direct their efforts regionally, and collaborate to create a regional research university. If the Commonwealth is to have a program of redress in higher education, a regional research university for middle African countries would be a worthy focus for it. But even in the small country context, one needs to think of a decent liberal arts college with a decent general education that responds to both a changing global environment and to local histories and contexts – a site for a general education that can produce a generation of leaders with a shared understanding and a shared vision. None of this can be left to the market. All of it requires willful and concerted action by people like ourselves.