
The University as a Site of Knowledge: The Role of Basic Research¹

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Abstract

This paper extrapolates from the tensions between the University of Dar es Salaam Academic Staff Assembly (UDASA) and the university administration to make a case for academic freedom in Tanzania in particular and Africa in general. It draws on two key statements on academic freedom in Africa – the Dar es Salaam Declaration on Academic Freedom and Social Responsibility of Academics (1990) and the Kampala Declaration on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility (1991), to discuss the role of basic research in the university as a site for knowledge production. The paper argues that the quest for academic freedom is only meaningful if universities renew their commitment to the public good. Only by fulfilling the public trust as weavers of the social fabric and upholders of the highest ethical dimensions of human life can universities reclaim their position in society and the world at large.

Résumé

Cet article procède à une extrapolation des tensions entre University of Dar es Salaam Academic Staff Assembly (UDASA) et l'administration de cette même université, afin de plaider pour la liberté académique en Tanzanie en particulier et en Afrique, en général. Il s'inspire également de deux déclarations clés concernant les libertés académiques en Afrique : la Déclaration de Dar es Salaam sur les libertés académiques et la responsabilité sociale des universitaires (1990) ainsi que la Déclaration de Kampala sur les libertés intellectuelles et la responsabilité sociale (1991), dans le but d'évoquer le rôle de la recherche fondamentale au sein de l'université, en tant que lieu de production de la connaissance. L'auteur affirme que la quête d'une certaine liberté académique ne conserve tout son sens que si les universités renouvellent leur engagement envers le bien public. Ce n'est qu'en méritant la confiance publique, en leur qualité de tisserands de la toile sociale et de garantes des grandes valeurs éthiques de l'humain que les universités pourront réclamer leur position au sein de la société et du monde, de façon plus large.

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‘The scramble to get into college is going to be so terrible in the next few years that students are going to put up with almost anything, even an education.’ Barnaby Keeney, President, Brown University (cited in Charlton 1994: 14)

Introduction

On 30 April 2003, the then United States Ambassador to Tanzania, Mr Robert V. Royall, was scheduled to inaugurate a USAID-funded modern transportation engineering laboratory on the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) main campus (‘The Hill’). This was at a time when the United States and Britain were pouring down thousands of tons of bombs on Iraq. On 29 April 2003 the University of Dar es Salaam Academic Staff Assembly (UDASA) strongly and unreservedly protested at the presence of the Ambassador on the main campus and called upon its members and the university community to boycott the event. UDASA stated that the American and British bombing campaign was

reducing ... [Iraq] to rubble, and literally disarming children, as the likes of Ali losing their limbs [had] shown’. It also complained that as a result of the bombing ‘the great libraries and museums of Iraq went up in flames, destroying the record of over ten centuries of Arab, Islamic and human civilisation.

The UDASA protest did not go down well with the university administration, even though the Tanzanian government was also opposed to the invasion of Iraq, as Parliament had been informed in the same month. The vice-chancellor responded to the UDASA statement through a letter to the chairperson on 9 May 2003. Among other things the letter questioned whether the statement was not contrary to the right to academic freedom. The vice-chancellor argued:

A university is a free market of ideas. One would, therefore, have thought that ‘un-embedded’ intellectuals would have asked, not for a boycott of Ambassador Royall’s visit, but for an invitation to him to a discussion/debate/panel discussion with others holding views different from those of UDASA.

The letter continued: ‘Why was this option not exercised? By condemning the US unheard as is done in the statement, will an invitation to a US government representative to the UDSM for a debate/discussion stand any chance of success?’ The letter went on to question even the calibre of the academic members of staff, claiming they were not aware of the implications of their actions. ‘Has UDASA reflected’, the vice-chancellor asked, ‘on what intellectuals elsewhere in the world who read the UDASA statement will conclude about the calibre and quality of intellectuals at UDSM?’ Then came the real crunch:

Would any of the un-embedded intellectuals have their sons, daughters or relatives studying or living in the US or UK? Would one meet any of them standing in queue for a visa to the US or UK? Will any of them neither seek nor accept funding for research, sabbaticals, and other academic pursuits from any of the two countries?

The following year UDASA and the university administration clashed again, after the administration, on 21 April 2004, suspended all students for ‘security’ reasons. This followed a two-day boycott of classes in protest at the Student Loans Bill, aimed at introducing the last phase of so-called cost sharing in higher education. On 20 April students had demonstrated against the bill, only to meet the wrath of the state in the form of the police and paramilitary, who broke up the demonstration using excessive force. Many students were wounded or jailed. When UDASA protested against this shabby treatment of the students, the administration questioned its legitimacy as an organisation and the manner in which it conducted itself as far as decision-making was concerned. The administration even challenged UDASA to conduct an opinion poll to ascertain whether its members truly agreed with the positions taken by the organisation, arguing that UDASA lacked even the basic rudiments of strategic planning.

Under such circumstances can the university still be considered a site of knowledge? Is it possible to undertake basic research in a situation where donors and international financial institutions (IFIs) dominate in every sphere of society and academia? What all the above demonstrates is the fact that there is nothing like academic freedom in the abstract. In the case of our countries, it ‘exists fully and concretely for those who control the means of production and circulation of knowledge, whether as a private or state capital; they can decide what to produce and how to produce it’ (Ake 1994: 17). The dictum that knowledge is power has been familiar since the times of Francis Bacon, but with rapid advances in information technology in the North, it is said increasingly that knowledge and the capacity to produce it are becoming key economic inputs which at the extreme supersede land, capital and labour.

The 1990 and 1991 Declarations on Academic Freedom

To discuss meaningfully the topic at hand, it is necessary to revisit the context under which two key statements on academic freedom in Africa were produced – the Dar es Salaam Declaration on Academic Freedom and Social Responsibility of Academics (1990) and the Kampala Declaration on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility (1991). The budgetary crises in African states during the late 1970s and 1980s had resulted in governments bowing to

the dictates of international financial institutions by liberalising their economies and introducing anti-welfare policies as part of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs). Currency devaluations and sky-rocketing inflation rates had eroded the earnings of the people in general, including academics. Institutions of higher learning had become characterised by the collapse of infrastructure such as libraries, bookstores and research facilities, serious shortages of books, laboratory equipment and research funds, inadequate teaching personnel and poor staff development and motivation.

In this context working conditions and remuneration in institutions of higher learning verged on the catastrophic. Academic members of staff were migrating to 'greener pastures', including apartheid South Africa, or resorting to outside work such as dubious donor-funded consultancies or even keeping poultry. Classrooms were overcrowded, students were becoming lecturer-dependent (relying on lecture notes and readers' notes) and lecturers were increasingly demoralised. In addition there was a steady deterioration of social and cultural values on many campuses, with a resurgence of gender-based, racial, nationalist, ethnic, religious and cultural prejudices, amidst an atmosphere of petty antipathies, bad conscience and brutal mediocrity. In the early 1990s, for example, a female student at the University of Dar es Salaam, Revina Mukasa, committed suicide as a result of gender harassment.

There were more and more incidents of violence on campuses, along with a marked tendency for students to regroup themselves in terms of ethnic affiliations. Ethnic affiliations, which were previously unheard of among students in Tanzania, had become necessary; it was claimed, to be a 'survival mechanism'. Students helped each other cope with the hardships resulting from 'cost-sharing' measures, but only within ethnic groupings.

On the other hand the deteriorating situation resulted in growing activism on campuses as a result of the growing demands by academics for a living wage and protests by students against the so-called cost-sharing measures. Usually governments in Africa have responded to this activism with the use of force, deploying military and security forces on campuses to 'restore law and order'. In several instances confrontations between these forces and students or academic staff have led to the closure of campuses. It was in this context that questions about academic freedom and the responsibilities of higher learning institutions and their autonomy were raised. The debates ranged from those focusing mainly on better living and working conditions to those 'concerned more directly with academic freedom and the relationship of the intellectual to society...[and] to those directly and centrally involved in broader democratic struggles' (Diouf and Mamdani 1994: 4).

The Dar es Salaam and Kampala declarations were not explicit on the role of the universities as sites of knowledge or even on the role of basic research. It seems that these issues were assumed to remain within the context of the traditional objectives of the university – scientific enquiry, pursuit of knowledge and the search for the whole truth in the interest of social transformation and human emancipation. The institutional transformations that were to be introduced in the universities in the 1990s and how these would impinge on knowledge production and research in general were hardly taken aboard, even in subsequent follow-ups on academic freedom (see CODESRIA 1996 and Sall 2000, for example). The issues of vital importance in the discussions in the 1990s remained those of harassment, repression, intimidation, suspensions, remuneration and freedom of expression, association, demonstration and assembly.

Postmodernism, Knowledge, Research and Neoliberalism

The French postmodernist Jean-François Lyotard published a book in 1979 which was translated into English in 1984 as *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Lyotard 1984). In this work Lyotard accounted for the changing nature of knowledge in the advanced capitalist societies and reassessed the role of the universities, given the computerisation process in those societies. His working hypothesis was that ‘the status of knowledge is altered as societies enter what is known as the post-industrial age and cultures enter what is known as the postmodern age’ (Lyotard 1984: 3). The term ‘postmodern condition’ was used to describe the state of knowledge and the problem of its legitimation, following what Lyotard considered to be the transformations that had been taking place in those countries since the 1950s.

According to Lyotard the Enlightenment project and its metanarratives concerning meaning, truth and emancipation, which had been used to legitimate both the rules of knowledge and the foundations of modern institutions, besides laying down the game rules for science, literature and the arts, had reached a crisis in the most highly developed societies. The ‘postmodern condition’ was defined by ‘incredulity toward metanarratives’ (Lyotard 1984: xxiv). By this phrase Lyotard meant to point to ‘the obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation’ to which corresponds ‘the crisis of metaphysical philosophy and of the university institution’ (Lyotard 1984: xxiii).

Lyotard further claimed that knowledge was increasingly becoming the major force of production and was increasingly becoming translated into quantities of information, with a corresponding reorientation in the process of research. He claimed that ‘the miniaturization and commercialization of machines is already changing the way in which learning is acquired, classified, made avail-

able, and exploited' (Lyotard 1984: 4). Knowledge in computerised societies was becoming 'exteriorised' from knowers, and the age-old notion of knowledge and pedagogy being inextricably linked was being replaced by a new view of knowledge as a commodity: 'Knowledge is and will be produced in order to be sold, it is and will be consumed in order to be valorized in a new production: in both cases, the goal is exchange. Knowledge ceases to be an end in itself, it loses its "use-value" ...' (Lyotard 1984: 4-5).

According to Lyotard knowledge in the form of informational commodity had become indispensable to productive power: 'It is conceivable that the nation-states will one day fight for control of information, just as they battled in the past for control over territory, and afterwards for control and access to and exploitation of raw materials and cheap labour' (Lyotard: 5). In this context the idea that 'learning falls within the purview of the State, as the mind or brain of society' was giving way to the idea that 'society exists and progresses only if messages circulating within it are rich in information and easy to decode' (Lyotard 1984: 5). In sum:

We may thus expect a thorough exteriorization of knowledge with respect to the 'knower', at whatever point he or she may occupy in the knowledge process. The old principle that the acquisition of knowledge is indissociable from the training (*Bildung*) of minds, or even of individuals, is becoming obsolete and will become ever more so. The relationships of the suppliers and users of knowledge to the knowledge they supply and use is now tending, and will increasingly tend, to assume the form already taken by the relationship of commodity producers and consumers to the commodities they produce and consume – that is, the form of value (Lyotard 1984: 4-5).

In the computer age, with the state playing more of a regulatory role, the power to make decisions will be determined by the question of access to information. Eventually academics will not be needed, since much of the work they undertake will be taken over by computerised data network systems.

Lyotard was essentially acknowledging the omnipotence of the free-market economy.

The university, with all its faculties and intellectual specialisations, becomes untenable because of the new nature of knowledge – cyberspace information processing which quantifies knowledge according to computer logic. For postmodernists the knower has been transformed into a consumer of knowledge. Perhaps these claims by Lyotard, which were celebrated in Europe and exerted profound influence among other postmodernists, could have remained a European academic fad, except for the fact they reinforced the ideas developed by the theorists of 'post-industrial society', such as Touraine (1971) and

Bell (1974) on information/knowledge workers. These theorists argued that industrial society was moving from a goods-producing to a service economy and was characterised by the pre-eminence of the professional and technical class and the widespread diffusion of 'intellectual technology'. After the 1968 student revolts in Europe Touraine predicted the possibility of deepening conflicts between students and teachers upholding the humanistic values of liberal education on the one hand and, on the other hand, those who control the technocratic apparatuses and are dedicated to economic growth.

Above all Lyotard's claims were being given credence and substance by developments in science – the new information technology (global cyberspace), the new cosmologies developed by conventionalists (the theory of everything) and the developments in genetic science (the human genome project). They also coincided with the rise of neo-liberal politics with the ascendancy of Pope John Paul II (Karol Wojtyla in 1978), President Ronald Reagan (1980) and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (1981) and the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, which signaled the complete triumph of the market economy. African and other developing countries were forced to structurally adjust their economies, adopt market-oriented policies and privatise public enterprises. With the rise of computer technology, cellular phones, modems and faxes, the world's financial markets became hooked up into a system of 24-hour non-stop trading. Take-over specialists bought and sold enterprises all over the world, making tens of thousands of workers redundant and countless stockholders rich, regardless of the long-term economic goals of a country.

The determinists in genetic science, sponsored by the multibillion-dollar Human Genome Project, which aimed to map and analyse the complete genetic blueprint of human beings, lent weight to the idea that human beings are pre-determined, whether in terms of intelligence, free market entrepreneurship, sexuality, male dominance, etc. Thus the project worked to legitimise the status quo of existing inequalities and forms of domination. Meanwhile, as far as physics was concerned, theories of chaos and complexity demolished the notion of control and certainty in science. Conventionalists claimed that scientific methods are just myths and that scientific knowledge is manufactured. Paul Feyerabend (1971: 5) had earlier explicitly argued that the 'only principle that does not exhibit progress is: anything goes Without chaos, no knowledge. Without a frequent dismissal of reason, no progress'.

As a 1994 European Union White Paper pointed out, there has been an increasing shift from the kind of society where formal learning occurs once-off towards one in which education does not stop after one has obtained a qualification. Thus both public and private organisations are increasingly taking on

the continuing education of their members as a major responsibility. The South African National Commission for Higher Education therefore concludes:

This means that higher education institutions will no longer have a monopoly on the transmission of knowledge, which will become increasingly diversified, with the higher education institution being only one of many organisations competing for the education/training market (NCHE 1996: 39).

In such an environment, if higher education institutions are not to be marginalised, they are going to have to develop partnerships with both private and public-sector organisations .

Neo-liberalism and Institutional Transformation in Tanzania

Broadly, whatever the misgivings some may have, post-independence Tanzanian nation-building was based on welfare policies that assumed the public provision of health, education, water, etc. This was reflected even in the conception of what the university and other institutions of higher learning were all about. According to Nyerere (1973: 192-3) the university was an institution where people's minds should be 'trained for clear thinking, for independent thinking, for analysis and for problem solving at the highest level. This is the meaning of 'a university' anywhere in the world.' Thus the university's role was threefold: to transmit advanced knowledge from one generation to another 'so that this can serve either as a basis of action, or as a springboard for further research', to advance the frontiers of knowledge 'through its possession of good library and laboratory facilities', and finally to provide high-level manpower to society. All three are necessary: 'a university which attempts to prohibit any one of [these functions] would die – it would cease to be a university' (Nyerere 1973: 193). For Nyerere universities in developing countries have exactly the same high responsibility towards themselves and their societies:

Thus our university, like all others worthy of the name, must provide the facilities and the opportunities for the highest intellectually enquiry. It must encourage and challenge its students to develop their powers of constructive thinking. It must encourage its academic staff to do original research and to play a full part in promoting intelligent discussion of issues of human concern. It must do all these things because they are part of being a university; they are part of its reason for existence (Nyerere 1973: 197).

In keeping with this vision post-independence education policies in Tanzania were premised on the provision of education, especially higher education, as the basis for social and economic development, with the state playing the central role.

However, the neo-liberal policies which were developed in the 1980s to cope with the crisis that had begun to face African economies since the 1970s argued that developing countries, with their abundant supply of unskilled labour, had a comparative advantage in the production of labour-intensive goods and services.² With increased free trade, this argument held, the wages of unskilled labour would increase in these countries, since goods produced by unskilled labour in the developed countries would face competition from those from developing countries, given the scarcity of unskilled labour in the former. Therefore free markets and competition would enhance technological progress and lead to high-quality, sustained growth in the developing countries (Michalopoulos 1987: 24). Within this context the World Bank produced a number of studies on education in Africa from the mid-1980s on (World Bank 1985, 1986, 1988, 1989, 1990a, 1991; Kelly 1991) calling for drastic reductions in state funding of higher education in Africa on the pretext of promoting higher efficiency and more egalitarian distribution of resources.

These studies claimed that the social return on public investment in primary education was 28 per cent, while that on tertiary education was only 13 per cent. They also argued that the return on *private* investment in higher education was as high as 32 per cent. The studies concluded that individual university graduates received about 2.5 times more income over outlay than the government but received 34 times more from the government than what primary students received. Accordingly, they concluded, education financing was unbalanced, and investment in higher education was inefficient. In the words of Michael Kelly (1991: 7), 'wastage, proliferation of small institutions, excessively large (especially non-teaching) staff and the nearly universal policy of charging no fees all contribute to high costs'.

The studies also argued that the distribution of education expenditure was very inequalitarian. For example, they claimed that 40 per cent of university students came from white-collar families (professionals, government employees and corporate employees). White-collar families represented only 6 per cent of the population but appropriated about 27 per cent of public education expenditure. Thus, rather than alleviating poverty, public expenditure in higher education, it was claimed, was increasing it. The World Development Report of 1990 identified the most critical elements of poverty reduction as labour-intensive growth, investment in human capital and safety nets for the poor. It emphasised the need for growth that is labour-intensive and removes distortions in labour markets. This was a time when many donor agencies had shifted their support to projects promising short-term pay-offs, which were mostly administered by NGOs whose success did not depend on high-level skills,

such as technical skills or PhDs. This approach reinforced the shift away from higher education as a development priority (Doss et al. 2004: 2).

At a World Bank meeting of African vice-chancellors in Harare in 1988 it was even claimed that Africa's need for university education to fill white-collar jobs could be met by overseas education institutions, so that resources could be channelled to primary, secondary and vocational education. The assumption was that African workers were destined for a long time to remain unskilled workers. This was the position of the World Bank's first Africa-specific education policy paper, *Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Policies for Adjustment, Revitalisation and Expansion* (1988). The paper was produced at a time when the bank's lending for the social sector was constrained to make room for SAPs lending in what the bank considered to be productive sectors. The main thrust of this policy was that higher education was too expensive and mainly favoured better-off population groups at the expense of primary and secondary education for the majority.

Since there was resistance from the institutions of higher learning, the World Bank called for a restructuring of education, so that there could be public cost-recovery and reallocation of government spending towards levels with the highest social returns. This, according to the World Bank, would promote higher efficiency and more egalitarian distribution of education resources. The bank was of the view that the higher education system should be made to operate at the lowest possible public cost and that higher-education institutions should exist by virtue of being 'viable' and 'efficient'. By viability was meant the institutions 'producing' for the 'market' and paying for themselves. The introduction of cost-sharing was part of this package. By efficiency was meant revising syllabi to ensure 'products' better suited for the market. The World Bank envisioned a network of market-oriented 'centres of excellence' replacing the present university systems. In the view of the World Bank education was bound up with the development of the overall economy. The crucial and determining factor was the question of employment (and unemployment), since educational levels have an effect on employability. Rhetoric aside, this was an expression in a subtle way of the view that universities should be turned into vocational schools in all but name!

According to the World Bank the multiple changes in economies, cultures and communication systems under globalisation call for greater flexibility in production to meet increasingly diverse global consumer needs. This flexibility can be attained by using new computer-led technologies and employing a more educated labour force in more participatory forms of work organisation. This has led to an increased need for a multi-skilled labour force that can adapt to new technologies and the continuous deployment of new knowledge. The

world is entering a new stage – that of the ‘knowledge society’ – in which productivity is increasingly becoming dependent on knowledge as a form of symbolic capital. Since higher-learning institutions are the natural habitat of specialised knowledge, they should therefore play a central role. The role of higher-learning institutions in Africa becomes one of producing skilled professionals and knowledge workers who can compete internationally.

Within this context higher education, like other public services, was increasingly being drawn into the world market. For example it was claimed that students were becoming consumers free to choose the best courses and that there was big money to be made by private firms. Higher education had therefore become a commodity. The income from foreign students in Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) member countries topped USD 30 billion in 1999. Even the World Trade Organisation (WTO) has turned its attention to this sector; the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) has included higher education on the list of services to be privatised since 1994. The negotiations on facilitating the flow of students and educational resources and on establishing colleges and campuses in foreign countries were planned to be completed by 2005.

In terms of financial resources public universities now had to compete with many other institutions. The changing forms of knowledge dissemination, and the entry of a plethora of private and public institutions performing the same work, ended universities’ knowledge ‘monopoly’. As far as research was concerned, it was claimed that, given the globalising trends, universities could no longer claim to be the leading sites of knowledge production. Their pre-eminent role had been eroded by multinational and private sector research laboratories, scientific and cultural councils, research councils and agencies and a host of individual and commercial organisations. Within this context the separation between theoretical (basic) and applied knowledge, it was claimed, was being contested both by the new forms of knowledge production and by new management models of research.

In light of these developments internationally, and the changing conception of the role of the university that they have given rise to, one can begin to make sense of the transformations that began to take place in the University of Dar es Salaam in the 1990s. The University of Dar es Salaam started reviewing its mission, objectives and activities in 1991, given that donors had shown a willingness to fund those transformations. The *raison d’être* for the review, it was claimed, was the fact that since 1985 Tanzanian society had undergone major changes politically and economically. The economy had changed from centralised to market-oriented, and the political system had changed from a one-party to multi-party. As the university administration concluded, ‘the existing ca-

pacities of the university were seen to be inadequate in meeting the increasing demand, thus calling for new and more efficient modes of delivery and strategic thinking' (UDSM 2004: 2).

Basically the thinking behind the review was in line with the policies that were being pushed by the World Bank and that had already been accepted by the government of Tanzania. UDASA's critical appraisal of these ideas in 1993, and of the issue of cost-sharing proposed by the university administration, fell on deaf ears. The administration went ahead with launching the Institutional Transformation Programme (ITP) 1993–2008, which aimed to analyse institutional strengths and weaknesses, find ways to reduce the costs of training students, agitate for a 'flexible' University Act to improve the 'autonomy' of the institution and, finally, improve the working conditions and environment for staff and students.

With the implementation of the ITP over the years student enrolment increased from 2,898 in 1995 to 8,411 in 2002 and to almost 14,000 by 2004. The proportion of female students increased from 15.9 per cent in 1995 to 31 per cent in 2004. The increase in enrolment resulted from an increased number of private students rather than from more government sponsorship. At another level the university privatised and outsourced several functions and had reduced the number of support staff by 1,013 by June 2002. It increased to some extent the space for teaching and student accommodation and introduced new training programmes and new management units. ICT infrastructure and capacity were enhanced, as were awareness and utilisation of ICT resources. The university also hived off units involved in the provision of services such as catering, accommodation, cleaning, transportation, etc., created a 'conducive environment for outsiders to invest on university lands' and adopted contract employment as the norm instead of employment on permanent and pensionable terms (UDSM 2004: 4-5). Over the past few years the university has also embarked on the introduction of 'programmes of excellence' that aim for multidisciplinary and that respond to job markets. A more corporate institutional culture has also been promoted.

All these transformations are aimed at responding both to global trends and the national goals advocated in the Tanzania Vision 2025, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, the Higher Education Sub-Master Plan, the Science and Technology Sub-Master Plan, the Civil Service Reform Programme, the National ICT Policy, etc. The stakeholders in the implementation of the transformations are the government, the university management, the university council, the Programme Steering Committee, the major university offices, the boards of colleges, faculties, institutes and major departments, the private sector and the 'development partners' (donors). Staff and students are the 'beneficiaries'.

As a result of this process the University of Dar es Salaam has reached a point where the production of ‘marketable goods’ – works, courses and graduates – is given priority over academic excellence, and where academic excellence is defined, in the narrow terms of policy makers, as marketability of courses and ‘outputs’. With these corporate strategic goals in place until at least 2013 it would seem that the University of Dar es Salaam is behaving like Rip Van Winkle. For example the University of Cape Town, which introduced similar institutional transformations in the mid-1990s, abandoned them in 2001 after recognising the dangers they posed as far as knowledge production and dissemination are concerned. More recently the World Bank itself has made an about-turn regarding its policies on higher education. Since 2000 the bank has produced reports which have suddenly rediscovered the centrality of education and, in particular tertiary education, for ‘the creation of intellectual capacity on which knowledge production utilisation depend and to the promotion of lifelong-learning practices necessary for updating people’s knowledge and skills’ (cited in Sall 2004: 179). Moving away from the higher-education model of the 1980s and 1990s the bank has begun talking about alternative models with a re-emphasis on the traditional forms of public higher education and knowledge production (Sall 2004: 180). It is recognising that the public university as conceptualised in the 1960s provided the services it was expected of it, and that the social value of its degrees was quite high, even in times of crisis. It is recognising that, with the policies of the 1980s and 1990s, there was hardly any basic research being undertaken and universities had ceased being sites of knowledge production in anything but name.

Conclusion

Under the present conditions academic freedom belongs to those who control and own the means of production of knowledge and its dissemination, not those who actually generate and disseminate the knowledge. With international financial institutions and donors playing a central role, the trend has been towards privatisation of educational processes, programmes and responsibilities while at the same time strengthening state control. The language has changed: students have been redefined as ‘consumers’ or ‘customers’, and universities have become ‘providers’. The officials and administrators use the language of ‘inputs’, ‘outputs’ and ‘throughputs’, and any notion that education serves some form of collective public good has been removed.

Basic research, as traditionally defined, is a focused, systematic study undertaken to discover new knowledge or interpretations and establish facts or principles in a particular field. This has always been differentiated from applied research, which though also a focused, systematic study, is done in order

to discover the problem-solving applications of the knowledge established by basic research. However, since the current transformations in higher education began, university staff members have either been engaged as 'counterparts' (spare parts) by researchers from Europe and the US, basically as enumerators, or at best they have survived on consultancies guided by external terms of reference. Even where it has been possible to undertake research independently, this has been possible mainly through new research centres or programmes such as the Research in Poverty Alleviation (REPOA) and the Economic and Social Research Foundation (ESRF) which have been established through donor funding to cater for the interests of the current economic dispensation.

At the University of Dar es Salaam no distinction is now made between consultancies and independent research; they are both 'research'. Moreover, as far as most are concerned, a research is only genuine when it involves field work and questionnaires. It is not surprising, therefore, that some lecturers teach focus group discussions (FGD) and rapid rural appraisals as research methods. These are eclectic methods that have been developed by donor agencies for purposes of collecting data in a short period in order to make quick decisions on a project. There are local academics who have learnt the same tricks of academic entrepreneurship as their colleagues of the Atlantic world and who have found a fertile ground for prospering in these circumstances of anti-foundationalism and sophistry expressed in the form of relativism. Some of them have been enjoying affluent styles of living using grants from so-called applied branches of science and research, which are claimed to be applications and developments of the 'pure' knowledge of the academy. There are those who have even been employed by branches of the state and industry, thus making 'research' a big business. This tendency for academic entrepreneurs to emerge has over the years been accompanied by the prominence of centres, bureaux, institutes, programme-based teaching, etc.

Under such circumstances a successful academic is not one whose research is acceptable to his or her discipline or relevant to human needs but one whose research is capable of attracting the greatest funds or who controls a research institution capable of distancing itself from the purely teaching structure of the faculties and departments. The most successful have been those employed to advise the government, the international financial institutions and other donors. Financial sponsors are the ones who determine the forms of knowledge, and accepted knowledge has over the years come to be defined as knowledge produced by 'research technicians' or 'professional researchers' rather than genuine scientists. The academic entrepreneurs have reduced knowledge to 'pragmatic' teaching programmes and research on practical concerns.

In this way the ‘stakeholders’ have been able to proclaim that ‘in such a worldwide informational economy investment in what is called “human capital” becomes strategic [and] universities become fundamental tools for development’ (Castells 1993: 66). They have further proclaimed that knowledge is increasingly no longer a cognitive appropriation of socially determined material transformations for life processes, but instead has become simply a post-industrial force of production, since the real substance of knowledge is informed by developments in science (global cyberspace, theories of everything and progress in genetics and its aims) and the triumph of liberal democracy and a free-market economy. The world has therefore entered an era in which cosmologies of the human subject are not the real thing, since technology and economics have fused under labels such as ‘computer economy’, ‘electronic services’ and so on. In sum it is an era of the celebration of the ‘end of history’ (as Fukuyama famously put it), even while all *other* histories are excluded.

Popular, academic and political thinking in Tanzania and Africa generally has increasingly ceased to debate emancipationist politics, politics which would lead to the transformation of societies and help people reach a stage where others’ humanity is not contested. Any critique of social realities from the point of view of liberation has become less fashionable. The most fashionable debates are around issues of how African countries can best be ‘globalised’ as an answer to welfarism, nationalism, socialism and so on. This celebration of the dehumanisation and desocialisation of relationships has been internalised by some academics, so that the concept of the university as an institution in which the faculties are central and the administration plays a supportive role has been reversed. The administration is now the university and the faculties are mere subsidiaries, as in business organisations!

In such an environment education becomes only a matter of the pursuit and provision of degrees and certificates. Career advancement, not the production of knowledge, becomes the key academic goal, to the extent that it is even possible to marginalise good scholarship and research. This situation becomes an excuse for some academics to pursue private interests to the neglect of public and social responsibilities and, increasingly, there arises a category of academics that live *off* the academy rather than *for* it. The university becomes just another way of getting ahead in the world, economically or otherwise, since there is a market of donors, NGOs, international donor organisations and consulting firms to which one can vend his or her ‘research’ skills. In the name of responding to international imperatives these academics accept the transformation of education from outside the academy based on the findings of consultants who may have little understanding of the difference between universities and corporations.

It is only with the recognition that universities can neither function like government departments nor like businesses that the central issues of knowledge production and basic research can be brought to the fore again. Mahmood Mamdani has pointed out that the reason universities cannot function like governments or businesses is because they are not limited by the short-term considerations of winning votes or making profits. Universities therefore have a unique freedom which gives them the capacity for longer-term research. The value of such research is not measurable in monetary terms, but by its significance to society, if it expands options for a secure and independent future. It is for this reason that higher education has never been profitable anywhere in the world and has always depended on heavy social subsidy (Sall 2004: 203-4).

If the value of higher education is indeed tied to the job market, then it would be logical to simply close universities in developing countries, as there is already too much unemployment! Why train more and more people who will only end up becoming unemployed? Moreover, to tie the whole question of education to the market is to go against the whole essence of human dignity, since what is disregarded here is the fact that education is a fundamental human right. Once upon a time slaves were denied the right to learn how to read and write on the pretext that plantation work did not require them to have such skills. When they were turned into workers, they were told that all they required was simply vocational or technical skills for particular utilitarian ends. They were not supposed to be trained so as to be able to think! That is how colonial education was modelled, and it is this type of education which is being encouraged again today, training in skills but not in thinking. We have become colonial subjects again.

Because education is geared towards the market, students – and even lecturers, I would argue – do not have reading and writing habits, except for utilitarian or bread-and-butter questions, that is, to pass examinations, get a job or a promotion, etc. Nobody wants to go beyond the classroom materials. When it is then claimed that education standards are falling because people are not able to speak or write properly in English, knowledge is being reduced to the question of language. But how does one master any language in this world without using it constantly in reading and writing? The question is pertinent for those of us who would like to consider ourselves 'knowledgeable' without ever visiting libraries or having a single book in our homes (although, of course, the TV or copies of tabloids will definitely be there).

The issue is that conceptualisations of change in the education sector today do not start from the point of view of the problems facing people and their history, or how to make education effective in improving the human condition, but how to create slaves for Mr Money Bags. The debate is no longer about

how to bring about forms of knowledge that enhance the chances of mutual survival by dealing with the problems facing humanity, but how our economies and societies can effectively compete and be integrated further into the global economy. It is hardly recognised that even the so-called revolution in communication so beloved by market fundamentalists has itself ignited an awareness of the problems facing humanity locally, regionally and internationally. The fundamental issues of transformation in education, therefore, need to deal with the extent to which the education system is playing its role in dealing with societal problems. This is the social responsibility of any education system worth the name, and it is only from this position that we can justify demands for academic freedom among students and lecturers.

From this point of view the search should be for an education system that equips people with the necessary tools to create or acquire knowledge and concepts necessary for the survival of the human race in this rapidly changing world. In other words it is the search for those concepts that enhance emancipationist and transformational modes of social activity. Such forms of knowledge and concepts definitely go beyond the job market's 'person power requirements'. Job markets and markets in general are a constraint on creativity, scientific inquiry, fidelity to the pursuit of truth and intellectual freedom in general. The academy's accommodation to market forces and global forces is nothing more than an ideologically determined position which would like to turn the university into a supermarket without any long-term consideration of national and societal needs. The historical experience in Africa requires a greater ferment of ideas and a more intense sense of commitment to social transformation and human emancipation than ever before. Taking such a position means viewing education from the point of view of fundamental human and peoples' rights. An equitable provision of education cannot be guaranteed if the link between the education institutions and the society is simply a matter of finance. There is nothing like 'free' education or social services in the world, as those who advocate the commercialisation or privatisation of social services want the world to believe. All governments in the world derive their revenue from taxation. It is for this reason that they are supposed to be responsible for the provision of social services and infrastructure. In other words it is society, not governments, that finance social services. Therefore to talk of free services is to mask the truth. To talk about government assistance (or so-called cost-sharing) to those who cannot afford it is a mystification, since those who cannot pay are the majority. Simply put, an education system that treats knowledge production as an industry tends to reinforce inequalities and hierarchisation.

What is important is to search for those responses that would define us in this world, where even our very humanity is questioned. In our situation (given

the nature of the problems facing the mass of the people) an intellectual must have a social and historical context. He or she cannot be just a free-floating agent but must be capable of reflecting upon and crystallising the woes and concerns of the masses of Africa – those who are marginalised, exploited and oppressed. The social responsibility of intellectuals lies in the rehabilitation of those academic practices which are sensitive to human predicaments, committed to responding to societal needs by engaging in critical inquiry and analysis and dedicated to championing social forms and organisations capable of fulfilling the needs of the human community as a whole.

Any so-called intellectual who takes it for granted that there is no alternative to the dominant forms of thinking about how the world is, anyone who takes ‘for granted that maximum growth, and therefore productivity and competitiveness, are the ultimate and sole goals of human action; or that economic forces cannot be resisted’ (Bourdieu 1998: 30), should be called to account. We cannot accept as inevitable the reduction of the state, the removal of the notion of public interests and the destruction of all philosophical foundations of welfarism and collective responsibility towards poverty, misery, sickness, misfortune, etc. on the pretext of reducing the costs of investors and creating an ‘enabling environment’ for the market.

If universities and their intellectual communities are to remain relevant and socially responsible, they must take the lead in revolting against those notions that treat knowledge and education as private goods and that result in the perpetuation of abuse, prejudices, mediocrity and regressive and repressive interests wrapped in forms of ‘universalism of the West’. The precondition for any meaningful renewal of a genuine search for authentic forms of knowledge is the existence of a body of critical intellectuals committed to being radical witnesses on behalf of those who sleep with empty bellies and children who have never experienced childhood because they have to wield guns at tender age. Such an intellectual body must avoid the unwitting pitfall of the demolition of metanarratives, as is the fashion now, or the simple application and use of models. It must win the intellectual high ground for theoretical independence. It is therefore necessary to take philosophy seriously, as the discipline that has traditionally underwritten what constitutes science (or knowledge in general) and determined which political practices are legitimate (Bhaskar 1989: 1). Such a community must be in a position to interrogate the various ontologies in the world, the kind of accounts of the world they give and their status in Africa. For us it is those emancipatory forms of knowledge which should inform our practices, those forms of knowledge which are oriented to human well-being and environmentally sustainable ways of life. Against all the cynicism estab-

lished by social Darwinism (the cult of the of winner), we must stand against the destruction of those ideals associated with public service, equality of rights and equal access to education, health, culture, research, art, etc. This is the basis of any meaningful renewal of our universities as sites of knowledge and research.

In sum, under the present circumstances, the quest for academic freedom as a right for the producers of knowledge is only meaningful if the universities and their academic members renew their commitment to the public good, which has always been the bedrock of any university worth the name. It is also in this way that public investments in higher education can be justified. It is by offering the best education, knowledge and research which address issues of public interest and the problems facing the people. Only by fulfilling the public trust as weavers of the social fabric and upholders of the highest ethical dimensions of human life can institutions of higher learning reclaim their position in society and the world at large. Rather than supplant the traditional role of training minds and producing thinkers, the new technological revolutions should be made to enhance this role. If there are no thinkers and people who are innovative, creative and original, who is going to advance these technologies further and use them for human good?

Notes

1. Paper originally prepared for 'Academic Freedom, Social Responsibility and the State of Academia in Tanzania' Workshop, organised by the University of Dar es Salaam Academic Staff Assembly (UDASA), held on 10–11 February 2005 in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.
2. Most of the following argument is based on my article, 'Social Policy and Development in East Africa: The Case of Education and Labour Markets' in *Social Policy in the Development Context: Africa and the Challenge of Social Policy*, UNRISD, 2003.

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