

Decolonizing the Postcolonial University? Possibilities and Exigencies with Evidence from Uganda*

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Abstract: Decades ago, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o famously raised the question of decolonizing the mind. Scores of postcolonial intellectuals followed with interventions on unmaking the ways that colonial education had bleached people’s stories embodying cultural inheritance and had caused epistemological violence. But the early postcolonial critics left open the issue of how to decolonize a principal site at which successor generations are

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taught and learn about civilizational values. What does it mean to decolonize the university in Africa? While many academics shared Ngũgĩ's hopes for indigenizing learning and called for autonomous discourses, translating them into practice proved to be a daunting task. Given powerful global forces and local interests, it becomes a matter of who owns the university in Africa and who controls the production of narratives. Based on extensive fieldwork on knowledge structures in Uganda, including documentary research and numerous discussions with key stakeholders—governmental ministers, civil servants, upper administration at university, academic and general staff, and students—this paper assesses efforts to meet fundamental challenges common to higher learning in many postcolonial settings, where, like in Uganda, local protagonists are attempting to expand policy space and realize the promise of decolonizing the university.

Keywords: Higher education, Decolonization, Development, Global South, Globalization, Postcolonial theory

Picking up on Frantz Fanon's seminal ideas, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, East Africa's leading novelist, a controversial playwright, and an astute social critic, famously raised the question of decolonizing the mind.¹ Scores of postcolonial intellectuals followed with interventions on unmasking the ways that colonial education sought to erase indigenous stories embodying cultural inheritance and waged epistemological violence. But the early postcolonial critics left open the issue of how to decolonize the university, a principal site at which successor generations learn about civilizational values.

While many academics shared Ngũgĩ's hopes for indigenizing learning and called for autonomous discourses, translating them into practice is a daunting task. Given powerful global forces and local

¹ Ngũgĩ's generative insights may be found in his *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986).

interests, it becomes a matter of who owns the university and who controls the production of narratives. Based on extensive fieldwork on knowledge structures in Uganda, this paper assesses efforts to meet fundamental challenges common to higher learning in many countries in the global South, where, like in Uganda, local protagonists seek to expand policy space and realize the promise of decolonizing the university. Uganda's university system exemplifies the aspirations and difficulties of decolonizing knowledge structures.

We start with the history of higher education in Uganda, which will be rendered in three periods:

1. Beginning in the nineteenth century, colonialism insinuated narratives in the minds of Ugandans and reeducated them. This system served to weaken their social institutions and worked to efface the wisdom of the people. It brought a different form of hierarchical education, implanting ways of thinking unlike indigenous knowledge. It transformed the moral culture.
2. With the rise of anticolonial nationalism, the university symbolized political independence, attained in 1962. Nationalists, Ugandan citizens themselves, assumed policy-making and managerial positions. They maintained a Western-oriented, elitist university culture, which they had known as students at home or abroad. But this state-driven education soon encountered tension with the local intelligentsia, shortfalls in resources, and pressure from global governance agencies. Added to these woes, economic turbulence and authoritarian politics devalued the core missions of higher education.
3. And from the 1980s to the present, higher learning in Uganda has fostered market over academic values, stressing efficiency, productivity, and competition. Universities in Uganda have countenanced massification, and, in the face of underfunding, transferred a large part of financial responsibility to individual students and their families.

Since the 1980s, Uganda's reform initiatives have varied widely by institution. While enacted as legislation, they are less formal, not as codified and elaborate as in most Western countries. Yet critically engaging these narratives—how people speak and think about university reforms—is important to analysis.

To be detailed below, the four prongs of Uganda's reform framework are shifts in governance, administrative decentralization, privatization, and increased global engagement. These overlapping factors constitute central elements in the reformation. While Uganda's university system remains emblematic of national wherewithal, many observers continue to ponder how to overhaul old structures, seen as vestiges of prior eras and ill-suited for current needs, a theme broached at the close of this paper.

One caveat: This research focuses on Uganda's oldest and best-known university, Makerere, and, to the extent possible, the country's other universities. Had the time and research support been available, I would have spread my net more widely and visited additional nonflagship campuses. However, I was subject to practical constraints that limited the fieldwork. That said, the premier university's experience with repurposing higher learning has rippled through Uganda's entire education system.

A Historical Touchstone

Before considering the historical setting, let me interject a personal note. My experience in Uganda during the early postcolonial period marks an occasion for comparison to subsequent periods. The reason for serving as a memorist is to create a touchstone for evaluation.

In 1967-68, I was a student in the M.A. Programme in African Studies at the University of East Africa, Kampala. Two years later, I returned to Uganda as a research associate at the Makerere Institute of Social Research (MISR) and a junior member of the faculty in the Department of Political Science and Public Administration at Makerere

University, which was no longer a branch of a regional university. In those heady days, Makerere won plaudits for its high educational quality. I recall exchanging views with great writers and social scientists: Ngũgĩ, Trinidadian-born and Nobel-Prize-winning author V.S. Naipaul, and the Norwegian pioneer of peace studies Johan Galtung, to name a few. The acclaim bestowed on such creative thinkers who wanted to visit or be based at Makerere reflected its eminence. All in all, their home countries spanned the globe, from the global North and South, the West to Eastern Europe. During the Cold War, scholars from near and far worked together, with a shared interest in the postcolonial condition. So, too, students, some of them fleeing conflict zones, came from myriad countries in Africa and other world regions.

To know excellence, we did not feel bound to embrace “objective” measures for nurturing habits of the mind, intellectual curiosity, and love of learning. University rankings had not been invented. A brain race for the upper echelon of higher education institutions was yet to start. Uganda’s university had not entered the global fray. Our standards of success were the thrill of intellectual pleasure, a fascination with ideas, the launch of new journals, the vibrant debates that they triggered, attention from many centers of erudition to Makerere’s academic programs, and international conferences that drew all sorts of scholars and practitioners to the campus. The excitement about higher learning was intoxicating. There was mutual intuition based on what could be observed. From this standpoint, I came to believe that knowledge is about quality, not quantity, even in changing times.

I truly enjoyed Makerere’s glory years and have not yet recovered from my good fortune. We engaged in stimulating debates about colonialism’s lasting imprint, the state’s agenda, and how to decolonize knowledge. On a grander scale, these exchanges were about what drives history and how to attain the good life. On these matters of moral reasoning, we vied with other scholars and government officials over vital political issues. Our classes included tutorials: instruction for individuals or small groups of students called upon to parse reading and

regularly submit essays. We often gathered in the largest auditorium, in Main Hall, for clashes among giants in the academic and policy communities. There was no dearth of public intellectuals—among others, Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere, Guyanese historian Walter Rodney, and Makerere’s head of its political science department, a Kenyan, Ali Mazrui—all of whom could rouse an audience and inspire younger generations of academics and activists. But another fate awaited this university. For reasons outlined below, it spiraled into steep decline, cascading to widespread disenchantment with Uganda’s higher education system.

In our times, there is no salvation in romanticizing the past; one cannot return to the golden age of Makerere’s storied history. Local conditions and transnational challenges have reconstituted the university’s business. Yet memories of the spirit of creativity for which higher learning in Uganda was lauded can help rejuvenate the knowledge structure. Memory research shows that a better intellectual community is possible in this country and others. Memory is not only history but a method for identifying acts of erasure and modes of recovery. In this sense, the vexing issue is finding appropriate antidotes for resuscitating universities. This rebounding can spring from the path taken by higher education institutions.

Historical Context

The run-up to independence

Taking a long view, education reforms in Uganda emanate from the precolonial and colonial periods, when the market economy accelerated class formation. More differentiation meant greater specialization in the division of labor. There was increasing demand for trained, practiced personnel. Early on, the training embraced indigenous knowledge and life skills (Ssekamwa 1997). The coming of missionaries and traders, mission schools, seminaries, and madrassas provided literacy and thus

social mobility. Soon after Uganda became a British Protectorate in 1894, missionaries introduced brick-and-mortar institutions in which the church and the colonial state produced an educated class to maintain infrastructure: offices, the railway, roads, and so on. Then, in the twentieth century, the roles of upper-level education were to staff the civil service and equip local people to rev up the engines of economic growth.

In most of Africa, university education emerged after political independence. However, North Africa has a different history, South Africa is a special situation, and the metropolitan powers established universities in a minority of colonies, including Uganda (Sawyer 2004: 4, 56). There, the evolution of institutions of higher learning can be traced directly to the launch of Makerere Technical College in 1922. Four years later, many of its technical courses were transferred to Kampala Technical College in the interest of promoting advanced education at Makerere (Ingham, 1958: 163). By the 1930s, the colonial government mounted post-secondary courses for the purpose of supplying the labor market with local elites, mostly teachers and bureaucrats.

In 1949, Makerere University College was founded, and its students earned University of London degrees upon graduation. The relationship between Kampala and London, however, ended in 1963, when Makerere, along with Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, became constituent colleges of the University of East Africa. Linking neighboring countries, this transnational university embodied the ideals of cultural and political Pan-Africanism. But powerful forces of nationalism were ascendant (see Mittelman 1975). The three colleges separated in 1970, and Makerere became a nominally independent university.

With decolonization, it soon became abundantly clear that a university under a national flag was not tantamount to a system that conveys local norms and beliefs. Symbolized, for example, by the Oxford–Cambridge customs of dining at high table in residence halls (dormitories) and donning gowns (robes) at evening meals,

colonial-style hierarchies remained in play. The challenge was to refashion a neocolonial education system and be cognizant of development needs.

Confronted with this quagmire, Ngũgĩ asked a probing question about the postcolonial knowledge structure with broad implications: in which language should African writers express themselves? A metropolitan language with international appeal and greater commercial value or a local mother language, and, if the latter, which one in a multilingual society? Taking an unambiguous stand, he rejected the primacy of English-language narratives and assigned high priority to forging collective self-definition in a world context. Mindful of his intended audiences, Ngũgĩ decided to compose his subsequent books in Gĩkũyũ and Kiswahili, followed by translations into English. He sought to use language as a means of empowerment.

Ngũgĩ's discourse on "the quest for relevance" unequivocally embraces locally-based internationalism fueled by a passion for learning (Ngũgĩ 1986: 87-109). From his perspective, this is a matter of the order in which European and other knowledge sets are presented to readers in their own contexts. According to Ngũgĩ, it is important to know where to start: in Africa, democratic and national perspectives should radiate out. But, he vowed, one knowledge set need not eclipse another.

In this respect, Ngũgĩ's reasoning intersects with that of disparate Western philosophers, such as Martha Nussbaum, who agree that to the extent that education challenges the pressures of conformity and stimulates the imagination, it is "relevant" for one's professional and personal lives. Addressing the purposes of a university, Ngũgĩ likewise punctuated the point that educational institutions should stimulate an appetite for knowledge: "The aim is to instil in the student a critical love of literature, which will both encourage its pursuit in later years, and ensure that such a pursuit is engaged in fruitfully" (Ngũgĩ, 1986: 99). To what extent have Ugandan universities fulfilled the aspiration of this graduate of Makerere University College?

The early postcolonial period

Many academics in Uganda shared Ngũgĩ's hopes for indigenizing learning. Yet, with the onset of decolonization, there was not a detailed agenda for Makerere, then Uganda's only university. It was generally seen as a core institution in nation building. Its specific roles in producing knowledge and a learned citizenry had yet to be defined. At this stage, the exigencies of development took precedence over the high objectives of university education.

After the 1960s, the "first generation" of African researchers returned home from studying abroad, mostly in America and Europe, and sought to steer the university (Mkandawire 1995: 9). Ugandans moved through the pipeline to assume posts on the faculty and in the administration, offices formerly headed by expatriates. Increasingly, the university was deemed instrumental to fostering national identity and a feeling of togetherness. The expressions of Ugandan artists and young writers were a crucial part of this reformation. The curriculum included new courses in development studies. Controversies in historiography addressed the question of agency. If colonial history featured colonizers as the makers of history, how to rewrite these scripts so that Africans come to the fore? But which ones—political leaders, soldiers, classes, ethnic groups, women, religious communities, or others? In addition, the data available for research questions and for public policy were patchy. Official figures were lacking. Academics had to adduce reliable information for analysis.

The "developmental university" supported the goals of the state (see Mamdani 1993: 7-20; Mkandawire 2011; Cloete, Maassen, & Moja 2013: 21-23). Makerere's initial purposes and practices yoked to governmental projects. The university became ancillary to the state. Makerere's role was to produce functionaries for public service plus assorted professionals to minister the economy. For its part, the state provided almost all the funding for the university. At first, academics on the left, center, and right accepted this tacit bargain. It was the fruit of

national independence. Yet the sequel proved less than satisfying.

Scholars wanted to safeguard intellectual autonomy. The intelligentsia sought to secure its own space for debate, creativity, and academic freedom. After all, universities must be sanctuaries for critical reflection, though not removed from societal conditions. But Makerere's leeway relative to the political sphere was tenuous. And the parameters narrowed. The university had to depend on the state for revenue, and governmental authorities sought to strengthen their legal and managerial control over academe. They adopted the 1970 Makerere Act, followed by the 1971 Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act, which ensured that government would be in charge of the university. This bill was passed without the involvement of university stakeholders (Musisi & Muwanga 2003: 13). In keeping with changing political and economic conditions, these acts were later updated. I will revisit the legislation shortly.

The Transition from a Statist to a Mixed Model

Although Makerere had served as a prestigious "national institution" and had endeavored to regenerate local knowledge, it suffered from declining financial support. Nationalist elites had their own political and economic interests. They were also subject to pressures from other local stakeholders and converging global currents.

At this juncture, the rise of neoliberal ideas in the United States and Britain quickly spread to other parts of the world, including East Africa. Global governance institutions propagated this new reform agenda. The World Bank's experts on Africa recommended best practices for education in Uganda. Through its coordinating role, technical advice, loan programs conditioned on a standard recipe of reforms, measures for categories that it had designed, and its interpretations of them, this Washington-based institution became a compass for Uganda's higher education policies (Samoff & Carrol 2003: 28-31). Ugandan critics have been less than sanguine about the World Bank's impact, castigating its

procedures as not only a key element in the global financial architecture but also a social technology (see, for example, Tandon 2008).

By dint of the nexus of the interests of Uganda's ruling elite and the World Bank's priorities, support for higher education lagged relative to funding for its primary and secondary schools. In the 1980s, the Bank claimed that reductions in higher education financing would increase efficiency and enable government to reallocate resources for training that would better suit labor-market needs. According to David Court of the World Bank and the Rockefeller Foundation, five years of financial reforms at Makerere in the 1990s changed the policy by which students had not been charged tuition fees—they were state-sponsored—to one in which 70 percent of them paid (Court 1999: i). A sharp per-capita, though not absolute, drop in government sponsorship for university students was accompanied by a shift to a market orientation in the management of Makerere. Court observed:

The strategic plan and package of reforms which Makerere is applying are not unlike ideas which have been disseminated by the World Bank.... Makerere has made the ideas her own and applied them in her own way (Court 1999: 11).

In his praise for Makerere's achievements, Court averred that Makerere's "quiet revolution...sets an example for the rest of the continent" (Court, 1999: 4). Among the reasons for this imputed success are university leadership and its "unambiguous sense of ownership of the reform process" (Court 1999: i). But what are the grounds for finding that local stakeholders at the university authored the reform process and stood behind it?

Court omits academics' myriad views of the changing purposes of the postcolonial university. University personnel certainly are not a monolith. For example, Mahmood Mamdani, director of MISR, regards Court's analysis as flawed and one-sided. Mamdani argues: "It was an ingenious way of translating external constraint into internal agency" (Mamdani 2007: 200). While his insight about the false equation of external and internal initiative is poignant, the telling issue is how global

and national forces intermingle and establish buy-in. At bottom, this is a story of accommodation among elites and their shared intersubjective framework. As we shall see, it is also about the responses that the reformist agenda elicited from varied actors.

In these interactions, the World Bank's thrust was hardly singular. Let me cite one among the other progenitors of education reforms in Uganda. Like the Bank, the World Trade Organization (WTO) embraced the position that education as a public good is an antiquated notion that must be put to rest if it fails to deliver cost-effective and competitive returns. This global governance agency regards universities as service providers. It is supposed to facilitate their cross-border activities and remove restrictions on these flows. As a member of the WTO, Uganda is obligated to adhere to its agreements and protocols. In other words, Uganda is expected to guarantee market access for providers from other countries. The difficulty, as some Ugandans see it, is that "we are asked to accept the view that education is a commodity to be traded in the open market" (National Council for Higher Education [NCHE] 2011: 28). They face unregulated market forces that bring incoming education commodities (Kasozi, 2005: 6). How then is a poor country with a weak private sector and a relatively small, though growing, middle class to apply its own regulations, say, those issued by a national accrediting agency, for the sake of upgrading standards and improving quality?

Academics at Makerere chafed at the erosion of intellectual autonomy. Leaving aside for now instances of blatant disregard for academic freedom, especially marked from 1971 to 1986, traumatic years of political and economic turmoil, intellectual autonomy was transposed into matters of administrative and financial autonomy (see Diouf & Mamdani 1994). In this shift, the university's senior administrators were supposed to take more responsibility for bringing in funding. The state gradually handed over a large share of this burden to them. Yet powerful globalizing forces pared down local officials' own autonomy. If they impinged on competing institutions' unrestricted access to the marketplace, their actions would violate WTO agreements.

This is not to excuse local authorities' incursions into academic freedom on the ground of honoring an international accord. But the crux of the matter is what lies behind the rulers' egregious actions. It goes to the structural power that shapes their convictions and policies.

In this phase of Uganda's history, the intended and unintended consequences of market-based reforms reflect a circuit of falling or stagnant unit cost (the real expense that universities incur for educating a student). To pick up the slack and cover high rates of inflation and other needs, such as technological advancement, the university increased the intake of privately sponsored students. Female access to education improved. More students from underrepresented regions of the country could be admitted, though progress on this front, especially for the Northern Region, was uneven, and the imposition of tuition fees further disadvantaged poor and needy families. Government scholarships still favored students who attended the better secondary schools.

At university, computer use and enrollments in science and technology and in commerce and business studies mushroomed. However, only 11 percent of the faculty had earned Ph.D.s. Qualifications and staffing shortages were persistent problems (NCHE 2011: 3.). While teaching loads became heavier, meager salaries for academics could not sustain them and their families. Moonlighting became commonplace. Morale plummeted. The university hired more part-time personnel for teaching. Funding for basic research dried up. Budget for books and scholarly journals was paltry. Lecture rooms, libraries, laboratories, recreation facilities, and administrative offices were overly crowded. Students rioted and challenged the higher administration. To help assuage them and meet demand, some colleges at Makerere have run classes 24 hours per day.²

² Author discussion with Damalie Naggita-Musoke, professor and dean, School of Law, Makerere University, Kampala, May 17, 2013; author discussion with Sylvia Tamale, professor and former dean, School of Law, Makerere University, Kampala, May 17, 2013.

The market model heightened competition and sparked conflicts between Makerere's central administration and its academic units as well as among the units. The struggles were primarily over money, as in the clash between Makerere University and its Business School initially concerning who would control lucrative MBA programs (Kasozi 2009: 38). Public lectures, which large numbers of faculty and students had eagerly attended, became few and infrequent. Academics could not find time to be present for these events. They were too busy making money, trying to stay afloat financially.³ So, too, Makerere's tradition of tutorials became a relic of a bygone era. With new rounds of reforms, academic quality suffered.

Socioeconomic Context

Next, I want to supplement the overview of Uganda's route to the twentieth century by locating its higher education institutions in their socioeconomic setting. This section will pave the way for mapping specific reform initiatives in the 2000s and their impact. It provides comparative context.

For perspective on the order of magnitude of these changes, let's return to the touchstone established at the outset of this chapter. When I arrived in Uganda in 1967, its population was circa nine million people. The sole university, the University of East Africa, in Kampala, had an enrollment of some 3,000 students. By early 2013, these numbers ballooned to a populace of 37,578,876; 35,761 were enrolled on Makerere's Kampala campus (NCHE 2011: 47, 89; World Bank 2014). In the second decade of the 2000s, the student body at all Ugandan universities, other higher degree-granting institutions, and affiliated colleges such as Makerere University Business School, which eventually merged with the National College of Business Studies, totaled 140,096

³ Author discussion with Apolo R. Nsibambi, former chancellor of Makerere University, former minister of education, and former prime minister, Kampala, May 31, 2013.

(Republic of Uganda 2011). The number of registered universities proliferated from one public institution in the 1960s to 29 in 2013, plus unlicensed degree and certificate programs. Of the 29, five are public; 24, private. More are in the making.

Although state spending on universities relative to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has fluctuated, it has decreased overall in real if not absolute terms. According to the World Bank, the government of Uganda allocated 3.16 percent of GDP to the entire education sector in 1971, 3.43 percent in 1985, 5.1 percent in 1988, and then 3.28 percent in 2012 (World Bank 2013).⁴ On the face of it, this would seem to suggest not only oscillation but a modest increase since 1971, especially if one allows for economic growth in Uganda. The small variation in percentage is, however, nearly nil in aggregate terms. Factors that mitigate the slight percent gain are adjustment for the rate of inflation (on average, 8.4 percent per year from 2002 to 2013) and rising demand for university education, reflected in large hikes in enrollments (World Bank 2014). Whereas the government had served as the principal sponsor for

Table 1.

Public and Private (Student) Contributions to Funding Makerere University, 1993-2005/2006

Year	Government Students	Total Government Funding	% Government of Total Funding	Private Students	Total Private Students	% Private of Total Funding	Total Funding from Both Sources	Total Students	Annual Growth Rate	Makerere Unit Income Per Student
1993/94	6,643	10,713,005,331	100%	701		0%	10,713,005,331	7,344	5.0%	
1994/95	6,494	17,660,738,900	100%	1,412		0%	17,660,738,900	7,906	7.7%	
1995/96	7,089	20,328,433,000	83%	2,280	4,080,059,201	17%	24,408,492,201	9,369	18.5%	2,605,240
1996/97	6,710	19,255,308,734	72%	7,902	7,561,493,114	28%	26,816,801,848	14,612	56.0%	1,835,259
1997/98	6,890	19,500,000,000	69%	7,477	8,799,261,213	31%	28,299,261,213	14,367	-1.7%	1,969,740
1998/99	6,545	22,541,938,000	62%	9,497	13,663,196,178	38%	36,205,134,178	16,042	11.7%	2,256,897
1999/00	6,103	22,990,000,000	60%	14,265	15,080,261,764	40%	38,070,261,764	20,368	27.0%	1,869,121
2000/01	6,133	22,060,000,000	56%	19,112	17,406,254,325	44%	39,466,254,325	25,245	23.9%	1,563,330
2001/02	7,712	26,650,000,000	58%	22,650	19,030,439,000	42%	45,680,439,000	30,226	19.7%	1,511,296
2002/03	7,932	26,260,000,000	47%	22,276	29,438,099,000	53%	55,698,099,000	30,208	-0.1%	1,843,819
2003/04	7,772	26,289,000,000	45%	19,454	31,981,937,218	55%	58,270,937,218	27,932	-7.5%	2,086,171
2004/05	6,799	28,874,000,000	43%	23,906	38,579,239,386	57%	67,453,239,386	30,705	9.9%	2,196,816
2005/06	6,948	38,472,472,000	41%	23,789	56,181,463,787	59%	94,653,935,787	30,827	0.4%	3,070,488

Source: NCHE (2010: 32). Donor funding from external agencies is not included in this table. Contributions are in Ugandan shillings.

⁴ These figures are for primary, secondary, and tertiary education.

students in the initial postcolonial period, the inception of private universities in the late 1980s and early 1990s and the introduction of fee-paying students at public universities in the 1997-98 academic year reconstituted the revenue structure. Table 1 above and figure 1 below capture these developments at Makerere University.

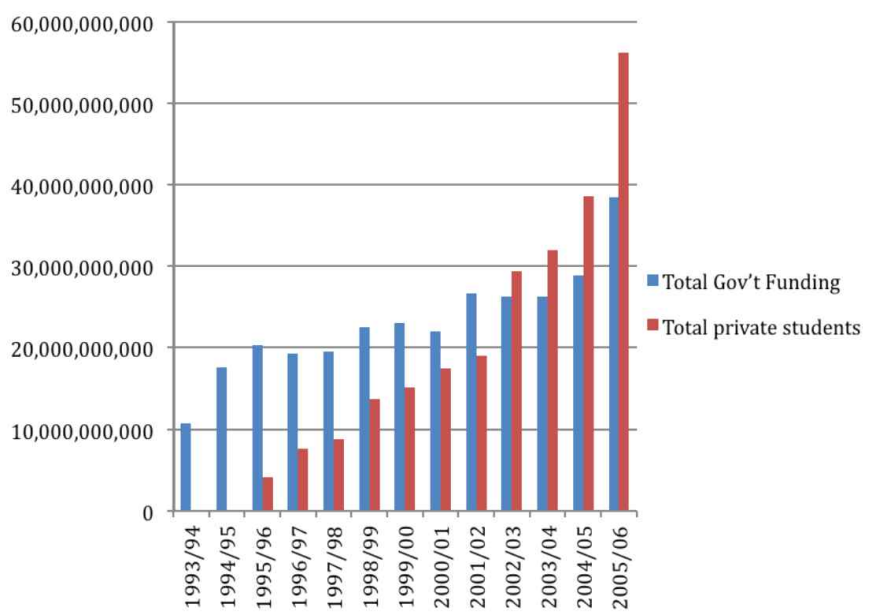


Figure 1. Comparison of government and private funding for Makerere University. *Source:* NCHE (2010: 31). The left column signifies total government funding; right column, revenues derived from private students. Both columns are in Ugandan shillings.

These graphics demonstrate that fee-based students’ share of generating funds for Uganda’s flagship university shot up from zero percent to 59 percent between the 1993-94 and 2005-06 academic years. My impression is that if current data were available, they would show even more of an upward swing. Put in perspective, this pattern reflects major alterations in state-university-market relations. A reason for the shifts is a changing conception of the public sphere. The state’s

responsibility to society for the general good is increasingly assigned to individual Ugandans and their families. The social compact for the wellbeing of citizens is metamorphosing in both attitudinal and material ways.

The Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) frankly recognizes the consequences of the move to private payers: “Public funding to higher education has been declining over time, i.e. (Government contribution of \$2,532 in 1970 to \$639 in 1985 per student and allocation less than 15% of the ministry budget)” (Republic of Uganda 2008: 20). More so from a comparative perspective: Uganda lagged behind its East African counterparts in financing upper-level education. State support for public universities in Uganda averaged 0.35 percent of GDP in the 1997-98 to 2009-10 period. In comparison, Kenya and Tanzania spent almost 1 percent during the same years (Kasozi, 2009: 33). The MoES views this pressure on public universities as resulting in “poor quality of service delivery” (Kasozi, 2009: 33). From its market-friendly standpoint, the central purpose of universities is to be an efficient provider of educational services.

The bite is acutely felt on the ground in Uganda, especially if one is mindful that after independence in 1962, admission to Uganda’s university was initially without tuition fees. Now, the cost of tuition fees outpaces GDP per capita in Uganda. Working on this research with me, Nicholas T. Smith sampled 14 private and public universities in Uganda in 2013.⁵ He found that at these institutions, the average annual cost for

⁵ The sample of undergraduate costs is for the following institutions: International Health Sciences University, Ugandan Christian University-Mukono, Mbarara University of Science and Technology, Makerere University, Mountains of the Moon University, Makerere University Business School, Kyambogo University, Bugema University, Kampala International University, Busoga University, Bishop Stuart University, Busitema University, Ndejje University, and Kabale University. The figures for the fee structures are drawn from the universities’ own websites.

tuition for undergraduate diplomas and bachelor degree programs in March 2013 came to \$620 per year.⁶ Compared to the steep price of higher education in some affluent countries, this figure may seem affordable. However, it must be seen in light of Uganda's GDP per capita of \$572 in 2013 (World Bank 2014). The \$620 average annual cost for undergraduate tuition at the 14 Ugandan universities sampled is 8.4 percent greater than the country's GDP per capita, though it is difficult to obtain solid data for financial-aid grants excluding loans that require repayment. But one can surmise that the hardship borne by Ugandan students for the actual outlay on higher education in relation to their means is a multiple of that in wealthy countries. This dimension of societal wellbeing must be construed to encompass varied levels of inequality and relative poverty.

The issue therefore becomes which students from what segments of Ugandan society experience the most difficulty qualifying and paying for university. We have already alluded to regional inequality as a factor in opportunities for higher education. While the North and rural areas generally are more impoverished than other parts of the country, it is not surprising that for Uganda as a whole, less fortunate families have marked disadvantages in placing their children at universities and supporting their education (Carrol 2005).

In this connection, in Uganda in 2013, 38.01 percent of the population lived under the poverty line of \$1.25 per day (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] 2014). In 164th place among 187 countries on the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development (UNDP) Index, Uganda's 2013 gross national income is rated in the bottom quintile at .484 and below the sub-Saharan average of .502 (UNDP, 2014). However, these human-development indicators

⁶ In this computation, the \$620 cost of tuition does not include fees. The data on fees at Uganda's universities are inconsistent and fragmentary. And some official documents issued in Uganda use the terms tuition and fees interchangeably.

must be adjusted when gender-based inequalities are taken into account. On its Gender Inequalities Index, the UNDP assigns a weight of .529 to Uganda, putting it in the 115th spot among 149 countries in 2013. At the same time, it has made strides. For example, women hold 35 percent of Uganda's parliamentary seats (UNDP 2014), though it should be said that this measure is not a sufficient gauge of women's influence in government.

Certainly, access to higher education is a key dimension of empowerment and economic activity. Historically, women in Uganda have lacked pre-university educational opportunities. Beginning in the 1940s, Makerere University College admitted only a handful of female students (Musisi 1992).⁷ Their numbers increased to 73 in 1968 (Kwesiga 2002: 207). Makerere mainly prepared them for specific roles and "traditional" jobs as typists, receptionists, caterers, and the like (Kwesiga, 2002: 21). Over the last 25 years, the public universities have adopted steps such as bonus points for female applicants so as to boost the percentage of women in the student body. The universities have also mounted gender studies programs. Yet as researchers in these programs highlight, structural barriers and disparities in representation are deeply entrenched. At Ugandan universities in 2010, women constituted 44 percent of student enrollment. But they are still concentrated in certain faculties and underrepresented in other fields of study, particularly in technical areas (NCHE 2011: 15).

Ultimately, these dimensions of the social fabric are linked to the stark reality that Uganda's scholars and students are entangled in an untenable structure of higher education. It is untenable partly because of a lack of political mettle at the top. The ruling elite is heretofore unwilling to provide requisite funding for the universities. So, too,

⁷ By comparison, Yale and Princeton became coeducational in 1969; Harvard proceeded in stages from the early 1970s and merged with Radcliffe College in 1999, though Harvard Business School started to enroll women in 1963.

dominant transnational paradigms of higher education reform are promoting policies wherein more students gain access to higher education but public authorities diminish the state's per-capita contribution to the budget. Priorities have been established. As applied in Uganda, the rules and regulations of global governance agencies are hewed in ways that I will spell out. Meantime, chronic revenue shortages are a brute fact of academic life in this country. Educational leaders have accordingly sought to mitigate the condition. Bricoleurs, identified below, have adopted a battery of remedial measures, trial-and-error strategies. The bricolage consists of a set of regulatory reforms.

The Architecture of Reform

Governance

To back up a bit in the chronology: From the 1960s to the mid-1980s, Milton Obote, first as prime minister and twice as president, and Idi Amin, a general who became president as a result of a military coup, wielded political violence with abandon and imposed inauspicious conditions on higher education. They led brutal authoritarian regimes known for corruption and repression. When Yoweri Museveni, a former student leader at the University of Dar es Salaam, took over as president of Uganda in 1986, academics there looked to fundamental changes in education policy. They wanted greater control over their institutions, sustainable financing for them, and genuine respect for academic freedom. To what degree have these expectations been met? What kinds of reforms followed?

The Museveni government's initiatives of the late 1980s and 1990s reached an inflection point when it adopted the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act, 2001, sanctioning regulatory authority and signaling policies to come (Republic of Uganda 2001). Although this Act has subsequently been amended, it still provides the basic legal and institutional framework for Ugandan universities. As such, it is a

linchpin for planning national development.⁸

The 2001 legislation established the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) to advise the minister responsible for accreditation of universities, monitor and evaluate them, and ensure national standards. The president of Uganda appoints the NCHE chairperson, and the minister names its executive director. It is mainly funded by Parliament and receives grants, gifts, and fees, some of them levied on students. The procedure for setting up new universities is by application to the NCHE, which makes its recommendations on licensing to the minister. Then, the president, if satisfied, confers a charter. Noticeably, the 2001 Act says little about the language of instruction or the status of Kiswahili in a country where many languages are spoken—an important issue in neighboring Tanzania. It only stipulates that an official language in Uganda (English) and “any other language” shall be a medium of instruction at universities (Republic of Uganda 2001: 81).⁹

In short, this legislation delimits how authority is exercised, ways to build capacity, and the modalities for implementing policy. It set the tone for reforming universities in the early 2000s. By law, authority would primarily be a matter of central control. The president, minister, and their appointees were to steer Uganda’s knowledge governance structure.

A challenge facing higher education leadership was to determine the role of academic deans in governance. Generally, they lack management training, are given incentives to adopt corporate practices, and embrace business enterprise models. Vital to effective university governance, decanal authority was and is subject to cross-pressure from officials who allocate resources, colleagues who insist on maintaining

⁸ A government agency, the National Planning Authority, is charged with coordinating and managing this process.

⁹ Parliament voted in 2005 to adopt Kiswahili as a second official national language, but measures to promote it in higher education have been slowly enacted.

academic values, and students demanding a better education.

Problems with public finance management, including leakage of cash flows, failures to provide instructional materials, and deficiencies in addressing the economic aspects of instructors' classroom absenteeism and tardiness worsened chronic underfunding of universities. In the face of spikes in enrollment and cramped facilities, the difficulty was how to cope with a government allocation for tertiary institutions that averaged only 11 percent of Uganda's education budget circa 2007 and was trending downward (Makerere University 2008: 9). In the eyes of numerous academics, the conditions for upholding university ideals had become precarious.

Intellectual freedom, in particular, was a matter of concern. Have constraints on it eased since the fall of Obote's and Amin's autocratic regimes and after scholars from across the continent issued the 1990 "Kampala Declaration on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility?" (Diouf & Mamdani 1994: 349-353). This statement spotlights the political and social crises besetting universities in Africa and the intelligentsia's obligation to champion high standards of ethical conduct. Sections B and C of the Declaration are devoted to the academic community's right to carry out their intellectual pursuits at autonomous institutions of higher education (Diouf & Mamdani 1994: 351). These passages emphasize that to the extent that independent inquiry and the democratic means of self-government at African universities are impeded, academic freedom is at risk.

Undeterred by such rights claim, the Ugandan government adopted the 2013 Public Order Bill, restricting political debate and the freedom of assembly. It closed media houses, banned news outlets, and clamped down on civil society rallies and political opponents. Opposition leaders were arrested for calling for walk-to-work protests over fuel hikes, the escalating cost of living more generally, and public graft. University students participated in these uprisings and mounted a strike in the face of a doubling of tuition fees (Branch & Mampilly 2015: 130-132). Public universities experienced a flurry of protests by non-teaching staff who

wanted pay hikes, faculty demanding salary increments, and students contesting the resultant closure of Makerere.

Even with this turmoil, higher education institutions in Uganda are not encountering flat-out repression, detentions, and threats to the same extent that stained the 1970s and 1980s. Academic freedom was more directly and forcefully violated during these times. On the whole, Uganda's scholars now engage in wide-ranging debates and attempt to push the boundaries of dissent. Though sometimes veiled, criticism and deliberation are tolerated. Universities continue to provide space, albeit circumscribed, for clear thinking. However, coercion takes many forms.

Structural conditions fetter academic freedom in subtle ways. Universities' economic marginalization hinders open inquiry. In particular, the drying up of funds for basic research limits the scope of intellectual pursuits. It is hard to tell how many academics keep their heads down and voices muffled because they figure that self-policing is the prudent course in the low-pay, high-workload system in which they are ensconced. Others have the courage of their convictions, speak up, and act on principle in keeping with the core values of universities as affirmed in their mission statements and strategic plans.

Makerere's avowed values include "academic independence" and "institutional autonomy," alongside "allegiance to the institution" and "customer responsiveness" (Makerere University 2007). This purposing makes one think hard about the intersection of knowledge and business. In practice, which priorities win out? The emphasis suggests a shifting balance, partly linked to attitudes, some of them the product of a legacy of strife in the country.

In post-conflict Uganda, the trust needed, including with political officials, to reinvigorate the university system is in short supply. Survey research shows that the general public regards education as the top priority for increased government spending (Afrobarometer 2015: 51). Also, recurrent student riots over the state of higher education are a patent sign of mistrust of power holders. Authorities have greeted student unrest over proximate wellness issues with a combination of concessions

and crackdowns, including the use of tear gas, arrests, and jail. The sensibilities of striking students continue to jibe with faculty members' discontent, culminating in their strikes over depressed salaries, small and delayed pensions, and the overall climate for research and higher learning.

Quite clearly, underlying problems of rights and responsibility have not faded away. Academic freedom is fragile. Autonomy in the sense of independence of mind is constrained by underfunding and controlling political and administrative structures.

Decentralization

Paradoxically, centralized control led to administrative decentralization. Center-driven university initiatives featured the delegation of elements of executive authority to mid-level management in individual academic units. This is in line with the best practices of world universities. In a way, decentralization is an instrument used by those at the helm for achieving cost-effectiveness (Berman 2014). While holding the purse, the central administration transfers much of the job of generating revenue onto colleges, schools, and departments.

Decentralization at Ugandan universities coincided with a devolution of governance tasks in the country as a whole. Although one can trace this history to earlier times, the Museveni regime accentuated the pattern. It is evident, for example, with regard to local government and public budgeting (Lambright 2011). It is consonant with a neoliberal framework and World Bank policy that encourages citizens to look to private means and local government for services and to provide resources for it. By shifting responsibilities for financing development to firms and the localities, it suits the national political elites.

At Makerere, a turning point was the conversion to a college system. A committee headed by Edward Kirumira, with support from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) to facilitate its aims, drafted a report, approved by University Council in

2005. It called for a three-level structure: central administration, colleges, and departments. It also contained provisions for mergers, resource reallocation, and implementation. In this system, there would be no deans. But some units were ill-disposed to couple with others—to enter “forced marriages,” as a Makerere professor quipped.

A new reform committee, chaired by Barnabas Nawangwe, a former dean of the Faculty of Technology, and partly funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, planned full implementation, with allowance for amendments, of the proposed restructuring by 2013. The deanships would be retained for the purposes of coordinating and managing departments and operate in conjunction with department heads. Deans, though, would not handle finances, which were to be vested in colleges and their principals. The colleges in turn endorsed the reforms, provided that they would increase authority and safeguards for financial devolution.¹⁰

Yet worries about the consequences, some unintended, of this decentralization linger. A major concern is that it is excessive and lacks adept coordination. Specifically, the central government must give public universities permission to raise tuition fees, which are below cost. While academic units receive revenue drawn from private students’ fees, only 2,000 students of the 13,000 admitted to Makerere each year are government-sponsored.¹¹ As a result, student enrollment and competition among academic units mount. Each unit is attempting to mobilize resources. In a country with small private markets and few big companies, colleges and departments compete for tuition fees and strive to become more marketable. Concretely, this means that the Department of Philosophy, for instance, introduces a course on the philosophy of

¹⁰ Author discussion with Edward Kirumira, professor of sociology and principal, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Makerere University, Kampala, May 21, 2013.

¹¹ Author discussion with John Ddumba-Ssentamu, professor of economics and vice chancellor, Makerere University, Kampala, June 6, 2013.

tourism, a degree program in secretarial studies is offered, classes that prepare students for careers as consultants are initiated, and so on.

Meanwhile, academic units contest the delivery of funds from the center. Their representatives claim that money is not transferred in a timely way and that the units lack direct access to the university's chief financial officers. The units within and among universities hunt for personnel. Poaching professors is a common practice. Public and private universities vie with one another. While the financial incentives vary, they jockey for dividends.

The competition for talent and salary crisscrosses with opportunities at think tanks. One of these, the Economic Policy and Research Centre is housed at Makerere. The center's work is oriented to development policy. It is headed by the minister responsible for finance and planning and Makerere's vice chancellor (the principal academic and administrative officer at British and other Commonwealth universities). The government of Uganda and a host of donors, including Canada's International Research Centre, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and the Netherlands Directorate-General for International Development, furnish funding. The Economic Policy and Research Centre also partners with the Brookings Institution's Africa Growth Initiative. Another think tank, Advocates for Development and Environment, publishes policy briefs, reports, and papers, and encourages dialogue among stakeholders. Support comes from several donors: among them, the Ford and MacArthur foundations, the International Institute for Environment and Development, and the Netherlands embassy in Kampala. The Uganda Development Policy Management Forum and other think tanks similarly seek to analyze and influence policy. On the whole, think tanks in Uganda are small, and partly, if not heavily, sponsored by donors.

On the university side of the knowledge structure, senior administrators increasingly fret about budgetary deficiencies. Makerere's leaders maintain that the formation of colleges imposes additional costs, including salaries for principals, their staff, offices,

equipment, and “top-up allowances.”¹² In this arrangement, the persistent problem is that both higher-ranking and college-level administrators can succumb to managerialism—groupthink and a technocratic mindset.

Not surprisingly, some academics are loath to relinquish old ways. Forestry economists, for instance, are reluctant to teach first-year economics to students in other fields of study. For various stakeholders, the structural issue is that autonomy in academe takes on more economic meaning.¹³ Self-determination becomes a matter of survival skills and self-financing. The fiscal dimension entails underwriting a large part of the university’s business, including base salaries and research costs. In Uganda, there is little national support for this work. Individual academics are left to source some or all of it as well as supplement their low income, which can lead to compromises in bidding for outside contracts. The risk lies in transposing academic freedom into the freedom to accumulate capital.

Under these circumstances, there is brain drain of two types: full, entailing an exodus from the university; and partial, wherein a portion of time is contracted out.¹⁴ In fact, the consultancy industry in Uganda is flourishing. It does not fall squarely under formal regulatory authority, save blatant forms of corruption. In effect, the practices of intellectual engagement have changed. When research is commissioned, the terms of

¹² Author discussion with John Ddumba-Ssentamu, professor of economics and vice chancellor, Makerere University, Kampala, June 6, 2013; “The State of Makerere University Ten Years after the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act (UOTIA),” workshop organized by the Makerere Institute of Social Research and the Human Rights and Peace Centre, MISR Public Policy Report No. 2 (August 23, 2011), pp. 9–11.

¹³ Author discussion with Samuel Kyamanywa, professor of agricultural entomology and acting principal, College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, Makerere University, Kampala, June 5, 2013.

¹⁴ Author discussion with Njuguna Ng’ethe, associate research professor, Institute for Development Studies, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Nairobi, Nairobi, May 27, 2013.

reference are given; the problems to be addressed, predetermined. Academic peer review is infrequently practiced. The investigator can be beholden to the benefactor. Research findings are merchandised. Critical inquiry is diminished. The rules of knowledge production and exchange are reformed.

Privatization

In the face of rising student activism and faculty dissatisfaction with the state of the university, Ugandan officials have opted for privatization as a means to meet mounting challenges. Its main facets are three-fold: opening more private universities and increasing enrollment at public institutions of higher learning; augmenting demand-driven, vocationally-oriented programs; and outsourcing educational services.

The founding of a private higher education institution, the Islamic University, in 1988, and the admission of fee-paying students at Makerere in the early 1990s were turning points in a system in which the state had been the only provider of university education. The origins of Uganda's Islamic University can be traced to 1974, when President Amin met King Faisal of Saudi Arabia at an Organization of Islamic Cooperation summit conference in Lahore. The two heads of state agreed to launch an Islamic university in Anglophone Africa. Uganda's next president, Museveni, embraced this project. Backed by the Organization's financing, the Islamic University set up a campus in Mbale, Uganda, and later formed a multibranch system. The enlargement came to include Kibuli near Kampala's central business district, Kabojja exclusively for women, and Arua, which attracts students from the South Sudan and the eastern Congo. The university has sought to address a specific legacy of colonial education: an imbalance wherein Christian missionaries built schools, Muslims went to madrassas, and few of the latter entered Makerere.¹⁵

¹⁵ Author discussion with Abdul Karim Nasser Ssesanga, professor of

In the years following the establishment of the Islamic University, the number of private universities and the intake of students at registered public universities grew appreciably, and the expansion of primary and secondary education continued to heighten demand for admission to institutions of higher education. Moreover, national economic growth, however uneven, boosted the pool of applicants.

These pressures, the level of funding, and the volume of self-sponsored students altered the caliber of higher education. Supposedly, the budget gap could be addressed by bringing in additional tuition and fees. The return of a portion of earned revenue to academic units was expected to provide incentive for moving in this direction. This strategy effectively lessened the scope of the public sector in higher education.

By 2005/06, the share of private fee-paying students at Uganda's public universities reached 80.2 percent of the total (Republic of Uganda 2010: 215). The percentage of privately-financed students of course varies by institution. At Makerere, the apex of the system, it came to 70 percent in 2013. Although Makerere remains a nominally public university, it is effectively becoming a private academy.¹⁶

New evening courses, weekend classes, and distance learning programs proliferated. Admitting more students to universities with inadequate facilities magnified the discrepancy between supply and demand. Overcrowding and understaffing are increasingly acute problems. The official figure for part-time faculty is 47.5 percent, which the National Planning Authority regards as "inconsistent with what is required to maintain high quality education and training standards" (Republic of Uganda 2010: 215).

management and administration of education, Islamic University in Uganda, Kampala Campus, Kampala, May 24, 2013.

¹⁶ Author discussion with Moses A. Golola, professor and acting executive director, National Council for Higher Education, Uganda, Kampala, May 31, 2013.

To tap other revenue streams, academic institutions have signed contracts with outside firms for facilities previously subsidized by central authority: bookstores, guest houses, printing shops, and so on. They are now in the hands of private entrepreneurs. While their net returns can be quantified on balance sheets, there are also qualitative differences in the knowledge structure itself, which encompasses fundamental, though not necessarily all, university services. The ethos of higher learning is rapidly evolving in tune with globalizing forces.

Repositioning in the global knowledge structure

While there is scant evidence of an overall national policy for the globalization of higher education, its rudiments can be detected. Ugandan universities have surely recognized the need to design a globalization strategy. Academics have appreciated the importance of a proactive stance lest their universities be takers rather than makers of global knowledge. But how to capture opportunities and reposition themselves?

When Makerere transitioned to the 2010s, its acting vice chancellor empaneled a team chaired by Robert Ikoja-Odongo to take stock of the impact of globalization on the university and make recommendations (Ikoja-Odongo 2010). Its report identifies opportunities: namely, forms of regional cooperation in higher education, information technologies, and Uganda's intellectual diaspora. It notes that globalizing trends also present threats, especially the digital divide, the brain drain, and large costs for physical infrastructure including adequate connectivity and fiber optic cable. Given that globalization has this double edge, the challenge is to reap its net payoffs. High on the list of proposals for redialing into globalization are building the capacity of faculty and staff, rehabilitating facilities for the diffusion of knowledge, investing in academic research, and opening to "relevant" partnerships so long as Uganda avoids "becoming a front desk for international institutions" (Ikoja-Odongo 2010: 12). According to team leader Ikoja-Odongo, some

of these recommendations were ultimately “adopted via the University Strategic Plan, some through annual work plans and some through projects e.g. buildings, connectivity and increasing private funding.”¹⁷

Efforts had long been underway to realize opportunities identified in the Ikoja-Odongo report: regional cooperation, information technologies, and links to the intellectual diaspora. There are numerous cross-border projects for collaboration and knowledge-sharing, research ventures, software development e-networks involving universities elsewhere in the global South, and appeals to diasporic communities for funneling their skills, expertise, and capital to the home country. Although Ugandan universities already have basic ingredients of a globalization strategy in place, the report emphasizes the need for others and for better coordination.

Makerere maintains active exchange agreements with several universities: among them, Bergen, Uppsala, Lund, Humboldt, North Carolina, North Dakota State, Rutgers, and Michigan State. To operate these programs, a small International Affairs office with a modest budget is tasked with processing applications, looking after health insurance and local clinics, arranging secure accommodations and transportation to and from the campus, advising students, facilitating joint supervision of their projects, creating databases, preparing memoranda of understanding, and developing new ties. Amid heated competition among public and private universities in Uganda and neighboring countries, the number of international students (graduate and undergraduates) at Makerere reached 1,899 in 2011 (NCHE 2013: 38).¹⁸

NCHE data indicate that all Ugandan universities enrolled 15,932

¹⁷ Robert Ikoja-Odongo, vice chancellor of Soroti University of Science and Technology and former principal of the College of Computing and Information Sciences at Makerere University, email message to author, July 23, 2013.

¹⁸ Also, author discussion with Martha Muwanguzi, senior administrative assistant, International Affairs, Makerere University, Kampala, June 6, 2013.

international students in 2011, most of them at private universities, led by Kampala International University, with a sizable contingent from Kenya (NCHE 2010: 47). The Trade and Tourism Ministry's Market and Education Service project has sought to augment export earnings generated by international students above the \$32 million level realized in 2004 (see Maseruka, 2010; Observatory on Borderless Higher Education, 2012).¹⁹ Whereas India, the United Kingdom, and other countries have operated programs and campuses in Uganda, its private universities, particularly Kampala International University, have maintained campuses in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam and represent potential sources of revenue.

These ventures beg questions about quality control and certification. A semi-autonomous body, the NCHE not only accredits institutions and programs but also denies it, as it has at the privates. For instance, the NCHE disqualified Ph.D. degrees awarded by Kampala International University in 2011 and 2012, ruled that they must be revised, and closed small programs. But as a regulatory authority for accreditation, NCHE lacks staff and budgetary support. Besides its state allocation and student fees, the NCHE draws on donors, such as the Rockefeller Foundation, Ford Foundation, Carnegie Corporation, and the government of the Netherlands. They fund specific projects but not basic operating expenses.

A small agency, NCHE networks with accreditors in Kenya and Tanzania, and establishes benchmarks, informed by other regulatory bodies' prototypes.²⁰ It looks to a plethora of reference points. International quality assurance groupings and initiatives that share common ground include the UNESCO-World Bank Global Initiative on Quality Assurance Capacity, the Africa Quality Assurance Network

¹⁹ The data on export earnings from higher education are spotty and do not distinguish between onshore and offshore (e.g., branch campuses in Kenya) revenue.

²⁰ Author discussion with M. A. Golola, May 31, 2013.

hosted by the Association of African Universities, the Europe-Africa Quality Connect project, the Africa Union Commission's African Higher Education Harmonization Strategy, the Africa Quality Rating Mechanism, and the Inter-University Council for East Africa. They provide guidelines and identify best practices. A consultant who studied their content and prescriptions reports "clear evidence of convergence" among them and finds that "diversity and harmonization are not mutually exclusive" across and within regions (Wells 2014: 21).

Yes, there is "converging diversity" in setting global and regional standards (Wells 2014: 21). But hierarchic relations lie behind the narratives. A set of discursive practices is evident in touting institutions' profiles. The dream is to gain global recognition, to be a world-class university. Better rankings are a means to convince government and donors to support universities and a way to attract students. Higher education institutions prize the rewards in this global race for the top.

As for African universities in general, none of them appeared among the 100 leaders in the 2014-15 Times Higher Education University Rankings. The University of Cape Town placed 124 and two other South African universities made the top 300.²¹ According to the 2014 Webometrics Ranking for Africa, produced by the Spanish Research Council, South Africa led the region with nine of the 15 upper spots (Webometrics 2014). Cape Town was number one, followed by Cairo University, the American University in Cairo, the University of Nairobi, Mansoura University, and Alexandria at 2, 8, 9, 10, and 15, respectively (Webometrics 2014). Webometrics rated Makerere 13th in Africa; 1,134th worldwide (Webometrics, 2014).

In Uganda, rankings are posted on university websites and reflected in the popular media, for example, in the newspaper *New Vision*

²¹ From The Times Higher Education University Rankings 2014-2015 and Goolam Mohamedbhai, "Should South African Universities Be Globally Ranked?" *Inside Higher Education*, November 5, 2012, <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/#>(access ed October 8, 2014).

(Kiwawulo 2013). These results sparked varied reactions. In an increasingly status-conscious society, the National Planning Authority recognizes that global university rankings carry a lot of weight and are a way for Ugandan universities to elevate their standards.²² But the NCHE has not promulgated rankings on the ground that they create unhealthy tension and make distinctions that can be divisive. Its acting executive director, Moses Golola, held that global rankings resemble IQ tests in failing to take into account differences in culture and background.²³ In his view, ranking systems attempt to measure aspects of performance that cannot be measured. And, he says, Ugandans are not well versed in the techniques for manipulating rankings.²⁴ He comes down on the side of the debate that argues that the numbers system is flawed because savvy institutions game it and that standards must be internally generated, not primarily externally driven.

More philosophically, this skepticism resonates with suspicion of underestimating the capricious and incalculable, the characteristics of academic life that proponents of utilitarian views of usable knowledge do not entertain. To some observers, however, the principles and values that the longstanding purposes of a university cultivate are useless; these ideals seem old-fashioned. In today's climate, the fight is over how to nurture humanistic sensibilities in a context where applied knowledge is needed without reducing a university to a technocracy. Undoubtedly, the practical challenges are crucial. The dilemma lies in reconciling a lack of resources for adequately staffing and maintaining universities with surging student enrollments, which higher education institutions cannot attenuate lest they lose revenue. And student numbers are likely to continue to increase exponentially. Yet levels of funding for instruction

²² Author discussion with Abel J.J. Rwendeire, deputy chairperson, National Planning Authority, and former minister of state for higher education, Kampala, May 23, 2013

²³ Author discussion with M. A. Golola, May 31, 2013.

²⁴ Author discussion with M. A. Golola, May 31, 2013.

and research are decidedly incommensurate with this trend. A coupling of budgetary constraints and an unsupportive political environment thus hampers educational development.

In this context, local educators rely on donors to fill the gap in public support for research. In 2010-11, for instance, the NCHE was able to fund only three research proposals out of 57 submitted (NCHE 2010: 20). Meanwhile, African intellectuals seek “autonomous spaces for interacting with each other in ‘a commonwealth of scholars’” (Mkandawire 2011: 33). But how to carve out autonomous discourses and drive the agenda when donor agencies are sponsoring most of the research at public universities? The bulk of allocations are for applied work with little for basic research. Donors, mainly philanthropies in the global North and development agencies, offer financing for centers of excellence, some of them networking initiatives, in thematic areas such as technology and innovation, water, and health. These partnerships share best practices, hold workshops, mount training sessions, and tender consultancy contracts. The difficulty is that they can breed dependence. And the infusions of loans and grants fluctuate and eventually peter out. Patrons typically suffer fatigue and reformulate their priorities. For clients, the challenge is to nip off funds in the short run while generating renewable resources for the long term. What then is the actual experience in this regard?

A collective effort by seven U.S.-based foundations, the Partnership for Higher Education in Africa (PHEA), provided \$440 million over 10 years to institutions of higher education and scholars in nine African countries.²⁵ Trailing the two largest recipients, South Africa and Nigeria, Uganda captured 10 percent of the disbursements (Lewis, Friedman, & Schoneboom 2010: 1). Makerere alone received more than

²⁵ The cohort consisted of Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Ford Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and the Kresge Foundation.

\$42 million. Concluded in 2010, the Partnership delivered tangible benefits, including expanded Internet connectivity, better library facilities, and help for marginalized groups' access to the university. The PHEA grant makers also invested in the Next Generation of Academics initiative for training early-career scholars as a way to address the problem of faculty regeneration and challenges facing women in the higher education system. The mechanisms included postgraduate programs and curriculum development. Correlatively, other learning grants are for the next generation.

PHEA's consultant hired to gauge its accomplishments and limitations found that it succeeded in establishing consensus among foundations with different institutional cultures, building infrastructure at African universities, and maintaining a long-running coalition, though without a clear exit strategy (Parker 2010).²⁶ But she should have trolled for information on the ground from various local stakeholders. The interviewees for her study are foundation officials, staff, and associates in the United States and their overseas offices (Parker, 2010: 43-44). In the absence of empirical evidence gathered in Africa, one is left to ponder the role of grantees in planning and shaping PHEA-sponsored programs.

Is there ownership of projects at the universities that received the grants? While it is hard to discern the exact points where control lies, structural power between the needy and their international patrons is nevertheless integral to this hierarchical relationship. It is asymmetrical. Deals are struck between unequal parties. As a report published by PHEA's secretariat attests, this partnership has influenced the agendas and perspectives of other donors, African governments, and individual and corporate funders (Lewis et al. 2010: 6). By its own account, PHEA leveraged its efforts with several purveyors of reforms, such as the European Union (EU), NORAD, and the World Bank (Lewis et al. 2010: 6-7). And in the education sector, donors, mostly northern governmental

²⁶ Also see Megan Lindow (2011).

institutions, have formed an umbrella organization—Uganda’s Education Funding Agencies Group (Kasozi 2005: 4, 17).²⁷ The impact of donors on higher education policy is reflected in their shared priorities, for instance, converging views on advancing programs dedicated to the next generation of scholars. While various funders have established grants under the-next-generation rubric, it remains to be seen what they have in mind: who among a populace is deemed to constitute this generation, the extent to which particular subgroups will be represented, how these learners will be equipped to discover new knowledge, and with which paradigms.

After PHEA ended and the World Bank invited U.S. private foundations to the table, the Bank presented its agenda for building infrastructure and expanding the role of markets in African universities.²⁸ In Uganda, its emphasis is on an institutionalized process of consensus formation, not content per se. This is a transaction between patron and client. The effects may be seen in the ways that procedures, such as for training administrators and evaluation, are carried out rather than in prescriptions for the particulars of what is taught in the classroom. Still, the availability of funding for certain fields of study instead of others is a form of indirect influence. As Court’s report, sponsored by the World Bank and Rockefeller Foundation, says, this matter comes down to ownership. When ideas are perceived as imposed by external actors, they can spark resistance and rejection (Court 1999: 11). While some local actors’ thinking about loans converges with World Bank ideas, the subtle

²⁷ Its members are the World Bank Group, the EU, Development Co-operation of Ireland, Netherlands, Japan, Germany, the World Food Programme, the United Nations Children’s Fund, Britain’s Department for International Development, African Development Bank, and the United States Agency for International Development.

²⁸ Author telephone discussion with New York foundation program director, January 3, 2011; author discussion with former New York foundation program officer, also advisor in the Ministry of Planning and National Development, the Republic of Kenya, Nairobi, May 28, 2013.

issue is the ways in which the Bank's measures are built into conditions for loans and technical advice. In this regard, Samoff and Carrol (2003: 34) find that "conditionality can disguise ownership" of a reform package. And when implemented, these programs take on the trappings of a national university.

Makerere's self-representations of its regulatory framework, for example, are emblazoned on its logo adorned with crested cranes, the national bird. The image of these birds in full plumage and standing on one leg, symbolizing that the country is not sitting still but moving forward, is powerful. This pennant looks and feels Ugandan. The branding is seemingly local though consonant with a global trend for universities to advertise comely labels more noticeably than ever.

In the evolving amalgam of donor-university relations, leveraging influence is more effective than imposing policies. Donor agencies use ownership discourse as a way to lessen their responsibility for the success or failure of regulatory reforms.

Correspondingly, since Ugandan universities are subject to the WTO agreements to which the Kampala government is a signatory, an agency like the NCHE can exercise but limited regulatory authority. It is constrained in its efforts to restrict market access because private providers from overseas gain easy entry for establishing branch campuses, degree programs and certificates, and distance learning, all subject to light national control over these services. Local universities thus come into direct competition with the pressures of the global marketplace. Aware of the need to abate these forces, the NCHE notes that Uganda is deficient in understanding the linkages: "educators, students, and the general public are seriously lacking in awareness on the forces which are impacting on the design of higher education courses and programmes" (NCHE 2011: 42). In this connection, the academic curriculum is deemed to be narrowing, with less scope for liberal approaches to learning and more space for vocational training suited to employers' needs and expectations of universities (NCHE 2011: 39-40). With stretched financial resources, more emphasis on technical and

business skills comes at the expense of literary and other humanistic knowledge.

A Stocktaking: Whither Purposes?

Can higher education in Uganda bounce back and regain its footing? Since the early postcolonial period, when its lead university was renowned for innovative research and its accomplished graduates, institutions of higher learning in Uganda have responded to a rapidly altered global environment by aligning with new demands and pivoting toward a business model. Emphasis is given to growing enrollment, raising funds, and connecting more thoroughly to a global meshwork of knowledge.

With these changes, Uganda's universities have scored successes. Signs of their revival are an improved research culture, advances in technology, and wider appreciation of the importance of Ph.D. training. For example, despite budget shortages, Makerere's University Senate and Council, followed by the NCHE, approved MISR's interdisciplinary Ph.D. in social sciences. Launched in 2012, it has garnered financial support for its critically-oriented programs in political economy and cultural, historical, and political studies. Geared to prepare younger civic-minded Africans for engaging globalizing forces, this initiative is run by Ugandans and primarily staffed by them.

The universities' achievements also include expanding access to higher education in terms of both numbers and representation of the general population. But less-privileged applicants who have not had the same opportunities, particularly in marginalized regions, are disproportionately admitted as private payers. And while the percentage of women in the student body, faculty, and administration has increased, gender equity by discipline, rank, and pay remains problematic.

Meanwhile, repurposing universities is fraught with tensions over core values. As higher education in Uganda becomes more attuned to global governance agencies' policies for promoting free markets, local

universities and regulatory authorities such as the NCHE encounter conflicting interests. For instance, in 2013, Buckingham University, a private British university, suspended accreditation for some of its courses at Victoria University in Kampala. The controversy centered on Uganda's proposed legislation regarding homosexuality. Buckingham registered concern about freedom of speech in this area. When it called for a statement on gay rights, Ugandan authorities held that this provision was not part of the original memorandum of understanding. Additionally, the Ugandan side maintained that university regulations accord with national laws, not British standards.²⁹ In Uganda, penal courts do not abide homosexuality. Ugandan officials at Victoria University pointed out that students are not asked about their sexual preferences. The Ugandans refused their British associates' demand on the ground that Africa should say no to impositions from outside providers. Buckingham then terminated its affiliation with Victoria. Soon thereafter, the Ruparelia Group, a private company headed by a Ugandan-born entrepreneur, took over ownership of Victoria University.

More broadly, the contention is about whose and which values shape higher education in this postcolonial country. In fact, Uganda does not have a general policy in regard to international partners or donors. Each university in Uganda, as well as its several units and individual researchers, has the prerogative of collaborating with them so long as the arrangements are in keeping with national norms and legislation. While the pressure for fundraising becomes more acute, donors emphasize their expectations regarding measurable impacts of the allocations. The searching question becomes what kinds of impact and knowledge are stressed, and whose research questions are valued and devalued? The matter comes down to who sets the academic agenda.

In the give-and-take among actors, Ugandan policy makers are determined to refurbish universities. The country has prepared a multitude of national development plans, institutional strategies, and

²⁹ Author discussions with Golola, Nsibambi, and Ssesanga.

visionary documents projecting targets all the way to 2040 (Republic of Uganda 2013). These visioning exercises can represent either genuine commitment or empty gestures. Although the former is of course desirable, the latter obtains in the absence of a predictable funding formula for bolstering the production and dissemination of knowledge, professed to be key components of development.

True, strengthening universities requires more than money. Yet without a feasible financing framework backed by public support, universities are left to improvise. The result is educational bricolage. Makeshift arrangements are the order of the day. Planning units keep designing roadmaps; however, higher education institutions, try as they may, are struggling to follow them.

Repurposed universities in Uganda are therefore in a quandary. Sustained support for undertaking original research, training Ph.D. students, and developing faculty talent is still in short supply. Higher education institutions are diminished to the extent that they become instruments of money culture and default on the academic missions of democratic education, critical self-reflection, and freedom to pursue intellectual curiosity. Personally, I believe that universities are fundamentally about loving ideas and inquiring what it means to share the human condition.

The particularity of a sense of purpose looms large in a postcolonial setting that had prided itself on an illustrious university. After a period of deterioration, fast economic growth in the 2010s has failed to void its grave consequences. Now, local protagonists are attempting to expand policy space. They strive to steer the higher education system and, at the same time, navigate a globally competitive environment. There is no dearth of innovative ideas and policies. Concrete initiatives include the establishment of a Pan-African University with regional campuses that emphasize research, and the incorporation of indigenous knowledge in university curricula in areas such as sustainable use of natural resources, technology, architecture, medicine, and art. More extensive collaboration among stakeholders in the university and the local community is another

priority. And detailed proposals for viable funding frameworks are on the table (apropos the latter, see Kasozi 2009: 200-215).

Amid this fluidity are but two certainties. To work, the strategy must be organic to recipients, not merely donors. If higher education innovations are imported without local support systems, they are likely to be denied as when the human body rejects a heart transplant. The changes must be integrated in, or emerge from, the existing social organism. Second, their realization will require intellectual imagination and political grit. Toward this end, a higher education system must surmount contextually specific challenges. As a practical matter, policy makers must come to grips with particular mechanisms and processes of university repurposing—funding formulas, centralized and decentralized budgeting, ranking systems, quality assurance protocols, and the like—as they alight in their own setting.

The links between the local and global levels are crucial. Major transnational trends are generic to variants of university reform in at least three ways.³⁰ First, state disinvestment in higher education is driving university executives to act more entrepreneurially and adopt aims that better serve market-driven actors. Second, universities are increasingly seen as not only recipients of funds but also sources of revenue—for example, from their medical centers, faculty-generated companies, and export services—for the local and national economy. Third, the academy's lax pace in adjusting to fast-moving globalizing forces is partly attributable to factors other than the tradition of shared governance, however eroded on many campuses. Part of the difficulty, it must be forthrightly said, rests with the professoriate. There is a defense of faculty privilege, and, for some in our ranks, prioritizing scholasticism over teaching, a trust that we must deserve. Our calling requires

³⁰ As detailed in Mittelman, *Implausible Dream*. Ken Conca, professor of international relations in the School of International Service, American University, email message to author, January 23, 2016, provided incisive comments that helped me to gather the themes in this paragraph.

introducing better pedagogies that pique intellectual curiosity, instill capacity for creative risk-taking, and enkindle critical sensibility. A central mission is to encourage students to face the question anew of the duties and responsibilities that democratic citizens should bear in a turbulent world.

Following the trail blazed by Fanon and Ngũgĩ, critical intellectuals must be investigative, provocative, yet constructive. In the tradition of postcolonial studies, the challenges are to develop a conceptual language for creative analysis that transcends categories of thought ingrained in the standard academic disciplines and bequeathed by colonialism. This involves querying universalizing narratives, interrogating history, reinterpreting it, and nourishing autonomous discourses. The issue then is how to respond to the epistemological distortions of colonial power and build knowledge institutions for shaping postcolonial universities. Ultimately, the objectives are to understand and reorder society.

Just as Ngũgĩ has continued to contemplate these challenges, the pedagogical tasks of opening the gates of learning endure (see Ngũgĩ 2012). As the Uganda case illustrates, postcolonial universities face formidable obstacles to redefining their relationships with the master narratives and practices of coloniality. They are attempting to find new possibilities for anchoring counternarratives in their academic programs and freeing the mind through a people's self-expression.

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