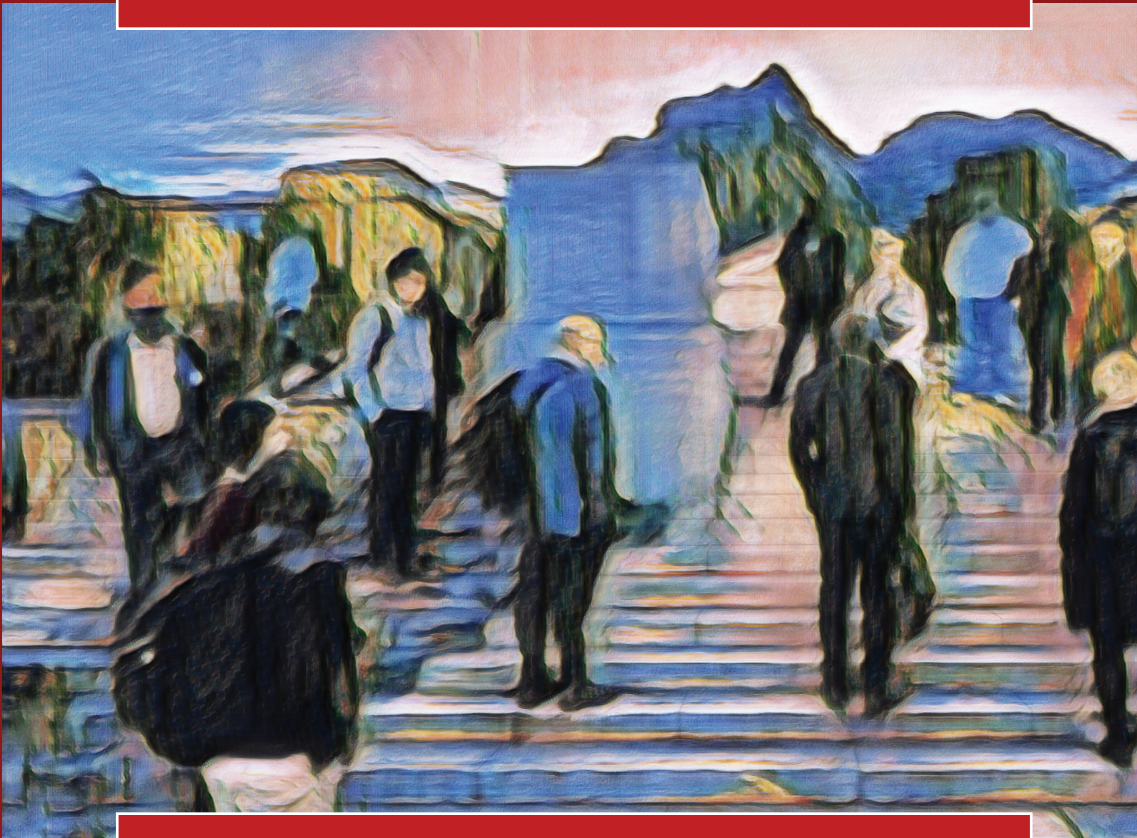


AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION: DEVELOPMENTS AND PERSPECTIVES

# Negotiating the Fabric of the African University

**Volume 1 – Global Narratives and Local Models**

Patrício V. Langa and David Kaldewey (Eds.)



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## Negotiating the Fabric of the African University

# African Higher Education

DEVELOPMENTS AND PERSPECTIVES

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# Negotiating the Fabric of the African University

*Volume 1 – Global Narratives and Local Models*

*Edited by*

Patrício V. Langa and David Kaldewey



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This work is funded for open access by the Volkswagen Foundation.

Cover illustration: University of Cape Town, September 2023. Photograph by David Kaldewey, edited by Andreas Sieß

All chapters in this book have undergone peer review.

The Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available online at <https://catalog.loc.gov>

Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: "Brill". See and download: [brill.com/brill-typeface](http://brill.com/brill-typeface).

ISSN 2666-2663

ISBN 978-90-04-72269-9 (hardback)

ISBN 978-90-04-72270-5 (e-book)

DOI 10.1163/9789004722705

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**Advanced Praise for**  
***Negotiating the Fabric of the African University:***  
***Volume 1 – Global Narratives and Local Models***

*“Negotiating the Fabric of the African University (...)* is an outstanding contribution to the study of African higher education. Combining conceptual reflections and detailed case studies, the book provides a comprehensive analysis of the historical and contemporary processes that have shaped the establishment and transformation of universities in Africa. One of the great merits of the volume is to bring out the distinctiveness and nuances that characterize the interaction among a variety of key actors, including students, teachers, researchers, administrators, and university leaders. Professors Langa and Kaldewey should be congratulated for this excellent scholarly work which is set to become the most important reference for researchers and policy analysts interested in the evolution and transformation of African universities. The result is the weaving of a “negotiated social fabric,” to use the evocative notion shared by the authors to describe the powerful identities that connect the local and global dimensions of scholarship and institutional life.”

– **Jamil Salmi, Global Tertiary Education Expert, Emeritus Professor of Higher Education Policy, Diego Portales University (Chile)**

“This book examines the university, the cradle of the colonial library, with a keen sense of theory. The book examines the students, teachers, researchers and administrators, architects, and users of the institution it describes with a passion for the empirical. The University of Africa, or African University, seeks to integrate the very thing it was created to oppose, local knowledge, torn between different colonial traditions and the call for decolonisation. The work is grounded in history beyond the ambient presentism. This impressive and comprehensive book is both original and enlightening. A great future classic has been published.”

– **Mamadou Diawara, Goethe Research Professor, University of Frankfurt/Main, Germany MIASA Director Germany, University of Ghana, Legon, Ghana, Point Sud, Center for Research on Local Knowledge, Bamako, Mali**

“In this nuanced and insightful exploration, Langa and Kaldewey, delves into the complex tapestry of the African university. Weaving together context,

institutional analysis, and personal narrative, with their collaborators they reveal the intricate negotiations that shape the fabric of the university in Africa.”

– **Luís Jorge Ferrão, Rector of the Pedagogic, University of Maputo, Mozambique**

“This book is not only a comprehensive and insightful volume on African higher education, but also an invitation to read diverse voices of authors from different countries and contexts. By examining the fabric of the African university, the book helps the readers to understand its patterns, colours and historic imprints and invites them to actively participate in weaving, cutting and sewing the fabric of the African university in the future.”

– **Lea Weigel, Sociology Student at the Goethe University Frankfurt, Germany**

“There is no such thing as the ‘African university’: there are instead many models, visions and histories. This edited collection offers a rich and diverse set of insights into the multiplicity and plurality of higher education across the continent.”

– **David Mills, Professor of Education at Kellogg College, Director of the Centre for Global Higher Education, Oxford University**

*To our loved ones, Judite, Christine, Michela (in memory),  
Patrícia, Jude & Enno  
To deferential and friendly collaboration*





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## Preface

This book is the first of two edited volumes that explore the idea and lived experience of the university in Africa. It embodies our collaborative effort to inquire and illuminate key themes and ideas within the disciplines of sociology, science studies, and higher education studies. Through this work, we aim to provide readers with insights and critical perspectives that can inspire both academic discourse and practical applications in these interconnected fields.

The volume critically assesses the historical and contemporary processes that have shaped the establishment and transformation of universities in Africa. The chapters are derived from the proceedings of two international conferences: “Negotiating the Fabric of the African University – Beyond Locality and Universalism,” which took place in Maputo, Mozambique, in 2022, and “Negotiating the Fabric of the African University – Global Trends and Local Realities,” which was held in Cape Town, South Africa, in 2023. For both conferences, we received generous funding from the Volkswagen Foundation. In addition, our cooperation benefited from the visiting professorship programme “Internationalisation of Higher Education in Times of Global Crisis” funded by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), which formed the starting point for our collaboration. Finally, our joint work was strengthened by the SDG scholarship programme funded by the University of Bonn.

The submissions following the two conferences have undergone external and editorial peer review. This first volume provides general perspectives, reflections, and a selection of case studies from different regions and higher education systems, highlighting the vibrant debates on the social and institutional life of universities in Africa. Through various accounts, the chapters capture the rich experiences, imaginations, and analyses of students, teachers, researchers, and administrators, showcasing the university as a dynamic lived experience. We metaphorically refer to the process of shaping Africa's universities and their outcomes as a negotiated social fabric, woven with purpose, and shaped by both ancient legacies and modern innovations. The resulting pattern reflects the powerful identities that connect local and global dimensions of scholarship and institutional life.

Our argument is that the ethos of the “African” university is currently at a crossroads. On the one hand, there are narratives and calls to reclaim the ancient, pre-colonial models of higher learning institutions in Africa in order to emancipate from the European tradition and its colonial heritage. On the other hand, the modern university, as the name suggests, claims a universal

significance as a site for the study of the human. In the history of universities in Africa in the 20th century we find many variations of this tension. In the words of Mahmood Mamdani, one of the leading thinkers on the subject, “the new post-independence African university was triumphantly universalistic and uncompromisingly foreign” (Mamdani, 1993, p. 11). The national universities in newly independent African countries made no concessions to local cultures. These institutions stood as custodians of the “standards” in the outpost of civilisation. Unlike the counterparts in Asia and Latin America, African universities did not even speak the cultural languages of the people. The language of instruction and research publications was either English, French or Portuguese, inherited from the colonial period. The linguistic curtain was but one of many other cultural aspects that functioned as mechanism of exclusion (Yallem et al., 2021).

We are well aware that the universalistic picture of the university cannot account for the complex reality of the African university – neither for its past, its present, or its future. However, we also note that amidst of the current resurgence of the decolonisation debate (illustrated by Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Zondi, 2016; Jansen, 2019; Zeleza, 2021) some misconceptions arise that can lead to one-sided callings, replacing the universalistic ideal with an absolutisation of local cultures, national specificities, and truly Africanised epistemologies. The aim of our book is to move beyond this binary and consider the multiversality and the pluriversality of the university in world society. For example, Kasturi Behari-Leak, in her chapter for this volume, suggests a radical reconceptualisation of the “uni-versity” as “pluri-versity.” In other words, the fabric of the African university emerges from the negotiations of its character through a multitude of actors and factors, intersecting global narratives and local models.

This collection represents a crucial advancement in our intellectual and academic focus on African universities and the broader field of higher education studies, hopefully paving the way for ongoing and productive collaboration. Integrating the study of African universities necessitates a significant shift away from simplistic perspectives, whether they are Eurocentric, Afrocentric, or based on binary distinctions like “Global North” and “Global South.” The authors contributing to this volume use the term African university referring to various types of higher education institutions on the African continent. We understand “African” identity without essentialist assertions, recognising the diverse cross-cultural influences on these institutions. Therefore, the terms “African university” and “university in Africa” are mostly used interchangeably in this book – though we are aware of the different meanings of these formulations.

## An Overview of the Chapters

As editors, we open the book with an introductory chapter that reconstructs the conceptual history of the African university. Our argument is that modern universities have experienced significant changes as they transition from Western contexts to diverse global settings, incorporating new characteristics that reshape their identity. In a historical perspective focusing the period between the 1960s and 2010s, we show how a selection of grand narratives and competing models fundamentally shaped our understanding of universities in Africa.

In Chapter 2, Elísio Macamo, a sociologist and professor of African Studies at the University of Basel, Switzerland, explores the relationship between the local and the universal in the African context. He asks whether there is a fundamental difference between the two and shows that if such a difference exists, it must be sought at the level of values. Macamo contends “that to weave the local into university knowledge is to recognise when we are being normative and, therefore, to know the limits of our knowledge claims.”

Chapter 3 is a contribution by the decolonial thinker and educationalist, Kasturi Behari-Leak, from the University of Cape Town, South Africa. She advocates for the reinvention of the university by acknowledging multiple ontologies and co-existence. Behari-Leak particularly explores the notion of pluriversality as a “decolonial alternative that can embody the identity and exercise the agency of the African university in its full ontological density.”

Chapter 4 is authored by Teboho Moja, a professor of higher education at New York University in the United States. She shows how African universities are adapting to the changing landscape of higher education, by developing “new modes of operation.” Moja presents several examples of these innovative practices, such as the integration of indigenous knowledge systems into the curriculum, the use of technology to expand access to education, and the development of partnerships with local communities to promote sustainable development.

In Chapter 5, Mariah Mosomi, an independent higher education researcher in Kenya, uses the concept of “institutional massification” to critique the traditional notion of massification. She explains how the growing higher education landscape in Africa impacts the academic practices at the micro level of higher education institutions. Building on a case study from a public university in Kenya, Mosomi contends that, as global trends and local realities converge, the African University continues to develop a specific contextual fabric that requires the inclusion of local definitions and frameworks.

Chapter 6 is a contribution by Lerato Posholi, an emerging scholar from South Africa, currently affiliated with the University of Basel in Switzerland.

Her research explores the links between education and epistemology. Against this background, her chapter recognises the dual demands that South African universities are facing: On the one hand the need for decolonisation, on the other hand the desire for internationalisation. Posholi explores whether these two demands are fundamentally incompatible. Using South Africa as a case study, she investigates the epistemic conventions of these two concepts.

In Chapter 7, Bakheit Mohammed Nur, an anthropologist based at the University of Bayreuth, Germany, brings us another case study. He asserts that African Islamic universities must actively divest from Western epistemic frameworks and prioritise the reconfiguration of knowledge production in the landscape of African higher education. Nur advocates the concept of a contemporary Islamic university in Africa as a structured way to rebuild modern epistemologies rooted in a socio-religious ethos and Muslim worldviews.

Another case study from Northern Africa is presented in Chapter 8 by Leonie Schoelen, an independent higher education scholar, currently affiliated with the University of Johannesburg. Her chapter discusses how universities and academics in Algeria balance global standards with national priorities, addressing the challenges of navigating national higher education policies alongside international expectations. Schoelen focuses, in particular, on how individual researchers deal with the ambivalences between these different expectations.

In Chapter 9, Destin Feutseu Dassi, a higher education practitioner from the Ministry of Higher Education in Cameroon, presents a case study of the University of Dschang, which plays a prominent role in the Cameroonian higher education system. He analyses the university's development and its impact both nationally and internationally. The chapter highlights how the University of Dschang has adapted to local needs and regional diversity while also aligning with international standards and requirements. Feutseu Dassi suggests that this institution represents a "new model" for the Sub-Saharan African context, serving as a catalyst for development and fulfilling a mission that goes beyond traditional teaching and research roles.

Chapter 10 is the final case study contribution to this volume. It is penned by three South African academics and managers, Laetus O. K. Lategan, Eli M. Bitzer, and Cecilé Swart, affiliated with the Central University of Technology and Stellenbosch University. The authors refer to the Central University of Technology as an exemplary institutional case study. They use publication statistics and graduation rates to demonstrate the professoriate's roles in the university's development and capacity-building. Their findings suggest that relevant research and its dissemination can enhance the contributions of universities of technology, thereby emphasising their specific role for the African university system in general.

By combining historical and conceptual accounts with exemplary case studies covering different regions in the African higher education landscape our book serves as an essential resource for educators, researchers, policymakers, and university leaders. We hope the contributions inspire readers to explore the rich intellectual, academic, and practical journeys of African universities.

## Acknowledgements

This volume is the result of a collaborative and multifaceted effort involving numerous contributors and participants at the two conferences in Maputo and Cape Town. Both conferences were held over three days at various universities in Mozambique and South Africa. In Mozambique, the events took place at Eduardo Mondlane University (UEM), Joaquim Chissano University (UJC), and Pedagogic University Maputo (UPM). In South Africa, we gathered at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), the University of Cape Town (UCT), and Stellenbosch University (SU). This arrangement enabled participants of both conferences to explore three different university campuses while discussing the concepts and experiences related to African universities.

As editors, we would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to all the speakers and authors who generously shared their insights and expertise at these conferences as well as in the chapters included in this book. The initial concept for compiling the proceedings from the two conferences emerged from our recognition of the rich discussions and valuable exchanges that took place in Maputo and Cape Town. These conferences provided a platform for diverse voices and perspectives, which we aimed to capture and present in this volume.

Moreover, the shaping of this compilation was significantly influenced by the thought-provoking discussions we engaged in with our students at different locations. In particular, we profited from a joint seminar at the University of Bonn about higher education and development beyond the Global North and Global South. The time we spent together at the University of Bonn allowed us to delve deeper into these topics, and the insights gained from students and colleagues greatly enriched the content and direction of this publication.

We would like to thank Lea Weigel, our former student, for her invaluable support with this book project and the organisation of the conference in Cape Town in 2023. We also thank another former student, Lisa Schubert, who helped organise the first conference in Maputo, Mozambique. Their dedication and effort have greatly contributed to our project, and we encourage them to continue applying their skills in future endeavours. Furthermore, we deeply appreciate the collaboration with our colleagues, Berit Stoppa and Philina Wittke, who were from the very beginning part of the project team for both conferences. They contributed their academic interests as doctoral researchers as well as their practical experience as higher education managers. Their efforts truly made a difference.

We extend our gratitude to the leadership and staff at the participating universities. In Mozambique, we specifically thank Manuel Guilherme Jr. (Rector, UEM), José Magode (Rector, UJC), Ana Nhampule (Vice-Rector, UJC), Luís Jorge Ferrão (Rector, UPM) and José P. Castiano (Vice-Rector, UPM). In South Africa, we especially thank Tyrone Pretorius (Rector, UWC), Sue Harrison (DVC, UCT), Azeem Badroodien (UCT, Dean of Education), Kasturi Behari-Leak (UCT, Dean Centre for Higher Education Development), Shose Kessi (UCT, Dean of Humanities), and Liezel Frick (SU, Vice-Dean Education)

We received additional support from Doris Westhoff and Amélie Zoll (University of Bonn, Germany), Patrick Swanzy (KNUST, Ghana), Quiséria Toalha, Benedito Mahumane, Celina Tchauque, Dércio Massinga, Alizio Muholove, and Orton Malipa (all from UEM), Sérgio Gomes (UJC), Amina Soulimani, Nuraan Allie, and Divine Fuh (UCT), François van Schalkwyk (SU), Ricardo Pinto Covele, Ibrahim Harun, Lydia Steer, Jamey Santon, Nigel Prinsloo, Nomthandazo Ngwenya, Hardi Zacharias, Kaylianne Aploon-Zokufa, Seamus Needham, and Rajendran Govender (all from UWC).

Finally, we are indebted to a number of our academic colleagues and friends who contributed to the conferences with their presentations, round tables, and discussions. Notably, we thank Elísio Macamo (University of Basel), Anna Kosmützky, (University of Hanover), Teboho Moja (New York University), and David Mills (University of Oxford) for delivering keynotes at the two conferences. We appreciate Sandra Felix Manuel (UEM), Pedro Guiliche (Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education, Mozambique), Winston Kwame Abroampa (KNUST), Sarita Monjane Henrikson (UPM), and Christine Müller (University of Bonn) for animating thematic round tables. We thank Oskar Levis for his kindness in editing and reviewing the manuscript.

Emnet Tadesse Woldegiorgis (University of Johannesburg, AMCHES), John Bennett and Christine Hededam (Brill) have rendered invaluable support and guidance throughout the publication process of this collection, ensuring it was executed with compassion and care.

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# Towards a Conceptual History of the University in Africa

## *Grand Narratives and Competing Models*

*Patrício V. Langa and David Kaldewey*

### Abstract

Is there such a thing as an “African university”? What characterises an “African” university? What does it mean to be an African university, apart from being a university in Africa? What insights can we gain by studying the university in Africa? These questions guide our exploration in this conceptual chapter. To answer them, we examine the grand narratives and competing models that have shaped the way African universities define their identities as distinct, socially situated institutions. We start by exploring the idea of the university as a travelling concept and show that the modern university underwent significant transformations as it expanded beyond Western societies to become a global institution. As the European model spread across the world during the colonial and capitalist developments of the 19th and 20th centuries, it adapted to incorporate different features relevant to new contexts. With the rise of the postcolonial condition in the second half of the 20th century, nationally rooted institutions began to evolve. As they negotiated their institutional fabric and societal role, they reflected both global trends and local realities. To better understand this process, we discuss in detail four narratives and corresponding models that have shaped and continue to shape the idea of the university in Africa.

### Keywords

African University – conceptual history – travelling concepts – narratives – models

## 1 Introduction: The University as a Travelling Concept

There is a sense in which we can think of the University in Africa as a travelling concept. According to cultural theorist Mieke Bal (2002), travelling concepts refer to ideas, theories, and terms that move across disciplines, cultures, and languages, taking on new meanings and interpretations. Bal proposes

a research program that outlines different models for the study of culture, explores avenues for interdisciplinary exchange, assesses key concepts and traces their travels across various disciplinary, historical, and national contexts. Thus, to trace the travelling of concepts means to map both their transfer from one discipline, approach, or culture of research to another and to identify the transformations which emerge during this process.

If we accept that the idea of the university did not originate in Africa, can we logically assume that it is a travelling concept? Yes, but we go beyond Bal's focus on how concepts cross disciplinary boundaries. We assume that concepts travel not only in the intellectual and academic space but, quite literally, in geographical and political spaces and socio-cultural environments. More generally, concepts matter not only in academia but also in the real world of higher education development and science policy (Schauz & Kaldewey, 2018). The concept of the university has travelled many roads, some of them connecting Europe and Africa as well as other regions of the globalised world. What we learn from Bal is that a concept is no longer the same after the journey. Furthermore, such journeys are not one-way trips, starting "here" and ending "there." Rather, following a concept through time and space implies a transnational perspective (Middell, 2014) that blurs the boundaries between the Coloniser and the Colonised, the "West" and the "Rest," the "Global North" and the "Global South." Therefore, the university in Europe is no longer the same since its idea has travelled the globe and in turn become influenced by non-European traditions, contexts, and policies.

In the 1960s the question of the Western origins of the "African university" was already raised by scholars such as Eric Ashby (1964), who wrote a detailed account of how Britain after the Second World War established universities in "her [!] tropical African territories" – to use the words of P.C.C. Evans, who reviewed the book in the leading British science journal *Nature* (Evans, 1965). The book was about institutions such as the University College Khartoum, the University College of the Gold Coast, the University College of Ibadan, and Makerere College. These colleges were affiliated with leading British universities, funded by the British government, and administered by the British "Inter-University Council for Higher Education in the Colonies" – in short, these were very British institutions. Nonetheless, after one or two decades, they became the leading universities of the newly independent African nation states: The University of Khartoum in Nigeria (1961), the University of Ghana (1961), the University of Ibadan in Nigeria (1962), and Makerere University in Uganda (1970). At the end of the journey, we find African universities.

From today's perspective, it is not surprising that Evans identified a "pattern of tension" in Ashby's book:

He seeks to trace the pattern of tension which has arisen in Africa between the English (and to some extent the European) idea of a university on the one hand, and, on the other, the demands of African politicians and intellectuals that their universities shall be product of their own soil, shall reflect their own national aspirations, and fulfil the expectations Africans have of them. (Evans, 1965, p. 731)

Six decades later, politicians, academics, and intellectuals have yet to solve the issue of the true character of the university in Africa. Whether there are genuinely “African universities” or whether there are mostly “universities in Africa” of colonial descent still divides expert and layperson opinions.

Although Ashby’s observations were mainly concerned with the universities in the British colonies of Ghana and Nigeria, scholars focusing on former French and Portuguese universities have identified similar tensions (Shabani, 2007; Da Costa Rosário, 2014; Langa, 2014). More recently, this tension became the subject of debate far beyond scholarly circles. Post-Apartheid South African universities in particular came under the spotlight in the wake of the 2015/2016 *#RhodesMustFall* student movement against the symbolic violence of colonial memorabilia and legacies (Nyamushosho & Chipangura, 2024).<sup>1</sup> In a way, Ashby anticipated such postcolonial protests: A few years after Ghana became the first African nation to ascend to independence in 1957, he criticised what he considered to be the lack of consideration given to preventing the wholesale export of the idea of the English university to Africa, thus overlooking the demands, structures, functions, and curricula of and for the African habitat.

Ashby, in other words, analysed the (British) university as a travelling concept and studied how these journeys resulted in a specific institutional fabric of higher education in the newly established African national states. In doing so, he follows Charles W. Eliot, a former president of Harvard University, who, more than a century ago, did the same when reflecting the origins of the “American university.” Eliot stressed that “a university must grow from seed” and “cannot be transplanted from England or Germany.” Thus, he claimed, “when the American university appears, it will not be a copy of foreign universities ... but the slow and natural outgrowing of American social and political habits” (quoted in Ashby, 1964, p. 4).

These historical accounts, as outdated as they may be, point to questions of lasting relevance: First, there is the general question of how travelling concepts change their character. If the idea of the university travels from one context and another, and gets transferred or transplanted into a new site, does it necessarily carry the same ethos of its original context? In other words, what

needs to be done to translate, recontextualise, and redefine a concept while simultaneously rupturing from its original context? And second, regarding the current situation of African higher education: Is the “African university” still in the process of moving away from its European/Western roots and becoming more aligned with the African social and political environment?

The chapters in this book address these questions and shed light on these transformative processes in various ways. They invite us to negotiate the fabric of the African University conceptually, historically, sociologically, epistemologically, and politically, and they let us consider whether the transformative processes needed to create distinct African universities are attainable goals or moving targets. The world in 2024 looks very different from that of 1964 when Ashby lamented the fate of the African university as an export of the European model. He referred to “cultural nationalism” both on the European and the African side and remained ambivalent regarding the positive and negative effects for the development of African universities. Since then, the world has become more interconnected due to globalisation, resulting in a rapid exchange of ideas, concepts, and models, including those related to universities (Perkin, 2007; Frank & Meyer, 2020). If these concepts are mostly centred in the European tradition, this process can be seen as Western cultural transnationalism, or “hegemonic” globalisation. However, reviewing the literature of the last decade we find many approaches that push back against the uncritical spread and adoption of Western ideas and models.

In this introductory chapter we argue that to understand the fabric of the African university, one has to understand how the concept has travelled across time and space, crossed cultural, geographical, and geopolitical boundaries and been subject to multiple processes of translation. The institutional and organisational forms of the university that we see today in the African continent are the result of these journeys and translations. Of course, colonialism plays a significant role in the concatenation of events, but it does not necessarily determine the whole process. Analysing the African university from the perspective of conceptual history thus urges us to consider the many other contexts, events, and narratives that shaped and changed the travelling concept.

In particular, we must ask about role of Africa in this process: In what ways did the various incorporations and appropriations by the so-called local contexts change the character of the university? What has become African and what remains alien in the diverse modern higher education institutions (HEIs) throughout the African continent? Before claiming that “Africanness” is an essential characteristic to be achieved by the university in Africa, should we not first consider the multiple meanings of “Africanness”

and “Africa”? What criteria should be used to establish the core values and principles that define the Africanness of an African university? Who should be responsible for developing these criteria, and under what conditions? Is this task meant to be undertaken by scholars specialized in higher education studies, science and technology studies, and higher education management and policy? Or rather by scholars specialized in cultural studies, history, and decolonisation? And within these many research fields, which experts most truly represent all Africans? And if they do, on what basis do they speak for everyone?

While these questions are legitimate, it is also evident that answering them will not result in a satisfactory definition of the African university. Each contemporary university in each social context is influenced not only by the “local” and the “global” context but by various cultural factors and geopolitical developments. Beyond the European, colonial, and postcolonial influence on the African university, new winds of change also emerge from Asia, particularly China and India.<sup>2</sup>

This introductory chapter is structured into five sections. So far, we presented the idea of the university as a travelling concept. Section 2 explores the continuity and discontinuity of universities in Africa, considering both their ancient and modern forms. Section 3 provides the theoretical background. In Section 4, we discuss in detail four grand narratives and corresponding models that shape the university landscape in Africa. The final section offers a conclusion.

## 2 Ancient and Modern Universities in Africa: Continuity or Discontinuity?

Before we address the complexities of the appropriation and contestation of current narratives and models of the university in the African context, we need to discuss the question of continuity and discontinuity between the ancient and the modern university (Cameron, 1966; Perkin, 2007; Woldegiorgis, 2023). It is essential to first address the distinction between ancient and contemporary universities because the idea of university at stake, even in Ashby’s case, is the modern university.

The debate about the origins of the university in Africa has turned increasingly towards truisms. There are two main narratives representing two opposing historical views. First, there are those who firmly assert that the university in Africa can be traced back to pre-colonial ancient times. Second, there are those who criticize this view because it fails to acknowledge the impact of

modern, colonial, and postcolonial eras on the types of universities present on the continent. The first narrative glorifies the pre-colonial ancient university in Africa, while the second narrative acknowledges forms of higher learning in pre-colonial Africa but rejects the idea that there is a structural or ideological continuity connecting these institutions with the modern colonial and post-colonial universities on the continent. In other words, the two accounts agree about the existence of relevant and valuable institutions of higher learning in pre-colonial Africa,<sup>3</sup> but they disagree about the question of continuity or discontinuity.

This section aims to resolve the debate and establish a foundation for reconceptualising and theorising the African university. The crucial methodological question here is whether and in what regard it is appropriate to establish continuity or discontinuity between the contemporary character of the university in Africa and the pre-colonial and ancient forms of higher learning. In fact, this question not only matters in the case of the university in Africa but more generally for a global history of universities.

The first narrative builds on our historical knowledge about pre-modern higher learning institutions and their cultural significance for the African continent (Lulat, 2005).<sup>4</sup> Early forms of such institutions were found in old civilizations in what is now North and Western Africa. Research indicates that Tunisia's Ez-Zitouna University, established in 737 AD as an Islamic school, is the world's oldest operating institution (Waruru, 2023). Beyond that, there are several other ancient proto-universities: The University of Al-Qarawiyyin in Fez, Morocco, established in 859 AD, is recognised by UNESCO and Guinness World Records as the oldest continuously operating university in the world (Muhammad Nazmul & Md. Faruk, 2021). The Al-Azhar University in Egypt, established in 970 AD, was founded as a mosque and Islamic law school (Fattah, 2019). The University of Sankoré in Mali, dating back to the 13th century, was a renowned centre of Islamic learning and trade in Timbuktu (Clarke, 1977; Cleaveland, 2008). The ancient institutions of higher learning played a crucial role in preserving and sharing knowledge, especially in the fields of Islamic scholarship, mathematics, astronomy, and medicine.

The second narrative builds on a global history of universities that does not take Africa as a special case. Rather, it emphasises that in premodern times there have been institutions of higher learning all around the world. Many of them can be understood as containing in one way or other elements of an idea that later became labelled as "the university." These traditions are summarised by historian Harold Perkin as follows:<sup>5</sup>

The Confucian schools for the mandarin bureaucracy of imperial China, the Hindu *gurukulas* and Buddhist *vihares* for the priests and monks of medieval India, the *madrasas* for the mullahs and Quranic judges of Islam, the Aztec and Inca temple schools for the priestly astronomers of pre-Columbian America, the Tokugawa *han* schools for Japanese samurai – all taught the high culture, received doctrine, literary and/or mathematical skills of their political or religious masters, with little room for questioning or analysis. (Perkin, 2007, 159)

In a similar vein, Perkin discusses the character of the monastic schools of early medieval Europe and the *athenaeums* and *lyceums* of ancient Greece, which undeniably shared similarities with the medieval European university: They not only upheld religious study and classical learning but also enabled free speculative thought and the questioning of authority (Perkin, 2007, p. 159). However, the university as an institution with its permanence was not achieved in the same way in ancient Greece and early medieval Europe due to the fragmentation of authority and the lack of a corporate form.

While there is broad agreement about the rich intellectual heritage in many regions of the premodern world and about the fact that all civilizations, including those in Africa, developed forms of higher education “to train their ruling, priestly, military, and other service elites” (Perkin, 2007, p. 159), the two accounts disagree on how exactly the past is linked to the present. The first narrative suggests a direct connection between ancient forms of higher learning institutions in pre-colonial civilizations and modern institutions. In contrast, the second narrative argues that only in medieval Europe did an institution recognisable as a university arise: “a school of higher learning combining teaching and scholarship and characterized by its corporate autonomy and academic freedom” (Perkin, 2007, p. 159). Focusing on the question of African universities, Mahmood Mamdani, in line with the global historical account given by Perkin, argues that though there had been institutions of higher education in the premodern era, there is “only one particular historical experience – the Western – that became globalised during the modern colonial era” (Mamdani, 2019, p. 48). If this is true, then tracing the origins of the university in Africa to its ancient and pre-colonial heritage rather than considering it a colonial legacy can be misleading and ineffective, as it ignores the historical realities of colonisation and globalisation:

It is striking, in the postcolonial era, how little the modern African university has to do with African institutions. It draws its inspiration from

the colonial period and takes as its model the discipline based, gated community that maintained a distinction between clearly defined groups: administrators, academics and fee-paying students. The origins of this arrangement lay in 19th century Berlin, and Humboldt University, founded in 1810 in the aftermath of Napoleon's conquest of Prussia. The African university makes its appearance later in the 19th century. (Mamdani, 2018)

Africa's experience with the university, as with other institutions of modernity (e.g., science, religion, labour), is ambivalent (Macamo, 2005). It is this ambivalence that is articulated in Mamdani's passage, where the university is both foreign to Africa's traditional institutions and integral to Africa's modernity.<sup>6</sup> Following this line of argumentation, there is a fundamental discontinuity between precolonial and modern Africa.

To summarize, we discussed two sets of ideas intended to explain the "ancient," "pre-colonial," and "pre-modern" origins, on the one side, and the "Western," "modern," and "colonial" origins, on the other side, of the university in Africa. One theory claims that the origins of the university in Africa should be traced back to the ancient and pre-colonial forms of higher learning that existed before the colonial rule. The other theory argues that universities in Africa, in their institutional and organisational forms, are a direct legacy of the colonial administration.

How can we navigate between and beyond these two narratives? A third theory, by Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2017), posits a "triple heritage" in the genealogy of higher education institutions in Africa: (I) the *pre-colonial* (II) the *colonial* and (III) the (*post-colonial*) "*African*" *university*. There seems to be a continuing and developmental lineage of the university in Africa from pre-colonial, colonial, to post-colonial, suggesting that the condition of possibility for the true character of the "African" university resides in the third stage.

The problem with the chronological and genealogical approaches to the African university is the emphasis on either the "myth" of origin (genesis) or the colonial reference. The theorisation of the university in Africa is demarcated with references to the (pre-colonial) past, the colonial, and the (post)-colonial, without the self-constitutive account of the lived and living experiences in contemporary universities in Africa. The genealogical approach emphasises finding an essence rather than exploring the dynamics of the process as constitutive of new realities. Hence, the debate tends to be normative rather than interpretative and fails to understand the complexity of confluences and influences that make up the living fabric of the African university.

### 3 Theoretical Background: Grand Narratives and Competing Models

If we understand the African university as travelling concept, it is evident that during its journey, this concept has not only travelled many places but has also encountered diverse narratives, which all have in one way or another remodelled its identity. In the following, we will focus on some *grand narratives* that have been particularly influential in the realms of higher education policy and institutional development.

With the notion of grand narratives, we refer to the French philosopher and literary critic Jean-François Lyotard (1984). On the one hand, Lyotard used the concept of narrative in a very broad sense, alluding to “ideas, concepts, notions, or beliefs which can function to legitimate certain social actions and practices” (Buchanan, 2018). On the other hand, in his book about the “Postmodern Condition,” Lyotard (1984) famously asserted the end of such grand narratives: The predominant characteristic of knowledge under postmodernity is an “incredulity towards metanarratives” (Lyotard, 1984, p. XXIV). The modern period, in contrast, legitimated knowledge “with reference to a meta discourse ... making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of the Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth” (Lyotard, 1984, p. XXIII) – we can add here that the European university itself often served as such a grand narrative. However, with “the obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation ... the narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal” (Lyotard, 1984, p. XXIV). This does not imply that narrative forms are becoming extinct, however. In place of metanarrative mechanisms, a multiplicity of language games and “smaller narratives” (Jameson, in Lyotard 1984, p. XI) come into play; these are not legitimated through reference to metanarratives but are provisionally “legitimated by the simple fact that they do what they do” (Lyotard, 1984, p. 23).

In short, following Lyotard, the grand narratives of modernity have been challenged and replaced by a multitude of micro-narratives. These reflect the unique experiences, local perspectives, and identities of individuals and communities, emphasizing the complexity and plurality of human experience. This shift highlights the importance of local voices and challenges the notion of a single, all-encompassing truth, embracing instead a multiplicity of truths shaped by varying contexts and lived realities. When we apply this logic to understanding the origins and evolution of African universities, it becomes manifest that the previously dominant narrative – where African institutions largely replicated a universal European model – has been challenged

significantly. Although many narratives still emerge from Europe or Western societies, these perspectives are increasingly being scrutinized. This critical examination underscores the importance of understanding how universities and educational systems can be effectively adapted to serve the unique contexts of African societies rather than adhering to universal models that may not resonate with local realities.

Another concept relevant for our analysis is that of *competing models*. In academic as well as in public debates about the university it has always been common practice to establish certain models to deal with the empirical variety of HEIs and with the divergent normative views of what a university is for (Collini, 2012). There is, therefore, a descriptive and a normative dimension in such models: On the one hand, a model simply points to a common denominator in the fabric of a set of existing universities. On the other hand, it refers to ideas and expectations about the societal function and the value of these institutions. Furthermore, a model usually draws a distinction between those HEIs that fulfil certain characteristics and those that do not. In a longue durée historical perspective, we are used to referring to some prominent models, such as the early modern four-faculty university, the 18th century Enlightenment university, the 19th century German research university, or the 20th century American research university. Another common way of talking about models is the comparison of institutional types such as “super research universities,” “liberal arts colleges,” “regional universities,” “specialized institutions,” and “virtual universities” (Palfreyman & Temple, 2017, p. 45). It is also possible to characterize models by highlighting specific missions (Pinheiro et al., 2015), functions (Castells, 2017), or purposes (Badat, 2023), resulting in functionally specified types such as the research university, the teaching-oriented university, or the entrepreneurial university.

In our analysis, we assume that most models of the university do not exist independently but are embedded in narratives and derive their legitimacy from the broader societal and historical context. However, models do not simply passively mirror grand narratives. Rather, a successful model can itself develop into a meta narrative or transform the narrative in which it is embedded. Take, for example, the intricate history of the idea of the Humboldtian University. Originally, in the early 19th century, Wilhelm von Humboldt presented a concrete plan for a concrete university in Berlin. This “model institution” (Anderson, 2004) was embedded in the grand narrative of German idealism. During the 19th century, it evolved to become the German “research university,” embedded in another grand narrative, namely that of societal and scientific progress. Only in the early 20th century, however, did people begin to invent what today we know as the “Humboldtian model” (Paletschek, 2002).

TABLE 1.1 Grand narratives and competing models – An overview

Grand narratives	Competing models	Timeline
(1) First wave of decolonisation	– The Africanised university (vs. the European university)	1960s
(2) The African condition and the developmental university	– The university as an institution of nation-building	1960s
	– The university in the marketplace	1980s
	– Universities as engines of economic development	1990s
(3) The global condition and the competitive research university	– The world class university model	2000s
	– The research university in Africa	2010s
	– The flagship university in Africa	2010s
(4) Second wave of decolonisation	– The new African university (vs. the European university, again)	2015s

During the 20th century, this model hardly described the reality of institutional structures but became a grand narrative, a frame of reference for higher education policies and academic self-reflection in Germany and beyond. In other words, it would no longer make sense to refer to the Humboldtian university as a *model*, but we can assume that many university models relate to some aspects of this old and lofty Humboldtian *narrative*.

In the next section, we take a closer look at the grand narratives and competing models that shaped the fabric of African universities since the 1960s. Table 1.1 contains an overview and illustrates how within the grand narratives we can discern competing models. We cannot, in this introduction, explain how these narratives have been challenged by micro narratives or counter-hegemonic practices in the African university. However, the other chapters in this volume illustrate that and how such grand narratives have always been in tension with the manifold institutional structures, social practices, and historical traditions of the diverse HEIs in Africa.

#### 4 Narratives and Models Shaping Universities in Africa

The university landscape in Africa has been shaped by shifting narratives. In the 1960s and 1970s, the focus was on the genealogy of the university in Africa,

particularly in newly independent African countries (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017). As explained above, the debate about the continuity or discontinuity between ancient and modern universities resulted in two contradictory narratives. This was, however, primarily an academic debate. At times, not least in the context of the emergent African nation states, it fed the ideological function of the University (Castells, 2017), but its influence on the formation of higher education policies and organizational development on the ground was limited. To understand the development of universities in Africa *after* decolonisation we must consider several other grand narratives, as well as the competing models emerging within these narrative frameworks.

In the following, we present four grand narratives that have been relevant to the identity of the African university in the last 60 years (see Table 1.1 for an overview). We list them roughly in the historical order of their appearance, though in reality they often coexist: We start with the idea of the Africanised university that followed the first wave of decolonisation right after the independence of African nation states. Second, we discuss the idea of the developmental university that emerged in the 1960s, became prominent in the 1980s, and brought forth various models, each focusing on specific functions of the university. The third narrative refers to the idea that within the global framework of higher education, universities necessarily become competitive, fighting for their place in the global prestige economy. This framework emerged in the 1990s and became dominant in the 2000s, where we can discern the proclamation of “standardised” models of the research university. Finally, we come back to more recent debates about the decolonised African university.

We do not claim that this typology is complete. There have been other narratives, and there will be more in the future. However, we assume that the variety of narratives and corresponding models presented here illustrates quite well how the character and identity of the African university has been negotiated in the course of its history. For the time being, we cannot predict whether one of these narratives will take up a dominant position relative to the others, nor do we argue that this is what is needed. Rather, we assume that the concept of the African university as we know it has travelled across all these lands, learned from a variety of experiences, and then moved on, without ultimately having settled down.

#### 4.1 *The First Wave of Decolonisation and the Africanised University*

Following the independence of African countries at the end of the 1950s and the early 1960s, it became imperative to redefine the ethos of the university. The existing HEIs, established by colonial authorities, failed to embody the

aspirations or demographics of the African population. Despite being labelled as African universities, these institutions lacked a distinct African identity (Ashby, 1964; Assié-Lumumba, 2007). Nearly every aspect of these institutions, including the student population, staff, curricula, and governance, predominantly reflected the European model of the colonial metropole.

The intensified efforts to decolonise and transform the universities into authentic African universities gave rise to the narrative of “Africanisation” (Horsthemke, 2004, 2017; Metz, 2017; Mbembe, 2019). A key feature of this narrative is a notion of authenticity that implies the transformation of academic and student bodies to represent the countries’ demographics: The native population that once was excluded and prevented from attending universities would now be admitted. The same applies to the academic and administrative staff, who during the colonial time were almost entirely comprised of the white population. Thus, to “Africanise” meant gradually hiring more black staff (Langa, 2014). This transformation of the university demographic at all levels was the most visible part of the Africanisation process (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017, pp. 60–61). There are other areas in which the university’s ethos, namely, its epistemologies, curricula, and institutional and organisational forms ought to be transformed. Given the scale and complexity of these multiple tasks, it is not surprising that the debate about the Africanisation of universities has been ongoing for several decades (Ashby, 1964; Moulder, 1995; Horsthemke, 2004; Lulat, 2005; Woldegiorgis & Doevenspeck, 2013; Fredua-Kwarteng & Oforu, 2018).

The exact meaning of Africanisation has remained contested – various definitions and approaches emerged. A common denominator is the idea of developing a new, resolute philosophy of higher education informed by African cultures and a fundamental redefinition of the university’s role in society (Horsthemke, 2004, 2017). The affirmative stance of this narrative is evident in the much-quoted definition by Malegapuru William Makgoba:

Africanisation is the process or vehicle for defining, interpreting, promoting and transmitting African thought, philosophy, identity, and culture. It encompasses an African mind-set shift from the European to an African paradigm. Through Africanisation we affirm and identify ourselves in the world community. (Makgoba, 1997, p. 203)

The narrative of Africanisation has from the beginning been closely linked to the aim of decolonising the university. By prioritizing African voices and scholarship, the goal was to create a more inclusive and representative educational environment that resonates with the lived realities of the continent’s

people. Thus, Africanisation is often described as a renewed focus on Africa and entails salvaging what has been stripped from the continent (Yesufu, 1973, pp. 3–10, 37–45; Horsthemke, 2017).

In summary, the narrative of Africanisation of universities represents a complex and ongoing process that requires persistent effort and adaptation. As these institutions work to authentically represent the diverse cultures, histories, and values of their societies, they must also engage thoughtfully with the global community. This interplay involves not only borrowing fresh ideas and concepts from other parts of the world but also critically evaluating how these can be woven into the fabric of the African university. As universities navigate this intricate landscape, they are tasked with continuously negotiating what new elements to incorporate into their curricula, policies, and institutional practices. This ensures that they remain relevant and reflective of the societies they serve, fostering an environment that promotes both local and global awareness. Ultimately, the Africanisation of universities is not a destination but an evolving journey that champions the integration of diverse perspectives and fosters a richer African academic ethos.

#### 4.2 *The African Condition and the Developmental University*

A second narrative that emerged after independence and lasted for a few decades revolves around the idea of the “developmental university.” This narrative is embedded in broader political and policy discourses about the African condition. It aims not only at assigning the university a particular role in society but also defining its African character as an African institution and as fulfilling functions deemed necessary for the development of African societies. Accordingly, this narrative partly builds on the first narrative about the “Africanised” university.

The discussion surrounding the developmental university model is deeply intertwined with three significant historical contexts. In each context, a distinct model emerged, assigning the university a specific mission within the broader narrative of development. The first context is the nation-building agenda of the 1960s, a pivotal period characterised by newly independent nations striving to establish their identities and infrastructures, with universities playing a critical role in fostering national development and progress. The second context is the university crisis of the 1980s. This crisis was a consequence of economic turmoil and widespread economic instability. During this time, universities faced significant challenges, including funding cutbacks and shifts in educational priorities, forcing them to rethink their position in the marketplace. Third, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, as African universities began to emerge from these turbulent times, a new discourse about the increasingly interconnected

global knowledge economy emerged. This context pushed universities to align their educational goals with global economic trends and led to various reconceptualisations of the university as an engine of economic development. As we consider these varied historical contexts, it becomes evident that within the grand narrative of development the idea of the university takes on a multitude of meanings, reflecting the unique challenges and aspirations of each era.

#### 4.2.1 The University as an Institution of Nation-Building

In the 1960s, African universities were praised for their role in development, social mobilization, and nation-building. The developmental narrative about the university in Africa was an extension and a consequence of the Africanisation narrative and the role of the state in relation to the university in Africa. As Mamdani (1993) shows, many academics believed that the state had an important role in managing the university, especially in the context of Africanisation. However, they soon faced government appointments and interference that conflicted with the broader principle of institutional autonomy (Perkin, 2007, p. 189).

African governments were trying to reconstruct African identity by creating strong African institutions which would propagate a sense of national belonging among the public (Woldegiorgis & Doevenspeck, 2013, p. 40; Badat, 2023). Furthermore, the nation-building effort in the 1960s was fuelled by the powerful Pan-African movement – both African-educated elites and governments were driven by a deep sense of nationalism (Seepe, 2004; Woldegiorgis & Doevenspeck, 2013). The nation-building role of the university is aligned with Castell's (2017, p. 35) notion of an "ideological apparatus," in which the university is expected, among other things, to strengthen the sovereignty of the new nation states and to train the "new man" (Langa, 2013) with a decolonised mindset. The university's public mission was for the newly politically sovereign African governments to reconstruct African identity by creating solid African institutions with strong national pride. To summarize, what we observe in this historical context is a model of the university that derives its meaning from being a core institution of nation-building.

#### 4.2.2 The University in the Marketplace

By the 1980s and 1990s, a looming crisis had beset many African universities, primarily fuelled by the deepening socio-political unrest and the sharp decline in economic conditions throughout the continent (Ravenhill, 1986; Atteh, 1996; Mamdani, 2008; Woldegiorgis & Doevenspeck, 2013). This challenging environment was characterized by instability, inadequate funding, and a growing sense of disillusionment within academic circles. In response to these pressing

issues, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund issued a series of recommendations that prompted a dramatic restructuring of educational priorities (Psacharopoulos et al., 1986) and resulted in a “crisis era” for the universities (Zezeza, 2009; Badat, 2023, p. 14).

One of the most significant suggestions was the closure of several African universities, deemed unsustainable in the face of limited resources. The World Bank advocated for a strategic pivot towards primary and secondary education, asserting that these levels of education offered much higher rates of return on investment compared to higher education (Psacharopoulos, 1985; Fredua-Kwarteng & Ofofu, 2018). This shift meant that funds and resources, which had once supported higher learning institutions, were redirected towards enhancing the foundational stages of education. The hope was that by investing in primary and secondary education, countries could improve overall educational outcomes and stimulate economic growth. However, this transition not only affected the immediate landscape of higher education but also set the stage for long-term challenges, leaving universities struggling to fulfil their roles as centres of research, innovation, and critical thought in an increasingly complex world.

While the economic advisers from the World Bank proposed the closure of African universities, this suggestion was in fact firmly rejected by most of the vice-chancellors (Mamdani, 2008). Following this, a series of university reforms were implemented as part of structural adjustments and fiscal discipline. This led to a decline in public investment in African higher education and subjected universities to the challenges of a neoliberal marketplace (Lebeau, 2008). Consequently, the education sector began to open to private operators, resulting in the commercialization, privatization, and commodification of higher education (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005; Naidoo, 2007). This transformation significantly shaped the future landscape and fabric of African universities in the following decades.

This dramatic situation of the African universities in the 1980s illustrates how the idea of the university has been transformed within the grand narrative of development: The dominant model of the nation-building university, which served a public good, was replaced by a competing model that conceptualized the university as outside the responsibility of the state. Following the neoliberal ideology, African universities were thrown into the marketplace.

#### 4.2.3 Universities as Engines of Economic Development

In the wake of the African university crises of the 1980s, the World Bank faced substantial criticism for its rigid “one size fits all” policies and the ideological bias evident in its rate-of-return studies on education. However, starting in

the 1990s, there has been a significant expansion and diversification of micro-narratives and competing university models worldwide in direct response to the dominant narrative of a neoliberal, market-driven society (Sifuna, 2014). In the decades that followed, a significant number of new studies and comprehensive reports emerged, many again commissioned by the World Bank (1999, 2002, 2007, 2009). These investigations provided compelling evidence of favourable rates of return on public investment in higher education, effectively overturning earlier scepticism. This body of research fostered the development of a robust narrative that intricately linked higher education to economic advancement (Bloom et al., 2006; Cloete et al., 2017). As the global landscape began to shift towards the knowledge economy – a dynamic environment where innovation, advanced skills, and intellectual resources drive growth – it became increasingly evident that investing in higher education is not just beneficial but essential for fostering long-term economic prosperity and societal progress (Pillay, 2010; Teal, 2011; Molla & Cuthbert, 2018).

What we can observe in this context is another shift within the grand narrative of development that again puts the universities centre stage: They were now modelled as “engines of development” (Castells, 1994; Cloete & Maassen, 2015; Cloete et al., 2017). The idea of the African university as a driver of development has gained popularity, especially in political discussions. This perspective often overshadows the traditional role of the university as a primary institution for knowledge (Langa, 2009). The United Nations’ implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and their successor, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), has further emphasized a practical and instrumental view of universities in Africa (Bekele, 2024). This has led to a growing distinction in political and policy discourse between what are considered relevant fields, such as Applied Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), and those viewed as less valuable, for example many disciplines in the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH). This shift has had serious consequences, leading in particular to the defunding of SSH departments (Mkandawire, 1997; Mamdani, 2016).

In summary, the notion of the university as a catalyst for development in Africa firmly shapes political thought, discourse, and higher education policy. While a clear model for a developmental university remains elusive, the ongoing debate has profoundly transformed the social and institutional landscape of the university across the continent. Until today, the concept of development is contested, particularly regarding its often-narrow economic focus. Therefore, the debate about the developmental university resurfaces again and again. For example, Fredua-Kwarteng and Ofofu (2018) recently suggested an updated definition of the model of the developmental university. They define it as “any

university that focuses on contributing to all aspects of the development of its home country. It does so through research, analysis, teaching, learning, advocacy and its relationship with industry and government.” As an example of the relevance of the model they point to the Dakar African Higher Education Summit, where former South African president Thabo Mbeki “endorsed the idea that African universities should be placed at the centre of the national development agenda,” and former UN secretary general Kofi Annan suggested that African universities can be “generators of research data to African governments for evidence-based policymaking.”

#### 4.3 *The Global Condition and the Competitive Research University*

In the context of our increasingly globalised world, various models and concepts of higher education continue to gain traction and circulate among institutions worldwide. African universities are not exempt from this trend; they are actively integrating into the global exchange of ideas and educational philosophies. This integration means that these universities may or may not have the power to selectively adopt certain narratives while firmly rejecting others, a process that is heavily influenced by the unique local realities, cultural contexts, and socio-economic conditions they face.

To understand the influence of this *global condition* one must consider the “soft power” of ideas in the framework of globalisation (Beland & Cox, 2010). Since the 2000s, universities around the world are redefining themselves as “global” institutions, closely interconnected and in fierce competition with one another (Krücken, 2019; Hart & Rodgers, 2024). African universities, in this context, are shaped by the same global forces as other universities, even the former colonial powers and “developed” nations in the Global North. In other words, the *competitive research university* is part and parcel of the grand narrative of the global condition.

How did this new narrative transform the landscape of higher education in Africa? At first sight, there is continuity, as the older narrative of the developmental university and its role for the economy has not been replaced. Rather, the challenge for African universities is now that they have to prove themselves not only in the traditional economy and its marketplace but also in the increasingly competitive terrain of the “prestige economy” (Blackmore & Kandiko, 2011). This environment is characterized by a relentless pursuit of recognition and status, compelling universities around the globe to adopt a variety of strategies and dialogues centred around academic rankings, excellence claims, and excellence initiatives (Altbach & Salmi, 2011; Yudkevich et al., 2023). As these rankings gain prominence, they serve as critical benchmarks that influence perceptions of quality and value (Hokstad & Bento, 2011; Kayyali, 2023). In

response, African universities are rethinking their roles and missions, implementing new practices aimed at enhancing research output, improving teaching standards, and fostering international partnerships (Vasudeva & Mogaji, 2020; Ndibuuza et al., 2021).

In the following, we distinguish three competing models of the university that have emerged in the context of the grand narrative of the global condition: first, the *world class university* as a new standard model, which, however, is hardly an achievable goal for most HEIs in Africa. As a reaction, higher education researchers have suggested two alternatives: on the one hand, a revised version of the *research university model*, on the other hand, a variant of the *flagship university model*, which refocuses on the national environment of universities.

#### 4.3.1 The World-Class University Model

The grand narrative of the global condition is not specific to the African context. Rather, its starting point is a model of the university which is fundamentally “global” instead of “national.” In the literature, this model is described as the “emerging global model” (Mohrman et al., 2008) and the “standard university model” (Palfreyman & Temple, 2017, p. 44). It is characterized by a strong focus on research, a high degree of autonomy from central government and a global perspective that transcends the boundaries of the nation-state (Mohrman et al., 2008). This global model has become even more dominant with the rise of university rankings (Hazelkorn, 2015; Cloete et al., 2016) and excellence initiatives (Salmi, 2016; Yudkevich et al., 2023). Often, it is assumed that only a small number of universities worldwide can compete with these truly global universities, which thus have been dubbed as “world-class universities” (Altbach & Balán, 2007; Deem et al., 2008; Altbach & Salmi, 2011).

It is doubtful whether the model of the world-class university is a meaningful and achievable ideal for those universities that do not have the huge resources needed to compete with the most prominent global research universities, particularly those in the US (Lee, 2013). However, the world-class university model has an appeal that “lures more and more institutions to become research universities” (Mohrman et al., 2008, p. 19) – even if that is an “implausible dream” for most of them (Mittelman, 2018). The situation is particularly difficult for developing countries, which aim to “enter an existing market already occupied by well-developed education systems and universities” (Lee, 2013, p. 233).

#### 4.3.2 The Research University in Africa

In the mid-2010s, a new model emerged advocating for the transformation of teaching universities into research-intensive universities in Africa

(Cloete et al., 2015; Slippers et al., 2015; Cloete et al., 2018). The research university was considered by some scholars as a realistic goal, especially for a group of African universities that had begun to integrate research into their core academic activities. In other words, this new model can be understood as a way of correcting the extreme requirements coming along with the world-class university model explicated above. The background is that authors like Altbach and Salmi (2011, p. 196) argued that attaining a “world-class” status as a research university would be difficult for most African countries apart from some universities in South Africa. In response, Cloete et al. (2015) and Slippers et al. (2015) outline a model for the a research university in Africa that generates critical research while relying on fewer resources and that jettisons some of the narrow expectations associated with the world-class university model.

The establishment of the African University Research Alliance (ARUA) in 2015 unequivocally demonstrates that African universities not only respond to local demands through their teaching mission but also actively strive to align with global trends and with the ideal of a “global model” of the research university. In the case of ARUA, the primary goal is to help a group of prominent African universities to leverage their research capacity and status in order to gain wider recognition as research universities (Mtawa et al., 2022).

The primary mission of a research university is said to drive cutting-edge research and cultivate the next generation of graduate students. Therewith, the model of the African research university builds on the well-established discourse of the “knowledge society” (Ndibuuza & Langa, 2020; Ndibuuza et al., 2021) and argues that research universities are pivotal for social and economic advancement (Nyondo & Langa, 2021). We can see here that the 20th century narrative of the developmental university has had a lasting impact and is still considered relevant. However, in the 21st century there is a much stronger focus on the production of scientific knowledge, indicating that the dominant meta-narrative has shifted to emphasize the university’s role as a fundamental contributor to global knowledge production and circulation: Research universities are regarded as fundamental to a nation’s ability to conduct advanced research and provide higher education (Kearney & Lincoln, 2013; Cloete et al., 2022). They serve as a critical bridge between global science, scholarship, and a country’s scientific and knowledge framework (Altbach, 2013).

#### 4.3.3 The Flagship University in Africa

Another model that builds on a critique of the “world class university” has been advocated by the US-American higher education scholar John Aubrey Douglass (2016). With the notion of a “new flagship university” – as opposed to

the “traditional flagship university” – he tries to avoid some the shortcomings of the global excellence narrative. At the same time, however, he remains committed to the global condition and does not call into question the narrative of competition itself:

The Flagship model does not ignore international standards of excellence focused largely on research productivity, but is grounded in national and regional service, and with a specific set of characteristics and responsibilities that, admittedly, do not lend themselves to ranking regimes. (Douglass, 2016, p. 5)

In other words, Douglass’s model emphasises the universities’ role in taking charge of their respective national higher education systems, shaping their institutional missions, and significantly influencing the societies in which they operate.

Again, we can examine the model of the flagship university as a travelling concept, and we can ask whether there are specific variations of this model in different regions of the world. While Douglass aimed for a global comparative approach, he did not include Africa in his book (de Wit, in Teferra, 2017, p. VIII). This gap was addressed by Damtew Teferra (2016, 2017), who examined the “neglected contributions” of flagship universities in Africa in terms of enrolment patterns, graduate numbers, and research productivity. Based on empirical evidence covering eleven flagship universities in Africa – Addis Ababa, Botswana, Cairo, Chiekh Anta Diop, Dar es Salaam, Ibadan, Ghana, Makerere, Mauritius, Nairobi, and Zambia – Teferra can testify to an impressive performance by these institutions over a long period of time. Not least, the empirical results help to moderate “some of the critical views against such institutions regarding their contributions” (Teferra, 2016, p. 79).

The narrative surrounding flagship universities in Africa firmly challenges the notion that African universities should model themselves after top Western research institutions like Oxford or Harvard. While these Western universities have undeniably played a pivotal role both in shaping the intellectual and educational progress of their respective nations and in making substantial contributions to research, innovation, and academic distinction globally, it would not make sense for African flagship universities to bow to the specific prestige economy of Western world-class universities (Obasi, 2008; Jowi, 2012). As argued by Ndofirepi (2017, p. 154), “while acknowledging the need for excellence and competitiveness on a global scale, ... knowledge processes in African universities should not be measured against western-dominated processes due to the uniqueness of each.”

The counterclaim asserts that nearly every African nation takes great pride in its prestigious universities, such as the Makerere University in Uganda and the University of Nairobi in Kenya (Lutomiah et al., 2022; Mosi et al., 2022). These institutions have played a pivotal role in nurturing intellectual and educational advancement across the continent, serving as beacons of excellence in academia and research. The model of the flagship university, however, argues that these universities should not be exclusively evaluated based on their academic standing but also be recognised for their profound impact on cultural exchange, innovation, and the cultivation of future leaders in Africa.

In summary, African universities intricately manoeuvre within the global higher education landscape, skilfully addressing the complex interplay between local needs and global influences. Teferra's (2017) flagship university model serves as a significant alternative to Cloete et al.'s (2015) model of the African research university. Both, however, critically question the influence of the world-class university model and the Western notion of excellence, which is mostly reduced to sheer research productivity. The juxtaposition of these models underscores the complexity of contested concepts in academia, which often mirror underlying power struggles. These struggles involve academics who are not only seeking to establish their relevance within the academic community but are also striving to make meaningful contributions to policymaking and educational leadership. Their aim is to influence and facilitate organizational transformation in the African higher education landscape. By examining these models, we can better understand the dynamics at play in shaping higher education policies and practices across the continent.

#### 4.4 *A Second Wave of Decolonisation?*

A fourth narrative, which we can only touch on briefly here due to its ongoing unfolding, closes the circle and revisits the concepts of decolonisation and Africanization. It introduces a fresh perspective that contrasts with the discussions prevalent during the 1960s. This contemporary wave has been significantly influenced by recent developments in South African higher education, which have revitalized the decolonisation discourse.<sup>7</sup> Unlike previous conversations, this new dialogue reflects a broader, more global engagement that encompasses a variety of voices and experiences.

To effectively understand and analyse these shifts in the decolonisation debate, it is crucial to delineate between two distinct phases: “decolonisation<sub>1</sub>” and “decolonisation<sub>2</sub>” – this distinction, as articulated by Olúfémi Táíwò (2022) in his thought-provoking book “Against Decolonization,” serves to clarify the evolving nature of the discourse. “Decolonisation<sub>1</sub>” refers to the initial efforts

and theoretical frameworks established in the mid-20th century, whereas “decolonisation<sub>2</sub>” captures the more recent developments and arguments that reflect contemporary realities and challenges (Táíwò, 2022, p. 3). This two-phase approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of how decolonisation is being reimagined and debated in today’s academic and social landscapes.

Táíwò’s inquiry reflects his concern about the ambiguous and often imprecise ways in which the term “decolonisation” is employed, particularly by scholars and commentators who attempt to analyse the aftermath of African nations’ independence. He critiques the tendency to use “decolonisation” without a clear definition, highlighting how this vagueness can obscure the complexities and varied experiences of post-independence developments across the continent. By calling attention to this lack of clarity, Táíwò emphasizes the need for more nuanced discussions that accurately capture the social, political, and economic realities faced by newly independent countries. He posits that since African countries have maintained their independence for over fifty years, their agency as sovereign nations must be fully recognised. This agency is crucial in empowering them to shape their own destinies according to their unique contexts and aspirations. While Táíwò acknowledges the interconnectedness of African countries within a global community, he emphasizes that influences such as capitalism and neoliberalism should not be solely viewed through the lens of colonialism’s historical impact. These economic systems, while significant, operate independently and are not directly tied to the remnants of colonial control that once dictated the conditions of life in Africa. Furthermore, Táíwò asserts that the concept of decolonisation becomes irrelevant in places where there is no longer a colonial presence to undermine sovereignty or self-determination.

Táíwò’s provocative perspective invites a nuanced understanding of the contemporary African experience, highlighting both the complexities of global dynamics and the importance of self-governance. The discursive shift from “decolonisation<sub>1</sub>” to “decolonisation<sub>2</sub>” became particularly visible in South Africa during the *#RhodesMustFall* and *#FeesMustFall* student protests in 2015/2016. These protests were characterized by widespread calls for the decolonisation of education, particularly in relation to the curriculum and institutional symbols. The movements sparked crucial conversations about addressing the legacies of colonialism and apartheid in South African society and institutions (Mbembe, 2016; Habib, 2019; Mbembe, 2019; Jansen, 2023). Some authors perceive the South African new edition of the decolonisation debate as a much-needed revival to address the unresolved issues of the “Africanisation” debate from the 1960s and 1970s. According to Jonathan Jansen (2023), decolonisation resurfaced as a prominent political term during

the student protests, increasingly replacing the official use of the term “transformation” to describe changes in the post-apartheid period. This shift was driven by the belief that the initial transformation efforts had failed to deeply impact campuses and communities, prompting the call for a more radical approach (Jansen, 2023, p. 141).

In a surprising turn of events, the spread of the new wave of decolonisation (decolonialisation<sub>2</sub>) has expanded beyond its origins in the South and has begun to exert its influence on HEIs in the Global North. This shift in the trajectory of decolonisation highlights its far-reaching impact and its ability to shape perspectives and policies on a global scale. It also illustrates how travelling concepts do not simply spread from one origin into the world but rather travel back and forth, thereby transforming the “original” meanings and contexts.

We cannot do justice to the multiple, complex, and at times contradictory arguments for or against decolonisation in this chapter. On the one hand, the demand for decolonisation emerges as a powerful response to the persistent structures of unequal dependence that characterize the relationships between nations in the Global South and Global North. These structures create significant disparities in power, resources, and opportunities, highlighting a pressing need for transformative change in the global order. On the other hand, it is equally crucial to understand that all countries are part of a complex and interconnected global system of higher education. This system weaves together various institutions and influences academic practices and collaborations across borders, creating a multifaceted landscape that complicates the decolonisation narrative. Isaac Kamola (2014, p. 605) insightfully points out how African universities exemplify this complexity: They are not merely isolated entities, but rather vibrant and dynamic sites where diverse political, social, and cultural forces converge. This interplay of factors necessitates a deeper exploration of the processes involved in both decolonisation and the broader integration within the global academic framework, allowing for a richer understanding of the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

#### 4.5 *Outlook: Negotiating the Fabric of the African University*

Given the historicity, contextuality, and plurality of the grand narratives and competing models that have shaped academic and public discussions about the character of the African university since the 1960s, one can legitimately ask whether it makes sense to continue talking about an “African university” – or whether we should more consequently consider a “pluriversity,” as suggested by Kasturi Behari-Leak (in this volume). What we can learn from the conceptual history approach, in our view, is that defining the character of the African university is not about identifying fixed attributes; instead, it is an open and

ongoing process that involves negotiating its very condition of possibility. There are, however, some aspects that run through this discursive process: a tension between the global and the local, a weighing up of various functions or missions of the university, and a consideration of the different environments in which a university operates (e.g., the nation, the economy, the civil society).

It is not surprising, therefore, that we cannot distil a perfect model from all these narratives. This is not a new insight: Astute observers and experts of the African higher education landscape have recognised this before. The conceptual struggle of envisioning the African university has been poignantly addressed, for example, by Asavia Wandira, the former Vice-Chancellor of Makerere University, in his keynote speech at the Conference on “The Role of the University and Its Future in Zimbabwe” in September 1981. Wandira shared insights that still echo today:

In your search for a role for the University of Zimbabwe in the years immediately ahead, I can offer *no models of perfection*. For, in spite of concerted efforts over the last two decades in Independent Africa, *there is no agreed model or set of models for university involvement with the national economy or polity*. Instead, there have been prolonged discussions followed by a growing realization that *the search for new models for the University of Africa cannot yet be ended*. Nor can I escape from the necessity for me to suggest a model for Zimbabwe, by pointing to a ‘*World University Model*’, sometimes suggested by some scholars. There is not yet a *globalized model* whose idea and structure I would recommend you replicate in Zimbabwe. I must therefore ask you to treat me with the same tolerance that you would afford your economic advisers describing alternatives on the one hand and options on the other. (Wandira, 1981, p. 8, emphasis added)

## 5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we explored the intricate debates surrounding the notion of an “African university.” Building on Bal (2002), we suggested understanding the African university as a travelling concept, which changes its function and meaning while it travels across time and space. Furthermore, we have been leveraging Lyotard’s (1984) concept of grand narratives, which enables us to pinpoint historical and contemporary frameworks that have influenced – and in part continue to influence – the evolution and identity of African universities. These grand narratives embody an array of competing models, which African scholars

and institutions continuously encounter. The result is an inconclusive discursive process that we summarize as *the negotiation of the fabric of the African university*: Scholars as well as policy makers engage both with the historically changing grand narratives and with the competing models that were developed within these narratives. In their everyday practice they actively assess, adapt, or dismiss these ideas and critically shape a distinct sense of Africanness that resonates within the higher education landscape of the continent.

We also placed this discussion against the backdrop of global trends that have a significant impact on higher education. Among these trends are the rise of “research universities,” which emphasize the research and knowledge production function of the universities; the development of “entrepreneurial universities,” which are designed to foster innovation and drive economic growth; various campaigns focused on achieving “academic excellence” and the competitive pursuit of advantageous positions within the prestige economy of “global rankings.”

It is essential to acknowledge that while such global trends exert significant influence on the fabric of African universities, their responses are uniquely moulded by local conditions. This complex interplay underscores the dynamic relationship between grand narratives and counterhegemonic micro narratives, between global models and localized practices, ultimately shaping the mission, identity, and future trajectory of African universities in an increasingly interconnected world.

In conclusion, the study of African universities offers a unique and insightful perspective on the global landscape of higher education. By acknowledging the unique challenges, innovations, and contributions of African universities, we can enrich our perspective on the broader world of higher education and pave the way for a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to globalisation in academia. African universities, alongside their European, American, and Asian counterparts, serve as crucial sites for conceptualizing and theorizing exceptional experiences within the global higher education landscape, providing valuable insights that can inform and enrich the broader discourse on the globalisation of higher education.

The “African experience” is a complex tapestry that weaves together the historical, cultural, and aspirational facets of the lives of most Africans. The scholarly discourse surrounding the genealogy and future trajectory of the university in Africa has been multifaceted, oscillating between seeking the essence of the African university in the pre-colonial era and advocating for a more inclusive and diverse postcolonial African university. However, the prevalence of normativity and self-replicating truisms in these discussions has sometimes hindered the development of a robust conceptual framework and

language to encapsulate over six decades of university experience in politically sovereign African countries. It is paramount that knowledge production by institutions of higher learning is intricately aligned with and enriched by the multifaceted “African experience.” We suggest moving beyond the ought-to-be into conceptualising and theorising the African experience as part of the “global” interconnected field of higher education.

### Notes

- 1 See also Kasturi Behari-Leak (Chapter 3) and Lerato Posholi (Chapter 6) in this volume.
- 2 For example, the footprint of Confucius institutes characterises the landscape of many “African” university campuses (Wheeler, 2014; Kragelund & Hampwaye, 2015; Procopio, 2015; Li, 2023).
- 3 Woldegiorgis (2023, p. 44) therefore uses the term „precolonial learning spaces,” which makes it possible to refer to these institutions without having to decide whether they are to be regarded “higher education.”
- 4 See also Kasturi Behari-Leak (Chapter 3) and Bakheit Mohammed Nur (Chapter 7) in this volume.
- 5 It is noticeable that Perkin does not include any example from Africa in this introductory list of ancient institutions. However, he does refer to examples of famous Muslim colleges, such as the mosques of Sankore in Timbuctu, Oarawiyyin in Fez, and Al-Aszhar in Cairo later in his chapter (Perkin, 2007, p. 188).
- 6 For another conception of ambivalence see the Leonie Schoelen (Chapter 8) in this volume.
- 7 See also Teboho Moja (Chapter 4) and Lerato Posholi (Chapter 6) in this volume.

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# Weaving the Local into University Knowledge in Africa

*Elísio Macamo*

## Abstract

This chapter explores the relationship between the local and the universal by asking whether there is a fundamental difference between the two and showing that if such a difference exists, it must be sought at the level of values. It is suggested that the universal expresses the local through its consolidation of normative structures which determine and lend legitimacy to the kinds of questions that can be formulated in local settings. The chapter argues that to weave the local into university knowledge is to recognise when we are being normative and, therefore, to know the limits of our knowledge claims.

## Keywords

African university – weaving the local – universal – university knowledge – knowledge claims

## 1 Introduction

Placing the “African University” at the centre of thinking around the challenges of making sense of the relationship between the local and the universal is always a good idea. It immediately raises issues around the ever-important debate concerning the nature of knowledge. As it happens, and taking into account the difficult context within which science is pursued nowadays, a focus on the nature of knowledge is a focus on real scholarly issues as opposed to the moral sainthood that passes for scholarship.

This echoes Susan Wolf’s 1982 article on “Moral Saints” – whom she describes as persons whose every action is as morally good as possible, that is, persons who are as morally worthy as can be. Such people, as she further argues, lack non-moral excellence because they do not have time for personal projects, as their moral sainthood requires from them the sole devotion of their life

to society's welfare. When applied to scholarship, moral sainthood translates into self-righteousness.<sup>1</sup> The basic impulse behind such self-righteousness is a low threshold of tolerance that turns human failings, mistakes, and misgivings into cogs feeding an invisible machinery that wilfully produces human misery (Wolf, 1982).

The trouble with this is that it promotes ideology as theoretical sophistication and value judgments as analysis, thereby giving those who are least interested in robust and vigorous intellectual debate too much attention at the expense of those who would like to contribute to knowledge production in earnest ways. The times we are living through require us to commit even more to science, to focus on real scholarly issues, and, above all, to acknowledge that scholars are frail as humans like everyone else. For this reason, they can easily become the targets of relentless campaigning by those who reduce knowledge production to identity politics, as the recent book by Mounk (2023) so pointedly indicates. In a similar vein, the Senegalese philosopher Souleyman Bachir Diagne once said the problem with identity politics in academia is that any form of critique easily becomes an *ad hominem* attack.<sup>2</sup>

## 2 Local Knowledge and Universal Knowledge

Is the concept of the "African University" an African concept? There is a sense in which, of course, we could argue that the African University is not an African concept. It cannot be for several reasons, chief among which is the nature and genesis of the institution of the University. The African University is only intelligible within the framework of an intellectual project such as the one that produced the institution of the University as we have come to know it today, namely an institution informed by the idea of an essential truth only discoverable through the commitment to a form of knowledge that is uprooted and acknowledges no local bounds.

But here we come to a second difficulty with the notion of the African University. If the knowledge that is foundational to its *raison d'être* proceeds from the premise that "true" knowledge knows no local bounds, then we would need to ask and answer the question as to whether we can speak from nowhere at all. This question lies at the core of most of the criticism levelled against scientific knowledge, especially by the Rest of the world (Ndlovu-Gatsheni et al., 2022). The claim of these criticisms is that universalism is a cynical ploy to pass local European knowledge off for something it is not. The criticism goes further than this. Critics argue that claims of universalism are functional to the reproduction of epistemic injustice that imposes one view of the world over

many more and, in the process, actively produces ignorance. In other words, the suggestion that knowledge can be detached from the place and time that made its production possible undermines the very goal of universalism. For there to be knowledge there must be a place from which to produce it.

As we know, we are all heirs to a very specific form of knowledge production. It draws on a conceptual vocabulary that emerged essentially in nineteenth-century Europe at the height of the imperial project. Against the backdrop of such a global imperial project – to use the words of Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) – ways of knowing emerged that were not only geared towards establishing what is the case but also to conjuring up ways of being that were functional to the reproduction of very specific relations of power. In other words, accounts of Africa, for example, were not only descriptions of the world out there. They were also projections of a local worldview whose horizon was set by the prospect of building a world in its image.

Returning to the point made in the introduction, once we start asking questions about how African the African University is, we begin to realise that even the opposition of the local to the universal is somehow untenable. The gist of the discussion so far suggests that we do not have an opposition between the local and the universal but rather an opposition of different forms of the local, perhaps some more hegemonic than others. This is, of course, reminiscent of Dipesh Chakrabaty's call for the provincialization of Europe (Chakrabarty, 2000) and Samir Amin's injunction to non-Europeans not to fall prey to the pitfalls of provincialism (Amin, 2009). The former, i.e. Chakrabarty, draws our attention precisely to the local nature of European knowledge and the importance of denying it the primacy it seeks over other forms of local knowledge. The latter, i.e. Samir Amin, reminds us that resisting the universal by unduly extolling the virtues of the particular may unwittingly render us hostage to the universalist claims from which we are trying to escape. Or to say it using the words of Kwame Anthony Appiah, the Ghanaian philosopher, that would be akin to responding to the emperor's demand that the natives wear clothes by insisting on wearing clothes from home grown cotton (Appiah, 1992, p. 60).

Perhaps there is no such thing as the universal, at least not in the sense which the idea of universal knowledge seems to suggest. To the extent that the universal is always an expression of the local, the question that deserves our attention bears mainly on the relationship between values and validity in knowledge production. Weaving the local into university knowledge – understood as a very specific form of knowledge production that takes place within a historical institution that saw the light of day in Europe – means identifying how knowledge can be normative and, on occasion, even undermine itself. It

means engaging in self-reflection not to avoid being normative but to recognise the normative character and, therefore, limits of our knowledge claims.

This requires a discussion of the relationship between values and validity and their role in shaping the conditions under which knowledge becomes normative, a topic explored below in Section 3. This is followed, in Section 4, by an illustration based on my experience of leading a Pilot Postgraduate Academy of African Studies at Point Sud in Bamako, Mali together with Mamadou Diawara from the University of Frankfurt. One project developed at the Academy will be discussed in particular, as it bears on what we might describe as the domestication of knowledge into Africa, a way of weaving local African knowledge into university knowledge.

### 3 Knowledge

My point of departure is the idea of the Canon as in the Western Canon,<sup>3</sup> the locus, as it were, of the University. The Western Canon refers broadly speaking to a body of high culture, literature, music, philosophy, and works of art that is highly valued in the West. These are held to be works that have achieved the status of classics, meaning that they set the terms of reference for what should count as knowledge and what, conversely, should not count as such. The problem with the idea of a Western Canon is that it raises questions about the world, language, and the norms underlying our ability to speak truthfully. The Western Canon suggests a single world conjured up by the Enlightenment and its commitment to a world retrievable through reason.

In broad strokes, this world corresponds to a view of Europe concocted by Europeans themselves resting on the assumption that European achievements were the achievements of humans at their best. This is well captured in Leibnitz's famous proclamation that We, i.e. Europeans, lived in the best of all possible worlds. What this view failed to acknowledge was the extent to which the idea of a single world – here again, the universe, *Universitas*, the universal – confused a historically contingent world – the world produced by Europeans at a particular moment – with a deterministic impossibility of other possible worlds. According to this view, the world that came into being did so because it was the only possible world, not one among many conceivable paths.

This commitment to a single view of the world required a language to describe it, which was premised on the idea that truth was all that we could say about this world. In other words, to speak objectively about the world became an exercise in accounting for the world against the background of European experience. This is why some, if not most, of us twist our noses in disgust when

people use the language of the social sciences to look for what is absent in Africa or, worse still, to describe what is different as abnormal. To put it differently, the description of the world required setting Europe as the standard against which everything else could be judged.

The point is that the relationship between the single world and the language of the social sciences raised the thorny question of whether we use concepts to describe a world out there or, rather, whether the concepts we use actually produce the world. This is where normativity rears its ugly head, for the idea of the objectivity of language in the context of a global imperial project turns descriptions of what is not Europe into normative accounts of the conditions that should be met for difference to be assimilated into the same.

This calls for further thought on the very difficult question of establishing what knowledge is. Rather than going down the path of philosophers who reflect on justified true belief, I want to suggest three elements we should take into account in any attempt at defining knowledge in the context of social science and, perhaps also, the Humanities. These elements are what for want of better terminology I will call context, content, and rules. Context and content refer to values whereas rules bear on validation.

Context is the idea that curiosity has a founding motive. We want to know for a reason. This reason is ingrained in livelihood, i.e. in lived human experience. As far as social scientific knowledge about Africa is concerned, its founding interest was essentially colonial. The knowledge the social sciences produced was meant to enable European colonialism in Africa. This claim should be understood in the broader sense discussed by Valentin Mudimbe in *The Invention of Africa* (Mudimbe, 1988), where he argued that what came to count as knowledge of Africa was functional to the reproduction of European power over the continent (see also Mudimbe 2021). In sociology, for example, the distinction between modernity and tradition was essential to the conceptualisation of Africa. Studying Africa was part of a broader intellectual agenda that had “social change” at its centre and laid the foundation for the intellectual culture of approaching Africa as a problem to be solved.

The next element is content which, broadly speaking, means the accounts of the world that the foundational motive makes possible. I prefer the notion of “accounts of the world” to “knowledge” to draw attention to the perspectival nature of what we do with concepts. We produce representations of reality – or the world – i.e. truths that are conditional on our ability to spell out the circumstances under which they can be accepted as “truths.” To put it differently, facts do not speak for themselves. People make facts speak. They do so by establishing principles that help us organise our observations of the world in very particular ways. Take the notion of development, for instance.

Poverty, illiteracy, political instability, and whatever else we can think of are just facts or, to use John Searle's language, brute facts that come to count as something in a particular context (Searle, 1995). The facts of poverty, illiteracy, and political instability come to count as signs of lack of development in the context of a discourse informed by the idea of progress that posits the basic and necessary attainment of well-being for all. We know that this is a pipe dream, especially in the context of structural constraints that, to paraphrase the old dependency school, make the underdevelopment of parts of the world a condition for the development of other parts of the world.

The interpretation of facts is never an innocent exercise in the social sciences. This is not to say that we should give up the goal of objectivity. It is to suggest that the opposite of objectivity is not neutrality but rather subjectivity, an opposition that should best be plotted on a continuum, not on different sides. It is because interpretation is subjective that the need arises to be objective, by which we do not mean a standard hovering above what we do on the ground. Rather, the standard I have in mind is a consensus on the terms under which we shall pursue intelligent conversations about the world. Under such circumstances, if owners of people made slaves in the American South claim the essential inferiority of Black people, making it legitimate to hold them in bondage, objectivity here meant simply agreement over the authority of the Bible in settling such matters and theologians' infatuation with Aristotle's notion of the "natural slave" that was the main argument used by Sepulveda in the famous Valladolid debate about whether it was right to enslave the natives of the Americas.

The third element in the characterisation of social science knowledge concerns rules, by which I mean the methodological criteria underlying the production of knowledge. Every activity has rules according to which it is carried out. These concern the strict criteria that must be observed for the activity to be what it claims to be. Knowledge production also has its own rules. These bear on procedural norms describing crude actions such as asking questions, gathering information to answer the questions, interpreting the information and, generally, participating in broader debates about the deeper meaning of such actions. A brief example is a conference. We observe procedural norms by holding a conference to address what we think to be an important question. Even the things we do to look serious, competent, and committed are by and large part of the broader remit of such procedural norms.

Knowledge in the social sciences is the combination of context, i.e. the foundational motive underlying curiosity, content, i.e. our accounts of the world and, finally, the rules by which we engage in the activity of producing knowledge. The reason to describe knowledge in this way is to make the following

point: Context and content are the elements where we are most likely to find values at work whereas rules are the element where validation counts most. It does not matter whether we are European, Asian, or African. Curiosity is based on interests to be met, and accounts of the world reflect our place in the world. To the same extent that we can claim, and quite legitimately so, that social science knowledge as applied to Africa reflected European will to power – to use Nietzsche's famous concept – we can also claim that postcolonial or decolonial critiques of Western epistemology are not only challenges to hegemonic ways of representing Africans but also, and perhaps fundamentally, ways of reproducing African academics as valid spokespersons for what we imagine to be Africa.

If this sounds cynical, maybe that is because it is. I have misgivings about such critiques, chief among which is our failure to acknowledge how deeply we are implicated in the knowledge we pretend to be rejecting. We, as academics, do not speak from outside the epistemic framework that we criticise. We speak from within it. So much is that the case that I often even doubt whether a critique that can be understood by those whom it targets can claim to be emancipatory. In other words, nothing undermines our critique more than when those we criticise turn to us and say they understand us. Then, when that is the case, one of two things is happening: either we are not radical enough, or we remain hostage to what we criticise. Whatever the case, we are rebelling against the emperor's command to abandon nudity by insisting on wearing clothes from local cotton.

#### 4 Weaving the Local

The Pilot Postgraduate Academy of African Studies can illustrate the aforesaid. This is a three-year project funded by the Gerda Henkel Foundation in Germany. We work with 15 young scholars from Francophone universities in West Africa to develop and foster scholarly skills that challenge the emphasis on applied research. We resent the importance given to applied research for the simple reason that for us this type of research is concerned with searching for answers to questions already formulated. As it happens, such questions have mostly been formulated outside of Africa by other people. This reminds us of Paulin Hountondji's old complaint according to which there was an international division of intellectual labour that reserved for Africa the task of producing raw data to be analysed and theorised in the North (Hountondji, 1990). African scholars become intellectual smugglers, to use Okot p'Bitek's (1971) trenchant label, i.e. brokers of knowledge of dubious origin.

We privilege applied research over basic research. As far as we are concerned, basic research deals with the search for questions for which there are already answers. We make free use of Hans Georg Gadamer's beautiful description of philosophy as the intellectual enterprise which looks for questions to which the disciplines already have answers. We also appeal to the great Malian scholar Ahmadou Hampaté Bâ who famously said that "if you know that you don't know, you will know," meaning that the true pursuit of knowledge consists in developing the skill to know what you don't know even as what you think you know is expanding. We could have appealed to Socrates, of course, but Hampaté Bâ is more local ...

What we do within the Academy is to look for ways of engaging with the element of rules so that we can frame context and content in ways that allow for critical engagement with local experience. We engage procedural knowledge to be able to produce propositional knowledge. We are working on a publication that is based on each one of us translating a basic concept from our disciplines – sociology, geography, information and communication, literature, history, anthropology, psychology, law, economics, education – into our respective mother tongues. The goal is not to find the most correct translation of the concept but to interrogate its underlying assumptions in order to appreciate its limitations on the ground.

We ask two basic questions. The first one concerns the problem to which the concept is a solution in its discipline. In other words, we invite our fellows to engage in a dialogue with their discipline, i.e. to inquire into the context and content framing how their discipline produces knowledge of Africa. The second question we ask is how the effort of thinking up a translation affects our understanding of the original concept but also of the local context. In order to give these questions a more tangible form, what follows are one or two examples.

One of our fellows, Habibou Fofana, is a sociologist from Burkina Faso, who works with the concept of the "individual" in sociology and asks how it can be translated into Marka, his mother tongue. In his account, the "individual" in sociology was the concept the discipline coined to account for the structural transformation of European societies in the wake of industrialisation. His idea is that the closest equivalent he finds – "mogo" – does not entail the idea of an atomised individual but rather of an actor embedded in deep social relationships. What follows from this is not the conclusion that the Marka are collectivists or communitarians as opposed to the individualistic Europeans but rather that social inquiry deploying the notion of the individual has to be sensitive to the concept's underlying assumptions, failing which the researcher risks misrepresenting what the informants tell her.

Another example is that of Khaoula Matri, a Tunisian, who contrasts the concept of the “public space” with that of “châra” in Arabic, which means street. It refers to the revolution that overthrew the authoritarian regime of Ben Ali in 2011. The decisive factor in that revolution was the street, more specifically how people claimed it as the site for exercising citizenship, demanding political participation, and setting an agenda. Whereas the Habermasian concept of the public space emphasises the constitution of a civil society informed by the concerns of the chattering classes, Khaoula Matri focuses her attention on how the idea of citizenship emerging from the conquest of the street is intimately linked to overcoming fear such that engaging in democratic politics comes to mean creating the conditions under which fear can be held in check.

Several other concepts are being explored by fellows of the Academy, such as the subject in sociology, conversion in church history, domination in political science, fantasy films in literature, virtual cities in information and communication science, childhood in psychology, “terroir” in geography, etc. Again, the goal is not to find the correct translation of these concepts. The goal is to weave the local into university knowledge by placing at the centre of knowledge production a concern with the local intelligibility of the conceptual vocabulary of the social sciences. It is an ambitious programme, and we are aware of that, but also a deeply rewarding one, for it frees us from the burden of looking for reasons to be offended by the knowledge claims made by others.

One key finding from this exercise in translation is that concepts are not simply models of phenomena. Concepts are ways of doing things. Social science concepts produce the world, i.e. they posit the world in particular ways and in so doing rather than describing what exists, they spell out the conditions under which things will come into being. This is, for example, the case with the concept of development in development sociology. Europe did not develop. It conquered the world and got fat in the process. Development refers to what African countries have to do if they want to be like Europe, but without all the circumstances that made Europe what it is.

Concepts also posit the specific conditions that must obtain for them to be operational. These are often institutional conditions. The concept of the “individual,” once again, is unintelligible outside the framework of institutional arrangements requiring the emancipation of the individual from the collective. For this concept to work elsewhere such conditions must be created.

Furthermore, concepts are ways of making up people, to use Ian Hacking’s handy label (Hacking, 2007). Their existence opens up possibilities for individuals to be people of a certain kind. The moral saints of our day, i.e. the ones who point accusingly at those they would like to commit to Christian eternal conscious torment for being human, i.e. making mistakes or, rather, behaving

in ways that are subject to the moral disapproval of our day, are artifacts of a conceptual vocabulary that gives people enticing ways of being in the world as the conscience of us all.

Finally, concepts are also windows into local imaginaries. For example, one of our fellows, Medina Karambiri from Burkina Faso, finds the notion of *kéré* (extension) in her native Dioula, which breaks down into *mara* and *dougou*, i.e. space for economic activity and space for accommodation, more informative than the French geographer's "terroir" (local terrain). It follows that through what concepts fail to capture we can come to appreciate the diverse ways in which we can think about the world.

## 5 Conclusion

The "African University" is an essential element in the articulation of the local and the universal. I was not sure I would be able to work with it because of my misgivings about its moral saints' logical impossibility. There is no such thing as an African University. Since I am far enough away from where you are and, because of that, have no fear of being stoned, I can say that the idea of an African University reminds me of the infamous claim made by the British historian Trevor-Roper who in arguing that there was no such thing as an African History – an idea reminiscent of Hegel (see also Macamo, 2023) – added that there was only the History of Europeans in Africa.

Is there just a European University in Africa? I do not want to go that far in my polemics. Suffice it to say that the idea of an African University does not describe an essence but rather a possibility. An African University is a potential, an emergent category given life not by our ability to find fault with the practice of knowledge production but by our ability to weave our lived experience into how we practice science. What makes the African University possible is not our ability to expose the colonial library supporting it. What makes it possible is our ability to use it as the place where who we are can be made useful to the global enterprise of rendering all possible worlds intelligible.

## Notes

- 1 This is close to what Tosi and Warmke (2016) call "moral grandstanding."
- 2 At an inaugural lecture for the Pilot Postgraduate Academy of African Studies in 2020, in Bamako.

- 3 I have developed these ideas fully in a chapter in a forthcoming book edited by Katharina Schramm and Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (Macamo, 2024).

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# Advancing the African UniPluriversity as a Decolonial Imaginary

*Kasturi Behari-Leak*

## Abstract

In negotiating the fabric of the African university, this chapter pays homage to the warp and weft of different cosmologies and epistemologies, advocating for the reinvention of the university by acknowledging multiple ontologies and co-existence. Africa's cosmology of diverse histories, influences, positionalities, perspectives, subjectivities, and intersectional nuances demands a layered understanding of what the university in Africa is, what it is for, and whom it serves even as the African university continues to struggle for autonomy. Weaving a thread to understand how universalisms and multiversalisms have impacted the modern university, I question whether this thread is beginning to unravel now because its integrity has been compromised. Is the concept of a university still adequate in accounting for the rich diversity of ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies we engage with daily? In this chapter, I explore the notion of pluriversity as a decolonial alternative that can embody the identity and exercise the agency of the African university in its full ontological density. If we are to deliver on our commitment to social justice, especially in the global South, what will it take to mitigate the totalising effects of knowledge presented as universal truths?

## Keywords

pluriversity – decoloniality – global south – multiversalisms – social justice

## 1 Introduction

When Achebe (1958) wrote about the warp and weft of African textiles, he might not have fully grasped how powerful a metaphor “textiles” or “fabric” is as a visual representation of “African culture’s beating heart.” Achebe’s novel, *Things Fall Apart*, offers a captivating glimpse into this world, as the protagonist’s attire is described as “a cloth, tied skilfully around his waist, hung down to his ankles, covered with the radiant designs that only the finest artists of Umuofia could create.”

African textiles, described as a symphony of culture and unity, are the weavers of tales, the keepers of cultural identity, and the vibrant canvas that paints the picture of a continent steeped in history and tradition (Javed, 2023).

The cultural significance of African textiles is recorded in a tapestry of traditions where textiles have long been the storytellers that not only bind the past and present but re-present each region's distinct textile tradition, weaving the threads of history, tradition, and community values into the very fabric of society (Picton & Mack, 2016). The importance of textiles in African society is a tribute to the artists and craftsmen who weave African cloth to signify individual and community identity. Weaving involves ...

crossing two threads, the warp and the weft, one vertical and the other horizontal, one stretched taut and the other undulating and intertwined with the first. To produce the textile, it is necessary for these two threads to be bound, otherwise each will remain a fragile and fluttering potentiality ... if the meeting of opposites does not take place, nothing is created, for each element is defined by its opposite and takes its meaning from it. (Valcarengi, 1994 in Ahmed, 2020)

Fabrics or textiles work like a text, signifying and communicating beyond the limitations of its interlocutors, weaving texture and meaning into the tapestry of African life (Javed, 2023). African textiles can be used as historical documents to convey important cultural information and often play a central role in festivities and ceremonies or serve to commemorate a certain person, event, and even a political cause (Donovan, n.d.).

Writing about her own warp and weft story, Mara Ahmed (2020), an interdisciplinary artist and activist filmmaker based in Long Island, New York, cites a tiny-text that captures the essence of the magnitude of meaning that textiles as tiles of meaning create when woven into a fabric:

I love textiles and embroidery and am constantly aware of the quiet, yet complex artwork produced by women. It's considered 'craft' and not 'art' for a reason. Weaving is the opposite of dividing and labeling, of centering and marginalizing. It starts with the assumption that every thread, every piece of yarn or wicker, is necessary for the creation and integrity of the whole. Pull one thread out and the construction of the cloth or basket will begin to unravel. (Ahmed 2020)

This chapter pays homage to the warp and weft of our different cosmologies, ontologies, and epistemologies, weaving a thread to understand how

universalisms, multiversalisms, and pluriversalisms have unfolded in the modern university and to question whether these are beginning to unravel now because the integrity of the thread has been compromised. In negotiating the fabric of the African university, I offer the provocation that we are obliged to acknowledge Africa's cosmology of diverse histories, influences, positionalities, perspectives, subjectivities, and intersectional nuances that defy monolithic definitions of what the university in Africa is and what it is for. The issue of the purpose of the modern university and, by inference and implication, the African university is central to my explorations to excavate and unsettle our assumptions and beliefs about the role, goal, and soul of the university as we know it.

If we accept that the integrity of the cloth from which the university was cut or, in other words, that its spine is not strong enough to bear the weight of the forces that tug at it, what is the alternative to the university? In this chapter, I submit an invitation and challenge to the contemporary African university to explore the notion of pluriversity and consider it as a decolonial alternative. I argue that we have graduated from universities in Africa bound by and rooted in their geographical locales but with histories that remain locked in a colonial vice, still controlled by the North. We need to "shift the geography of reason" (Mignolo, 2007) so that we truly realise the identity and agency of the African university in its full ontological density. If not, we will continue to bear false witness to the global North's universal truths and grand challenges as we masquerade as impostors and brokers for the South.

## 2 The University

In addressing the theme "Negotiating the fabric of the African University," it might be salient and salutary to trace the evolution of the modern university against its spatial and historical timeline to account for the change in purpose over the years. In Europe, the University of Bologna, founded in 1088 in Italy, is said to be the oldest university in continuous operation in the world and the first degree-awarding institution of higher learning (Donovan, 2016). It is here that the word *universitas* was first coined, a Latin word meaning "the whole, total, the universe, the world" from which many different perspectives were acknowledged (Verger, 1992). The word "university" is now understood as an institution of higher (or tertiary) education and research which awards academic degrees in several academic disciplines (Allen, 1988). Slightly south of Bologna, on the African continent, the University of Timbuktu is also said to be one of the world's oldest and most prestigious universities (Khair, 2003).

The Sankoré was established as the famous medieval mosque-university at Timbuktu (in present day Mali) around the twelfth century, and teaching was based on Arabic scholarship and Islamic values. Made up of three mosques, it is known for its significant contributions to Islamic culture and for providing texts that inform our understanding of the history and culture of the time period (Alemu, 2018).

Slightly more west, Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, founded in 1636, is the oldest and most prestigious institution of higher learning in the United States. It is one of eight Ivy League schools, highly regarded for their high academic standards, selectivity in admissions, and social prestige. During its first two centuries, the college was gradually liberated, first from clerical and later from political control, until in 1865 the university alumni began electing members of the governing board. More recently, Makerere University in Uganda was established in January 1922 as a technical school with 14-day students who began studying carpentry, building, and mechanics. Just over a century old now, Makerere University's vision is to be a thought leader of knowledge generation for societal transformation and development.

What does it mean to be a "truly African university" in a global context? Decolonial scholars have long debated the distinction between "universities in Africa" and "African universities"; the former referring to geographical location and the latter to social and cultural context. What the African university is for and its purposes, roles, goals, and objects (Badat, 2023) is a highly contested topic, with some scholars claiming that an African university is not ontologically possible (Langa, 2021). According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2017), "the university in Africa has three genealogies if not 'triple heritages,'" (p. 52), namely the Indigenous precolonial higher education, the opening of the "university in Africa" as branch campuses of the colonial higher education institutions, and the struggle for the "African university." According to Mamdani (2019), "the African university began as a colonial project – a top-down modernist project – its ambition being to transform society in its own image" (p. 62). From the brief historical traces (above) of the origins of the first types of universities located in the North and South, we see there are different reasons for their establishment and differing views on their prowess and success, depending on the interlocutor. What was the stature of the Sankoré in comparison to the University of Bologna, for example? Did the two universities command an equivalence in *gravitas* and *veritas*? Why not?

Despite differences in location and context, the concept of the university as it is used today defends a "unified worldwide cultural frame, in contrast to a dominant view of it as a set of thousands of distinct organizational structures" (Frank & Meyer, 2020, p. VII). In other words, the university is based on truths

interpreted as being universally applicable and relevant. These universalisms are not innocent though and have dire consequences. The effects on different subjectivities living on/in the borders and margins of modernity (Global south, “third world,” east, Africa, etc.) are material. Many lives are reduced, minimised, and denied ontological depth or status (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017) compared to those fortunate enough to be in the hub of modern thought and reasoning: the US and Europe. Knowledge produced at/for universities from this universal hub often occludes socially situated knowledge producers, who are often marginalised, alienated, and invisible because they are not considered authentic and credible in comparison (Haraway, 1991; Moya, 2011).

Universalisms are easily linked to advancement of those who are privileged and can also masquerade in various forms. In a post-truth era (Froughi et al., 2019), where our senses are saturated with emotionology, fake news, and untruths (Martel et al., 2020), the world wide web is a serious contender in making information readily available for general consumption as universal truths. Similarly, in a post-human era (Susen, 2022), we now engage with Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its generative large language models, ChatGPT and its more recent competitors. These machines provide a plethora of information and universalising options, trained on a database sourced from a mainly western white male bias (Roche et al., 2023). For the unsuspecting, uncritical consumer, these “truths” are influential in casting the dye on people and topics that support a universalist approach to epistemologies and cosmologies (Grosfoguel, 2007).

### 3 Purpose

As universities grew and expanded, their purpose became differentiated and contingent on local contexts, global changes, and other pressures. The unifying aspect that enabled uni-versities to distinguish themselves from hospitals, financial entities, and government and to hold their own as intellectual homes was their commitment to research, knowledge production, and teaching (Alemu, 2018). In exploring the research function of the university, we need to question who decides on the research agenda, funding, and resources. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that knowledge, as a research output, is now used as a commodity for entrepreneurial gain, academic capital, and performativity (Shore, 2000). The impact of this is measured using metrics that translate into university rankings and league tables (Hazelkorn, 2007).

The purpose of the university regarding knowledge generation has been brought into sharp focus in recent years. The student protests under the

banner of the #MustFall movement of 2015–2016 raised questions about what knowledge is, who gets to create it, and whom it serves. Students challenged the university to think about its knowledge-making machinery and how this had been appropriated to produce specific kinds of knowledge that served specific ends. Since then, our universities have been tasked with transforming and decolonising their curriculum offerings to make the curriculum representative and reflective of our students and to ensure that knowledge, pedagogy, and assessment are rooted in the social and cultural ethos of our contexts. We have also witnessed the adoption of a social justice imperative, where universities assert their role as drivers of transformation. In the global South the focus is on inequality and access, on diversity and inclusivity in the curriculum. Through the contestation around the curriculum and knowledge per se, students exposed the totalising effects of knowledge presented as universal truths.

If the university is primarily to serve the public good by enabling student success, its purpose might be more resolutely identified with its pedagogical function, where mediating social, cultural, economic, and political dimensions in the classroom and validating difference are viewed as markers of success (Badat, 2023). Knowledge becomes the medium through which the above is achieved, but the main goal would be to shape students into their fullness of being to act in and on the world. The lines between the epistemic and social are becoming more porous as we witness social challenges entering the university through the back door, as it were. Students are persistent in waking us up to their lived realities, to walk our talk, and to make the theory we espouse apply to real life challenges. One has to look at issues such as climate change, gender-based violence, and so on to see that the modern university is struggling to reckon with its social purpose against the backdrop of how it came about, whom it serves, what it does, and how it measures its success.

The Covid-19 pandemic provided a further thrust for pedagogical change when the transition to online learning and teaching exacerbated the schisms between students with access and those unable to bridge the digital divide (Belluigi et al., 2022). Online learning, hybrid, hyflex, and alternative modes of delivery have put paid to the residential university as we witnessed a proliferation of private, distance, and online schooling in the aftermath of the pandemic. As the pandemic unfolded, it placed untold pressure on us to critically examine what we had been doing and whether the mechanics of the university served us any longer. In addressing the issue of purpose with a renewed post-pandemic interest, provocations around what the university stands for and what it is supposed to be doing in a climate of capitalism and neoliberalism (Lalu, 2019, p. 45) emerged. If the integrity of the modern university has been compromised, and given the current financial austerity climate, is it

possible that the main purpose of the university has become administration, governance, and marketisation of the knowledge project rather than education for the public good (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2000; 2016)? While the sustainability of academic institutions as business entities is important, how do we manage the numerous financial demands placed on HE currently? Managerialism and corporatism (Beck & Young, 2005; Shore, 2010) introduce phrases like consumers, clients, value for money, the bottom line, and in recent times, austerity and fiscal fragility (Marginson & Yang, 2024). As a neoliberal agenda takes firm hold in higher education across the world (Hlatshwayo, 2022) and becomes normalised and internalised as a “necessary evil” (Williams, 2016) to ensure the sustainability of academic institutions as business entities, the role definition of the “academic” has changed considerably, and it is no longer clear what role the university plays in society. Is Readings’ (1997) assertion that the university is in ruins a cautionary tale that the demise of higher education is fast approaching?

It is becoming clear that the concept of the university does not have the capacity of an all-embracing term to accommodate the array of roles assigned to the academic in the modern university setting. Also, the concept of singularity underpinning university is inadequate to account for the huge diversity of ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies that are the fabric of the modern university we engage with. In fact, there is little that is unitary or universal about our universities. The sooner we embrace a new frame that helps us to negotiate and navigate our identities and agency in a multi-pronged entity that is no longer uni (singular) but multi (many), the better we might harness the affordances that this postmodern moment holds. In many ways, the demands being placed on academics are so onerous and multimoded that it seems easy to segue from university to a multi-versity as a catch-all term that contains the broad spectrum of roles that management and administrators expect of academics and staff today.

#### 4 The Multiversity

When Clark Kerr, president of the University of California, coined the term “multiversity,” he provided a dynamic proposition for the expanded purpose and value of higher education institutions. He claimed that new knowledge was the most important factor in economic and social growth, as a focal point for national growth (Kerr, 2001). In his book, *The Uses of the University* (2001), Kerr focused on structural changes taking place in US colleges and universities and argued that leading research universities had evolved into substantially

different entities, with new “uses” in society and influenced by the growing importance of higher education in the polity. Kerr argued that research universities, as the chief generators of new knowledge, had become as vital to society as the national and state governments, the military, national health, the religious sects, economic competitiveness, artistic excellence, social harmony, and political stability (Shore, 2010).

In a sense, Kerr (2001) had pronounced the knowledge economy into being, suggesting that the real growth in economic development would not come through manufacturing or expanded industrialisation but instead from knowledge and information. This prompted the US federal government to invest huge new sums of money into research and development work in industry, new government agencies, and the nation’s research-oriented universities (Donovan, 2016). Kerr (2001) compared the multiversity to the university as one would compare a federal republic to a kingdom. In the multiversity, these varied forms and components are ultimately merged into one identity tied specifically to location, mission, and the historic population of that campus (Kerr, 2001). Kerr’s assertions suggested that for traditional universities to morph into multiversities, they had to serve a national purpose as “producer, wholesaler, and retailer of knowledge” (p. 114) through a renewed focus on the HE enterprise as a social and economic engine.

Kerr’s “multiversity” attracted much debate and critique, seeing as it included multiple and often competing and conflicting goals, interests, and trajectories (Dirks, 2023). This incongruence of disparate parts was counter-productive to the unifying and universal alignment in the traditional university structures. Kerr’s multiversity had multiple purposes, centres of power, and clienteles. It was inconsistent in embracing many truths, comprising several different communities, and serving conflicting interests both internally and externally (Donovan, 2016; Kerr, 2001). Critics of Kerr’s multiversity phenomenon also pointed out that education in the multiversity reflected the fragmentation of its institutional structure and scholarship (Donovan, 2016). Coupled with a neoliberal agenda, the multiversity saw the rise of the “schizophrenic university” (Shore, 2010). The knowledge project was reconceptualised as a problem-solving intervention of practical and technical nature, aimed at the development of skills that qualify an initiate for a specific profession. Liberal education, as a last vestige of traditional university education, had become generalist education, stressing variety without coherence (Shore, 2010). According to Donovan (2016), the term “multiversity” also borders on elitism, being focused on a few research universities in the United States. Kerr viewed these as located at the heart of national and international economic growth and social, political, and cultural development, with characteristics

that set these institutions apart from the traditional late-modern idea of the university. Simon Marginson, responding to Kerr's multiversity through his own book, *The Dream Is Over: The Crisis of Clark Kerr's California Idea of Higher Education* (Marginson, 2016), astutely points out that the conditions that gave rise to Kerr's proclamations in the 1960s no longer exist, as "universal access is faltering, public tuition is rising, the great research universities face new challenges, and educational participation in California, once the national leader, lags far behind" (2016, p. 94).

Kerr's multiversity fits hand in glove with a neoliberal agenda, which according to Shore (2010, p. 1) is focused on excising public spending and capitalising on new commercial opportunities opened up by university teaching and research in the emerging "global knowledge economy." From a decolonial perspective, neoliberal conceptions move HE away from the public good and see the student as an individual economic investment in the national economy (Dussel, 1994). This new vision of universities as transnational business corporations operating in a competitive global market (Readings, 1997) promotes discourses such as "the bottom line" and "for profit," quality assurance, performance measures, funding sources, and audits. This is the colonial matrix of power in action (Quijano, 2000). All of this is geared towards tightening the purse strings while policing the quality of delivery to ensure more economical, accountable, flexible, and responsive dispositions to industry and to government (Shore, 2010). As many critics of neoliberalism have noted, "the traditional professional culture of open intellectual enquiry and debate has been replaced with an institutional stress on performativity ...strategic planning, performance indicators, quality assurance measures and academic audits" (Olssen & Peters, 2005, p. 1).

From what we now know and have experienced as the alienated, marginalised, and subaltern positionalities of the South, it should be clear that neither the university nor the multiversity serves the needs of the socially excluded and extant victims of social injustice. We should also be able to see that the colonial and the neoliberal/neocolonial are not just intertwined but entangled (Barad, 2007). Such is the confidence borne of Northern benefactors of policies, frameworks, guidelines, and taxonomies we have inherited. As the global South, though, our uncritical reproducing of these frames is on us and on our watch. If the concept of university with its totalising universalism is not the solution to our ills, and if its reincarnation, the multiversity, is focused wholly on a neoliberal agenda that widens the gap between the privileged and the marginalised, where do we turn? Does the "pluriversity" hold any promise for the re-birth of the African university?

## 5 The Pluriversity

According to Mbembe (2016), a pluriversity is not the plural form of university. It is also not the opposite of university; nor is it the proliferation of the Eurocentric and universal model of the university across different locales in the world. In Mbembe's words, "a more open critical cosmopolitan pluriversalism is a task that involves the radical *re-founding* of our ways of thinking and a transcendence of our disciplinary divisions" (2016, p. 37). It is an invitation to a different way of knowing and engaging with knowledge.

Engaging with knowledge in this way is not only an act of epistemic justice. It is also an honouring of ontological depth and healing of wounds. If all one has read in academic research outputs is the magnification and amplification of the superiority of Modernity's Man, of the anthropocentric human fashioned after the Enlightened self and person (Wynter, 1995), it is easy to believe that being human is reserved for a chosen few. Fanon's (1991) exegesis on the zones of being and non-being demonstrates how this non-state was experienced when a little boy called out to him from across the road, "Mama there is a negro!" Grosfoguel (2007) expands on this by explaining how life is either mitigated or aggravated depending on which zone you belong to. This connects with the notion of an "unperson," so named to describe the liminal state of living/not-living as a colonial subject. The "unperson," manifested as one who has been denied their past existence but who is required to fulfil the same affective and epistemic requirements as fully embodied and situated beings, instantiates the double consciousness (du Bois, 1999) where one is caught between one's own reality and one externally imposed. This is taxing emotional and psychological labour for colonial subjects.

This sense of the double-self is developed, even encouraged, from the time we start school, which happens in a formal setting, indoors, and inside a special building. We learnt that learning is a formal process; it does not happen incidentally or naturally or in the corridor, as it were. We were taught, even policed, to walk in straight lines, sit in neat rows, to listen, obey, and comply, speak when spoken to, and be invisible and silent for the most part. We became part of the assembly line of education, conscious that our behaviour was pan-optically surveilled and punished until we acquiesced and fell in line. Even our out-of-class activities, such as physical education classes, intended to release the stress accumulated from the sedentary confines of the classroom which demanded a bodily discipline of sitting still, were designed and modelled on the military boot camps, with our teachers as our drill sergeants.

With this, we became regulated and disciplined, to obey the codified norms of acceptable social behaviours, to show mastery of mind over body, and to ensure that the mental is superordinate to the carnal and corporeal. I think therefore I am! And so we became separated from our bodies – disembodied from our hearts and souls – and dis-membered from our minds and emotions; decontextualised and depersonalised. Only when we left school and progressed to the limited freedoms of the university, did we encounter a language that explained the dysmorphia and dystopia experienced as children. It was the Cartesian dualism (Alanen, 1989) which categorised the split between body and mind to establish the academy as a place of intellect and mental activity, not of the affect, the subjective, and emotions that are necessarily part of any embodied experience, whether as teacher or student. Decolonial scholars from Latin America have advocated for collapsing binaries and dualisms to escape the colonial vice that traps us in the coloniality of knowledge, being, and power (Maldonado-Torres, 2016).

The pluriversity is about epistemic and ontological justice and intended to right the wrongs of an underwhelming formative socialisation into a world fashioned after mainly western beliefs about how the mind and body work, to the exclusion of humans' relationship with nature, the spirit world, and the supernatural. The pluriversity is undergirded by a humanising pluralism that advocates for epistemic diversity, access, testimonial and hermeneutical justice (Fricker, 2007), and for being in dialogue with different epistemic traditions. This is a far cry from the monolithic traditions of the uni- and multi-versities discussed earlier, where western "epistemology and hermeneutics prevent the possibility of pluriversity, with all its internal diversity, and close off ways of thinking and doing that are not grounded in Western cosmology" (Mignolo, 2018, p. 10). The main difference is of course that the pluriversity recentres knowledge as the focus of the academic project and defends the right to academic debate, dissent, and interrogation of many ways of theorising and conceptualising the world. If we reformulate the purpose of a university to mean access to diverse thoughts, ideas, research, and knowledge, we can envisage a new humanism (Mills, 2017) and new ways of doing. Caught in a colonial paradigm for too long, we have been "disciplined" to indulge in epistemic decadence (Gordon, 2019) by being disciples to epistemic traditions and methodologies (Garuba, 2017) that claim scientific rigour and objectivity to the exclusion of Indigenous ways of knowing the world (Nakata, 2007; Smith, 2012). The decolonial response has been to delink from minimalising and reductionist worldviews by challenging the source of knowledge and whom it serves.

We have been disciples of grand theories and narratives invented in the pre- and modern eras to suit the needs of the university and its reductionist

and minimising practices. It is time that we enacted epistemic disobedience (Mignolo, 2011) to counter the abyssal thinking and epistemicide (de Sousa Santos, 2007) that Indigenous, marginalised, and border communities have had to endure. De Sousa Santos defines abyssal thinking “as a system of visible and invisible distinctions that divide social reality as either on ‘this side of the abyssal line’ or on ‘the other side of the abyssal line’” (2007, p. 132). For years now, many people have remained in the borderlands or have fallen into the abyss of alienation, marginalisation, and invisibility as they are structurally and agentially prevented from asserting their own truths in a world where western scientific truth is the main arbiter. When abyssal lines transmute into border thinking, it can be quite generative to think from the outside, using alternative knowledge traditions and alternative languages of expression which introduce other cosmologies into the hegemonic discourse (Anzaldúa, 1999). From a decolonial and epistemic justice lens, this space to think anew reinvigorates knowledge production as epistemological pluralism (Andreotti et al., 2011).

Writing from an Andean worldview, Querejazu (2016) explores the concept of the pluriverse “to show from different ontological positions, particularly relational cosmologies like the Andean worldview, alternatives actually appear” (p. 2). Decolonial scholar Walter Mignolo (2018) suggests that a pluriverse should not be “a world of independent units (as is the case with cultural relativism) but a world entangled through and by the colonial matrix of power” (p. 11). It is by dwelling in the interstices or borderlands (Anzaldúa, 1999) that we are able to think “pluritopically,” experiencing life from inside. Liminal spaces can give rise to new ways of being in the world as espoused by Njogu (1999): “The ‘in-between’ space is a site of struggle and a position in which to view the beginning of ‘being’ and to question the normalcy of skewedness espoused in Eurocentric and ethnocentric discourse” (Njogu, 1999, p. 69). This is what makes the pluriverse convivial, dialogical, or plurillogical (Mignolo, 2018). Pluralism is not merely diversity but “energetic engagement with diversity,” in contrast to diverse groups living alongside but not necessarily engaging with each other (Vasconcelos & Martin, 2018). The overall point is that pluralism can only become fully plural if it is an onto-epistemological plurality, which demands that Southern and Indigenous theories work with and alongside those in the West.

To embrace ontological pluralism (Querejazu, 2016) is to be fully human, as we can be many forms at the same time. We do not need to be regulated by clocks and timetables as the linearity (Blaser, 2012), punctuality, and supposed precision of the West is but one way of thinking about time and space. Circular time, open spaces, and lunar calendars need to be reclaimed by Indigenous

people. What students have found in the Gen-Z era of TikTok and social media is that you can be both-and: forensic psychology is real, as is biodiversity. It is an age for things to emerge, and we cannot fathom the possibilities for a new world and new humanism from behind the gates that keep us shackled. Embracing these many different ways of doing research, of engaging with academia and the disciplines is to pay homage to the creativity and magic that keep us connected to our primeval passions and drivers. In an age of machines, it is critical that we are able to outsmart non-humans and exercise our agency as a matter of survival but also as a promise never to be subjugated again, albeit this time by metal objects that can discern, make decisions, simulate consciousness, and be discriminative in responding to human problems and challenges.

## 6 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have advanced an argument for the need for the African university to be (re)born as the African pluriversity, which embraces multiple ways of being in the world as there are many worlds to know and be in. We need to embrace an ontological pluralism that does not relegate certain ontologies to the realm of myths, legends, and beliefs (Querejazu, 2016). This is to march to the sound of our own drum, in tandem with many other drums to re-centre and re-member who we are (wa Thiong'o, 1986). To rank the importance of one way of knowing over another is to deny the value of each as well as to renege on our spiritual and humanitarian obligation to respect each Other and our origins.

Pluriversity should not be seen as cultural relativism but as the entanglement of several cosmologies connected in a power differential (Todd, 2011). An African pluriversity is a place and space for a consciousness borne out of struggle, clear about its purpose, philosophy, intent, and ethos, and established on its own terms. It is from this place of truly owning its identity as a multitude of ontologies and pluriversal epistemologies that Africa can negotiate its fabric. We have to let go of our fixation with the one-world ontology or universalist paradigm. As it weaves the warp (North/West) and the weft (South/East) of its own tapestry, the African pluriversity can take its rightful place as a knowledge generator, commensurate with its global partners. If the "pluriversity" is apt as a socially just concept, by combining the warp and weft of university and multiversity to serve the needs of the African continent in pluriversal ways, we can negotiate the fabric of the African university from a place of strength and authenticity.

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# Innovative Practices in African Higher Education

## *Teaching, Research, and Community Engagement*

*Teboho Moja*

### Abstract

The chapter discusses the innovative practices embarked on by African higher education institutions. In setting the context within which innovative practices are emerging, it briefly discusses the importance of internationalisation and collaborations with various stakeholders. In recent years, African universities have sought to expand their global and local reach to foster knowledge-sharing and enhance educational offerings. They are increasingly forming partnerships to align their research agendas with development goals, such as the African Union Agenda 2063 or the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, and in some instances, their individual national goals. The chapter further examines the emerging modes of operation driven by innovations in teaching, research, and community engagement. It elaborates on how African universities are adapting to the changing landscape of higher education by developing new modes that promote diversity, relevance, and access. The chapter highlights several examples of innovative modes that are being implemented by universities across the continent, including the integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems into the curriculum, the use of technology to expand access to education, and the development of partnerships with local communities to promote sustainable development. Despite these efforts at transformation, funding challenges persist as higher education institutions remain underfunded. The conclusion showcases how African universities are opting for innovative ways of addressing funding challenges in order to sustain themselves. The chapter also makes a call for continuous research and the study of higher education in Africa to support the advancement of African universities.

### Keywords

innovations – partnerships – community engagement – Indigenous knowledge systems – sustainable development

## **1 Introduction**

As global dynamics shift and new challenges emerge, African institutions are embracing new approaches in teaching, research, and community engagement to better serve their students and societies. The sector is continuously being transformed, and in the last decade numerous publications and projects have emerged that address the issues of re-envisioning, re-imagining, or revitalising it (Badat, 2023; Dei, Osei-Bonsu & Amponsah, 2020; Oanda & Sall 2016; Zeleza, 2024). The expectations that universities should play a role in innovation has been a driving force for African universities to chart new paths by establishing partnerships and collaborations of various types on their terms. Universities are definitely responding to the calls for a reimagining of how teaching, research, and community engagement are approached, fostering a more integrated, inclusive, and impactful higher education landscape. This is evident in their innovative practices that aim to elevate the quality and impact of universities across the continent.

These innovative practices are redefining the educational landscape and fostering a culture of creativity, collaboration, and excellence. By integrating interdisciplinary research and community-driven initiatives, African universities are positioning themselves as key players in both regional and global contexts. This chapter delves into the diverse and dynamic strategies being implemented to enhance the overall effectiveness and relevance of higher education in Africa.

## **2 Internationalisation and Collaboration**

Internationalisation and local collaborations are pivotal in the advancement of African higher education institutions. By forging partnerships with universities and research centres worldwide, African institutions are able to access new resources, knowledge, and technologies, thereby enhancing their educational and research capabilities. International collaborations often bring opportunities for student and faculty exchanges, joint research projects, and participation in global academic networks, which help to elevate the global standing of African universities. Simultaneously, local collaborations with industries, non-governmental organisations, and community groups ensure that the research and teaching efforts are grounded in the realities of African societies. These partnerships facilitate the translation of academic work into practical solutions that address local challenges, fostering a symbiotic relationship where both academic and community needs are met.

For decades African universities operated in relative isolation, with limited international collaborations and partnerships. They were often overlooked by global counterparts or considered mere subjects of study or sites of study for research projects. They were also criticised for a lack of clear missions and goals and seen as needing major transformations (Aina, 2010). Some institutions have transformed in recent years, fuelled by a realisation of the importance to establish international linkages, leverage global expertise, and address pressing local and regional challenges more effectively.

Universities are by nature competitive with one another. However, they could benefit from borrowing practices from industry such as the concept of *coopetition*, where institutions blend cooperation and competition for the mutuality of benefit for partnering institutions. African universities are not in *coopetition* relations yet but have been working on positioning themselves to cooperate and compete in the global market. One example to mention in this case is the University of Pretoria in South Africa where its leadership prioritised effective local and international partnerships that are a contributing factor in improving its global rankings recently.<sup>1</sup> Moja (2018) further presents an argument for the exploration and the promotion of regional collaboration through various forms of partnerships. She states that there are some collaboration efforts and active research partnerships in place in Africa that serve as regional models for others, such as the various African Centers of Excellence promoted by the Association of Research Universities in Africa (ARUA),<sup>2</sup> the Association of African Universities,<sup>3</sup> and the World Bank.<sup>4</sup> Partnerships have promoted collaborations between African academics and international researchers and have played a crucial role in enhancing research output. Many African researchers engage in collaborations with colleagues from around the world, resulting in joint publications and the sharing of expertise. However, Mouton and Blanckenberg's (2017) study indicate that there are more joint publications with external scholars than joint publications amongst scholars within Africa, which is an issue that needs to be addressed. Another positive outcome of partnerships has been the financial support and resources they attract (Makoni, 2017).

There is also increased interest by universities to transform themselves from being teaching-intensive to becoming research-intensive. A study conducted by the Higher Education Research and Advocacy Network in Africa (HERANA) indicated how eight selected universities in the study positioned themselves to become research-intensive (Centre for Higher Education Transformation, 2016). This growing interest in universities to become more research intensive is elaborated on further by Cloete and Maassen (2015) who state that there

has been a growing policy focus on the university's contributions to innovation and economic development. As such, the university is expected to play a central role in this adaptation since, as the main knowledge institution in any society, it is assumed to link research and education effectively to innovation. (p. 5)

Internationalisation and collaboration in African higher education have emerged as critical drivers of progress, innovation, and global engagement in recent years. As universities and academic institutions across the continent seek to expand their global reach, gain visibility, collaborate in knowledge production, and enhance their educational offerings, internationalisation and collaboration have become essential components of their strategies. Internationalisation in African higher education encompasses a range of activities aimed at enhancing global engagement and achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, fostering cultural exchange, and promoting international collaboration. It involves the development of mutually beneficial partnerships, the promotion of student and staff mobility, the integration of global perspectives into curricula, and the establishment of research collaborations. In recent decades, there has been a growing recognition of the need to enhance the capacity of African institutions and promote more equitable and mutually beneficial collaborations. A case in point is the recent February 2023 US-Africa University Partnership Initiative Summit co-hosted by the University of Pretoria in collaboration with the US Embassy in South Africa. The key goal was to share experiences and lessons from collaborative partnerships between African and US higher education institutions. At the summit, the US Assistant Secretary Phee challenged participants to do more: more research, more exchanges, more collaboration, and more partnerships.<sup>5</sup>

Internationalisation has also been facilitated through projects such as the Carnegie African Diaspora Fellowship Program (CADFP) that has mobilised the African diaspora to engage with African universities. The programme was launched in 2013 and to date has awarded 667 fellowships for participation at 179 universities in Africa.<sup>6</sup> Such internationalisation initiatives have involved the African diaspora academics and created opportunities for African universities to learn from global best practices, enhance their academic programmes, and develop a diverse and inclusive learning environment.

There are regional collaboration initiatives such as the African Higher Education Harmonization and Tuning project, which seeks to develop a common framework for academic standards and qualifications across the continent (Teferra, 2012). Other regional collaborations focus on research, such as the Association of Research Universities in Africa (ARUA), or on the training of

doctoral students, such as the African Economic Research Consortium (AERC). There are intercontinental collaborations such as the Alliance for African Partnerships (AAP) led by Michigan State University in collaboration with 10 African Universities<sup>7</sup> and the Australia-Africa University Network (AAUN) consisting of 10 Australian and 10 African University members.<sup>8</sup> Lastly, there are national collaboration efforts with examples from South Africa being the Gauteng Research Triangle<sup>9</sup> that is pulling its resources to maximise the impact of the universities on society and the Cape Higher Education Consortium (CHEC), which was first launched under a different name in 1993 in response to severe budget constraints during the collapse of the apartheid state.

It is important to note that internationalisation and collaboration in African higher education is aligned with broader development agendas, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the African Union's Agenda 2063 (Aats, Greijn, Mohamedbhai & Jowi, 2020). Universities in Africa are increasingly embarking on research agendas informed by these development frameworks, contributing to the attainment of socioeconomic, environmental, and cultural objectives. By aligning their efforts with national, regional, and global development agendas, African universities are well-positioned to address the unique challenges facing the continent and contribute to its sustainable development.

Internationalisation and collaboration in African higher education are essential catalysts for progress, innovation, and societal development. Through international collaborations, African universities are expanding their horizons, enhancing their academic programmes, and contributing to global knowledge production whilst addressing local challenges and fostering sustainable development.

### 3 Promoting Diversity, Relevance and Engagement

African universities are adapting to the changing landscape of higher education by adopting approaches that promote diversity, relevance, and engagement. As mentioned earlier, African universities are boldly embracing change, charting new paths, and redefining their approaches to teaching, research, and community engagement.

#### 3.1 *Diversity of Knowledge Systems*

Universities in Africa are embracing change by revisiting traditional pedagogical approaches as well as making epistemological changes to their curricula offerings. Universities are redefining the landscape of teaching by

incorporating diverse perspectives and knowledge systems into their curricula. They are recognising the importance of indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage and integrating these elements into their educational programmes (Khan, Sultan & Mantzaris, 2006; Taylor & Cameron, 2016). These initiatives are encouraged and supported through funding from, e.g., the South African National Research Foundation (NRF), among others. By doing so, universities aim to provide a more inclusive and culturally relevant education that resonates with the local context.

In South Africa, examples are the initiative located at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal and the University of Mpumalanga. The initiative includes a multi-country African Institute of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) set up virtually with plans to partner with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).<sup>10</sup> The partnership includes North-West University, the Universities of Limpopo and Venda as well as the University of South Africa (UNISA) as the largest in the country and a distance-learning institution. The centre is one of the five consortium partner institutions that make up the Department of Science and Innovation-National Research Foundation (DSI-NRF) Centre in Indigenous Knowledge Systems (CIKS).<sup>11</sup> At UMP, their website mentions that their curricula and extracurricular activities expose students to different ways of knowing and to the value of Indigenous Knowledge Systems.<sup>12</sup>

Another example in South Africa is the North-West University which pioneered the African Indigenous Knowledge Systems with the establishment of the Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) Centre. The Centre is hosted by the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences (FNAS). The IKS Centre is inter-multidisciplinary in nature and engages in teaching, learning, research, and community engagement across different fields, such as African indigenous astronomy, African indigenous health systems, African indigenous agriculture, African indigenous science and technology, African indigenous languages, African heritage, African arts and culture, biodiversity, cultural diversity, African indigenous law, African indigenous education, African traditional leadership and governance, etc.<sup>13</sup> The IKS Centre offers a Bachelor's degree in Indigenous Knowledge Systems (BIKS), which is approved and recognised by all relevant institutions of government.<sup>14</sup>

To further deepen this drive in the country, the NRF has issued calls for proposals to cover areas such as IKS and Bioeconomy (African traditional medicine, food security and cosmetics); IKS Epistemology (Ubuntu and cosmology, taxonomies, pedagogies and methodologies); IKS and Climate Change; IKS and Energy; IKS Practices of Khoi, Nama, Griqua and San communities; and novel and creative thinking that will shift the boundaries of IKS knowledge

production and address national priorities across different universities in South Africa.<sup>15</sup>

The Centre for African Studies based at the University of Cape Town focuses on the interdisciplinary study of Africa's diverse cultures, histories, and societies. The centre offers courses that explore African languages, literature, art, and music, thus providing students with a deeper understanding of African cultures and heritage.<sup>16</sup> The centre also hosts public lectures, conferences, and cultural events to promote dialogue and engagement around African knowledge systems.<sup>17</sup>

In East Africa, the University of Nairobi has taken significant steps to integrate indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage into its academic programmes and research activities. The university recognises the wealth of indigenous knowledge that exists in Kenya and the importance of preserving and promoting this knowledge within the educational system. The Institute of Anthropology, Gender and African Studies at the University of Nairobi is one of the key institutions driving the integration of indigenous knowledge. The institute offers courses and research opportunities that explore various aspects of African cultures, including indigenous knowledge systems, traditional medicine, cultural practices, and belief systems. Students and researchers have the opportunity to engage with local communities and learn from indigenous knowledge holders. Additionally, the university hosts cultural events, workshops, and conferences that celebrate and showcase indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage.<sup>18</sup> These events provide a platform for dialogue, knowledge exchange, and community engagement.

Furthermore, the University of Nairobi has established partnerships with local communities and organisations to promote the documentation, preservation, and revitalisation of indigenous knowledge. Collaborative research projects are undertaken to address local challenges and leverage indigenous knowledge for sustainable development. Through these initiatives, the University of Nairobi aims to provide a culturally inclusive and relevant education that embraces the contributions of indigenous knowledge. By incorporating indigenous perspectives, the university prepares students to appreciate and engage with the rich cultural heritage of Kenya and contributes to the preservation and promotion of indigenous knowledge for the benefit of society.<sup>19</sup>

Last but not least, in West Africa, universities are also recognising the importance of indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage and incorporating them into their educational programmes. For example, through its Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, the University of Ibadan, Nigeria has developed initiatives focused on integrating indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage into its academic programmes.<sup>20</sup> The Department conducts research

and offers courses on Nigerian and African cultures, traditional knowledge systems, and heritage preservation. The university also collaborates with local communities and cultural organisations to promote cultural heritage documentation, conservation, and community engagement.<sup>21</sup>

Another example in West Africa is the University of Ghana with its Institute of African Studies, which plays a significant role in the integration of indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage.<sup>22</sup> The institute offers interdisciplinary courses that explore African history, cultures, languages, and traditional knowledge systems.<sup>23</sup> It also hosts research projects and cultural events to foster the understanding and appreciation of African cultural heritage.<sup>24</sup> There are also efforts to link indigenous knowledge to sustainable development agendas (Amlor, 2015). The last one to mention in this case is the University of Cheikh Anta Diop in Senegal which has a strong focus on African cultures and indigenous knowledge.<sup>25</sup> The Faculty of Arts and Humanities offers programmes that examine African languages, literature, history, and cultural practices. The university's Center for Research and Documentation on African Traditions and Languages promotes the study and documentation of indigenous knowledge and collaborates with local communities to preserve and promote traditional cultural practices.

These are just a few examples of universities that are actively recognising the importance of indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage. These universities engage in research, offer specialised courses, and collaborate with communities to ensure that African cultural heritage and traditional knowledge are valued, preserved, and integrated into educational programmes.

### 3.2 *Charting New Paths for Relevance*

Universities in Africa are charting new paths and redefining the landscape of research. They are actively engaged in research endeavours that align with national development agendas, regional priorities, and global sustainability goals. National Science Granting Councils are also aligning their priorities in funding research projects that correspond with national, regional, and global development goals (Moja & Okunade, 2022). Universities are conducting research that addresses pressing societal challenges and contributes to the socio-economic development of their respective countries. Their research focus ensures that their efforts are relevant, impactful, and address the unique needs and aspirations of African societies.

For example, research conducted by African universities that align with national development agendas include *Agricultural Research for Food Security*, where research is conducted to enhance agricultural productivity, improve farming techniques, and address food security challenges. For instance, the

University of Nairobi's research on sustainable agricultural practices and crop improvement techniques contributes to Kenya's national development agenda of achieving food security and alleviating poverty. The other area of note is in *Health Research and Innovation* where universities across Africa are actively engaged in research related to public health issues such as infectious diseases, maternal and child health, and healthcare delivery systems (Moja & Okunade, 2022). The University of Cape Town's research on HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment strategies has made significant contributions to South Africa's national efforts in combating the disease and improving healthcare outcomes.<sup>26</sup>

Lastly, another area to mention is that of *Renewable Energy and Environmental Sustainability*. African universities are at the forefront of research on renewable energy sources, environmental conservation, and climate change adaptation. The University of Ghana's research on solar energy technologies and their application in rural communities aligns with the country's renewable energy goals and contributes to sustainable development.<sup>27</sup> These examples illustrate how African universities are conducting research that directly addresses local challenges and contributes to national development priorities. By aligning their research agendas with national agendas, universities ensure that their efforts have practical applications and lead to tangible benefits for their societies.

### 3.3 *Redefining the Landscape of Community Engagement*

African universities are increasingly recognising the importance of community engagement and forging strong ties with local communities. They are actually undergoing a transformation in their approach to community engagement, recognising its pivotal role in fostering positive social change and contributing to sustainable development. Universities are establishing partnerships and collaborative projects with community organisations, government agencies, and industry stakeholders to address community needs and contribute to sustainable development. These engagements involve knowledge co-creation and sharing, capacity building, and collaborative problem-solving to foster positive social change.

They recognise and value the wealth of indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage present within their communities and strive to incorporate those communities into research, teaching, and community development efforts. For example, universities collaborate with community elders, traditional leaders, and local experts to document traditional practices, medicinal knowledge, and sustainable resource management techniques. This knowledge sharing approach ensures that community voices are heard, respected, and integrated into academic endeavours.

The partnership between the University of Botswana and the San community in the Kalahari Desert is one such example. The university has established a collaborative project with the San community, one of the indigenous groups inhabiting the Kalahari Desert. The project aims to document and preserve the rich traditional knowledge and practices of the San people, including their medicinal knowledge and sustainable resource management techniques. Through this collaboration, the university researchers work closely with the San community elders, traditional healers, and local experts to understand and document their traditional knowledge systems. In addition, the university provides training and resources to community members, empowering them to actively participate in the research and documentation process.<sup>28</sup>

It is important to note that the project goes beyond documentation and aims to promote the integration of traditional knowledge into academic and research activities and teaching. There is mutuality of benefit to the partners since, in return, the partnership benefits the San community by promoting cultural preservation, raising awareness about their unique heritage, and creating opportunities for economic empowerment. As a result, they contribute to capacity building and skills development, collaborate in problem solving, and inform policies aimed at benefiting society as a whole.<sup>29</sup>

### 3.3.1 Capacity Building and Skills Development

Universities are playing a crucial role in capacity building and skills development within local communities. They offer training programmes, workshops, and practical initiatives to empower community members and enhance their livelihoods. Some programmes include entrepreneurship training, vocational skills development, and support for small-scale businesses. By equipping individuals with relevant skills and knowledge, universities are contributing to local economic development and empower communities to address their own challenges.

### 3.3.2 Collaborative Problem-Solving

Universities are increasingly embracing a collaborative problem-solving approach, partnering with communities to address pressing social, environmental, and economic challenges. This sometimes involves joint research projects, community-based participatory research, and multidisciplinary initiatives. For instance, some universities work with communities to develop sustainable agriculture practices, implement renewable energy projects, or devise strategies for poverty alleviation. These collaborative efforts ensure that solutions are context-specific, responsive to local needs, and sustainable in the long term.

### 3.3.3 Policy Engagement and Advocacy

African universities are now leveraging their expertise to inform policy-making processes and advocate for positive social change. They engage with government agencies, NGOs, and civil society organisations to contribute research-based insights and recommendations on key development issues. Through policy engagement and advocacy, universities play a vital role in influencing decision-making processes and shaping policies that benefit local communities.

By embracing community engagement, African universities are redefining their role as agents of social change and sustainable development. Through knowledge sharing, capacity building, collaborative problem-solving, and policy engagement, universities are actively contributing to the well-being and empowerment of local communities. This transformation in community engagement practices not only benefits the communities themselves but also enriches the academic endeavours of the universities and fosters a more inclusive and socially responsible higher education sector in Africa.

In summary, these examples demonstrate the various ways in which African universities are embracing change, forging collaborations, integrating local knowledge, and engaging with communities to redefine the landscape of teaching, research, and community engagement. They are boldly embracing change, charting new paths, and redefining the landscape of teaching, research, and community engagement.

## 4 Addressing Funding Challenges

Research in universities is one of the three key functions of any university, side by side with teaching and community engagement. Sawyerr (2004) and Ahemba (2006) (in Kyaligonza, 2015) make a point that production of quality research depends a lot on the funding resources available. However, research in African university is often underfunded by governments and is not regarded as a top priority in most universities especially in a context where they face competing demands to pay salaries and maintain the infrastructure. It is against this background that African universities aspire to move from being teaching-intensive to becoming research-intensive as articulated in their mission statements. Unfortunately, this is not possible if there is no strong financially based support for research. Governments in Africa have been struggling to meet a commitment they made to fund Research and Development at the level of 1% of their GDP since the commitment was made in 1980 as part of the Lagos Plan (Science Granting Councils Initiative, 2017). As a result, universities

are finding alternative and innovative ways to fund research activities which are discussed below.

#### 4.1 *The Rising Cost of Higher Education*

Higher education institutions in Africa have been plagued by budget cuts from their governments amidst rising costs, demands for expansion of access, student failures to pay fees resulting in high levels of debts, and decreasing funding from donors due to what has been referred to as donor fatigue. This is happening in a context where higher education in many African countries is tuition free for students and mainly funded from the taxpayers' contributions. However, students are still charged various fees such as application fees and other additional fees for universities to cover their operational costs. Attempts to charge tuition or raise fees are met with fierce resistance from students who are sometimes supported by other stakeholders, as was the case in Sudan (Sawahel, 2023), or politicians hoping to get student votes. In South Africa, where the 2015 #FeesMustFall student protest led to the then President Zuma, on his way out of the political office, declaring that there would be no more tuition charges for students who cannot afford higher education, student debt has continued to be a problem for institutions (Banda & Lusengo, 2023). As a result, some institutions opt to block students who owe monies from registering, which in turn leads to further protests by students that destabilise the institutions. In Zimbabwe, the National University of Science and Technology had to reverse its proposed 100% fee hike following student protests (Gora, 2023).

Institutions in Africa have been resilient and continually work around the challenges they face to keep their doors open and continue delivering education. Activities in increasing a third stream of funding, in addition to government subsidies and student fees, are escalating as more and more institutions have embarked on income-generating activities to raise funds. Third-stream funding, according to Ntshoe and De Villiers (2013), include philanthropic funding and academic entrepreneurialism. Third-stream, argues Wedgwood (2005), has become mainstream and is encouraged by governments such as in the USA context with the rationalisation that it serves the purpose of stimulating business growth, supports economic growth, and is about the contribution universities make to society. Monyane (2017) presents a strong case indicating that the survival of South African universities depends on their ability to strengthen the third-stream income, and I would argue that this is the case for many other universities in Africa as well. Visiting some of the universities in Ghana and Uganda, one is struck by the deteriorating infrastructure, as universities struggle to keep up with capital projects on their campuses. Monyane (2017) further asserts that commercial activities at universities "includes

maximising income streams through the establishment of a Business Enterprises, the development of strategies for increased third-stream income and initiating an Institutional Capital Campaign” (p. 28).

There are a range of activities that universities have embarked on to generate funds such as the ones discussed in this chapter. In the following, I focus on three, namely, funding for research, consulting services, and the establishment of university foundations.

#### 4.1.1 Third Stream of Funding for Research

There is growing interest among African universities in collaborating with the private sector, non-profit organisations, and governmental agencies on research and development projects. These partnerships often come with funding support and can lead to commercialisation opportunities, creating new revenue streams.

Currently, a number of universities are actively engaging in raising funds for research by conducting collaborative research with industry, government, and non-government organisations such as the University of Nairobi in Kenya, Makerere University in Uganda, Cairo University in Egypt, and Stellenbosch University in South Africa. Partnerships for knowledge production, services to society, and income-generation are central to institutional survival. Knowledge generation for some institutions has resulted in those institutions’ ability to transfer technology and intellectual property in the form of patents, inventions, and copyrights. A study of research funding in Uganda by Kyalingoza et al. (2016) indicated that research was one activity in universities that was grossly underfunded by universities, industry, and government and recommended that universities should consider third-stream sources of funding. Currently, in Uganda, universities are encouraged by their government to set up Technology Transfer Offices (TTO) to generate additional funds and to use research for the benefit of the broader society. This was encouraged because of the innovations being made by Ugandan researchers, as acknowledged by the central institutional set-up dedicated to technology transfer (Uganda National Council for Science and Technology, 2023). In Kenya and Zambia, a unit responsible for the valorisation of research products has been established (Moja & Okunade, 2022). For South Africa, the National Research Foundation (NRF) has developed a partnership strategy for engaging with the private sector as a way of also generating additional resources to fund research projects (National Research Foundation, 2019).

#### 4.1.2 Consulting Services

Many universities have started offering consulting services to industries and organisations that require expertise in areas such as engineering, agriculture,

business, and healthcare. These services include feasibility studies, technical assistance, and problem-solving.

#### 4.1.3 University Foundations

Setting up endowments is common in universities in the global North, particularly in the US. Alumni tend to be more generous in gifting large sums of money to universities. Teferra (2005) makes a case that African universities need to establish endowments to survive. However, this is something new to them and presents challenges as this form of philanthropy is different from the common forms of African philanthropy which Moja and Jaumont (2022) discuss in their paper.

In South Africa, it is mainly the historically White English universities that had ties with their alumni based in the US, the UK, and Australia, including the University of Cape Town and the University of the Witwatersrand which managed to set up organisations that help them raise funds to support their activities. The University of Cape Town has a representative in the US for the US Fund<sup>30</sup> and another in the UK, the UCT Trust. The same applies for the University of the Witwatersrand with its Wits Fund USA,<sup>31</sup> the Wits Foundation UK, and the Wits Australian Board of Directors.

Another emerging trend, as observed by Jaumont and Moja (2020), is that some of the universities are starting to establish independent foundations such as the one by Cheik Anta Diop University of Dakar (UCAD). With the support of the President of the country, Macky Sall, the Fondation de l'Université Cheikh Anta Diop University (FUCAD) was created in 2009 to support UCAD activities related to research, teaching, improving infrastructure and student living conditions, and other activities. The Partnership for Higher Education in Africa (PHEA), sponsored by several major US foundations, also encouraged universities working to establish Development Offices to help raise funds and be weaned from dependency on donor funding (Jaumont, 2016). Jaumont and Moja (2020), however, acknowledge the fact that while such moves help in raising the much-needed funds, there are risks involved as the third parties might seek greater control over the universities and the involved foundations are often criticised for lack of transparency and cases of fraud and abuse.

## 5 Conclusion

In concluding, I would like to return to the point made at the beginning that universities in Africa are actively planting the seeds of change, supported by their leaders and nurtured by passionate educators, driven researchers, and

engaged communities. Students are excited by such innovations and are demanding greater access to higher education. I have illuminated the innovative strides universities are taking to shape the future of education, contribute to sustainable development, and foster global collaboration.

However, despite the progress made in transforming their institutions, universities in Africa continue to face various challenges. Factors such as constrained funding, aging and unmaintained infrastructure, and bureaucratic as well as political barriers hinder universities' efforts to sustain international partnerships. Another challenge they face is the need to be global partners whilst addressing local priorities as well. To address these issues and stay focused on African problems, African universities need to be financially supported, mainly by their governments, and receive supplemental resources from funding agencies and international partners. There are also contextual issues that universities face such as in South Africa where universities face the challenge of making sure that they are transformed from their apartheid legacy as well.

To conclude, this contribution is also a call for the support of studies on higher education in Africa. The now defunct Center for Higher Education Transformation (CHET) played a critical role in generating an understanding of higher education in Africa and closed down when donor funding ended. There is currently the International Network for Higher Education in Africa (INHEA) based at the University of KwaZulu Natal and the Centre for Research on Evaluation, Science and Technology (CREST) based in South Africa. CREST conducts research on various aspects of science, technology, and higher education, including innovation, research capacity, and science policy. There are also pockets of research on higher education in Africa located within other disciplines, but insufficient information is generated to create a clearer understanding of higher education systems in Africa and the role they play in advancing sustainable development. It is vital that the innovation and transformation ideas which have gone undocumented throughout the continent are captured instead and shared to ensure the continent's further development.

## Notes

- 1 <https://www.usnews.com/education/best-global-universities/university-of-pretoria-501543#:~:text=University%20of%20Pretoria%20Rankings,about%20how%20we%20rank%20schools>
- 2 <https://arua.org.za/centres-of-excellence/>
- 3 <https://ace.aau.org/tag/africa-centers-of-excellence/#:~:text=The%20Africa%20Higher%20Education%20Centers,Environment%20and%20Social%20Science%20Applied>

- 4 <https://www.worldbank.org/en/events/2022/09/20/the-african-centers-of-excellence-a-pathway-towards-sustainable-development>
- 5 [https://www.up.ac.za/news/post\\_3125323-university-partnership-initiative-summit-set-to-boost-us-sa-higher-education-partnerships](https://www.up.ac.za/news/post_3125323-university-partnership-initiative-summit-set-to-boost-us-sa-higher-education-partnerships)
- 6 [www.iie.org/AfricanDiaspora](http://www.iie.org/AfricanDiaspora)
- 7 <https://aap.isp.msu.edu/>
- 8 <http://aaun.edu.au/>
- 9 <https://grt.ac.za/>
- 10 <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=2021100614485245>
- 11 <https://natural-sciences.nwu.ac.za/indigenous-knowledge-systems-centre/home>
- 12 <https://www.ump.ac.za/Teaching-and-Learning/Educational-Philosophy.aspx>
- 13 Ibid.
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- 15 <https://www.news.uct.ac.za/images/archive/researchoffice/circulars/IKS.pdf>
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- 18 <https://sps.uonbi.ac.ke/basic-page/cultural-social-activities>
- 19 <https://african-studies.uonbi.ac.ke/index.php/thematic-areas/anthropology-conservation>
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- 21 Ibid.
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- 23 Ibid.
- 24 <https://ias.ug.edu.gh/content/ghana-dance-ensemble>
- 25 <https://www.africanreadingcultures.org/partners/institut-fondamental-dafrique-noire-universite-cheikh-anta-diop-ifan-ucad/>
- 26 <https://health.uct.ac.za/school-public-health/research-research-centres-units/centre-infectious-disease-epidemiology-and-research-cider>
- 27 <https://www.ug.edu.gh/sites/default/files/documents/Energy%20Awards%20-%20Read%20more%20about%20the%20awards%20at.pdf>
- 28 <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/sanbasarwa-studies-university-botswana>
- 29 <https://www.ub.bw/research/research-centres/san-research-centre>
- 30 <https://health.uct.ac.za/alumni-international-offices/uct-fund-inc-usa>
- 31 <https://witsfund.org/>

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# Higher Education Massification and the Power of Academic Practices

*Experiences and Insights from a Public University in Kenya*

*Mariah Mosomi*

## Abstract

Global policy discourse and practices currently shape our imagination of universities in the 21st century. Oftentimes this model assumes a universal level playing field for higher education institutions either by definition or operationally. However, it is becoming evident that African universities have evolved differently especially as a result of colonial experiences, leading to unique challenges that may not resonate with what is happening in other world regions. This calls for a review and redefinition of critical concepts that define the African HE landscape. This chapter will undertake a critical reflection of the context of higher education expansion in Kenya and its implications for academic practice. Based on a case study of a public university in Kenya, it shows that HE expansion is an institutional challenge, here referred to as “institutional massification.” This term refers to a situation in which institutions encounter a disparity between enrolment expansion policies, available resources, and resultant implications for academic practices. The chapter concludes that in the convergence of global trends and local realities, the African University continues to develop a specific contextual fabric that requires the inclusion of local definitions and frameworks. Accounting for the central role of academics, the institutions of the continent should draw on the experiential knowledge, expertise, and goodwill that academics can offer in times of massification to strengthen the fabric of the African University.

## Keywords

Kenya – institutional massification – academic practice – social practice theory

## 1 Introduction

Globally, higher education institutions (HEIs) are facing pressure due to increasing demands for enrolment expansion amidst scarcity of funding (Schendel &

McCowan, 2016). On the one hand, there are insistent demands for enrolment expansion, spurred by both supply and demand dynamics. Conversely, institutions are confronted by a scarcity of funds to recruit additional academic staff, develop learning facilities, and expand crucial equipment to cope with these growing needs. Amidst these conditions, academic practices – meaning the ways in which academics negotiate the institutional context and perform their roles as researchers, teachers, and university employees – remain under-explored and are often over-looked by institutional policy structures. The present chapter is based on a thesis (Mosomi, 2022) that uses social practice theory to explore the relationship between academic practices and so-called practice architectures, meaning the established conditions and routines of practice which shape and provide the space for individual practices, behaviours, and choices to emerge. Recognising the role of higher education as the backbone of African economies, this chapter acknowledges that rapid enrolment expansion at the institutional level without increases in requisite resources presents a threat to the social and economic fabric of many universities.

While expansion of Higher Education (HE) is not a new phenomenon globally or within Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), ensuring the visibility in the global discourse of the particular issues confronting the African context is of crucial importance. As far back as 1972, Martin Trow formulated the term massification to describe the perceived linear growth of higher education that transitions from “elite” to “mass” to “universal” stages (Trow, 2020). In his discussion, he proposed that a country with a national enrolment of up to 15% of the relevant age group be considered as having an “elite” higher education system; one with an enrolment of 16–50% as having a “mass” system; and one with more than 50% enrolment as having a “universal” system. This definition has continued to dominate the categorisation of enrolment expansion globally with little regard for the emerging economies within the African region whose national enrolment ratios are way below 15%. The thesis providing the basis for the present chapter, entitled “Implications of ‘Institutional Massification’ for Academic Practices: A Qualitative Study on the Perspectives and Experiences of Academics at a Public University in Kenya Conducted in Light of Social-Practice Theory” (Mosomi, 2022), suggests on the basis of its findings that Trow’s definition falls short of the African experience of massification. Completed in 2022 at the University of Liverpool, the thesis engaged 20 academic staff at a Kenyan public university representing all the university colleges and a cross spectrum of departments. The findings indicate that academics are experiencing the effects of massification at the institutional level even as the growth of admissions at the national level does not conform with Trow’s definition. Furthermore, academics expressed concerns over the growing number

of students that is not met with a commensurate expansion of human, financial, and infrastructural resources. This chapter analyses the implications of this expansion, here defined as “institutional massification,” on academic practices. The term denotes HEIs that are characterised by significant enrolment expansion while struggling with inadequate funding, poor physical infrastructure, inadequate staffing, and crowded classrooms (Mosomi, 2022). This definition also highlights the challenge of a very low higher education enrolment ratio nationally but the comparatively rapid growth in real student numbers which many HEIs are facing (Kipchumba, 2019). As Peter Scott (2017) suggests, massification should not be understood as referring to an expansion of student numbers and the number of institutions of higher learning measured only in quantitative terms. It should also account for the ability of institutions and staff to respond appropriately.

## 2 Situation Analysis

Enrolment expansion in most of Africa has been described as massification without the masses. In a comparison of higher education systems globally, the enrolment rate in much of SSA universities is at 9% of the relevant age group while it is at 79% in Europe and North America (UNESCO, 2022). Although in a global perspective this statistic may not indicate massification, on-going discourses in SSA often use the term massification to denote the problems encountered by HEIs even as the expansion at the national level remains sluggish. For instance, the Economist ran an article in 2017 entitled “More can be less” to indicate the plight of HEIs in Africa that are recruiting too many students while lacking corresponding funds. The same conclusion was true ten years earlier in a study of seven African universities which showed that student enrolment had increased up to eightfold with an annual increase of 15–25% over the period 1986–2006. Today, most African HEIs suffer from the negative effects of institutional massification. These include very low staff/student ratios, overcrowded lecture theatres, insufficient laboratory equipment, and the transition to a more theoretical training approach and away from tutorial and practical sessions that allowed students to engage more deeply with their subjects and with staff and student colleagues. These developments have been associated with a negative impact on the overall quality of teaching and learning (Menard et al., 2015). Therefore, as African universities endeavour to meet the pressure of expanded admissions without sufficient sectorial expansion, they remain marginalised and unable to equitably compete in the world-wide arena until their unique experiences form part of the global discourse.

### 3 Methodology

The PhD study forming the basis for the present chapter implemented a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to explore how academic staff encounter HE enrolment expansion. The study relied on a qualitative descriptive methodology with a constructivist worldview. This approach pays particular attention to the description of experience, precise meanings, feelings, and practices that develop in and through the relationships between people. In-depth interviews were conducted with 20 academics from all the colleges at the selected university. An interpretive approach to data analysis was adopted in order to focus on the subjective human experience as well as participant perceptions and feelings (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The inductive nature of thematic analysis enhanced the data-driven assumptions of the study by providing a useful link between emerging themes and qualitative data from the participants. Through a review and synthesis of participants' narratives and behaviours, this approach illuminated why participants made certain choices in their academic practice during massification.

To successfully accomplish the interviews, prior appointments with purposely selected participants were made. The response was very positive with 20 out of 21 participants accepting. This was later viewed as an indication of the desire among academics to address challenges of massification head-on. The data was examined based on the elements of social practice theory, the author's prior experiences with qualitative research approaches, and thematic analysis techniques.

### 4 Theoretical Framework

Social practice theory presents a new perspective in which practices, instead of individual or other analytical classifications, become the unit of analysis (Welch, 2016). The theory argues that transforming social life requires changing practices, meaning what people say, what they do, and how they relate to each other. Overall, the practices of individuals help to constitute and are simultaneously shaped and determined by so-called "practice architectures." In this view, cultural, material, and social transformation is not about changing social structures but about changing the practices whose repetition and reproduction in patterns of everyday social life create the impression that structures exist. The argument of this chapter is that individual academic practices exist in a reciprocal relationship of influence with broader institutional practice architectures, including the cultural-discursive (Sayings), material-economic

(Doings), and social-political (Relatings) arrangements that make practices in HE possible (Kemmis et al., 2014). Academic practices can therefore influence processes of institutional massification by intervening in practice architectures. This theory illustrates how individual autonomous action at the university is constrained or enabled by practice architectures, meaning the engrained patterns of what academics and other stakeholders say and do, and how they relate with their environment.

## 5 Findings and Discussion

This chapter argues that cultural-discursive, material-economic, and socio-political dimensions have an impact on academic practices in diverse ways during enrolment expansion. It has been presumed that globalisation can only be profound to the African University when guided by local realities. This may include a review of state funding for higher education, currently accorded low priority, in order to ease pressure on universities facing rapid youth population growth and to improve student participation rates.

The findings make apparent that material conditions and existing dynamics shape academic practices but that practices can also enable academics to navigate through the pressures of local realities (massification at the institutional level) and global trends. The study revealed that people, objects, discourses, relationships, activities, and circumstances in social life are enmeshed in sites of practice in different and unique ways. Through a review and synthesis of participants' narratives and behaviours, this approach helped to identify what motivated participants in their academic practices and mapped out these decision-making processes.

It is presumed that higher education expansion in Africa can be described as massification without the masses. While Martin Trow limited his definition of massification to describe countries with a HE enrolment ratio exceeding 15%, the results of this study show that the everyday experiences of African academics clearly negate this broadly accepted definition. Accordingly, massification can be understood as an expansion not borne out of national strategic plans but promoted instead by the social, financial, and political demands of the day. This perspective suggests that trends towards growth and development represent both important challenges and opportunities for African universities, as illustrated below.

### 5.1 *Challenges and Opportunities for Academic Practice during Massification*

In spite of the challenges of massification for African universities, this chapter captures the strong goodwill and potential of academics to negotiate between

the pursuit of excellence and difficult political and economic conditions. In light of the widespread influence of the university as a unified global cultural reference system, it highlights the need to interrogate and recalibrate the concept of the university in order to account for the specificities of the African University. This is especially urgent in areas where local realities are clearly peculiar and unique, rendering them difficult to align with the constricting global standard in its current form. This approach is intended to safeguard African HEIs from unfair comparison with institutions that do not share similar attributes or contexts. The dimensions that influence academic practices have been classified as either cultural-discursive, material-economic, or social-political. Looking at the material-economic dimensions of massification, the study demonstrates that environmental and financial factors pose major challenges to the institutions. Secondly, in spite of barriers posed by the social-political environment, academics display a commendable level of innovative practices and goodwill which must be recognised as a valuable resource for the development of the institution. Ultimately, these findings suggest the need to move from changing individual behaviours to altering social practices by understanding the components that make up these practices, as discussed below.

### 5.2 *The Cultural-Discursive Dimension*

This dimension did not feature very prominently in the participant experiences, however, the international massification discourse is grounded in cultural-discursive arrangements. This dimension requires further exploration and expansion. Stern (1996) argues that the attitudes, traditions, and values of institutions and institutional stakeholders constitute the cultural barriers to effective academic practice. The findings from the study confirm that academic attitudes and perceptions shape practice as the participants expressed their concerns with regard to massification and how the phenomenon has affected their attitude to their work. The participants cited concerns over the poor delivery of staff welfare services, lower salaries, and the assignment of management duties that academics clearly consider outside of their core mandate.

*Issues of staff-welfare are critical. You are a human being with needs to be addressed. These are basic issues. The salary is laughable; Medical services are non-existent.*

Participants' feelings in this regard were key to their work performance.

### 5.3 *The Material-Economic Dimension*

Institutional support of academic work can be a crucial ingredient for fostering progressive academic practices, but lack of support can lead to negative

effects on practices, as alluded to by participants and supported by the existing literature.

*I have struggled to find time to do research ... In the process many aspects of my life have suffered ... Something has to give.*

For instance, Nda and Fard (2013) show that the absence of support from the administration can lead to frustration among genuine academics trying to enhance institutional performance and productivity. Similarly, participants stated that they are rarely consulted on questions of policy and that administrators make decisions about expansion that are incompatible with an academic ethos. The academics in this study advocated for policies that are socially constructed, meaning that they capture the views of critical stakeholders and reflect prevailing social conditions with the aim of fulfilling the mandate and core values of the institution. Drawing on social practice theory, the argument can be made that institutions addressing the challenges of massification should focus on the practices of academic staff. This is based on the assumption that theories of practice can help to resolve challenging dualisms such as the one between structure and agency. Resolving this dualism should be of particular importance to policy makers concerned with enabling behavioural and social change in higher education as it permits a view of behaviour as the observable performance of social practices and turns the focus toward changing practices and their performances rather than individuals (Spurling et al., 2013).

In the responses of the participants, environmental dimensions of time and space, and concerns over the physical sites where academic activities take place, were frequently mentioned. The theory of practice architectures contends that structures of practice present both constraints and opportunities for action to practitioners (Kemmis et al., 2014). One can argue that identifying and understanding the specific conditions relevant to people in their use of, and practical relationship with, resources can enhance positive practices as suggested by participants in the following excerpts.

*You spend a minimum of 8 hours at work in a day ... if you are uncomfortable ... it must affect you somehow.*

*some rooms are so small that some students attend lessons through the window.*

*The classes have no sockets ... I have to get my own cable to connect power from a distant room if I need to use a projector.*

The sentiments expressed by these participants are an indicator of the impact that inadequate relevant materials have on the performance of academics. It is

therefore of vital importance to take these concerns and feelings seriously as downplaying them will affect the overall quality of performance in HE.

Furthermore, studies on social practice theory and the concept of time underscore the importance of including the experiential knowledge of the involved stakeholders when designing and scheduling the workday. Research on experiences in contexts of time scarcity illustrates how subjective experiences of being hassled matter for the temporal organisation of what people do. A pragmatic illustration of this relationship can be found in how experiences of increasing academic workloads and associated pressures impact on strategies of coping with academic life. Higher education academic staff have commonly identified lack of safeguarded time to take part in existing programmes as barriers to effective practice (Ludmerer, 2000). This was demonstrated in the study as participants passionately expressed their views on how massification has contributed to scarcity of personal and professional time in the performance of their work. The participants argued that the decision by the university to admit more students created what they call seamless teaching that has interfered with vacation and research practices. Seamless teaching was the term used by participants to describe a situation where the university admits new students in October, January, and May and therefore academics teach from one semester to the next without a break.

Moreover, academics responded to the experience of an increasing workload in different ways. While some participants were overwhelmed by the amount of work associated with massified classes, others devised innovative teaching and assessment strategies that encouraged critical thinking and learning. Nevertheless, the study shows that despite the endeavour to incorporate innovative strategies into their teaching, academics still argued that they were not in a position to meet their full obligations due to conditions of heavy workload and time pressure in the site of practice. Rose and Sika (2019) established that for every unit increase in teacher workload, there is a decrease in pupils' academic achievement. This should encourage stakeholder discussion in favour of the needs of practitioners and students and improving the overall structure and fabric of higher education in Africa.

Responding to increasing pressures related to massification, innovative strategies were developed in the area of teaching practices. Some academics incorporated flipped learning to cope with the growing workload, and these approaches form part of the way forward for African universities whose projections show that the population of students is expected to continue growing over the next four decades.

*I am now using flipped learning, and it works. I assign students all the content they need to learn in advance, and I separate them into groups and ask*

*them to do their own research and improve the content. Students don't miss class because they are the leaders in the learning process.*

Flipped learning refers to an instructional method that integrates many aspects of teaching and learning, including some of the following attributes: interactive group learning in class; practical and laboratory work; assigning reading out of class especially in advance of the class; computer assisted activities; online lectures; and reliance on technology to introduce course content. As an innovation, it has been positively used to mitigate the challenges of massification in other countries as well. In Morocco for instance, academic staff working in overcrowded classrooms achieved a reduction in academic failure among students in addition to saving time by using flipped learning (Idrissi Jouicha et al., 2018).

Studies from other countries outside the SSA region support the reality that innovative responses to massification are a source of new practices. In the UK, enrolment expansion encouraged some institutions to successfully adopt, introduce, and expand online training practices. As the theory of practice architectures acknowledges, innovation creates new possibilities for practice by interrogating unsustainable practices in education and embracing unexpected ones (Mahon et al., 2017).

The issue of inadequate time for research is further reflected in the type of research currently undertaken at the institution. Participants argued that they lack sufficient time to develop research proposals that address the gaps in knowledge in their respective fields. They claimed that they are leveraging on student research work that they supervise instead of providing research leadership. As one participant stated: *Masters' students do research, and I supervise them in the field, but you see this is not my research work.* This is rather unfortunate when Africa needs state-of-the-art research to drive her development agenda within a globalised competitive environment and universities should be promoting targeted research work.

Besides the negative impact of growing time pressure, insufficient spatial relations also affect academic work. Space for educational and learning settings can have implications for teaching and learning practices, but interviews with the participants about their experiences of agency exposed spatial conditions as a neglected area. The findings of this study show that the physical spaces and settings necessary for learning have not been sufficiently considered in the planning processes of facilities during enrolment expansion. The participants argued that current working spaces were either lacking, insufficient, or compromised, prompting academics to go out of their way to use personal time and equipment to facilitate teaching and learning. In instances where participants did not have a physical office on site, the greatest loser was the student community.

*Some staff members don't even have an office and that means they cannot be reached by their students for consultation.*

*Lecture rooms are inadequate and often there are clashes between classes.*

These sentiments point to institutional conditions in which communication, planning, and consultation between university administration and academia is dismal. This calls for more strategic collaboration and consultation between the key stakeholders as a way of redesigning the fabric of the African University to better serve the needs of staff, students, and society at large.

#### 5.4 *Inadequate Financial Resources*

In social practice theory, financial resources like other material-economic resources shape the doings of practice by affecting what can be done, when it can be done, how it can be done, and who can do it (Mahon et al., 2017). Financial stability features as a very prominent determinant of academic practices as participants associated the levels and distribution of funds with the implementation of many academic projects.

*Research funds from the university are not adequate and when they are allocated, they take a very long time to be availed.*

*If staff and students are going to finance their research out of necessity, then the quality of research is compromised because they will only do the bare minimum.*

*When research funding is entirely left in the hands of donors or industry players, then the research undertaken will most likely be advancing the agenda of the funder first.*

These sentiments mirror other studies that have closely linked massification of higher education with inadequate funding (Jacob, 2020). Sharing the Haitian experience with massification and funding, Jacob found that massification contributed to a drop in per-student expenditure.

However, in keeping with the notion that “necessity is the mother of innovation,” participants indicated that as a means of mitigating the challenges of acquiring research funding some adopted collaborative approaches toward grant proposal development. They argued that complementary efforts through multidisciplinary resource mobilisation, involving academics from different departments working together to source research funds, enhanced funding

opportunities. The academics demonstrated their power, resourcefulness, and use of networks to augment national higher education funding efforts.

*We team up based on our skill areas and look for opportunities to carry out research together as well as raise funds for postgraduate training.*

*The aggressive heads of department have managed to secure funds to support postgraduate students through various collaborative means.*

*We do benefit a lot from various networks ... bringing in more research funds. This includes collaboration with other universities and research institutes.*

The efforts described in this finding go beyond the recurring mindset of getting resources from “out there.” They contribute to curbing overdependence on donor funding. Exploring possibilities to expand funding sources, as has been practiced with much success in other environments, should be made a key part of the fabric of the African University (Ward et al., 2020). On the other hand, the theory of practice architectures is not just about identifying constraints but about leveraging available opportunities and skills to harness positive results for African universities, as demonstrated in this study.

### 5.5 *Staffing and Infrastructure*

Instead of simply focusing on the overall reduction of resources consumed, social practice theory offers an alternative approach that places the sustainable use of human resources at its centre. Participants in the study viewed themselves as a resource to be harnessed for the overall growth and development of the university and the country at large. But pressure from work overload resulting from inadequate staffing was a barrier to their performance. Scholars of social practice theory argue that the design of practice has an effect on the consumption of resources. Practice architectures that do not permit an efficient allocation of resources can lead to redundancies, doubling, and waste, but this applies to both financial resources and human ones. The innovation of a procedure or practice can, therefore, help to make it sustainable by accounting for the needs of its users and including their input in its design, in a process we might refer to, drawing on the work of Brynjarsdottir et al. (2012), as non-persuasive sustainability or enabling sustainability. This view points to the importance of adequate staffing and infrastructure as key resources that shape academic practices.

Kemmis et al. (2014) posit that practice architectures constitute the preconditions that prefigure practice, making the doings of practices possible and

holding them in place. In this study, academics rejected the doubling up of roles as they considered it constraining to their “legitimate” practices. They described how doubling of academic roles with administration work impacts on their practices when administrative work involving participation in many time-consuming policy-related meetings usurps academic time.

*The load is heavy because of inadequate staffing. You cannot continue teaching and handling administration duties at the same time. We need role differentiation between academics and administration.*

Closely linked to this argument of role differentiation during massification is the issue of preparing funding proposals and seeking funding for research. The participants argued that the competitive environment for funding proposals necessitates the allocation of sufficient time and people with the right skills and talents. The participants recommended the establishment of a grant unit purely dedicated to raising funds for research activities in order to carve out time for teaching and research and guard against role ambiguity, thereby improving employee work performance (Ogohi, 2019). This finding is especially persuasive seeing as many higher education institutions fail to acknowledge the importance of deploying staff according to their key strengths. I argue here that grant proposal writing, carrying out research, and teaching are more or less distinct talents and gifts that individuals possess. Universities can achieve more by allowing academics to do what they know best as their core assignment while awarding promotional rights without prejudice. The current design of “publish or perish” may need to be subjected to further review.

*The role of the academic staff should be to do the proposals but grant seeking [should] become the responsibility of the university.*

*I think we need a grants office ..., and that is a huge responsibility off the shoulders of the academics.*

Furthermore, participants assigned great significance to the role and upkeep of materials, facilities, and equipment. Encountering issues stemming from their perceived inadequacy and lack of structure led some academics to take charge, stimulate organisational change, and enable future academic practices. One of the greatest concerns participants talked about related to the availability and suitability of infrastructure. They argued that facilities have remained the same in spite of enrolment expansion, and this has affected both the teaching and laboratory spaces, leading to overcrowded classes. In

addition, the equipment required to match the population of students has not been expanded and there is inconsistent maintenance of existing materials. As a result, students are forced to share critical equipment like dentistry instruments which compromises the learning experience so that some students do their practical work by watching. It is important to note that in this environment academics continue to develop and share innovative coping strategies, including leveraging networks to outsource equipment and drawing on personal equipment reserves. This is a clear indication that academics do not simply “stand and watch” from the edge, learning through gradual participation, but instead remain active participants in the community of practice (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

### 5.6 *Response to Social-Political Dimension*

To properly consider the role of the social-political dimension it is necessary to acknowledge that practices do not evolve in a vacuum but are rather socially enabled and/or constrained by practice architectures that involve ways of understanding, acting, and relating to one another at the site of practice (Kemmis et al., 2014). This perspective further suggests that practices create emotions and that in turn emotions can be regarded as a practical engagement with the world (Scheer, 2012). Indeed, the participants in this study expressed themselves through emotions when talking about encounters with and in their social-political environments.

In this regard, social practice theory helps to examine the existence and operation of power in the social by focusing on how practices relate to, and associate with, each other to enable individual acts and shape conduct. Monique Sheer argues that social practice theory provides an interpretive lens to examine power relations that are often unspoken and ubiquitous. In this view, human action is often subject to external influences, and power relations continually inform action and the capacity to act in the performance of practices.

Despite the glaring negative conditions of massification, participants reported a great number of positive experiences, as discussed. They passionately shared how massification can provide opportunities to apply their talents and initiate and expand research and funding horizons through the implementation of ground-breaking practices. The participants and their views represent a wide range of existing possibilities for African HE. Their expertise and experiences hold the key to enhancing academic practices in response to massification and approaching other challenges through collaborative endeavours and links with other institutions. Participants also emphasised the benefits of hiring more graduate assistants and tutorial fellows using grant funding, which tremendously eases the pressures of staffing shortages while improving

departmental research portfolios. In addition, academic staff were able to secure funding for training programmes, including PhD studies, by cultivating a multidisciplinary approach where academics from diverse departments collaborated to enhance grant proposal development.

*The quality of research is going up because now we have more graduate assistants and tutorial fellows who assist the lecturers to do the research.*

*Through networking I was able to get a grant for my PhD based on the multidisciplinary grant proposal.*

It is plausible to argue that what may be considered constraining conditions for practice can be adapted in innovative ways to produce opportunities for academics.

### 5.7 *Resistance to Institutional Policies*

In spite of the positive achievements discussed above, participants sometimes responded to their situation with outright rage about institutional policies and practices. Academics have increasingly been called on to function as bedrocks of social and economic growth for national and regional states. In the process, they are expected to produce high quality viable teaching and research work. These demands have exerted tremendous pressure on academic staff working in massified higher education systems without guaranteed commensurate funding. Undeniably, some systems have overlooked the critical link between funding and enrolment expansion and continued to implement neoliberal funding strategies that have seriously defunded the sector. These policies have helped to produce situations that undermine and threaten the mandate and identity of academics to the detriment of academic practices.

It is apparent that academics consider massification a major contributor to the poor working environment and the frequent industrial strikes experienced in many universities in Kenya. In their view, the need to demonstrate resistance to institutional policies is a depleting experience that has corrosive effects on the relationships between academic staff, the administration, and society at large, as implied in the following excerpts.

*This salary reform and the never respected Common Bargaining Agreements (CBAs) irritate me quite immensely. Not that the salary is worth demonstrating over in the first place.*

*If you are financially comfortable, then you put your all to teaching.*

This causes one to wonder, who is meant by “the other side”? As far back as 1995, academic staff at public universities in Kenya organised industrial strikes to protest government attempts to silence what they considered to be legitimate demands and to vocally express their emotional discontent (Mazrui & Mutunga, 1995). To this day, academic staff feel that the government continues to suppress them through a coalition with university administrations. This has continued to anger academics who often respond with long industrial strikes that have affected the university training programmes (Omolo, 2012). Most participants perceived themselves as powerless in the decision-making processes and strongly resisted the changes that they associated with managerialist ideologies. They cited the dismal implementation of remuneration, admissions, and communications policies as major causes of industrial strikes. As a result of perceived poor remuneration, some participants reported engaging in private consultancy work on university time. This finding is supported by other studies that have looked at the relationship between job satisfaction and organisational performance, establishing a positive correlation between the two (Latif, 2013). It suggests again that social practice architectures strongly influence the doings of academic staff. Poor remuneration has encouraged academics to resist institutional policies. The staff not only felt unappreciated for their efforts but a deep sense of lost identity, explaining that while industrial action may be justified it was not a desired response. Altbach (2012) confirms that university teaching is one of the lowest paying professions worldwide. In light of this, the participants reiterated their legitimate demands for appreciation and remuneration that will permit them to meet their basic needs and maintain their perceived dignity in society through benefits such as comprehensive health care and tax rebate.

As Pierre Bourdieu elaborates in his concept of habitus, “the body is not a static, timeless, universal foundation that produces a historical emotional arousal, but is itself socially situated, adaptive, trained, plastic, and thus historical” (Scheer, 2012, p. 193). Reflecting the importance of feeling socially situated, the participants stated that they had lost their sense of identity, with one participant saying:

*Something has disappeared.*

The sentiment of this speaker suggests that they woke up one morning and something was gone. Nobody had prepared them for the disappearance. There is a sense of loss among these academics, suffused by frustrations and disappointments but also by an unwillingness to accept their framing as passive victims of change. Nevertheless, some participants expressed that they

were experiencing a period of deterioration in their academic practice combined with a sense of lost identity, ultimately evoking feelings of resentment. In social practice theory, identity is understood as a negotiated outcome. As Wenger (1998) puts it, we define who we are by the ways we experience ourselves in processes of (greater or lesser) participation as well as by the ways in which we reify ourselves and are reified by others. In this study, participants felt that they lacked the means and capacity to resist the changes instituted by those holding decision-making power, often succumbing to a sense of suffering. Based on these experiences, it can be argued that the inefficient implementation of policies and guidelines and the inadequate communication on enrolment expansion policies are perceived as constraining the practices of academics.

*You see there was no elaborate plan to involve staff before the expansion.*

*And we are told, if you feel you are being cheated as a human being, you reduce your effort, for that is the only way the thing can be sustainable.*

According to the participants, seamless admissions – with up to four admissions cycles per year and staff continuously involved in academic work and the teaching of new entrants – denies academics the opportunity to take sabbatical leave and structured vacations. They are granted no time to recover, as implied below.

*There is no long vacation anymore because we have another group of students coming in. It is like there are classes the whole year around. So clearly that forces you to be running up and down so that the time you could spend in research or developing yourself is taken up by other classes.*

This participant argues that the decision by the university to admit more students has created seamless teaching that has interfered with vacation, research, and development practices. There is a degree of discontent in his voice. His sentiments are supported by colleagues from other departments.

*We have to teach extra hours especially in a department like ours where we also have laboratory sessions. After the lecture of 1 hour, we still must spend another 3 hours with the students in the lab.*

The heightened workload is thus intruding on previously cherished moments when academics could take time off to do research, work on publications, and

rejuvenate. Furthermore, the large numbers of students significantly constrain teaching, research, supervision, and assessment practices. Overall, these sentiments indicate a misalignment of priorities and a knowledge gap which together fall short of the goal of a vibrant and meaningful higher education landscape. Yet even accounting for all the disappointments expressed by participants, one of this study's key findings are the equally impassioned statements of hope issued by the academics amidst a deeply challenging environment.

## 6 Conclusion

The phenomenon of massification is a growing reality in Africa, and it has the potential to cause grave long-term consequences for social development, economic growth, and the overall educational landscape. This chapter points to the existing possibilities that academic staff can draw on in their search for solutions to the effects of massification. The experiences of academics demonstrate the importance of attending to the practice architectures and material realities of organisations. The results offer a window of hope for institutions struggling with massification by highlighting the importance of incorporating the views and perceptions of academics and other key stakeholders of HE in the formulation of policy.

The analysis of results was based on the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014). In analysing academics' response to massification, the study has shown that academics are dedicated to upholding good academic practices even when faced with adverse conditions. The findings further showed that cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political dimensions on site can enable and/or constrain practices. What emerged as meaningful for the academics was the ability to forge new partnerships and new practices to cope with institutional massification.

Seen through the theoretical lens of practice architectures, it becomes obvious why massification, from the point of view of academics, presents a considerable challenge. The analysis based on this theory contributes to the discussion about what kind of arrangements can support academics in their initiation and innovation of new practices. It further shows the importance of studying in detail each unique massification context to understand how academic practices can be strengthened at the local or regional level. Ultimately, this casts some doubt on the legitimacy of the universalising massification typology developed by Martin Trow.

The study has demonstrated that academics perceive and respond to massification in very unique ways, also offering opportunities for practitioners and

institutions to create new practices by challenging and interrogating current forms of practice in education (Mahon et al., 2017). The social practice theory drew attention to the innovative work of academics in constructing and reconstructing disciplinary identities and academic practices in the context of changes brought about by institutional massification. The findings reflect how university structures and policies influence the everyday teaching and learning on site, ultimately shaping the very fabric of academics' experiences in their practice.

This chapter acknowledges the importance of expanding university enrolment while recognising that these policies can only succeed with adequate strategic planning and the intentional involvement of academics in the decision-making process. Consequently, challenges of inadequate planning and implementation can be avoided if stronger relationships are forged between academic staff and key stakeholders. The theory of practice architectures can inform such interrogative work (Mahon et al., 2017), and studies show that when people play an active role in group decision-making and problem solving, they tend to view the outcomes as "ours" rather than "theirs," in a process we can refer to as non-persuasive sustainability (Brynjarsdóttir et al., 2012).

In conclusion, this chapter argues that academics in the region have the potential and resilience to give the fabric of the African University a new face through close collaboration with government and university administrators. For their part, policy makers have the task of broadening communication channels with academics and other stakeholders in order to enhance positive and meaningful engagement. This should engender the responsible utilisation of academic skills and competencies as well as national and regional resources without losing site of the need to participate in the globalisation process. Finally, academics share the responsibility of working towards strengthening these relationships for the good of the students as well as the growth and development of HE in Africa.

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# Decolonisation and Internationalisation of Higher Education

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## Abstract

South African universities face two seemingly opposing demands from decolonisation and internationalisation. Decolonisation calls for universities to become locally relevant institutions that do not simply instantiate “western” models of universities in South Africa. On the other hand, internationalisation of universities, in the conventional sense, seems inherently outward looking and aims to meet the criteria and standards for higher education determined according to so-called “Western” metrics. This chapter considers the question whether internationalisation and decolonisation are essentially incompatible. Do the demands of internationalisation necessarily stand in conflict with those of decolonisation? To answer this question, the chapter critically discusses what is meant by internationalisation and decolonisation, drawing particularly on the South African literature, and analyses whether these two processes are incompatible. It explains how conventional conceptualisations of internationalisation of curricula can be perceived as undermining decolonisation’s goal of challenging Eurocentrism and thus viewed as in conflict with decolonisation. It then discusses Kwasi Wiredu’s conception of decolonisation and illustrates how in this conception internationalisation is an intrinsic feature of decolonisation. Following from this, the chapter concludes that decolonisation is not necessarily in conflict with internationalisation.

## Keywords

South Africa – internationalisation – decolonisation – Eurocentrism – Kwasi Wiredu – curriculum

## 1 Internationalisation and Decolonisation: Friends or Foes?

South Africa’s public higher education system has global ambitions, with most of its universities striving to solidify their place on the global stage. These global

ambitions are often encapsulated in universities' international partnerships and internationalisation strategies. At the same time, South African universities are still battling with the legacies of colonialism and apartheid and have been challenged to be more responsive to national contexts and devise standards that reflect local concerns. The latter has been articulated in resurgent calls for transformation in universities under the banner of decolonisation. Hence, South African universities can be seen as needing to straddle between two seemingly opposing demands: decolonisation and internationalisation. On the one hand, decolonisation calls for universities to become locally relevant institutions that do not simply instantiate "western" models of universities in South Africa. On the other hand, internationalisation, in its traditional conceptualisation, seems to be inherently outward looking and about meeting the criteria and standards for higher education determined and dictated by so-called "western" metrics and stakeholders.

This chapter investigates whether the demands of internationalisation necessarily stand in conflict with those of decolonisation? To answer this question, it critically discusses what is meant by internationalisation and decolonisation, particularly in the South African literature, and analyses whether these two processes are incompatible. The chapter explains how, conceived in conventional ways, internationalisation of curricula seems to undermine the decolonial goals of challenging Eurocentrism. It then critically discusses Kwasi Wiredu's conception of decolonisation, showing how, in this conception, internationalisation is an intrinsic feature of decolonisation. The overall conclusion is that internationalisation is not necessarily in tension with decolonisation.

## 2 Calls to Decolonise Curricula in South African Universities

Almost thirty years into democracy, the South African higher education system has experienced significant growth and many achievements in the higher education sector. One main achievement is greater access and diversity in the demography of students in South African universities. However, many challenges pervade the system because of its historical legacies of colonialism and apartheid. The "fallist" movements (#FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall) of 2015/16 gave expression to some of the key challenges faced by South African higher education and brought about a renewed interest in the call for transforming universities under the banner of decolonisation. These calls for decolonisation emerged out of growing frustrations with underfunding issues in higher education in the context of increasing enrolment growth of poor students, dissatisfaction with what and how students are taught, and critiques of

how the institutional culture of many universities isolates and marginalises students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Webbstock, 2016). The unifying call of the decolonisation movements is for higher education in South Africa to be more responsive and attuned to the realities and needs of its constituents, especially students, as well as to advance the development and social justice goals of South Africa (Webbstock, 2016).

South African higher education, because of the historical baggage of colonialism and apartheid, is tasked with redressing past inequalities and transforming the higher education system to serve a new social order, to meet pressing national needs, and to respond to new realities and opportunities (Department of Education, 1997). Many aspects of universities in South Africa have been identified as targets for decolonisation. One aspect that has been the subject of much critique are curricula. The kind of knowledge that is taught and the ways in which it is organised and delivered to students remain a central concern for decolonisation movements. One principal contention by proponents of decolonisation is that “curriculum content is dominated by – to name some – white, male, western, capitalist, heterosexual, European worldviews. It under-represents and excludes the perspectives, experiences, epistemologies of those who do not fit into these mainstream categories” (Shay, 2016).

Those who call for the decolonisation of curricula argue that curricula in universities in South Africa “remain largely Eurocentric and continue to reinforce white and Western dominance and privilege while at the same time being full of stereotypes, prejudices and patronising views about Africa and its people” (Heleta, 2016, p. 2). South African universities, proponents of decolonisation argue, are based on western models of academic organisation (Le Grange, 2016) and are highly “westernized” in that

they aspire to become local instantiations of a dominant academic model based on a Eurocentric epistemic canon – a canon that attributes truth only to the Western way of knowledge production, disregards other epistemic traditions, and portrays colonialism as a normal form of social relations between human beings rather than a system of exploitation and oppression. (Mbembe, 2016, p. 32)

These westernised academic institutions are “disconnected from African realities, including the lived experiences of the majority of black South Africans” (Le Grange, 2016). Hence, calls for decolonisation bemoan the systematic exclusion and marginalisation of African-centred approaches to knowledge from curricula in South African universities (Fataar & Subreenduth, 2015).

The Eurocentric curricula in universities are part of the inheritance of colonialism and apartheid in South Africa. During colonialism and apartheid, higher education in South Africa was designed to entrench the power and privilege of the ruling white minority (Heleta, 2016) and, as Mbembe (2016, p. 32) remarks, “the syllabi designed to meet the needs of colonialism and apartheid continue well into the post-apartheid era” (see also Le Grange, 2016, p. 5). The principal claim is that university curricula designed to meet the needs of the colonial and apartheid eras have not been sufficiently transformed to meet the redress and social justice goals of universities. In his paper “‘Potted Plants in Greenhouses’: A Critical Reflection on the Resilience of Colonial Education in Africa,” Nyamnjoh (2012) argues that the colonial character of education in Africa persists despite the formal ending of colonialism. He remarks that

education through schools and other formal institutions of learning in Africa is largely a process of making infinite concessions to the outside – mainly the western world. Such education has tended to emphasize mimicry over creativity, and the idea that little worth learning about, even by Africans, can come from Africa.

Nyamnjoh presents a scathing critique of the uncritical domestication of “western” models of education which compels Africans to conform, stifles creativity and a multiplicity of perspectives, and invariably results in graduates who are “excellent at irrelevance” (Nyamnjoh, 2012, p. 8).

This brief discussion of the decolonial critiques of South African university curricula highlights that curricula in universities are dominated by “western” knowledge and practices and largely lack “African” elements. In some sense, then, the curriculum at South African universities is international because it is dominated by European and American scholarship, scholars, and worldviews (Heleta, 2023, p. 826). In so far as Europe and America are the dominant forces in determining what is “international,” the Euro-American elements that are argued to dominate curricula in South African universities are what makes them international. The almost exclusive use of English in South Africa and other European languages in many previously colonised parts of Africa as the primary language of universities is one example of international elements dominating universities in Africa.

To answer the central question of whether the calls for decolonisation and internationalisation of the curricula that exert demands on South African universities are in conflict with one another, such that the pursuit of one compromises the pursuit of the other, it is crucial to be clear about what

internationalisation and decolonisation mean. This requires getting clearer about how decolonisation and internationalisation are conceptualised.

### 3 Conceptualising Internationalisation

The internationalisation of higher education has been an influential trend on universities in Africa with the rise of globalisation. Traditional forms of internationalisation of universities include: student and staff mobility, international research collaborations and networks, participation and excellence in global university rankings, the inclusion and integration of international elements in teaching and research practice, joint provision of qualifications, etc. For most universities, the key promise of internationalisation is global recognition: internationalising promises to enhance the global reputation and visibility of African universities. More substantively, and in line with the knowledge project of the university, internationalisation can be a way to recognise and exploit the diversity and richness of the world in the development of innovative solutions to the challenges posed by our interconnected worlds. Internationalisation is thus seen as the pursuit of world-class quality higher education and an opportunity to draw from global best practices in research and teaching.

Despite being a globally influential trend in higher education, what internationalisation means as a concept is contested. A general and widespread definition of internationalisation is that it is

the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff and to make a meaningful contribution to society. (De Wit et al., 2015, 29)

In line with this broader definition, internationalisation of the curriculum involves the intentional “incorporation of international, intercultural and global dimensions into the content of the curriculum as well as the learning outcomes, assessment tasks, teaching methods and support services of a program of study” (Leask, 2015, p. 9). The internationalised curriculum reflects the global diversity of knowledge, ideas, perspectives and ways of being.

A few core aspects of internationalisation are important to note in the definition above. Firstly, internationalisation is an intentional process; it does not happen automatically. Internationalisation thus should not be confused with the mere presence of international components in curricula. As has been

made clear in calls for decolonisation, international elements – specifically Euro-American knowledge – dominate university curricula in South Africa. These “western” influences have their origins in colonialism and were introduced as part of furthering the aims of colonisation but may persist due a lack of reflection and willingness to change in the present. Hence, the dominance of Euro-American knowledge because of colonialism should not be conflated with the intentional, often strategic process of internationalisation of the curriculum. Secondly, internationalisation aims at improving the quality of education for all, for the ultimate purpose of improving society. Colonisation (which results in the dominance of Euro-American elements in universities) and internationalisation are both intentional processes, but they do not share the same normative goals. Colonialism introduced foreign elements (for example “western” knowledge and languages) into universities to displace and marginalise local elements. In contrast, internationalisation tends to integrate foreign elements with the aim of strengthening university curricula and teaching and learning more broadly. More than being internally oriented towards meeting certain global standards for the sake of global recognition, internationalisation is ultimately about contributing positively to society.

The above definition is widely adopted and informs most conceptualisations and practices of internationalisation. In South Africa, this definition frames how internationalisation is conceptualised in an important policy document: the *Department of Higher Education and Training’s Policy Framework for Internationalisation of Higher Education in South Africa*. In this policy document, internationalisation is defined as the

intentional or steered process to incorporate intercultural, international and/or global dimensions into higher education in order to advance the goals, functions and delivery of higher education and thus to enhance the quality of education and research. (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2019, p. 9)

The internationalisation of the curriculum is similarly defined as “the incorporation of intercultural, international and/or global dimensions into the content of the curriculum as well as into the learning outcomes, assessment tasks, teaching methods and support services of a programme of study” (DHET, 2019, p. 9).

The DHET’s policy framework outlines the following goals as part of rationale for internationalisation of higher education:

the positioning of South Africa’s higher education sector to be competitive in a globalized world, the advancement of the quality of higher

education, enhancing intellectual diversity, contributing to scholarship capable of addressing global challenges as well as the benefiting of society at large and enhancing opportunities for higher education to contribute to the public good. (DHET, 2019, p. 20)

Still, the department of higher education maintains that “internationalisation of the curriculum must not negate curriculum transformation imperatives that higher education institutions in South Africa have an obligation to fulfil; the two can be carried out together successfully” (DHET, 2019, p. 45). Although universities in South Africa are free to design and implement their own internationalisation policies and plans, the policy framework is meant to outline some of the broad principles and values that should guide internationalisation in South African higher education institutions (DHET, 2019, p. 19). Even without a binding mandate, the policy framework is an important document to consider when thinking about how internationalisation of higher education is envisioned on a national level. Recently, some higher education scholars in South Africa have criticised that the conception of internationalisation underpinning the policy framework is highly problematic and likely to fail in shaping truly internationalised universities in South Africa.

In his “Critical Review of the Policy Framework for Internationalisation of Higher Education in South Africa,” Heleta (2023, p. 820) criticises three dimensions of the policy framework:

DHET’s copying of the Eurocentric definitions of internationalisation; lack of a critical discussion about the historical and contemporary global and South African higher education and internationalisation contexts; and the primary focus of the framework on operational and technical issues instead of epistemic plurality.

For Heleta (2023, p. 828) the policy framework “reads like an operational and administrative manual for internationalisation, focusing on student and staff mobility, generation of revenue through internationalisation, joint degrees, MOUs and the reporting requirements.” The fundamental epistemological issues of the politics and inequalities that mar theories and practices of knowledge in universities are glossed over with references to the broad call for the “advancement of all forms of knowledge and scholarship” (Heleta, 2023, p. 821). The current debates about the politics of global knowledge are disappointingly absent in the policy framework. This illustrates a decontextualised approach to the development of the policy framework. The failure of the policy framework to foreground epistemic issues about the ways in which global

knowledge politics and inequalities delimit internationalisation is at the heart of the criticism of this policy by various scholars (see Chasi, 2021; Heleta, 2023; Heleta & Chasi, 2022; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021).

It is surprising that the resurgent issue decolonisation did not inform the policy framework, especially because the development and release of the policy coincided with the decolonisation movements and debates that followed.<sup>1</sup> The policy framework does not engage sufficiently and explicitly with decolonisation. Although the framework addresses issues related to decolonisation – that is, transformation and Africanisation – the term decolonisation is absent in the document. Chasi (2021, p. 31) explains that by not engaging internationalisation in conversation with decolonisation, “the policy missed an opportunity to ... imagine internationalisation differently from the perspective of the Global South.”<sup>2</sup> In similar vein, Heleta (2023, p. 828) concludes that because of the administrative focus and neglect of the pressing epistemological concerns raised in calls for decolonisation, DHET’s policy framework does not provide guidance for reconceptualising internationalisation so that it contributes to dismantling coloniality and Eurocentric hegemony and promoting epistemic pluralism in South African higher education.

The implicit point is that a decolonial conception of internationalisation, which understands the risk that global and intercultural elements could be integrated in ways that promote Eurocentric tendencies in curricula, is necessary. Eurocentric conceptualisations of internationalisation, Heleta (2023, p. 824) criticises, largely interpret it in “abstract and apolitical” ways which hide the politics and inequalities that define the global production of knowledge. Such conceptualisations do not engage with the ways in which the highly unequal and unjust constitution of the “international” shape education and therefore internationalisation (Heleta, 2022).

Critics of the dominant conceptualisation of internationalisation draw on insights from decolonial theory to propose a definition of internationalisation that is informed by the imperative to challenge Eurocentric thinking in curricula. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021, p. 93) proposes that internationalisation must be founded on epistemological decolonisation which advances pluriversities and ecologies of knowledge. This form of internationalisation is grounded on “a recognition of the diverse ways through which different people view and make sense of the world (the paradigm of pluralism/globalectics/pluriversality)” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021, p. 79) and a contestation of the hierarchisation of knowledge and knowers. Similarly, Heleta and Chasi (2022, p. 263) argue that decolonisation can be used as a framework to critique conventional notions of internationalisation of higher education and “expose the limitations of Eurocentric internationalisation in the post-apartheid context.” The proposed definition of internationalisation informed by decoloniality is that

Internationalisation of higher education is a critical and comparative process of the study of the world and its complexities, past and present inequalities and injustices, and possibilities for a more equitable and just future for all. Through teaching, learning, research and engagement, internationalisation fosters epistemic plurality and integrates critical, antiracist and anti-hegemonic learning about the world from diverse global perspectives to enhance the quality and relevance of education. (Heleta & Chasi, 2022, pp. 269–270)

This proposed conception of internationalisation is argued not only to be the most effective in introducing the benefits of foreign elements to curricula in African universities but, crucially, in producing knowledge that foregrounds the inequalities and injustices in the constitution of the world, thereby ensuring that education is of enhanced quality and relevance as well as striving towards global justice and equality. This reformulated conceptualisation offers a more substantive look at what an internationalised curriculum should consist of instead of only addressing its implementation at an administrative level. In contrast to the mainstream definition of internationalisation as a process of integrating intercultural/global dimensions into curricula, this reformulation emphasises the content of the global aspects that should be integrated: they should critically engage past and present global injustices and inequalities and look at how these can be overcome for a more equitable and just future for all. The global justice agenda of internationalising curricula is central in the reconceptualised decolonial definition of internationalisation.

#### 4 Internationalisation and Decolonisation: Necessary Conflict?

Today, internationalisation and decolonisation are high on the agenda of South African universities. Internationalisation primarily takes the form of securing partnerships with other universities, research collaborations, recruitment of international students, promoting academic mobility, and branding universities as globally competitive through participation in global rankings. At face value, internationalisation appears to call for a global orientation and thus seems in tension with the requirement for local relevance foregrounded in decolonisation. This apparent tension raises the question of how to achieve a balance between being locally relevant and globally recognised as up to standard and competitive (Webbstock, 2016, p. 15).

In relation to curricula, internationalisation involves the inclusion of foreign knowledge, ideas, and practices in teaching and learning. On the other

hand, decolonisation, on one interpretation, calls for privileging local forms of knowledge in curricula and having local concerns inform teaching and learning processes. Understood in this way, decolonisation and internationalisation seems in conflict: the former calls for more localisation while the latter requires universities to be more globally oriented. The apparent tension might also be framed in terms of the intentions underpinning decolonisation and internationalisation. Decolonisation is crucially concerned with redressing past inequalities and injustices while internationalisation is concerned with ensuring that university curricula reflect global elements and prepare graduates for the global scene. Internationalisation, in its traditional conceptions, does not reckon with the ways in which the “global” is dominated by Europe and America, and because of this, international elements that get integrated into curricula in African universities tend to be Euro-American. The point is that for internationalisation not to compromise decolonisation, the integration of global elements must not replace the prioritisation, whether temporary or long-term, of local knowledge and ideas.

To be sure, the apparent tension between local relevance and global recognition could foster the impression that locally relevant curricula might have little value or relevance in the global context. This is not necessarily so. Moreover, it is crucial to emphasise that internationalisation is about “integrating” global elements; not necessarily “replacing” the local elements in higher education. Put simply, the integration of global elements could be compatible with prioritising local forms of knowledge. Still, scholars who bemoan the outward orientation of South African university curricula and their preoccupation with mimicking “western” models might suspect that internationalisation means incorporating *more* foreign elements in curricula that are already international. The rhetoric of the need to internationalise and become globally competitive might perpetuate what Nyamnjoh (2012, p. 8) describes as “an excessive orientation and appetite for all things ‘western.’” Put differently, internationalisation touted in terms of global competitiveness belies the western-modelled and oriented nature of education in Africa. This sort of education produces Africans who are “excellent at being irrelevant for Africa,” as they consume the types of knowledge that alienates them from everything to do with Africa. Heleta (2023, p. 826) remarks that for South African universities especially “internationalisation practices and activities have copied Eurocentric concepts and approaches, favouring engagement and collaboration with the global North while sidelining the collaborative and epistemic engagements with the African continent and other parts of the global South.”<sup>3</sup>

Internationalisation, then, might belie the continuance of Eurocentric education which tends to produce Africans who are incapable of being adequately

responsive to the needs of postcolonial Africa. Hence, some scholars have expressed that true internationalisation cannot be achieved without decolonisation. Ndlovu-Gatshehi (2021, p. 78), for example, argues that “there cannot be a genuinely international higher education without decolonisation of knowledge.” This means that decolonisation is a necessary condition for the internationalisation of knowledge. Kwasi Wiredu offers a different understanding of the relationship between decolonisation and internationalisation that brings forth a unique perspective on the question about whether internationalisation is in conflict with decolonisation. Wiredu offers a view of decolonisation that is instructive of the proper attitude to take towards foreign elements that already exist in university curricula and those that universities may wish to incorporate. Ultimately, Wiredu’s decolonisation involves the process of deciding, in a critical manner driven by the interests of Africa, what to keep and what to discard from globally and locally available knowledge and ideas.

To be clear, the important question, in my view, is not whether we should internationalise or decolonise. We ought to heed and take seriously the calls to decolonise and internationalise for the sake of achieving relevant quality education and global justice in our globally interconnected world. The important question, in my view, pertains to the appropriate ways, and to what extent, we take up the demands of internationalisation and decolonisation. As the scholars considered above have rightly pointed out, conceptualisations of internationalisation of curricula in South African universities must take seriously the politics of global knowledge and the inequalities that shape the production, dissemination, and use of the diverse knowledges across the world. The Eurocentrism of South African university curricula which manifests in the dominance of “western” knowledge and ideas cannot be denied. At the same time, great caution must be taken that the legitimate concern over the pervasive Eurocentrism in curricula does not result in a default rejection of all foreign elements. A blanket hostility of this kind would undermine African universities’ agency to appropriate the knowledge of the world for its own local purposes and deprive it of the world’s epistemic richness (Táíwò, 2022).

Wiredu’s “conceptual decolonisation” provides a model of decolonising that can help us think about how to facilitate the critical and selective integration of foreign elements in curricula that does not undermine but enhances the prioritisation of local knowledge and ideas. To forestall misunderstanding, Wiredu’s thoughts on decolonisation aimed at rethinking teaching, learning, and research in the discipline of philosophy in Africa specifically. However, the insights are valuable and informative for thinking about curricula in other subjects, especially in the humanities and social sciences.

What is conceptual decolonisation according to Wiredu? Wiredu first uses the term in his 1980 paper “Teaching and Research in African Philosophy: Some Suggestions” at a UNESCO conference but does not explicitly define it until later in his 1996. He explains that decolonisation aims at

avoiding or reversing through a critical conceptual self-awareness the unexamined assimilation in African thought of the conceptual frameworks embedded in the foreign philosophical traditions that have had an impact on African life and thought as well as a positive aspect which entails a synthesis of the resources of our own indigenous conceptual schemes in our philosophical meditations on even the most technical problems of contemporary philosophy. (Wiredu, 1996, p. 136)

An important point to note in this passage is that decolonisation itself is defined by Wiredu as a critical approach towards local and foreign elements in thought. Applying this point to curricula, decolonisation can be said to be the process of disentangling foreign elements that came through colonisation and critically synthesising local knowledge with foreign knowledge to address the needs and problems of Africa. Later, Wiredu defines conceptual decolonisation as “the elimination from our thought of modes of conceptualisations that came to us through colonisation and remain in our thinking owing to inertia rather than to our reflective choices” (Wiredu, 2002, p. 56). More critically, Wiredu refines his conception of decolonisation and writes that the process

consists in an African divesting his thought of all modes of conceptualization emanating from the colonial past that cannot stand the test of due reflection. This divestiture does not mean automatically repudiating every mode of thought having a colonial provenance. That would be absurd beyond description. What it calls for is the reviewing of any such thought materials in the light of indigenous categories, as a first step, and, as a second, evaluating them on independent grounds. (Wiredu, 2004, p. 15)

Wiredu proposes, through his notion of conceptual decolonisation, that Africans must develop curricula suited for our present-day Africa by exploiting knowledge resources available from our diverse African cultures and foreign cultures. Importantly, Wiredu insists that it is especially crucial that we divest ourselves of knowledge and conceptual resources that came to us through colonisation *and* remain in our thinking due to inertia rather than from critical reflection on their usefulness for present day African existence. The quest to decolonise African education is an attempt to guard it against its tendency

to produce mimicry at best and irrelevance at worst. In a nutshell, Wiredu's decolonisation is the process by which we determine what to jettison and what to keep from both indigenous and foreign traditions of thought (Emmanuel, 2022, p. 311). Importantly, this process is taken up in a critical manner that does not take the relevance and usefulness of either local or foreign knowledge for granted.

According to Wiredu (2002), we should divest from knowledge, especially "western" knowledge, that is reminiscent of the goals of colonial education and no longer serves the goals of present-day Africa. This does not mean that no "western" knowledge is useful for Africa, but that it must be found worthy of remaining in our curricula in relation to the goals and needs of postcolonial Africa. More broadly, this proposes a particular attitude and rationale in how internationalisation – the integration of knowledge and cultures from other places in our curricula – should be taken up: internationalisation should be framed against measures of relevance and usefulness for the South African context. At the same time, we must source epistemic and conceptual resources from our own cultures that can help us shape the Africa we want to create. Internationalisation efforts must pass the test of usefulness for Africa. What this means is difficult to specify. But in the field of philosophy, Wiredu thought that decolonisation must ultimately lead to African self-knowledge and help Africa hold its own in the competition of cultures.

Overall, Wiredu sees decolonisation as already involving the critical appropriation of foreign elements in curricula. In other words, internationalisation is already an intrinsic aspect of decolonisation. In so far as decolonisation responds to colonisation – the forceful and unfair introduction and preservation of foreign elements in education – it already presupposes engagement with the "international." Wiredu's decolonisation is an approach that combines internationalising curricula and redressing past epistemic injustice in knowledge. The approach proposes that curricula in African universities be transformed by critically appropriating both local and foreign knowledge to meet the standards and needs of Africa. The apparent tension between decolonisation and internationalisation disappears in Wiredu's conception of decolonisation: internationalisation is an intrinsic aspect of decolonisation.

## 5 Conclusion

It is by now a truism that colonial power relations have structured global knowledge production in skewed favour of European thought. The concerns

raised by decolonisation discourses that Eurocentrism pervades university curricula in South Africa should inform a rethinking of internationalisation to guard against a rhetoric that masks the continuation of the dominance of “western” knowledge and ideas in curricula. This concern about the goals of internationalisation and worries that it might perpetuate “western” hegemony in universities is arguably the reason for the perceived tension and incompatibility between internationalisation and decolonisation. Wiredu’s perspective on decolonisation of curricula shows that internationalisation need not threaten the decolonial imperative to challenge Eurocentrism. Wiredu does not advocate the outright rejection of foreign knowledge (meaning the rejection of internationalisation of curricula) but he is wary of an uncritical assimilation and appropriation of foreign knowledge and elements in education in Africa. For Wiredu, all foreign and local elements should be adopted in education in so far as they are found to be relevant and useful for Africa’s goals. Crucially, internationalisation (conceived as critical appropriation of foreign knowledge and ideas) is an intrinsic part of decolonisation. Hence, internationalisation and decolonisation are not necessarily oppositional; they can be pursued harmoniously within the South African higher education system.

### Notes

- 1 The development of the policy framework took place, approximately, between 2015–2019 (Heleta, 2022).
- 2 There are other scholars who acknowledge that internationalisation should not be considered from exclusively western perspectives (Jones & de Wit, 2014, p. 28).
- 3 Some manifestations of this excessive “western” orientation of African universities include: universities being ranked internationally and rated using criteria which few universities in Africa have contributed to establishing, requiring academics to publish in international journals and not promoting journals of the continent, students’ selection of universities being determined by where their lecturers obtained PhD degrees but hardly by the relevance of curricula to local needs (Nyamnjoh, 2012, p. 9).

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# The Idea of an Islamic University in Africa

## *A Discourse on Knowledge Politics*

*Bakheit Mohammed Nur*

### Abstract

The idea of a modern Islamic university in Africa emerged from the postcolonial discourse on knowledge politics and identity (re)formation as a systematised means of (re)building contemporary epistemologies grounded in a socio-religious ethos and Muslim ontologies. This chapter explores the role of African Islamic universities in divesting from Western epistemic representations and investing in a reconfiguration of knowledge production in the landscape of African higher education. It defines the idea of an Islamic university and explains how it grew out of its nascent roots. How does such a university depart from the modern secularised university model prevalent in Africa? What is the epistemological foundation on which the modern Islamic university in Africa builds and pursues its academic programme? How does Islam-centred tertiary education constitute the reconfiguration needed to chart an “authentic” epistemic path for Muslims? How does the Islamisation of knowledge paradigm relate to the broader debate on the politics of knowledge production in the Global South? What are the possible tensions or contentions between decolonisation and Islamisation of knowledge projects as each engages with the epistemic emancipation of colonised societies and the process of (re)building the mind? The chapter discusses these questions intensively and highlights the Islamisation of knowledge theorists’ discourse on the idea of an Islamic university.

### Keywords

Islamisation – Islamic university – knowledge – epistemology – epistemic emancipation – decolonisation

## 1 Introduction

In Africa, the concept of the university emerged more than one thousand years ago. In the ninth century, institutions of Islamic higher learning in Africa began

to develop epistemologies in areas of spirituality and science. Ndlovu-Gatsheni argues that Muslim and ancient African civilisations “enabled universities to emerge from indigenous cultural soil and the sociopolitical and economic climate” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018, p. 161). The modern Islamic university, which emerged during the postcolonial period of the 1980s, was inspired by its historic predecessor. It aims to revitalise Islamic epistemology by challenging the exotic representation of Islam produced by Western centres of knowledge and education. This chapter explores the discourses surrounding Islamic higher education institutions in Africa, examining their socio-historical and contemporary development.

The idea of a modern Islamic university in Africa emerged in the postcolonial discourse on knowledge politics and identity (re)formation as a systematised means of (re)building contemporary epistemologies grounded in a socio-religious ethos and the ontological realities of Muslims. Since every culture has its own epistemic system of knowledge production, education becomes indigenous to the local milieu. Muslim communities across Africa are no different. In this regard, scholars working on knowledge politics argue that every human being is born into a valid knowledge system (Mudimbe, 1988; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). The concept of the Islamic university builds its epistemological legitimacy on such principles, seeking to establish a knowledge system that stems from the socio-religious and cultural narratives of Muslims. Some scholars have already examined the epistemological matrix of the modern Islam-oriented university and its pedagogical functionality, comparing it with the secular university model that exists in Muslim societies (see Zaman, 1985). This chapter expands that narrative and explains the rationale behind the growth of the Islamic university whose mission and epistemic orientation aim to address issues of postcolonial educational reform and to (re)generate new forms of knowledge responsive to Islamic worldviews and ontologies.

The frame of reference in this discourse is the Islamisation of knowledge (*Ar. aslamat al-ma'rifa*) movement, which aims to create a new body of knowledge and methodological approach that is rooted in Islamic civilisations. Proponents of this movement argue that Islam and science are compatible, tracing the origin of the sciences back to the history of Islamic civilisation. They look to the development of Arabic numerals and mathematical disciplines such as algebra and algorithms, which were historically invented in the matrix of Islamic civilisation, as examples of this compatibility. Furthermore, the Islamisation project presents the concept of *tawhîd* (unity) as a unifying framework based on the Islamic idea of the unity of God's creation, the unity of knowledge, the unity of life, the unity of humanity, and the cosmic order of things.

This chapter explains how theorists of Islamisation articulate their theoretical foundation for Islamic epistemology. Thus, the project to Islamise knowledge denounces what it sees as the reductionist compartmentalisation of thought and rejects the positivist paradigm of knowledge production, which excludes religions, metaphysics, spirituality, and intuition from ways of knowing and scientific rationality. It does not disregard, however, the non-faith-based sciences or secular systems of knowledge production that derive from non-Islamic philosophy. Rather, this project attempts to appropriate these epistemological paradigms by divesting them of their Western worldviews and misrepresentations and then incorporating them into the Islamic epistemology. Its educational outlook and pedagogical orientation promote knowledge production and transmission rooted primarily in Islamic epistemology and Muslim worldviews. The chapter provides a brief account of ancient Islamic universities in Africa, highlighting the encounter between Islamic epistemology and European colonialism and relating these discourses to the Islamisation of knowledge movement and the emergence of modern African Islamic universities.

## 2 Ancient Islamic Universities in Africa

The pursuit of knowledge is a key Islamic principle. The call to Islam began with the call to pursue knowledge. In Islam, males and females are equally responsible for acquiring knowledge, a tenet that transcends gender binaries, androcentric values, and intersectionality. The rise and spread of Islam went hand in hand with the pursuit of education, which aimed to develop personality, spirituality, rationality, and the intellect. In the context of Africa, indigenous cultures and Islam were the two key civilisations that contributed to the production of African Muslim lifeworlds, centuries before the European colonialism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Mazrui argues that the dual legacy of Africanity and Islam included the great Mali and the Songhai Empires that flourished, at their height, between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries (Mazrui, 2005, p. 71). These two empires produced the historically significant city of Timbuktu, which became the most prominent intellectual centre in the history of Africa. In this historical epoch, the triumvirate of “God, gold, and glory” drove colonial expansion on the African continent. Mazrui explains that God was represented by indigenous African religious traditions and Islamic intellectual scholarship while “the gold featured in the trans-Saharan trade” and exposed Timbuktu to international trade networks and trans-regional business actors. The glory was represented by the Islamic

scholarship and rich intellectual tradition that developed in the city (Mazrui, 2005, pp. 71–72; 1986).

A great intellectual tradition whose cultural edifice built upon the dual legacy of Blackness and Islamicity thus emerged and developed in Timbuktu, linking scholarly West Africa with North Africa and beyond. This early process of Islamisation awakened Black consciousness among Africans by connecting Arabs in Islamic learning institutions and in commercial businesses. By viewing Blackness as part of the “triumvirate of God, gold, and glory” (see Mazrui, 2005, p. 71), these interactions led Africans to acknowledge their Blackness without experiencing the feelings of inferiority stirred up by European colonialism. In the twelfth century, Mansa Musa of the Malian Empire created the eminent medieval mosque-university in Timbuktu, which later rose to fame as a celebrated centre of scholarship (Kane, 2016). The search for and support of knowledge were not only championed by individual scholars but also by rulers who employed scientific knowledge to advance, expand, and consolidate their political power. The mosque-university established a renowned scholarly community that endured for many centuries and connected Africa with Asia and Europe. Its immense scholarship attracted scholars and students from different places and cultures within the continent to study theology, history, geography, medicine, astronomy, and Arabic.

Mazrui argues that Timbuktu's integrative epistemic policy was the product of a historical fusion of Islamic vision and scientific advancement. This religio-scientific connection was key to the historiography of the city and its place in scholarship. Scholars in Timbuktu were using Arabic numerals, algebra, and algorithms long before Europeans were (Mazrui, 2005, p. 73). The university produced hundreds of thousands of manuscripts in different fields of study written in Arabic, Fulfulde, Soninke, Songhai, and Bambara. Recently, some of these manuscripts have been digitised to preserve their intellectual heritage and to remain accessible to future scholars. It became the regional hub of book trading and scholarly exchange. Timbuktu's scholarship formed a foundational ground for understanding contemporary epistemic practices and academic studies in West Africa and beyond.

Timbuktu was not the only prominent academy for the pursuit of knowledge in Africa. Earlier than Timbuktu, several other African institutions of higher learning sought to systematise the acquisition of knowledge. Throughout these pursuits, women were important constituents of intellectual tradition, engaging in scholarship, sponsoring study programmes, and establishing institutions of higher learning. For example, Fatima Al-Fihri of Morocco founded the Al-Qarawiyyin Mosque-university complex between 857 CE and 859 CE

in the ancient Moroccan city of Fes. Subsequently, the mosque-university became one of the most prominent intellectual, spiritual, and educational centres in North Africa and the Muslim world. It continued to operate for centuries as an institution of higher learning in both spirituality and science until it transformed into the modern University of Al-Qarawiyyin in 1963. Currently, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) classifies it as the oldest continuously operating university in the world.

In order to fulfil Islam's core requirement on knowledge and learning, scholars in Muslim societies have established schools and institutes. In the seventh century, Cairo was among these prominent centres of higher learning, translation, and scholarship. Subsequently, the University of Al-Azhar (970 CE–972 CE) was founded in Cairo to facilitate the acquisition of Islamic knowledge, Arabic literature, and the sciences (see Peters, 2019). What started as a study circle gradually grew into a *madrasa* where scholars and jurists gathered to exchange ideas and it subsequently became the most prestigious university in the region and the second-oldest degree-granting university in the world. Al-Azhar's curriculum included subjects such as Qur'anic studies, Islamic law, jurisprudence, logic, philosophy, rhetoric, Arabic grammar, literature, astronomy, and science. The university encouraged philosophical pursuits, promoted various branches of knowledge, and collected academic writings. It accommodated diverse opinions within Islam, and its scholastic pre-eminence appealed to students from different parts of the Muslim world and the African continent in particular. The university organised foreign students into *rivâqa* (fraternities) according to their nationalities or regional affiliations and study programmes. In 1961, the Egyptian state re-established Al-Azhar as a modern Islamic university, expanding its academic mission to include modern disciplinary specialisations such as science, medicine, pharmacy, economics, and business.

Al-Zitouna Mosque-University, established in 737 CE in Tunisia, was among those ancient institutions of higher learning that attracted scholars and scientists from different cultures. It became a major academy for intellectual pursuit, boasting Ibn Khaldun, one of the first social historians, as one of its graduates. Ibn Khaldun's best known work, *Al-Muqaddimah* (The Introduction), lays out a foundation for the modern discipline of economics, sociology, historiography, political theory, and history. Al-Zitouna contained a rich library and taught Islamic jurisprudence, Arabic grammar, sciences, medicine, and history. Al-Qiarawan mosque-university founded around 670 CE was another important Tunisian centre for higher education in Islamic thought, as well as social and natural sciences. Between the tenth and eleventh centuries,

Al-Qiwarawan became a temple of knowledge and a renowned centre for the study of sciences and Islamic civilisations, gaining a reputation as a hotbed of scholarship in North Africa.

Between 800 CE and 1900 CE, three Islamic institutions of higher learning in Timbuktu shaped the rich Islamic intellectual traditions that flourished in Muslim societies throughout Africa. The mosque-universities of Al-Qarawiyyin, Al-Azhar, and Al-Zitouna offered a combination of religious learning and systematic scientific study. They mobilised scholars from different cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds to gather and translate foreign-language books into Arabic and subsequently formed a comprehensive epistemic policy and practice that transcended the spiritual domain. These historic universities became public academies and intellectual centres where scholars from different places could meet to discuss and share knowledge. They housed not only religious scholars but also scientists and scholars of medicine, physics, alchemy, mathematics, astrology, philosophy, and engineering, among other disciplines. These scholars conducted original research and made significant contributions to their fields. Mazrui argues that Al-Azhar, Timbuktu, and Al-Qarawiyyin together form the most famous classical centres of Islamic learning in Africa. Al-Azhar and Al-Qarawiyyin “were older than Timbuktu, but they were also older than any Western university in existence. Today Al-Azhar is more than a thousand years old – which makes it older than almost any existing Western centre of learning” (Mazrui, 2005, p. 71).

These institutions contributed to the rich intellectual heritage of Africa and the Islamic world. Academic exchange and collaboration further strengthened their interdependence. A significant epistemic feature of Timbuktu was the link between religion and science. Mazrui (2005) argues “scholars of ancient Timbuktu were among the first to synthesise the twin studies of religion and science,” giving “the image of Africa a place in the history of science” (p. 73). “There are two methods for a religious school to go beyond being purely religious – one is through a strategy of secularization and the other through a strategy of dualization” (Mazrui, 2005, p. 73). Here, secularisation expresses the idea of an epistemic shift away from religion toward science and independent thinking. In this way, the scholarship moves away from faith-based values and towards more religiously neutral values, drawing on philosophy and the wider civilisation. Thus, pedagogical practices, the methods of teaching and study, assessments as well as qualifications for different purposes, and graduation became more and more religion-neutral. This model, according to Mazrui (2005), was followed in classical Western institutions, such as Oxford University and Harvard University, that are located within societies where religious authorities were once hostile to progressive scientific values.

Dualization, on the other hand, is the process by which an institution evolves its epistemic mission into a dual legacy – one religious and sacred and the other secular and modern. In this form of dualization, religion does not lose its socio-cultural significance but rather extends its epistemic horizon to include other cultural traditions and accommodate both spirituality and materiality. In this sense, the two components combine to create one unified epistemology whose methodology of knowledge production rests on the Islamic unificatory ethos. According to Mazrui (2005), Timbuktu, Al-Qarawiyyin, and Al-Azhar adopted this dualization approach.

Many other centres of higher learning with strong intellectual traditions emerged in different parts of African Muslim societies between the thirteenth and nineteenth centuries. These were diverse and holistic in their scientific inquiries about knowledge covering broader fields of theology, philosophy, and the sciences, among others. The comprehensiveness and flexibility of their scholarly pursuit helped develop strong intellectual traditions in the Muslim world. Here, the production of knowledge was not bound by religious principles but by those of flexibility, rationale, and free thought. The intellectual environment was imbued with a borderless approach toward thinking, learning, and producing knowledge. Religious and secular ideas engaged with one another to encourage the growth of knowledge productivity and the transference of ideas. In other words, the idea of couching knowledge in a framework of religious ideals was not thought to curtail intellectual thinking and development.

### 3 Islamic Epistemology and the Colonial Encounter

In the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, African Muslim societies fell subject to the violence of European colonialism, which imposed upon them foreign cultural practices, languages, economic systems, and worldviews. African Muslim societies subsequently faced immense socio-political, economic, and epistemological challenges that dramatically upended their structures and knowledge systems. Contemporary challenges in these societies trace back to European colonialism and imperialism, capitalism, globalisation, modernity, foreign invasion, terrorism, sectarianism, and internal conflict between Muslim nations and communities (Mamdani, 2004). In this context, Al-Fârûqî argues that in any corner of the vast Muslim world, “Muslims were defeated, massacred, double-crossed, colonised, and exploited, proselytised, forced or bribed into conversion to other faiths. They were secularised, Westernised, and de-Islamised by internal and external agents of their enemies” (Al-Fârûqî,

1989, p. 1). Across generations, Muslim societies in Africa share a deep sense of resentment toward colonialism and the epistemic injustices that they were forced to endure.

Colonialism deeply impacted a rooted Islamic intellectual landscape as well as the systems of knowledge production previously established in historic African Islamic universities. As they were not hegemonic or imperial in their structure, these historical institutions of higher education were destroyed by the violent European colonial conquest and “easily overtaken by the modern Westernised model of the university” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018, p. 161). The colonial onslaught exposed Africans to Western worldviews, ideas, and institutions, and subjected their intellectual universe to Western epistemic invasion. Furthermore, Western epistemology and its methodology of learning were thrust upon African Muslim societies (Kane, 2016, p. 120). Muslims fought against imperial domination and the imposition of a secular positivist knowledge paradigm, struggling to preserve Islam’s spiritual, socio-cultural values. However, with the aid of advanced military technology, the European powers defeated Muslims and imposed new rules and new knowledge systems. They began gradually to isolate Muslim leaders and intellectuals in an attempt to quash any organised resistance to colonial rule. Panjwani states that “colonialism brought a total eclipse of Muslim military, political and intellectual life” (Panjwani, 2004, p. 22). Furthermore, the colonial authorities devised and used a new educational policy, based on Western worldviews, to consolidate their power and (re)shape Muslim minds, cultures, and societies.

Colonial rule capitalised on print technologies, spreading new cultures and forms of knowledge through books and other print materials. It also sought to establish and advance cultural supremacy through its newly imposed systems of education. The aggressive spread of European cultures, ways of life, worldviews, and epistemologies marginalised African cultures, languages, and epistemologies. In this colonial power matrix, new educational concepts such as “critical thinking and learning,” socio-economic terms like “societal development,” or epistemic policy theories like “civilizational mission” emerged to project what Sarr calls “the myths of the West onto the trajectories of African societies” (Sarr, 2019, p. 1). In this regard, Ndlovu-Gatsheni argues that “colonial invaders did not only target the land and human resources, they also invaded the mental universe of those people they colonised. The mental universe of the colonised experienced the depth of epistemological violence” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018, p. 137). From its inception, colonialism actively invaded the African intellectual universe by (re)shaping approaches to the world, oneself, and others. This invasion helped destroy African authenticity and epistemic originality and annihilated the spirit of technological creativity inspired by

Africa's socio-religious values. Such cognitive invasion, as Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) states, "launched Africa into a long night of epistemic dependence" (p. 138) and alienation.

As a result, African Islamic intellectual movements have struggled to emerge from this onslaught by reconfiguring their own "authentic" epistemological frameworks. European intellectual hegemony transformed the culture and social organisation of learning, values associated with the acquisition of knowledge, intellectual personalities, and the place of learners in colonised societies (see Launay, 2016). Al-Attas argues that Western civilisation threatened Muslim society, writing that "the greatest challenge that has surreptitiously arisen in our age is the challenge of knowledge, indeed, not as against ignorance; but knowledge as conceived and disseminated throughout the world by Western civilization" (Al-Attas, 1985, p. 127). For Al-Attas, Western epistemology was unjustly imposed on other cultures, "othering" local communities and perpetuating injustice, suffering, racism, and confusion. The colonial encounter produced a persistent new form of education that was secular and epistemologically rooted in Western civilisations. The critique of colonial education rests on the idea that it perpetuates Western epistemic hegemony and reinforces exotic images of the "other," created through mythological narratives of the colonisers.

When African Muslim nations gained independence, the postcolonial regimes of these countries embraced this secular paradigm of education. They aimed to produce professionals able to succeed in the new modern job market, producing engineers, technicians, scientists, intellectuals, politicians, lawyers, social scientists, journalists, administrators, and public opinion makers (Nur, 2022; Medani and Nur, 2020). Moreover, traditional Islamic education became the domain of religious specialists whose scholarship dealt with theological disciplines such as jurisprudence, exegesis, and creed (Nur, 2020a; 2022). Overall, the traditional system of Islamic education has no access to public funding but depends significantly on the residue of charitable endowments and philanthropy. It aims to preserve religious-cultural heritage and promote social values, morality, and discipline. Graduates are equipped to meet some personal and educational needs in areas of ritual performance, Islamic law, and spirituality. However, in the neoliberal labour market, graduates of traditional religious schooling are confined to positions in the field of religious affairs or self-employment, many face unemployment. In recent years, some attempts have been made to apply religious knowledge to new social fields by analogical extension and juristic speculation but with little success.

Muslim educationists and intellectuals see this dichotomy in educational systems as a means of dividing Muslims, draining their cognitive energy, and

limiting their ability to cope with the challenges of contemporary Muslim societies. Thus, they attempt to modernise and broaden the scope of traditional Islamic education to address the complexity of modernity and social change as well as the socio-political, epistemic, and economic demands of Muslims. Some scholars call this recovery process “retraditionalisation,” in which the members of a society deliberately cultivate renewed respect for indigenous knowledge systems (see Mazrui and Tidy, 1985). Some Islamisation enthusiasts refer to the same process as *taʿsīl* (authentication of knowledge), which means “rooting” or returning to the origin of something in order to authenticate sources of knowledge (Omer, 1993). In the case of Islam, rooting does not mean returning to traditional forms of knowledge but rather anchoring modern epistemological structures in Islamic sources of knowledge by placing them into the Islamic revelatory framework. It is a framework whose epistemological narrative is based on the revelation set forth in the Qur’an, which in turn provides the foundation for the political economy of knowledge production. In this context, the term revelation denotes that which has been sent down by the divine. The concept of *taʿsīl*, therefore, takes reflexive modernising forms of reconfiguration as well as aspects of decolonisation to create a new epistemology originating from a solid Islamic foundation and Muslim societal norms. Muslim educationists criticise and deconstruct the Western-secular-oriented educational system and (re)-direct its epistemology in accordance with Muslims’ socio-religious and cultural values. This critique builds on the idea that Westernised education fails to adequately address questions of the epistemological, socio-cultural, political, and practical relevance of its educational content for Muslim societies. These efforts led to the emergence of the Islamisation of knowledge – a new epistemological trend whose edifice rests on Islamic conviction and attempts to (re)map the political economy of knowledge production in both theory and practice.

Islamisation of knowledge discourses and practices have evolved gradually into a pervasive epistemic movement, stimulating research and advancing decolonial educational policy and practice. The movement tries to reconcile Islam and modern education, seeking a methodological reconfiguration that adopts scientific methods in a way that is consistent with the Islamic worldview and ethical values. It aims to decolonise knowledge and (re)direct the cognitive orientation of individual Muslims away from Western thought, which it considers to be “detrimental” to that of the “constructive” Islamic thought and way of life. It also aims to recover the history of Islamic epistemology and the ways of knowing and (un)learning that are responsive to Muslim cultural norms. The idea of responsiveness can be better understood within the broader context of postcolonial knowledge politics, which introduces the

role of university knowledge in social development. It is about the engagement or lack of engagement with social problems in both teaching and knowledge production. Brink asks what universities are good for in order to conceptualise the idea of a responsive university in South Africa (Rink, 2021). In a Muslim context, Al-Maududi describes the colonial legacy and the forms of Western-oriented knowledge imbedded in social orders of Muslim societies as *al-'bûdiyya al-fikriyya* (epistemic slavery), denouncing their prevalence throughout the Muslim lifeworlds (Al-Maududi, 1987). Al-Maududi began to reflect on this epistemic dependency in the 1960s through his Islamic revival advocacy on the Indian sub-continent, thereby initiating a new direction for Muslim education policy.

#### 4 The Islamisation of Knowledge

The Islamisation trend prioritises (re)building the mind and raising an emancipatory consciousness among Muslims through (re)structuring the educational system and (re)directing its philosophy and methodology towards Islamic worldviews. This reconfiguration aims to restore dignity to individual Muslims and lay a foundation for cognitive consistency between the contents of educational materials and the Muslim ontologies. Investment in an Islam-informed epistemology and the rejuvenation of the scientific spirit in Muslim societies occupied pivotal points of the discourse on Islamic revitalisation and the renewal of its epistemology. Scholars' encouragement of Muslims to take scientific ideas seriously as a way to overcome this socio-political impasse has gradually turned the call for Islamic reform into a powerful movement to Islamise knowledge, aiming to engage broader epistemological questions rather than just renew Islam at the spiritual level. The Islamisation of knowledge, as a reformative educational movement with articulated epistemological objectives, thus emerged in the 1970s when the Muslim world was engaging in a thorough post-independence socio-political discourse on how to transform societies that had fallen victim to arduous colonialism and intellectual invasion.

This new epistemological trend seeks to respond to the idea of academic dichotomisation, that is, Islamic versus Westernised educational systems, in order to counter the colonial educational legacy prevalent in Muslim societies. The movement began its reformative work by reconfiguring methods used in education and moved on to more complex epistemological and methodological issues that question all forms of knowledge produced and transmitted in the context of both modern and traditional Muslim educational institutions.

Paya states that the movement to Islamise knowledge changed its Islamic renewal agenda from “a call to a critical revision of educational methods in Muslim societies into a mission to produce new types of knowledge” that are free from Western influence and its epistemic representation (Paya, 2022, p. 2). Within the framework of this epistemic movement, intellectuals and educationists sought to formulate new educational policies, epistemic orientations, and practices that are ontologically responsive to the socio-religious and cultural values of Muslim societies. This attempt departs from Western theories and concepts that map the political economy of knowledge production in and on Muslim societies. The Islamisation of knowledge movement has expanded its epistemological horizon as the scope for Islamic educational revivalism has widened, transforming itself from a provincialised initiative limited to a certain context or a region to a ubiquitous trans-national and trans-continental epistemic spanning Muslim societies and nations across Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and the Americas.

The contemporary movement to Islamise knowledge thus builds on the failures of previous reform attempts. Examining these reformists, Al-Fârûqî (1992) points to the Salafi movements in North and West Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. According to Al-Fârûqî, these movements successfully addressed the deterioration in the Muslim world by attacking excessiveness and mysticism; however, they erred by setting out to confront their fellow Muslims and the outside world without addressing the root causes of injustice and systematic misrepresentation. Al-Fârûqî applies a similar critical view to the Muslim Brotherhood, writing that, after the death in 1949 of its leader Hasan Al-Banna of Egypt, the group floundered and strayed from its vision of reformation. Al-Fârûqî argues that the Muslim Brotherhood was unable to “crystalize the vision of Islam as relevant to every moment of human life, every shade of modern human activity” (Al-Fârûqî, 1992, p. XIII). He goes on to critique reform efforts undertaken by nationalist regimes of the post-colonial Muslim world whose proponents address the material needs of Muslims and omit the importance of spirituality in the societal development and epistemic transformation in systems of education. He describes nationalism as “a despicable Western virus,” claiming that it perpetuates the colonial legacy of divide and rule, tribalism, ethnocentrism, despotism, secularism, Westernisation, Arabism, and Islamism. He feels that these elements collectively damage Muslim populations and consequently reinforce the image of Muslims as caricatures of the West (Al-Fârûqî, 1992, pp. XIII–XIV).

The movement also criticises the traditional mode of Islamic education as failing to transcend critical theological disciplines and certain thematic fields,

such as *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *shari'a*, (Islamic law), and *tafsîr* (Qur'anic interpretation and commentary). Al-Alwani argues that traditional religious education is superannuated and repetitive, "offering the same commentary on the same texts in the same disciplines" over centuries (Al-Alwani, 2005, p. 4). He believes that its anachronous methodology and obsolete forms of knowledge render it ill-equipped to deal with today's intricate set of epistemological complexities and the political, socio-cultural, and economic problems of contemporary Muslim societies. This critical assessment of traditional Islamic education invites a rethinking of conventional methodological approaches to Islamic knowledge.

Furthermore, the Islamisation project challenges the present state of intellectual thought, knowledge, and civilisation in the Muslim world. It claims that the secular positivist paradigm harms current Muslim thought and knowledge systems, thus alienating Muslims from their cultures, religion, and worldviews. The positivist paradigm of knowledge production is believed to have gained ascendancy among Muslims in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when Western political, economic, and knowledge systems began to prevail in the Muslim world. The Islamisation movement refutes the claimed universality and objectivity of Western epistemology and provincialises its premise that the Western paradigm of knowledge production constitutes the only way to achieve scientific truth. Alternatively, it adopts a decolonial epistemic perspective postulated in the Global South and engages in a critical dialogue between Islamic and Western epistemologies, articulating the shortcomings that perpetuate the asymmetry in power and knowledge production between the West and the Muslim world.

Islamisation of knowledge proponents critique the positivist paradigm of knowledge, asserting the idea that positivism denies the spiritual foundation of things and discards the revelation and metaphysical aspects of reality (Dzilo, 2012, p. 249). In the Western societal context, the renunciation of spirituality emerged from the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods when Europeans started to question despotism in religious institutions and governments. During this time, a movement away from religious epistemology and toward secularism paved the way for a scientific revolution. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, European colonial administrations imposed the concept of secularism and other Enlightenment ideas onto the invaded Muslim societies. Islamisation of knowledge proponents see this imposition as an attempt to limit Islam to matters of personal belief and force instrumentally Western worldviews and their cultural representations on Muslims. This notion, in turn, created controversy in political thought and practice and provoked the concept of secularism as an anti-Islamic movement.

However, some Muslim thinkers advocate secularism as a way to separate Islam from politics and promote democracy, good governance, tolerance, human rights, freedom of expression, and state neutrality toward religious communities (see An-Na'im, 2008). Their framework for nation-building and societal development rests on the Western secular model in which Islam plays a marginal role in the formation of state institutions and governance. Historically, such advocacy emerged from the matrix of post-colonial politics whereby Muslim despotic authoritarian regimes began to manipulate Islam in order to consolidate their political power. As proponents of fatalism and divine destiny, they exempted themselves from leadership accountability. This form of Islam-backed manipulation and despotism perpetuates coloniality and thus foments political discontent and resistance. In this sense, secularism serves as a mechanism for political opposition and a way for society to protect itself against the imposition of a particular Islamic interpretation. It also serves as a way of encouraging free conviction of the Islamic faith and supporting harmony in a multi-confessional society or among multi-Islamic schools of thought. In contrast, Islamisation of knowledge proponents consider any secular-oriented attempt to minimise Islamic influence on politics, economics, law, epistemology, and culture as a manifestation and perpetuation of the colonial legacy produced by Westernised education (see Al-Turabi, 2010; Al-Alwani, 2005; Al-Fârûqî, 1989; Al-Attas, 1985).

These critics argue that the secular positivist approach to knowledge would create contradictions and dichotomies in the socio-political and epistemic orders. Moreover, they believe that its research methodology, which deemphasises spirituality and faith, could have disastrous ethical consequences on humanity. Thus, positivism is thought to be reductive in the sense that it values scientific empiricism, focusing on spheres of change and becoming and on technical sensory experiences while excluding revelation and intuition. The epistemological undertaking of the project to Islamise knowledge thus pushes toward a rethinking of Westernised knowledge and a critical assessment of its implications on humanity in general and Muslim societies in particular. Critics fear that Westernised knowledge and scientifically based technology are increasingly becoming a driving force for human salvation while religion is steadily losing its soteriological function and ethical guidance among Westernised educated elites. In this regard, Mbembe argues that technology has become the new universal religion of the epoch of our time, assuming the attributes and functions formerly assigned to transcendence and thus (re) directing the forces of becoming (Mbembe, 2022, p. 14) and the way we think about our surroundings and the universe.

The reason for this perception is that contemporary technological endeavours do not address questions of meaning and moral-ethical judgement and have therefore lost their moral compass and larger sense of purpose. As a result, it is believed that secular scientists are stumbling into a scientific moral vacuum. In the Einsteinian sense, science does not provide methodological guidance to scholars because it lacks a foundation of ethics. Rather, the ethical foundation of science followed in the conduct of research and knowledge production rests not on science but on a collective network of cultural understandings and religions. Dzilo argues that “the religion of a culture is the foundation of its identity” since religions are distinguishing and integrating factors of cultures and civilisations (Dzilo, 2012, p. 249). Therefore, the movement to Islamise knowledge aims to adopt a holistic epistemic approach to knowledge production that values both rationalism and spirituality. In this way, adherents would draw scientific inspiration from both tangible and intangible worlds.

Today, science has developed nearly unimaginable technological capabilities that allow humans to answer questions and decipher puzzles previously considered opaque. Thus, scientists trust firmly in these scientific developments, believing that they are capable of solving not only puzzling questions about humanity but also questions about the universe, the cosmological order of things, life on planet Earth, and the possibility of life on other planets. This trust has led to what some scholars call “scientism” (Lennox, 2019; 2020), the opinion that science is the only way to approach truth and rational thinking about reality and the world. The development of this phenomenon has had a significant impact on the politics of knowledge production and on the modern idea that science and religion exist in an antagonistic dichotomy. Furthermore, this absolute trust in science has created suspicion and scepticism toward forms of knowledge that do not require scholars to provide experimental evidence to justify their arguments. This applies to disciplines such as philosophy, theology, and social science, which some scientists regard as fairy-tale disciplines and therefore redundant in the domain of scientific inquiry.

Although scientific and technological development has significantly enhanced human capability, its methodology of knowledge production remains limited and unable to answer what Lennox (2020) calls “the bigger questions” that concern the origin and the destiny of humanity as well as the meaning of life itself. Furthermore, science and religion have different approaches to knowledge and the understanding of the universe as each draws its scientific inquiry and methods from a distinct epistemic tradition and reasoning. However, the Islamisation movement holds that science and religion complement each other and together enrich human understanding of reality

and the universe. Lennox argues that science takes things apart in order to understand how they work and what they are made of while religion puts them together in order to comprehend their meaning (Lennox, 2019; 2020). Proponents of Islamisation believe that, in the pursuit of knowledge, all epistemological approaches and methodologies, whether dealing with matter, values, ethics, or other matters, make significant contributions to the field of scientific inquiry. They advocate this integrative approach to knowledge to help explain the human self and the world.

According to this epistemology, knowledge acquisition aims to produce good Muslims who are intellectually capable and willing to use their acquired knowledge to advance humanity and preserve the cosmic order. Teleologically, this idea brings the ethics of knowledge pursuit into epistemological policy and practice. It also interconnects the discipline of body, mind, and soul with knowledge production and attempts to set ethical principles that govern the ways in which knowledge inspires benevolent human action. In this regard, Al-Attas opines that “discipline is the method of knowing by which we actualise the condition of being in the proper place” (Al-Attas, 1979, p. 11). Here, discipline represents Islamic etiquette, which guides the pursuit of knowledge and its application to either advance intellectual philosophies or find pragmatic solutions to societal dilemmas. This understanding creates a variety of interlocking relationships between knowledge, human action, discipline, ethics, and moral responsibility in scientific inquiry. In this context, Muslim thinkers, like Al-Attas, often criticise harmful Western inventions such as nuclear and chemical weapons and other lethal technologies that threaten the very existence of humankind. They trace these noxious inventions back to the lack of moral, ethical, and spiritual guidance in the conduct of scientific research and application.

The need to maintain balance in the relationship between ethics and scientific inquiry concerns not only Muslim scholars but also spiritual revolutionary leaders of other religious traditions. For example, Martin Luther King, Jr., an American Baptist minister and leader of the civil rights movement in the United States in the 1950s and 60s, wrote, “When scientific power outruns moral power, we end up with guided missiles and misguided men” (King, 1967, p. 4). For this reason, proponents of Islamic epistemology maintain the idea that scientific inquiry should be guided by benevolent moral codes and spiritual and ethical considerations. In other words, it is a moral and ethical responsibility for researchers and scientists to interrogate themselves as well as their work and explore the implications of their scientific findings (Mama, 2007). Questioning the scientific code of ethics raises critical awareness about research methodologies and epistemological approaches used in knowledge production today.

The Islamisation project presents the Islam-driven epistemology as a panacea for Muslim intellectual predicaments, targeting the (re)structuring of the mindset and exotic representations prevalent in educational practices in Muslim societies. The movement identifies the contemporary Muslim crisis as intellectual and thus finds its remedy within an intellectual framework of Islamisation. Proponents believe that change must begin by “decolonizing the minds” (Wa Thiong’o, 1981) of Muslims and by redirecting Islamic thought (AbuSulayman, 1993) towards an emphasis on the unity of God, the unity of God’s creation, and the unity of truth and knowledge as a foundation for theory, epistemology, and methodology. The Islamisation project thus seeks to appraise the coloniality of education and develop a new paradigm of knowledge premised on Islamic epistemology. The project claims cognitive emancipation in the sense that its epistemic programmes tend to liberate Muslims from Westernised forms of knowledge. Al-Alwani argues that the Islamisation of knowledge paradigm is a comprehensive undertaking as its proclaimed epistemic project is not limited to Muslims but includes the whole of humanity. This universal, inclusive foundation rests on a “*tawhid*-based reconstruction of the concept of life, humanity, and the universe” (Al-Alwani, 2005, p. 5).

## 5 Modern Islamic Universities in Africa

In the last few decades, the number of modern Muslim institutions of higher education has been rapidly increasing across African-majority Muslim societies and elsewhere. Islamic universities and colleges have been established, even in minority Muslim countries such as Kenya, Tanzania, Burkina Faso, Mozambique, South Africa, and Uganda, to provide tertiary education and skilled training in various fields of Islamic, social, and natural sciences (Lo & Haron, 2016). Consistent with a growing Islamic epistemological consciousness, statistics show that the number of Islamic universities across the African continent is increasing rapidly. In 2012, Lo identified 32 Islamic colleges and universities located in African Sub-Saharan countries (Lo, 2016) while the Alliance of Islamic Universities of Africa pinpointed 43 universities and colleges in 2023 (COMSTECH News, 2023).

Sudan spearheaded the Islamisation process and invested a tremendous effort in building an educational system in accordance with this new epistemic orientation. As early as the 1980s, a small number of Islam-oriented intellectuals from the Faculty of Arts of the University of Khartoum in Sudan was beginning to promote Islamisation. In collaboration with international institutions also working on Islamisation, these Sudanese intellectuals organised

an international conference in Khartoum in 1987 to create intercontinental and transnational networks of Muslim scholars and organisations and to lay a foundation for a new academic policy built on Islamic epistemology. This conference focused on the formulation of an Islamic methodology of social sciences and on its possible applications in Muslim institutions of higher learning. This social sciences' reconfiguration was aimed to both de-Westernise and de-secularise education and to make an epistemic paradigm shift in Muslim educational systems (Lo & Haron, 2016). In Sudan, support for this Islamisation trend skyrocketed during the Islamist regime which ruled the country from 1989 until 2019, during which the government adopted the Islamisation project as an epistemic edifice for its education policy. Thus, the country's reform-oriented government played an important role in the development and propagation of the Islamisation paradigm not only in Sudan but also across the African continent. It motivated potential students and awarded scholarships to foreign students willing to acquire tertiary educations in Sudanese Islamic universities. The regime played a very active role in (re)directing education towards this vision of knowing and financially supported the Islamisation of knowledge in Sudan, across Africa, and beyond.

The Sudanese regime established the International University of Africa (IUA) in 1993 to become a leader in the domain of Islamic higher education in Africa and to convey a message of Islam-driven epistemology to the wider Muslim world through *da'wa* (proselytization). The regime considered the IUA an international academic institution whose epistemological vision rests on Islam and combines academic excellence with Islamic ethics and morality. Ideally, it was founded to educate Muslim scholars who specialise in Islamic and Arabic studies as well as in different fields within the modern social and natural sciences. This institution was also created to establish cultural ties with scientific bodies and institutions in African Muslim communities outside of Sudan and in the Muslim world at large. In addition, the regime's interest in founding this Islamic university was to inculcate Muslim students from different parts of Africa with an Islam-oriented epistemology that would inspire spirituality in social and natural sciences. Furthermore, under its Islamist regime, Sudan became an active member of regional and global networks of Islamic higher education, claiming to be a pioneer in implementing this new Islamisation project and helping to spread it throughout the African continent. Salomon argues that the Islamisation of knowledge project in Sudan attempted to combine instrumentalist readings of the Qur'an within "distinctly modern epistemological, bureaucratic, social, and political categories that emerged out of the secular scientific enlightenment" (Salomon, 2016, p. 104). Furthermore, he writes, it did not question the "ontological assumptions

written into the notion of the division between the social and natural sciences” but rather took these disciplinary categories for granted and tried to Islamise their academic contents by divesting them of Western ideological representations (Salomon, 2016, p. 104).

In the second half of the twentieth century, Sudan underwent a thorough reconfiguration of educational policies and practices which became recast according to Islamic epistemology (Salomon, 2016; Nur, 2017; Nur, 2020b; Seesemann, 2018). This intensive Islamisation process encompassed not only knowledge but also all aspects of socio-economic and political life. In the early 1990s, the Islamist regime upgraded the Faculty of the Holy Qur’an to the fully-fledged University of the Holy Qur’an and Islamic Sciences. It also transformed Omdurman Islamic University, which had been established in the 1960s, into a multi-disciplinary institution encompassing five broad disciplinary areas of specialisation, namely Islamic studies, social studies and humanities, medicine and health sciences, engineering sciences, natural sciences, and technology studies. It also promoted the Institute of Qur’anic Sciences in Wad Madani into the University of the Holy Qur’an and the Islamisation of Sciences. These universities depart from Western-based academic institutions by offering an alternative epistemic orientation of knowledge production and transmission for Muslims in Sudan and across Africa and by attempting to (re)shape knowledge within an Islamic framework.

Today, Islamic civil society organisations and Muslim community leaders who are active in the field of Islamic educational reform and who challenge the shortcomings of colonial epistemology also adopt the idea of the Islamisation of knowledge in their educational, developmental, and transformational agendas. They engage Islamic epistemology discourse, mobilise internal and external funding, and collect donations from philanthropic bodies to establish Islamic universities. The involvement of community leaders and non-governmental organisations in the promotion of Islam-oriented knowledge seems to have dramatically changed the spread as well as the institutionalisation of the Islamisation of knowledge on the African continent. In the late 1980s, for example, the Muslim community in Uganda was able to mobilise financial resources from the local government as well as non-governmental organisations such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to establish the International Islamic University in Uganda (IUIU). Today, the IUIU provides Islam-oriented tertiary education to anglophone African Muslims of different English-speaking nationalities within Africa. The university caters not only to Ugandan Muslims but also to English-speaking Muslims from other African countries. It recruits from afar students who seek to acquire a higher education and pursue scientific research from an Islamic epistemological perspective.

Gyagenda and Rajab-Gyagenda put forth the proposition that the establishment of this university is illustrative of the complex interplay of international politics and diplomacy. At the time, Uganda was pursuing a policy of aligning itself with the Middle East, seeking to gain the favour of the Muslim minorities residing in the country. Consequently, the IUIU, whose knowledge politics are rooted in Islam, emerged and developed as a challenge to the prevailing Western-oriented secular model of education in Uganda (Gyagenda & Rajab-Gyagenda, 2016, p. 135).

Following a similar educational reconfiguration, the Muslim community in Niger mobilised financial resources and academic staff to establish the International Islamic University of Niger, intending to offer higher education opportunities to African francophone Muslims across Central and West African regions. It is worth noting that the names of these universities all include the term “international,” which presumably stretches the boundaries of faith-based knowledge and pleads for global epistemological recognition.

Furthermore, the Muslim minority in Ghana engages the same epistemic paradigm, boasting its own university where community members can acquire an Islamic-oriented tertiary education. In 2001, community leaders opened the Islamic University College in Ghana to offer Muslim youth the opportunity to compete with graduates of secular-oriented universities (Kobo, 2016, pp. 179–180).

In Chad, advocates of the development of Arabic and Islamic education founded the King Faisal University in 1991. Moussa argues that these founders intended to develop Islamic curricula and to enter scholarly and cultural agreements with international agencies that work on Muslim education (Moussa, 2016). King Faisal University is a non-governmental academic institution partly supported by the Chadian government, local entrepreneurs, and the Islamic World Relief Organization of Saudi Arabia.

Furthermore, to stimulate and support Muslim efforts in higher education in Tanzania, the Muslim Development Foundation (MDF) negotiated with the Tanzanian government to establish an Islamic university in the country. In 2004, the government granted permission to the foundation, which then established the Muslim University of Morogoro in the same year (Njozi, 2016). The installation of the university was regarded as a way to manage and address “a deep undercurrent of resentment toward the state, and widespread political discontent among Tanzanian Muslims” (Njozi, 2016, p. 96). Thus, the university is expected to tackle the issue of Muslims’ underrepresentation in higher education and the public sector.

In countries with large Muslim populations, the issue of the Islamisation of knowledge and its implementation was taken even more seriously than

in Muslim minority countries. This is because the Islamisation process was included in the electoral process. For instance, when the Nigerian government started to grant licenses for the establishment of private universities, Muslim foundations and entrepreneurs began to promote and build Islam-oriented universities in different parts of the country with larger Muslim populations. As Sirajudeen states, today the recognised Islamic universities in Nigeria include Crescent University, Al-Hikmah University, Fountain University, and Katsina University (Sirajudeen, 2016, p. 78). These four universities were established between 2005 and 2007 and are all academically oriented toward Islamic epistemology. Sirajudeen believes that the overarching idea for their establishment is to make an epistemological shift from Westernised colonial cultural bondage to an Islam-oriented education that can “provide the platform for utilising the resources of Islam to nurture Muslims at the highest level of education” (Sirajudeen, 2016, p. 88). They intend to promote what Sirajudeen calls a “complete and balanced education,” meaning the development of the spiritual and material well-being of individual Muslims through religious and secular education.

These different Islamic universities all draw their academic inspiration from Islamic epistemologies and are committed to both the propagation of Islam and the advancement of the sciences (Erich, 2014). The Islamic university thus seeks to (re)interpret, analyse, and (re)frame various branches of knowledge through the lens of the revelatory episteme. The purpose behind this endeavour is to harmonise the socio-religious and cultural ethos of Muslims with contemporary forms of knowledge, provide alternative perspectives rooted in Islamic epistemologies and ontological realities, and develop new frameworks and methodologies that consider Islamic ethics and values alongside academic disciplines. This form of university intends to negotiate what Grosfoguel (2010) calls the “locus of enunciation” that would enable its graduates to ground their theories and concepts in Islamic philosophy and pursue scientific research that responds to the demand of Muslim societies. Grosfoguel argues that “[w]e always speak from a particular location in the power structures” as we cannot escape the intersectional dimensions (class, gender, spiritual, geographical, and racial hierarchies) of society (Grosfoguel, 2010, p. 67). This, in turn, renders different forms of knowledge relative, provincial, and contextual. Proponents of the Islamic university model believe that an Islam-informed epistemology could lead to the development of a more holistic approach to knowledge production, an ethically grounded methodology, and culturally relevant knowledge systems capable of reflecting Islamic values and contributing to the advancement of Muslim societies in Africa and elsewhere.

## 6 Conclusion

Across Africa, the idea of the modern Islamic university tries to recapture the merit of the early institutes of African Islamic higher learning, recover the history of Islamic intellectual prominence, and reconstruct the once glorious edifice of Islamic epistemology. This undertaking intends to raise Islamic epistemic consciousness, remodel the colonial system of education prevalent in contemporary Muslim education, and (re)build a new epistemic structure grounded in Islamic philosophy and responsive to the socio-cultural, political, spiritual, and material needs of Muslims. These Islamic universities in Africa emerged out of the politics of epistemic emancipation in general and the Islamisation of knowledge discourse in particular. These discourses arose from the matrix of decolonisation in the 1960s and have intensified through the struggle to recover African indigenous knowledge systems. The universities seek to restructure the political economy of knowledge production by restoring the Islamic worldview in Muslims' thinking and education. In this reconfiguration process, Islamic epistemology becomes a tool to overcome Western epistemic dominance in Muslim societies and the crisis of thought produced by the colonial systems of education.

This wave of consciousness led to the resurgence of an Islamic epistemology whose approach to knowledge production draws from axiological principles of Islam that incorporate elements of ethics and benevolence. Islamic universities serve as an institutional means for the realisation of Islamic epistemology in both theory and practice, engaging epistemological reconfiguration, (re)building new curricula and learning theories, designing new textbooks, and (re)structuring the teaching methodology and pedagogy. These ventures attempt to cultivate new forms of knowledge in all modern disciplinary specialisations by adopting an Islamic epistemological approach in the articulation of knowledge contents and intellectual orientation. This measure aims methodologically to divest modern disciplines of their secular and alienating Western epistemological perspectives. Thus, the Islamic university exists as an alternative higher education institution to the dominant secular-oriented university, which continues to serve as an agent of colonialism and Westernisation in Muslim societies.

It is important to note here that the Islamisation of knowledge in Africa is not a homogenous process. As a diverse continent, Africa is home to a wide variety of cultural, Islamic, and intellectual traditions that have developed throughout history under different circumstances and socio-political contexts. Therefore, there are multiple interpretations and approaches to the Islamisation of knowledge. Accordingly, the practical implementation of

the Islamisation of knowledge at modern African Islamic universities differs from one society to another depending on the prevailing socio-religious and political circumstances. However, despite these differences, overall, the African Islamic university aims to combine Islamic teachings with the pursuit of modern knowledges and the intellectual development of African Muslim societies on the continent and beyond. It aims to provide an Islamic framework for understanding and addressing the socio-political, cultural, epistemic, and civilisational challenges that face the contemporary Muslim world in general and African Muslim societies in particular.

### Acknowledgements

I wrote this chapter with funding from my Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence fellowship (funded by the German Research Foundation under Germany's Excellence Strategy – EXC 2052/1 – 390713894), which I held from September to December 2022. I am grateful for the insightful academic exchange in the reconfiguration forums and the financial support I received over the course of this fellowship. I presented an earlier draft of the paper at the international conference entitled “Negotiating the Fabric of the African University: Beyond Locality and Universalism,” held on September 13–15, 2022, at the Eduardo Mondlane University in Maputo, Mozambique. I am thankful to the organisers of this conference for supporting my work and for the constructive discussions in the regular meetings as well as the fruitful informal conversations during the breaks. Thanks go also to Bonnie Rose Schulman for her invaluable comments on this paper.

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# Negotiating Ambivalences between the Global and the Local

*An Empirical Study of Hybridisation of Higher Education in Algeria*

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## Abstract

Building on the findings of an empirical study conducted in Algeria, this chapter explores how the university and individual academics negotiate ambivalences between the global and the local. The Algerian higher education system is undergoing a process of transformation triggered by and correlating with increasing globalisation and pressures for system integration. The effects of this development and of the Algerian system's ways of navigating between national and international concerns are reflected in the country's higher education policy. The study is based on interviews with Algerian academic staff of various scientific disciplines at universities and research institutes. In addition to analysing these interviews, the chapter also offers some personal reflections on the data collection phase. The conceptual focus is on Lüscher's concept of "ambivalences," which is used as an interpretive lens to frame and explain the results of the study. The chapter concludes with implications for the overall analysis of higher education in the North African context and identifies a situation of hybridisation developing in the Algerian higher education system.

## Keywords

Algeria – higher education policy – ambivalences – internationalisation – hybridisation – research

## 1 Introduction

According to Bauman (2013), the modern age is not only inherently ambivalent but requires a wide degree of toleration of these ambivalences. Drawing on this idea, the present chapter suggests that the constitution of modernity in African societies should not be considered an abnormality but as intrinsically ambivalent, having become what it is as the result of historical contingencies

(Macamo, 2005). At the same time, modernity in Africa must be understood against the background of the postcolonial situation characteristic of many transforming societies.

This chapter focuses on research as one of the functions of the university that has gained importance in Algerian higher education, as it plays a key role in adaptation processes of internationalisation. This new relevance of research in the value system of higher education policies has become particularly visible because it is being prioritised by a centralised government that exerts considerable influence on institutional policies. The chapter is based on a PhD thesis (Schoelen, 2020) that explores the academic practices of Algerian professors and researchers as an expression of their agency and as individual adaptation strategies within the university context. Connecting the macro (system) and micro (individual) levels, the particular practice of research in the university context can be reconstructed as clamped between these levels. The study identifies various strategies among researchers, who have to operate in a context that often seems incompatible with the practices they are engaging in or supposed to engage in. Their actions, in the form of coping strategies, can be considered as a means of adapting to the ambivalences induced by the macro level.

The concept of ambivalences as a sensitising construct links the macro and micro levels in that it can either take an individualistic, i.e. personal, or a structural approach, where social situations are highlighted (Lüscher, 2011b, p. 387). Moreover ambivalences are not limited to the individual level. They may determine the macro (system) level as a whole, which is relevant and pertinent in an African context (Langa, 2010, 2011). As a disclaimer, it must be acknowledged that the concept is of European origin. Thus, epistemologically, the concept is not neutral, it may be linked to an inherent bias, a particular worldview, and a level of normativity.<sup>1</sup> The point, therefore, is not to apply the concept in an universalistic sense, but rather to test and question it in its claim of portraying and making sense of reality in a given context – in this case the Algerian higher education system. The following section outlines the analytical and conceptual framework of the empirical study, based on which the ambivalences observed between the local and the global are explored.

## 2 Ambivalences: A Theoretical Approach to Analysing the Tension between the Global and the Local

The Swiss family sociologist Kurt Lüscher conceptualised ambivalences from a sociology of knowledge perspective as a “sensitizing construct” (Lüscher, 2011a,

2011b),<sup>2</sup> originally in the framework of the study of intergenerational, i.e. parent-offspring, relationships which are in a constant state of oscillation between closeness and distance, love and hate, responsibility and burden, obligation and personal life. While the concept has been developed with this particular social constellation in mind, it offers a “heuristic definition that can serve as a reference for research, theory, and policy” (Lüscher, 2011a, p. 192). The notion of ambivalence, “implying the dynamic interplay of difference and communal-ity with autonomy and dependence,” reflects the “coexistence in one person of contradictory emotions or attitudes toward the same object or situation” (Lüscher, 2011a, p. 194). The concept is relevant and, indeed, transferable to an education context because it facilitates the observation of “personal preferences measured against an ideal of normality ... In this way, social structures, ideas, and ideologies become relevant” (Lüscher, 2011a, p. 195). Ambivalences are inextricably linked to the social context in which an individual finds itself, as is shown in the following:

First, there is the dynamic search for the significance or meaning of persons, relationships, or objects. Second, the notion of ambivalence draws to our attention that we can be confronted with a specific kind of conflict. This conflict is between options, which are reduced (or which we reduce) to juxtapositions that we attribute to contradictory forces or conceive of as polarizations, often expressed as fundamental differences. These forces can be of different strength and thus are not balanced. We may become aware of social conditions and social situations that provoke such experiences of individual actors. (Lüscher, 2011a, p. 195)

Hence, there are interrelated, parallel processes, and those circumstances result in “conflicting experiences that are relevant for personal identity or for the personality” (Lüscher, 2011a, p. 195). Further, the concept of ambivalence helps to describe the “relationship between the self and agency” which “generate[s] different strategies for coping” in “processes of oscillation between polarized juxtapositions” (Lüscher, 2011a, p. 196). As examples for such juxtapositions Lüscher points to the tension between difference and similarity, between autonomy and dependence, between moral obligations and self-interest. It is evident that the concept of ambivalence can be adapted to reflect the tension between the global and the local, which is the focus of this chapter. The definition of ambivalences is summarised as follows:

The concept of ambivalence refers to certain kinds of experiences. They occur while we search for the significance of persons, social relationships,

and facts that are relevant for our identity and our agency, thereby oscillating between polar contradictions in feeling, thinking, wanting, or social structures, contradictions that appear temporarily or permanently insoluble. These oscillations can be asymmetrical, imbalanced, and reflect the impact of powers. I call this definition heuristic because it is not definitive but encourages empirical validation and transformation. (Lüscher, 2011a, p. 197)

Correspondingly, the link between theory, methodology, and practice is established by this “sensitizing construct,” which complements theoretical elements with ambivalences as found in an empirical, especially qualitative, study (Lüscher, 2011a, p. 200). It is based on the fact that “experience of ambivalence refers to the confrontation with fundamental difference and, consequently, dealing with ambivalences requires the acknowledgment of such differences as challenges” (Lüscher, 2011a, p. 202). The concept of ambivalence is sufficiently open while also allowing for the specificities of “time and context.” It demonstrates an “ongoing concern [with] a dynamic definition” while also ensuring a focus towards a particular subject (Lüscher, 2011a, p. 202). For these reasons, it is both fit-for-purpose and universally applicable. Based on the principle that it is not possible to not act, and given that there is always a social element to one’s individual action, ambivalences have to be dealt with in one way or another, which can include different strategies such as ignoring or accepting, hesitating or considering alternatives (Lüscher, 2011b, p. 374). The concept of identity as process (Lüscher, 2011b, p. 378) illustrates the dynamic and open construct of ambivalences, its causes and constituent parts as well as the resulting process of oscillation. In addition, agency, which in the social sciences is commonly defined as the ability to act, also includes for Lüscher the quality of being susceptible to ambivalences as well as the ability to deal with them (Lüscher, 2011b, pp. 381–382). The latter is of particular interest in this work as it relates directly to professional practices as well as to research and its methods (Lüscher, 2011b, p. 386).

### 3 Data and Method

For this study, a total of 31 semi-structured interviews were conducted in April and May 2018 at several institutions in various urban or semi-urban settings in two main geographical regions of the country. The selection criteria for the interview participants included: (1) the profile of the interviewee, specifically their status as *enseignant-chercheur* (academic staff engaged in research) at

a university or as a permanent researcher at a designated institute; and (2) a diversity of organisational perspectives, including both professors with and without administrative functions as well as two persons based at national research institutes and one political representative.

The snowball technique was used to recruit interview partners (Heckathorn, 1997, 2011). This is a qualitative non-probability sampling method in which research participants are recruited through interviewees themselves after a random starting point selected by a first identification. The snowball technique is deemed particularly suitable to access hard-to-reach and “hidden” populations (Goodman, 2011). This method has proven to be feasible in the Algerian higher education system, characterised by individual stakeholders in a controlled and centrally governed environment. Personal referral is an accepted cultural and academic practice in this context and happened without the author’s specific intervention in the field after five initial contacts were solicited in different locations and corresponding institutional settings. In order to assure a variety of perspectives, interviewees were asked specifically to refer to representatives from a variety of disciplines in order to account for expected differences caused by the variation in teaching and research languages. In this context, it is important to bear in mind that the social sciences, arts, and humanities are mainly practiced in Arabic, whereas the main language in the sciences and technological fields is French.

Generally, access to the field for a foreigner was challenging. It took one year in total for the German author to receive her first visa for a three-months stay in Algeria – in spite of several prior professional assignments over a period of two years and an associated network of contact persons. A research stay of three months was formally agreed upon, divided into two separate six-week visits at a relevant research unit in Algeria. After the host was identified, all required documentation was submitted to the centre’s administration to then obtain the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MESRS)’s approval necessary for an institutional invitation letter.

In the end, the corpus included interviews with professors, deans, and vice-rectors with different disciplinary backgrounds. Sometimes two persons from the same discipline, professionally and personally well acquainted with each other, participated in the same interview. In addition, focus group discussions with graduate students (Master/PhD level) were conducted. Out of the total of 31 interviews, 15 interviews have been selected for the detailed analysis, including 12 single expert interviews and 3 two-person interviews. This reduced sample thus consisted of 17 participants (6 female, 11 male). The disciplines represented by these academics include chemistry, physics, mathematics, engineering, architecture, Arabic language and literature, Islamic sciences,

history, library and information sciences, archaeology, anthropology, sociology, French linguistics, and music. These were grouped into two main subject areas, namely, humanities, arts, and social sciences on the one hand, and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) on the other. The length of the interviews varied between 35 and 165 minutes, with an average duration of approximately one hour.

The 17 questions in the final version of the interview guidelines were constructed as open-ended questions and designed in a deductive way, i.e. from the general to the more specific as the sequence progressed. There were thematic blocks, notably, internationalisation and reforms, though these were neither explicitly labelled nor mentioned or read out to interviewees. Although information sheets, including individual printouts of the guidelines, had been prepared for each interview, interviewees generally preferred having questions read out just before replying rather than looking at the document first or in addition.

The interviews took place at the university workplace, in (personal) offices, in (private) libraries, in public places such as a restaurant or hotel, or at home, as requested or suggested by the interviewees. Appointments were made and arranged at short notice, for the most part through telephone calls by the author herself or by colleagues. Drop-in was also solicited in some cases. Because of the announcements when arranging the interview the introductions to the interviews involved outlining overall themes and mentioning higher education reforms and system internationalisation to invoke a positive connotation – as the pre-test had shown. Before starting a formal interview, interviewees were informed about the number of questions in two parts and the estimated average duration of the interview. Research questions were not explicitly mentioned.

Participants were reassured of their anonymity and personal data protection and were asked for permission to record the interview with a dictaphone, for the purpose of transcription and data analysis, to which all interviewees agreed. It was decided to abstain from both individual written recording consent and data utilisation permission forms because their use would likely have raised suspicions in the particular cultural and political context. No documents were sent via email to participants prior to or after the interview.

Transcripts as a static, compressed, presentable form of the spoken data were created and smoothed for dialect and colloquial expressions in order to focus on the interview content and to improve readability as a compromise between precision and workability. The semantic content type contains what is being said rather than how something is said (Kuckartz et al., 2008; Dresing & Pehl, 2015, pp. 28–32). Qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2012; Mayring,

2015) was used for the analysis, which was conducted with the software f4.<sup>3</sup> A first open thematic coding in hierarchically organised categories was performed in order to identify relevant material (Saldaña, 2016). The category system combines deductive, i.e. theory-based, categories and inductive, i.e. data-derived, sub-categories. The main categories are made up of the four functions of the university identified by Castells (1993, 2017) and Bourdieu's types of capital (Bourdieu, 1986), which are complemented by sub-categories created from the data. The results of the analysis are presented as a mix of typology and category system description.

#### 4 Analysis: Algerian Academics and the New Research Imperative

As it is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide a more detailed analysis including illustrative quotations, what follows is a summary of the outcomes.<sup>4</sup> Firstly, there are system limitations related to a lack of institutional autonomy. Algerian higher education institutions are subject to centralised governance control, which makes them prone to politicisation. These system characteristics are atypical of academia worldwide, where universities are mostly considered special organisations that are self-governed. If these conditions are not met, however, individual academic freedom is at risk.

Since the system is centrally governed and publicly financed, there is little room for experiments. Reforms – such as the recent adoption and implementation of the Bologna process – are imposed by the responsible authorities, mostly without considering individual situations, cases, and contexts. At the same time, a policy analysis shows the absence of an internationalisation strategy, an implementation plan, or national research programmes. Overall, the macro level is dominant, and academics at the micro level are subordinate to the purposes of the national operation of higher education. The predominant foci on the macro level are improving access, social integration, and undergraduate teaching. It is noteworthy that academic self-governance, which is characteristic of universities as special organisations, is largely non-existent according to the interviews. Therefore, system factors strongly influence the everyday life and work of an Algerian lecturer-researcher at a higher education institution. This problem became particularly apparent when the interviewees talked about the activity of research, which is an essential task of both the individual academic and the field as a whole.

As a consequence of the growing higher education system and the corresponding expansion of teaching loads, the university function of teaching tends to be prioritised over other needs and functions. According to the data,

various forms of ideology find expression throughout the curriculum and system, which is relevant especially for non-STEM fields. Consequently, politicisation is rife, reflected in centralisation and the assignment of executive positions rather than appointments by election, which has implications for individual academic freedom. Not least, the centralised language policy does not take into account personal competences and needs. The clearly outlined policy objective of widening education and access is often to the detriment of research, according to most academics. The Algerian higher education system – i.e. the universities, which are separated from the national research centres – neither rewards research activities nor sanctions the lack of research engagement. Therefore, the responsibility for research lies entirely with the individual scholars. Overall, the main function of universities in Algeria, in Castells' terms, is to satisfy a social need, aiming towards the massification of the university system and surplus labour absorption in the postcolonial context.

Secondly, research is a comparatively new imperative in the field of higher education in Algeria. While research has traditionally played a subordinate role only, it has recently become a top-down policy priority, with implications for academic staff. As a consequence, research activity constitutes a new means for differentiation among colleagues and is generating new forms of competition in the social field of academia (Bourdieu, 1975, 1980; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2006). This raises the question of how the different forms of (economic, social, and cultural) capital, as conceptualised by Bourdieu, relate to each other in the Algerian context.

Drawing on Bourdieu's theory of social fields, it is apparent that in the Algerian context material incentives have little effect on an individual academic's motivation to engage in research. Proof of this claim is the absence of any mention of financial means by the interviewed academics. The salaries of Algerian senior academics – i.e. their economic capital – are typically viewed as sufficient by the interviewees, particularly when contrasted with the salary levels found in other professions in the country. Instances of inadequate financial resources are uncommon and represent a small fraction of discussions around cultural capital. However, the lack of financial competition among colleagues in Algerian academia reduces the significance of salary as a criterion for distinguishing oneself or motivating research engagement. In other words, economic capital does not play a critical role in influencing individuals' choices to undertake research activities.

A similar ineffectiveness can be seen with regard to the social capital of Algerian academics. With a few exceptions, social status seems to have no significant influence on Algerian professors' research activity. One explanation

accounting for this phenomenon may be that professors share a similar and comparable position as academics – whether engaged in research or not – in a postcolonial context.<sup>5</sup> This context is strongly informed by the former French elitist and exclusive approach to higher education.

Furthermore, following the tradition of the French system, research at Algerian universities has traditionally been considered less relevant than other functions of the university. The fact that its importance has increased is a comparatively new phenomenon – indicating that the global imperatives have become more relevant in comparison to the tradition of French universities. Meanwhile, the reproduction of elites – including the training of state officials for positions in public administration – continues to be performed via the *grandes écoles* type of institution. At the same time, in the French system there is a tradition that research is not conducted at universities but at other specialised institutes. Only recently universities started incorporating research as part of their mission. The current landscape of Algerian higher education and its policies remain strongly influenced by the French colonial legacy. However, internationalisation and globalisation are driving transformations in the Algerian higher education system.

Overall, the influence of both economic and social capital can be considered diminutive. The individual behaviour and actions of academics in the Algerian context are rather determined by cultural capital, which comes in various forms. Simply put, in its embodied state as personal reputation cultural capital enables professors and permanent researchers to engage in research. This is reflected in holding a necessary rank or obtaining a position by acquiring the necessary competencies. This behaviour may be predominant in the beginning of one's career, or, with increasing seniority, in competition with others. Colleagues in the national sphere are competing and cooperating in the immediate academic environment or within the wider Algerian scientific community. Beyond that, on the international level, there exists an exchange with the relevant representatives of the respective disciplines at conferences and in academic societies.

The embodied cultural capital is complemented by its institutional form, which equally plays a role in academics' behaviour and their respective scope for action. It refers to the formal qualifications as well as the reputation of the universities or research institutes, with which the individual is affiliated. However, the individual researcher defines themselves primarily through personalised, i.e. embodied forms of cultural capital, rather than through capital brought by the affiliated institution through respective credentials. Given that research assessments, not least in the international context, are based on exactly this individual performance – including, though not limited to,

publications – the way to compete is to adhere to these global rules and standards of the scientific enterprise.

Nevertheless, political circumstances and the institutional environment cannot be left out of consideration: When academic freedom is curtailed or political views affect the language used in publications, researchers in the social sciences and humanities in Algeria may find it hard to connect with or compete in an international context. This is true even if they have valuable cultural knowledge within their own country, as in the case of Berber languages (Tamazight). As a result, extra effort has to be put in by the individual to engage in research that is internationally recognised. The motivation for this additional work as well as the will to confront the inconveniences in a centrally governed system, where such activity is not incentivised, draw exclusively on the embodied cultural capital. Furthermore, individual academics might even have to compromise on their social capital, at the detriment of good relationships with colleagues, who choose to adopt a different approach to the research imperative: They might deliberately avoid such engagement or retreat to administrative positions. The choice to conduct research is a matter of personal prioritisation by the individual and relates to their career preferences.

According to the interview data, the most important function of the Algerian university is to fulfil the social need of surplus-labour absorption. Hence, higher education is primarily supposed to prevent and counteract unemployment. Ideology in the form of the politicisation of higher education also continues to have a strong influence: Historically, the academic system in Algeria has been designed with the intention of promoting national unity. This conception of the university and its function for society, however, does not currently address the issue of national reconciliation after the conflict of the “black decade,” which would need to be addressed at multiple levels, including the political. Rather, the Algerian university serves as a means of superficially maintaining social peace. According to the participants, its colonial origins and implications are not dealt with in national policy, but they are widely discussed within the country’s diaspora. Accordingly, the absence of discourse on the “black decade” points towards related political structures which are taken for granted and widely accepted. The reproduction of elites and the training of the bureaucracy exist to some extent in the Algerian context but are no longer the core of the higher education system. They represent the remnants of the inherited French model, which are slowly but surely disappearing from the Algerian system, partly due to internationalisation, partly due to national interests.

Apart from this general political context and debates about the different functions of the Algerian university, there are a number of other factors that

deter or prevent Algerian academics from engaging in research: the (un)availability of human resources at both the junior and senior researcher levels, inadequate technical competences and soft skills, and the lack of budgetary autonomy. The problem, therefore, does not lie in the absence of any particular function of the university. Rather, the challenge is the oscillation between the local context and the imperative of research in the global science system. Accordingly, academics develop coping strategies to deal with the conflicting demands that emerge from national and international contexts.

## 5 Higher Education Hybridisation

How can these study results be interpreted in terms of higher education policy in Algeria? The Algerian higher education system is currently undergoing a transition. Yet, this transition is neither characterised by a profound transformation nor by a revitalisation as observed in some sub-Saharan African countries. For example, Rwanda recently switched from French to English. In Cameroon, the co-existence of both English and French systems is producing tensions. Mozambique has seen several mergers of universities and numerous East African countries have incorporated private institutions into their respective higher education systems. Meanwhile the current readjustment of the Algerian higher education system may best be characterised as a process of hybridisation.

The hybridisation process consists of the system embracing, combining, and allowing for the co-existence of both local and global elements within a national higher education system. Such an approach, combining diverging local and global expectations, implies retaining nation-defining elements and philosophies, derived from a country's history, culture, and religious values. At the same time, reforms need to implement international standards for quality assurance in research and training, which are commonly applied by the global academic community. Further, the resulting system should protect universities as complex and self-governing organisations and as integral components of the knowledge society. This includes the protection of institutional autonomy, individual mobility, and academic freedom, especially in the social sciences.

To summarise, the Algerian higher education system can be characterised as a mixture of national and international elements. Globalisation has played a key role in the internationalisation of the system. However, unique political and social contexts remain influential. It remains to be seen whether and how this kind of higher education hybridisation can contribute to the transformation of societies and welfare states.

## 6 Conclusion

The Algerian case exemplifies how North African universities are negotiating their fabric as they navigate the ambivalences produced by global and local demands, resulting in a process of hybridisation. Algerian academics' agency is reflected in their individual ways of conducting research and the development of adaptation strategies. This chapter illustrated how they respond to the emerging requirements for active research engagement and to the ambivalences they encounter in their institutional contexts. There are three coping strategies which Algerian academics employ in their situation of personal oscillation: Individual academics in the Algerian context may be (1) embracing research activity, (2) rejecting or minimising it, or (3) retreating themselves from the exposition to research.

In the first case, they engage in research against various system-imposed obstacles such as a lack of institutional autonomy. Individual quality assurance is then practised to set up international standards. Seeking foreign partnerships or publishing abroad are other measures. Finally, some choose to emigrate altogether. At the same time, individuals can still adhere to national principles, either out of personal conviction, as is the case in e.g. Islamic sciences, or by necessity and practical considerations. The latter would be especially prevalent in, and applicable to, the social sciences, particularly when they deal with the national society.

Secondly, Algerian academics may choose not to engage in research or conduct it in a minimal form only. This coping strategy is based on a variety of reasons, including governance-related, institutional, or personal. The limitations on academic freedom, decision-making power, and mobility opportunities abroad are examples of each of those. Some systemic factors of the national higher education context, such as insufficiency of qualified or competent junior researchers, also deter academics from engaging in research. However, the decisive criterion is personal reasons. Those range from resistance to reforms, lack of financial incentives, and, not least, lack of foreign language skills, which are perceived by the interviewed academics as a major obstacle in conducting research. Due to the missing institutional autonomy, institutional reasons play a minor role.

Thirdly, Algerian academics seek alternatives within academia, either by taking up administrative and executive positions or by dedicating themselves to teaching and supervision or other extra-curricular initiatives. By doing so, they are usually unable to engage in parallel research due to limited time resources. However, academics who avoid research in this way do not usually make a conscious decision to do so. It is rather the case that they are just busy with other activities. As can be seen from this classification, the reasons for

not engaging in research are extensive and highly differentiated, as they span several levels and are cross-cutting.

In view of these options, the most typical strategy of an Algerian academic seems to be to conduct at least a little research, though this varies across disciplines. According to the data, Algerian academics from the arts, humanities, and social sciences are particularly impacted by ideological exposure and national language policies, which hinder their engagement in the international arena. Consequently, while individual academics might support and promote research at the Algerian university in general, public or political advocacy does not necessarily mean personal engagement. In this case, the path of least resistance is chosen, in avoiding dealing with ambivalences resulting from the status of being research active.

To summarise, Algerian academics oscillate in their identity between the two poles of the global versus the national. In practice, they act as a bridge between the presently still disconnected micro and macro levels. An example of providing solutions or novel concepts is introducing a discussion about institutional autonomy at the meso level. In doing so, change agents can scale-up hybrid coping strategies to manage academic ambivalences. Negotiating locality without giving up universality is recommended as the way forward by the academics interviewed. Both the local and the global are integral elements of the system and thus manifest the ambivalent fabric of a hybrid African university in the Algerian context.

## Notes

- 1 These characteristics are also applicable to the author of German nationality.
- 2 The first article (Lüscher, 2011a) is written in English, whereas the second article (Lüscher, 2011b) is in German. The latter was published just months after the first.
- 3 <https://www.audiotranskription.de/english>
- 4 For the complete data and a more extensive analysis see Schoelen (2020).
- 5 Rogosovic & Baranovic (2016) generally see a problem in the fact that social capital is a neglected category in Bourdieu's theory, which "focuses more on the socioeconomic status and cultural capital of an individual in attaining educational achievements than on his/ her social capital; the latter is therefore much less elaborated in Bourdieu's work" (Rogosic & Baranovic, 2016, p. 91).

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# The Advent of a New Model of the African University

*The Case of the University of Dschang in Cameroon*

*Destin Feutseu Dassi*

## Abstract

Created in 1993 alongside other Cameroonian universities with the aim of containing the surplus of the growing number of students enrolled in the then singular federal University of Yaoundé, the University of Dschang has come a long way and undergone several structural and administrative transformations that go beyond its initial mission. Emerging as a peripheral university in the 1990s and 2000s, the University of Dschang has become a renowned institution in Cameroon and in the Central African subregion thanks to its adaptation to local environments, its innovations in research and entrepreneurship, its national and international expansion, and its raised position in university rankings. Enshrined in the theoretical framework of higher education management and policy (Shattock, 2004), the present chapter analyses the development of the University of Dschang, nationwide and even beyond Cameroon, alongside its adaptation to local needs and its response to international requirements and standards. The chapter suggests that the University of Dschang appears as a new model for the Sub-Saharan African context, becoming a sort of catalyst or framework for development with a mission that goes beyond the traditional roles of teaching and research.

## Keywords

Cameroon – developmental university – third mission – regionalisation – higher education management and policy

## 1 Introduction

Previously known as a peripheral university (Zajontz, 2010), the University of Dschang – officially created under the auspices of the new University

Reform of 1993, namely by the presidential decree N° 93/030 of the 19th January 1993 (Simeu & Schamp, 2014) – has gone beyond its initial mission of enrolling the surplus students who could not be contained by the structurally deficient University of Yaoundé. It has thus become increasingly attractive to students and nationwide and internationally competitive in such a way that it is often referred to as “the most national university” of Cameroon (Folefack, 2016, p. 47). The university now covers almost all ten regions of Cameroon via its satellite institutions, centres, and private higher institutions under its tutorship, and some university rankings have ranked it first in the Central African region throughout the last decade (University of Dschang, 2021). What, then, makes such a university attractive to students considering that there are today state universities in all ten regions of Cameroon? What strategies and policies at the pedagogical, economic, and social levels have helped to make it a dynamic and prosperous university? What factors explain its informal designation as “the most national university” in Cameroon? Could it be considered a new model of the African university?

To address these questions the present chapter considers a conceptual framework of university governance that “deals with universities as a sector and focuses on how they interact with one another, their relationships to the state and how they are affected by national as well as transnational and global transformations” (Musselin, 2021, p. 306). In this light, the chapter discusses the development of the University of Dschang, nationwide and even beyond Cameroon, alongside its adaptation to local needs and its response to international requirements and standards. The argument is that the University of Dschang appears as a new model for the Sub-Saharan African context, acting “as a catalyst for regional and national developmental processes” with a mission that goes beyond traditional roles of teaching and research (Zajontz & Schamp, 2016, p. 169). In order to better illustrate this perspective, the chapter offers a presentation of the University of Dschang, including its geography, missions, and achievements.

## 2 The University of Plurality

The University of Dschang is located in Central Africa, in the West Region of Cameroon. It is made up of three main campuses, located across three divisions: the main campus with its six faculties, located in the Menoua division, especially in Dschang, the university’s namesake; the campus of Bandjoun in

the Koung-khi division where the University Institute of Technology is located; and the campus of Fouban in the Noun division that is home to the university's Fine Arts Institute.

Located in the town of Dschang, 400 km from the country's capital Yaoundé, the main campus of the university, headquartering the institution, has a geographical position that gives it some linguistic specificities. The university is located in between the two English-speaking regions of Cameroon, that is, the North- and South-western regions where English is the most spoken language followed by the national languages. This geographical position is so influential that the university is bilingual in its use of English and French as official languages of instruction, making it the most fully bilingual university in Cameroon (Tchomga et al., 2012, p. 5).

The main campus is made up of six faculties: the Faculty of Agronomy and Agricultural Sciences, the Faculty of Letters and Social Sciences, the Faculty of Medical Sciences and Pharmacology, the Faculty of Sciences, the Faculty of Economic Sciences and Management, and the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences. These various faculties are in turn divided into departments, as summarised in Table 9.1.

Based on the above and only looking at the main campus, it appears that the University of Dschang is a sort of melting pot, a place that offers many and diverse opportunities to Africans and particularly to Cameroonians. One example of this is the existence of a faculty, the Faculty of Agronomy and Agricultural Sciences, that is only available at the University of Dschang, found at no other Cameroonian institution. Overall, the existence of these faculties and their many departments means that each and every student entering higher education is given a wide range of opportunities, depending on his or her specialisations (Zajontz & Schamp, 2008). The University of Dschang is thereby able to fulfil the social role of universities "as the principal generators and distributors of knowledge" (Zajontz & Schamp, 2016, p. 167). This role benefits not only those living in the university's immediate vicinity but anyone interested in the curricula on offer. The university thus acts as an "[incubator] of innovations to drive growth and technological change, not only in national but also in regional and local environments" (Zajontz & Schamp, 2016, p. 167). In an environment where there are a growing number of state universities, with ten institutions covering all ten of the country's regions, every university must have its specificities in order to be competitive and attract students with its programmes, and by ultimately demonstrating the absorption of its graduates into the job market (Tsafack Nanfosso, 2017). This reflects the goals and conditions

TABLE 9.1 The faculties and departments of the University of Dschang

Faculties	Departments
Faculty of Agronomy and Agricultural Sciences (FAAS/FASA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Agriculture</li> <li>– Forestry</li> <li>– Rural Engineering</li> <li>– Soil Sciences</li> <li>– Agricultural Vulgarisation and Rural Sociology</li> <li>– Zootechnics</li> </ul>
Faculty of Letters and Social Sciences (FLSS/FLSH)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Foreign Applied Languages</li> <li>– African Studies and Mundialization</li> <li>– Geography and Environmental Development</li> <li>– History and Archaeology</li> <li>– Bilingual Letters</li> <li>– Philosophy – Psychology – Sociology</li> </ul>
Faculty of Sciences (FS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Biochemistry</li> <li>– Animal Biology</li> <li>– Chemistry</li> <li>– Vegetal Biology</li> <li>– Geology</li> <li>– Physics</li> <li>– Mathematics and Computer Science</li> </ul>
Faculty of Economic Sciences and Management (FESM/FSEG)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Economics and Development</li> <li>– Public Economics</li> <li>– Entrepreneurship and Innovations</li> <li>– Finance and Accounting</li> <li>– Marketing and Management</li> <li>– Agribusiness</li> </ul>
Faculty of Law and Political Sciences (FLPS/FSJP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– English Law</li> <li>– International and Community Law</li> <li>– Business and Enterprises Law</li> <li>– Penal and Criminal Law</li> <li>– Private and Fundamental Law</li> <li>– Common Law</li> <li>– Political Sciences</li> </ul>

*(cont.)*

TABLE 9.1 The faculties and departments of the University of Dschang (*cont.*)

Faculties	Departments
Faculty of Medical Sciences and Pharmacology (FMSP/FMSP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Biochemistry and Physiotherapy</li> <li>– Microbiology, Haematology and Immunology and Morphology</li> <li>– Anatomical Pathology and Legal Medicine</li> <li>– Surgery, Reanimation and Anaesthesia</li> <li>– Radiology, Biophysics and Medical Imagery</li> <li>– Genecology and Mothercare</li> <li>– Pharmacology</li> <li>– Paediatrics and Childcare</li> <li>– Internal Medicine, ORL and Stomatology</li> <li>– Ophthalmology</li> <li>– Public health</li> <li>– Physiotherapy</li> </ul>

SOURCE: MINESUP (2018)

outlined by Douglass (2004, p. 10) as part of a conceptual framework of higher education management and policy:

Nation systems of higher education need sufficiently stable organisational structure levels of funding to support and sustain high quality academic programs. Yet these systems must also have organisational flexibility to meet new and expanding societal demands, and to on occasion anticipate them. One might argue that the contemporary proliferation of higher education reforms by nation-states seeks this equilibrium, conditioned by their historical mix of tertiary institutions, their contemporary political culture, and, increasingly, international models.

While Douglass's reflections were made in the context of a comparison of the United Kingdom with California, they also apply in the Cameroonian context where the proliferation of HEIs creates a type of competition between institutions that are often forced, it should be remembered, to function autonomously without any financial support from the government and must, accordingly, develop coping strategies. A look at the specificities of the University of Dschang provides insights into what such strategies can look like.

### 3 A National and International Curricular Train

Even though most of the faculties found at the University of Dschang look similar to what exists in other universities in Cameroon (Ngwana, 2003) and in the whole subregion, with the exception of the Faculty of Agronomy and Agricultural Sciences, a close look at the combination of subjects offered in the various departments shows that the University of Dschang has its own specific academic DNA, present in none of the other nine state universities.

For example, the university's Department of Foreign Applied Languages offers a subject combination that is unique in the African context, offering the combinations French-English-German, French-English-Italian, and French-English-Spanish. These combinations are offered especially to students in the Arts who from year one to year three (six semesters) study three languages and by year three specialise in either Literature or Linguistics in one of the three languages. Such a specialisation from year three precedes what students do at the master's level, where they must continue with either French, English, or German.

Accordingly, it can be argued that the language programme contributes to the university's attractiveness and growth, as students interested in multilingualism and related job opportunities are inclined to opt for the University of Dschang. The exponential increase in the number of students at the Department of Foreign Applied Languages is exemplary of this institutional advantage. Whereas one year after the university's creation, the Department of Foreign Applied Languages was made up of only 53 students, that number multiplied almost tenfold (to 498) by the 2000s (Tchomga et al., 2012, p. 7). Nowadays, the statistics indicate that around 600 students are enrolled in the department, out of the 23,000 students enlisted in the university as a whole.<sup>1</sup> The study carried out by Tchomga et al. (2012) about the absorption of graduates from the Faculty of Letters and Social Sciences additionally indicates that most, if not all, students trained in trilingual letters easily enter the job market, especially in the teaching domain. This domain, however, is not the only one in which students trained in trilingual letters are hired, as can be seen in the statistics below culled from the study by Tchomga et al. (2012).

According to the available statistics, the 20 graduates in the field of trilingual letters have jobs spread across the following fields: 4 are certified foreign language teachers, 13 are part time teachers (most often pursuing a master's degree alongside their part time job), 1 is working in a banking institution, and 2 are working as administrators. As suggested, the teaching field is far from the sole sector into which these graduates enter, with others of the same subject combination doing well in the domains of journalism, digital communication, marketing, tourism, and translation and interpretation, as stated by the head

TABLE 9.2 Occupations of the postgraduates of the Faculty of Letters and Social Sciences with respect to fields of studies

	Geography	History	Bilingual letters	French modern Letters	English modern letters	Philosophy	Sociology	Psychology	Trilingual letters	African literature	Total
Teachers	04		02	01	02	02	03	02	04	01	21
Part time teachers	05	08	10	07	02	01	03	05	13	05	59
Hairdressing				01							01
Council	03		01			01					05
Conservation									01		01
Banking	02						01	01			04
Religion				01			01				02
Stationery	01										01
Insurance	01										01
Health							01				01
Cashier							01				01
Administration	01	01					01	01	02		06
Research	03										03
Cybercafé								01			01
Secretariat			01					01			02
Agriculture and farming	01			01							02
Transport	01										01
Communicator						01					01
NGO			01								01
Total of workers	23	09	15	11	04	05	11	11	20	06	115
Jobless	05		07		02		02			01	17
Total	28	09	22	11	06	05	13	11	20	07	132

SOURCE: TCHOMGA ET AL. (2012, P. 11)

of the Department of Foreign Applied Languages in a 2017 interview (University of Dschang, 2017a). Table 9.2 demonstrates how the trilingual programme helps to attract students, as indicated by the exponential growth of enrolment numbers. It suggests further that the training offered by the department is well aligned with the demands of the job market.

Whereas other universities in Cameroon and the sub-region offer only two language combinations, the University of Dschang facilitates the combination of Cameroon's two official languages (French and English) with a third foreign language (German, Spanish, or Italian). Having been granted "the unofficial status of a bilingual university (English/French)" (Zajontz & Schamp, 2016, p. 174), the institution is attractive to learners from both Anglophone and Francophone educational backgrounds. This not only gives the University of Dschang a competitive edge in the production of knowledge nationally and internationally but also aligns it with the Humboldt University model, in which the university is "viewed primarily as a learning institution (mission: 'teaching') and a location where knowledge is produced (mission: 'research')" (Zajontz & Schamp, 2016, p. 168). However, as the realisation of its missions requires the university to remain flexible and to adapt its philosophy and policies, it cannot be readily classified as belonging to one particular university model.

#### 4 Nationalisation and Regionalisation: The Philosophy of the University of Dschang

Among the elements that constitute the originality of the University of Dschang is its prominent nationwide presence, which has garnered it the name of "most national state university," ("la plus nationale des universités d'État," Folefack, 2016, p. 47). This recognition is confirmed in an interview with the head of the university's communications office, who states:<sup>2</sup>

Au moment de l'avènement de l'université, quatre antennes avaient déjà été créées: MAROUA dans l'extrême nord, BAMBUI dans le Nord-Ouest, BELABO à l'Est, Yaoundé dans le centre. Ces antennes ont été juridiquement rattachées à l'université et de façon fonctionnelle, elle prolonge la présence la présence de cette université comme jadis du centre universitaire dans ces régions. Par la suite, une nouvelle antenne a été créée dans les années 2000 (2007) à EBOLOVA dans le Sud et en 2016, une annexe a été mise sur pieds à BAFIA dans le centre. (Feutseu Dassi, 2021)

According to the head of communications, the University of Dschang is geographically present in six of the ten regions of Cameroon, namely the far Northern region in Maroua, the Northwestern region in Bambui, the Eastern region in Belabo, the central region in Yaoundé and Bafia, the Southern region in Ebolowa, and of course the Western region where the main campus and the university headquarters are located. The presence of the university in all these regions is made possible by its "antennas" and "annexes," the former being

understood as extensions of the whole institution and the latter as expansions of specific faculties or schools. Thus, for example, the BAFIA campus is an annex of the Faculty of Agronomy and Agricultural Sciences. Aside from its national expansion, it is worth noting that within the Western region the institution has expanded across multiple towns and regional divisions. The head of communications further declares:

Au-delà des autres régions du pays, il convient de mentionner toujours dans le cadre de l'éclatement territorial de l'institution, qu'au sein même de la région de l'ouest, elle se déploie dans trois départements distincts: la MENOUA où il y a les établissements facultés classiques (6 Facultés), le NKOUNGKI où l'on trouve l'IUT FOTSO VICTOR et le NOUN où est érigé l'IBAF. À l'occasion des jeux universitaires de 2019, du fait de cette implantation géographique, l'université de Dschang a inauguré au Cameroun le concept de "jeux-éclatés," l'ensemble des activités qui rentrent dans la dynamique de ces jeux ont ainsi bénéficié aux villes de Dschang dans la MENOUA, de BANDJOUN dans le NKONG-NKI et de Fouban dans le NOUN. À travers cet éclatement, l'on a bien vu comment une implantation territoriale de proximité pouvait faire bénéficier de nombreuses localités à la fois des retombées d'activités sportives et culturelles. (Feutseu Dassi, 2021)

The statement makes clear that the university is present in three divisions of the Western region of Cameroon, which became palpably evident in the course of the 2019 university games, during which events were hosted across all campuses in the three towns. At this point, one may ask how and why the University of Dschang has become so present throughout the country. In the same interview, a possible answer is offered: "Au-delà de cette vocation pédagogique et de recherche, les antennes avaient une mission d'impulsion du développement local dans les lieux où elles avaient été implantées" (Feutseu Dassi, 2021). Importantly, the answer brings to light another mission of the university, i.e. that of contributing to local development. In doing so, the university fulfils its role "as a catalyst for regional and national developmental processes" (Zajontz & Schamp, 2016, p. 169) and can be considered as transitioning from the "Humboldt University Model" to the "Developmental University Model [as] emerged in the USA." Following this transition, the university has developed "a more prominent practical focus and is more oriented towards the needs of the (local) community" (Zajontz & Schamp, 2016, p. 168). This holds true insofar as the university's campuses and antennas were created in accordance with local cultures and practices. The campus of Fouban, for example, where the Fine

Arts Institute is located, reflects local handicraft and art practice, whose artistry can be admired, for example, in the architecture of the Fouban Museum or the town gates. Another example is the town of Bandjoun, being like a round-about and a highway to two other regions (the Littoral and Central regions). One can easily understand why the Institute of Technology with subject areas such as mechatronics is found there, since travellers needing to repair their cars can easily access the region. Meanwhile, the annex campus of Bafia as an extension of the Faculty of Agronomy and Agricultural Sciences is located in an environment where the main economic activity is agriculture and especially the cultivation of cocoa. Finally, the antenna of Belabo with its 2,400 ha of land in the Forest of Demba permits students of the Faculty of Agronomy and Agricultural Sciences to engage in practical field work as they study various species and plants. In this vein, it becomes clear that such a “systematic development of knowledge channels between the university and its regional environment represents the key determinant to ensure the fulfilment of the ‘Third Mission’ in many knowledge-based approaches” (Zajontz & Schamp, 2016, p. 170).

In addition, the number of private university institutes (*Institut Privé d'Enseignement Supérieure*, IPES) under the tutorship of the University of Dschang keeps gradually growing, both nationally and internationally. The university of Dschang has satellites in many cities in Cameroon, but also tutors university institutes abroad. This not only indirectly facilitates the university's expansion but also helps promote local realities and development and contributes to the university's third mission goals as well. This idea is confirmed again in the aforementioned interview:

En 2020, l'institution assurait la tutelle de 43 IPES, implantés dans les régions suivantes: Adamaoua, Est, Centre, Littoral, Nord-Ouest, Sud-Ouest (Achas University Institute And Business Management Buea) et Ouest. Hors du pays, elle assure la tutelle du groupe École de Management du GABON (BP 9985 Libreville, [www.em-gabon.com](http://www.em-gabon.com)) et entretient des coopérations nombreuses et fructueuses avec des universités zairoise (RDC). (Feutseu Dassi, 2021)

Table 9.3 summarises the number of faculties and institutions that make up the University of Dschang, and the number of national and international private institutes tutored by the university. Table 9.4 summarises the number of Cameroonian and international enrolled students.

The evidence summarised in the table illustrates why the University of Dschang is referred to as “the most national university”: via its faculties, campuses, and annexes it is present in six of the ten regions of Cameroon. Outside

TABLE 9.3 Faculties and institutes of the University of Dschang

Faculties, schools	Location	University institutes tutored
Faculty of Agronomy and Agricultural Sciences	Dschang, Belabo, Bafia, Maroua, Bambui, Yaoundé, Ebolowa	52 university institutes in Cameroon, Gabon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Tchad
Faculty of Letters and Social Sciences	Dschang	
Faculty of Economic Sciences and Management	Dschang	
Faculty of Law and Political Sciences	Dschang	
Faculty of Medical Sciences and Pharmacology	Dschang	
Faculty of Sciences	Dschang	
Institute of Fine Arts	Foumban	
University Institute of Technology	Bandjoun	

SOURCE: [HTTPS://WWW.UNIV-DSCHANG.ORG/ABOUT-US/](https://www.univ-dschang.org/about-us/)

TABLE 9.4 Number of students enrolled in the University of Dschang during the academic year 2022–2023 and their countries of origin

Country	Number of students
Tchad	1,662
Gabon	72
Congo	57
Central African Republic	21
Angola	21
Niger, Rwanda, Mali, Benin	167
Total on Non-Cameroonians	2000
Cameroon	21,000
Total	23,000

SOURCE: [HTTPS://WWW.UNIV-DSCHANG.ORG/ABOUT-US/](https://www.univ-dschang.org/about-us/)

of Cameroon, the university is also present in other countries of the subregion through the private higher institutes it tutors, especially in Gabon, DR Congo, the Central African Republic, and Tchad, where four out of the 52 tutored university institutes are found (Wanda, 2018; 2019). The number of students enrolled in the academic year 2022–2023 reveals that 2,000 of the overall totals of 23,000 students in that period came from other countries in the subregion, namely Tchad, Congo, Rwanda, the Central African Republic, Gabon, Niger, Mali, Angola, and Benin. This data, then, speaks to the attractiveness of the university not only in Cameroon but all across the central African subregion.

Furthermore, as is the case for other state universities, the University of Dschang is also affected by the downsizing of government funding. This financial challenge does not however prevent the university from carrying out its projects and fulfilling its missions. University management has put in place three structures that aim to secure new funding and increase the institution's autonomy and independence. The first structure, known as the GIE-UDS (Groupe International Entrepreneurial de l'Université de Dschang), is an international entrepreneurial group which aims to support the university and its financial interests and was created in 2006 by the former vice-chancellor Prof. Anaclet Fomethe (University of Dschang, 2016).<sup>3</sup> It is a university-based enterprise that produces goods through poultry, farming, and a university shop, to name just a few, and which promotes these products to fund the university and facilitate the fulfilment of its missions. The chair of the board of the group clarifies the functions and objectives of the GIE-UDS, stating:

Le GIE est une entreprise qui a vocation à créer de la valeur pour l'ensemble des parties prenantes de l'UDs. À cet effet, nous avons pour vision d'inscrire durablement l'entrepreneuriat au cœur du processus créatif de l'UDs. Nous voulons faire l'entrepreneuriat en prêchant par l'exemple. Notre slogan c'est avec le GIE-UDS S.A, l'entrepreneuriat universitaire cesse d'être un slogan. (University of Dschang, 2020)

The GIE-UDS, in the words of the chair, is not a single enterprise but a group of diversified enterprises with an emphasis on six specific lucrative domains. It is the practical counterpart to the entrepreneurial courses taught in the university, with its slogan indicating that the GIE-UDS helps to move entrepreneurship from mere sloganeering into the practical realm. The chair declares further:

Le Groupe International Entrepreneurial de l'Université de Dschang S.A (GIE-UDS S.A) est un groupe d'entreprise fortement diversifié dans divers domaines; Le Groupe s'appuie sur six leviers, qui constituent par ailleurs

ses différents domaines d'activités stratégiques, ce sont en l'occurrence: Le pôle édition; Le pôle Étude, formation et renforcement des capacités; Le pôle advisory, tax and legal; Le pôle agro-industrie; Le pôle sécurité, innovation et nouvelle technologie; L'incubateur SYLLICON WESTERN. (University of Dschang, 2000)

In addition to the GIE-UDS, another structure was created in 2016 by the university's vice-chancellor, Prof. Roger Tsafack Nanfosso, namely the CATI2-UDS (Centre d'Appui à la Technologie, à l'Innovation et à l'Incubation de l'Université de Dschang) (Tsafack Nanfosso, 2016). It is a think tank and incubator that aims at promoting entrepreneurship among students as well as technological transfer and innovation while offering platforms for students to put into practice their visions and proactive ideas. This was clearly outlined by the vice-chancellor in the project's official announcement:

L'ambition du CATI2-UDS est de promouvoir l'entrepreneuriat, le transfert et l'innovation technologique, le plus en amont possible, en fournissant un cadre permettant aux étudiants en particulier de développer leur esprit visionnaire/proactif, leur capacité d'initiative et leur aptitude à prendre des risques. Ces aptitudes permettront à l'étudiant une insertion facilitée par la création d'entreprise et le développement de projets innovants. (Tsafack Nanfosso, 2016)

This excerpt clearly states the objectives of the CATI2 think tank and also indicates the actors that are meant to benefit from it: the students and the local community, thanks to job opportunities created by the students' work. By 2022, the CATI2-UDS had already reached out to 45,494 students, evaluated 3,773 pre-projects, counselled 2,778 students on their various projects, trained 484 students, developed 207 student projects and created 150 start-ups headed by the students enrolled in the programme (University of Dschang, 2022).

As part of his philosophy and vision of a "collective dynamic" (Tsafack Nanfosso, 2015), the university's current vice-chancellor also created the university foundation FONDUDS (University of Dschang, 2017c). Created in 2016, it acts as a fundraising organisation that supports the university when and where the state fails to do so. A report by Armand Siewe issued for the launch of the foundation describes the philosophy and idea behind FONDUDS in the following terms:

Face à des besoins et à des défis sans cesse croissants, l'université camerounaise dont les ressources sont limitées doit pouvoir se réinventer pour être à la hauteur de ses missions fondamentales que sont l'enseignement, la recherche et l'appui au développement. C'est dans ce contexte que le

recteur Roger Tsafack Nanfosso, par ailleurs fondateur de la FONDUDS, situe la création de cette nouvelle structure universitaire de Dschang. La FONDUDS est donc un outil d'accompagnement de l'UDs qui vient s'ajouter au GIE-UDs (Groupement d'Intérêt Économique de l'Université de Dschang créé en 2006) et au CATI2-UDs (Centre d'Appui à la Technologie, à l'Innovation et à l'Incubation de l'Université de Dschang créé en 2016) pour assoir les conditions favorables à la réalisation des missions précédemment énoncées. (University of Dschang, 2017c)

All in all, as the vice-chancellor and founder of the foundation suggests, it is “un instrument indépendant permettant d'assurer une mobilisation aussi large que possible des ressources humaines, financières et matérielles pour propulser le développement de l'Université” (University of Dschang, 2017b). In other words, it is an instrument aiming at putting together all the necessary resources, be they human, material, or financial, to foster and concretise the development of the University of Dschang.

The creation of these three structures makes the university fall within the category of the entrepreneurial model, according to which the “university ... must generate innovations that are of practical private use during the course of its research and advanced teaching activities, the sale of which becomes an important source of finance for the university's budget” (Zajontz & Schamp, 2016, p. 168). However, as discussed above, the Humboldtian and Developmental models are also part of the university's philosophy. From this point of view, one can conclude that the model proper to the University of Dschang is a hybrid model, a model that is always reinvented to meet the needs and missions of the university. Such a university management policy corresponds with the previously discussed vision for higher education management outlined by Douglass (2004, p. 10).

## 5 Conclusion

From its status as a peripheral university (Schamp & Zajontz, 2008) created to absorb the surplus of students who could not be accommodated by the old federal University of Cameroon, the University of Dschang has grown significantly and become a model and modern university topping most rankings of the last decades, not only in Cameroon but also across the Central African subregion.<sup>4</sup> This was made possible by the attractiveness of the university's pedagogy and programs, engendered by its singular subject combinations, its offering of unique areas of study, and its designation as a completely bilingual university, while the language of instruction at other state universities is either

exclusively French or English. More than that, the presence of the university in almost all ten regions of Cameroon in the form of its campuses, antennas, annexes, and tutored university institutes raises the university's profile through its contribution to local and national development and its integration of local practices. Accordingly, the University of Dschang is involved in the production of knowledge and in local and nationwide development. However, the realisation of these missions is only possible if the university has at its disposal the necessary human, material, and financial resources. Since state funding is often insufficient or not available on time, the University of Dschang has developed into an entrepreneurial university with various initiatives like FONDUDS, GIC-UDS, and CATI2. These initiatives were put in place by successive vice-chancellors with the aim of raising funds and seeking solutions that can lessen the dependency on frequently missing state support, thereby fostering an entrepreneurial model of the university. Ultimately, these developments have helped to create a flexible and hybrid university that goes beyond the Humboldtian, the Developmental, and even the entrepreneurial model as defined by Zajontz and Schamp (2016). Rather, the model of the University of Dschang is rooted in local realities and open to the world at the same time, as the Cameroonian educational orientation law of 1998 stipulates (Djouda, 2009). Taken together, these features might constitute what we call an African University, offering a model for Sub-Saharan Africa that can inspire other institutions and promote the alignment of university training with the demands of the job market.

### Notes

- 1 See the Facebook page of the department. <https://www.facebook.com/flshlea>
- 2 All the quotations given in French are directly followed by a comment or summary in English to ease the understanding and avoid breaking the momentum.
- 3 GIE is an Economic Interest Group put in place in the year 2006 by the then Vice-chancellor of the university of Dschang, Professor Anaclét Fomethé in order to financially render the university as much autonomous as possible, thus 80% of the shares of the said Group are owed by the University of Dschang and 20% by its member, most being lecturers and other workers of the university.
- 4 Scimago Institutions Rankings 2023 (University of Dschang as the most innovating university in Cameroon); AD Scientific Index (University of Dschang researchers among the best in Africa and central Africa subregion); EduRank 2023 (first in Neuroscience researches in Cameroon and third in Sub-Saharan Africa).

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# Building African University Capacity through Research Output

*The Case of One South African University of Technology*

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## Abstract

Transforming higher education in South Africa after apartheid into a single, coordinated system (Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 as amended) resulted in a typology consisting of three university types. These are “traditional” universities, “comprehensive” universities, and “universities of technology” – the latter also known as “new generation” universities. A relevant question that remains is how “new generation” South African universities are meeting the expectations of being a university, especially in relation to national priorities and demands. This chapter focuses on one South African university of technology by exploring how its professors’ research output is contributing towards and strengthening capacity development within the South African and African context. This chapter draws on publication output statistics and graduation rates of research students at the Central University of Technology as an institutional case to illustrate the professoriate’s current and potential contribution towards the university’s development and capacity-building goals. The findings indicate that relevant research and its dissemination in the form of publications and graduations may strengthen the contribution of universities of technology towards the very aims, fabric, and focus of the African university. Also of note is the contribution of research output related to the mission of universities of technology, namely technological advancement in education and research.

## Keywords

South Africa – universities of technology – professors – professoriate – publications – senior degree graduations

## 1 Focus: The Role of Professors in Building the Fabric of the Professoriate

Recently, the professoriate has been distinguished as potentially contributing towards the aims of the African Union (AU, 2013) in a relevant visionary document, “The Africa we want, 2063.” One strategic element of this vision suggests that new knowledge should contribute to addressing Africa’s pressing social and economic challenges. One expectation is that the university professoriate should be responsive to this call based on its leadership and expert knowledge. Although university professors are regarded as “academic leaders” who should promote knowledge advancement within the African research agenda, there is no clarity or consensus on exactly what professors must do or do differently. Their “lead” ranges from excellence in research and teaching and the scholarly development of a discipline to contributions to professional, commercial, and industry sectors, and more. The professoriate is further expected to contribute to the advancement of a university’s standing through its expert research, grants, and networks. To this list of activities can be added the development of the next generation of academics and securing scholarships for postgraduate students. Evans (2017) rightfully observes that the professorial position evinces “more of a purpose- or function-related, than an ontological, slant” (p. 124). The importance of the university professoriate is well portrayed by Visser (2022) who remarks that there is a direct relationship between the reputation of a university and its professoriate. Universities can hardly meet their social responsibility aims and maintain academic excellence if there is no firm academic core to deliver on their mandate.

The professoriate’s contribution to the South African university system should be viewed against the transformation of the South African higher education system since 1994. Transforming higher education in South Africa into a single, coordinated, and differentiated system (Republic of South Africa, 1997a) resulted in a typology consisting of three university types, namely “traditional” universities, “comprehensive” universities, and “universities of technology.”

In this chapter, professors at universities of technology (UoTs) are the focus of discussion. These universities, which came into existence in 2004 and are also known as new-generation universities, offer a range of programmes, primarily at the undergraduate level, and are vocationally and/or professionally oriented (Council on Higher Education, 2020). They are also increasingly contributing to research relevant to the issues and problems of the African continent.

To play a meaningful role within the tripartite university typology described above, UoTs progressively strive towards an inclusive research culture as

evidenced by growing the numbers of completed publications and postgraduate students. This growth corresponds with objectives 13 and 14 of the South African National Plan for Higher Education (Department of Education, 2001) and expectations that research at UoTs should positively impact job creation and economic growth, especially in Africa where such contributions are of vital importance.

In his reflections on the essence of what universities of technology are, Du Pré (2010, pp. 14, 21) remarks that teaching and learning, applied leadership in technology, technology transfer and innovation, and partnerships with industry (the world of work) constitute their core activities. Preparing students for careers in industry has always been regarded as an important contribution by UoTs, in addition to the creation of new knowledge through relevant research applications. Professors are considered essential senior role players in building research capacity and expertise (Dyason, Lategan & Mpaku-Ntusi, 2010, p. 57).

Building on these observations, our study analyses the research performance at one South African UoT as an institutional case to illustrate the professoriate's current and potential contribution towards the development and capacity-building goals of UoTs within the national university system and how this performance can meet the vision for universities as outlined by the AU. In this chapter, the research output is measured using two contribution categories, namely publications and senior degree graduations. A case is thus made for how relevant research and its dissemination in the form of publications and the graduation of senior degree students may contribute to the very fabric and focus of the UoT as an African university.

## 2 Orientation and Context

As universities became more responsive to societal needs during the 1960s, university mission statements expanded and have been continuously expanding the scope of universities' activities. Entrepreneurship and innovation, for example, are continuously embedded in the mission statements of universities. At the same time, governments in Africa are also steering (public) universities to support national policy implementation and socio-economic development. A relevant example is the National Development Plan 2030 (NDP) (Republic of South Africa, 2012) aiming for 75% of academics at universities to obtain a doctoral degree. A further target is the graduation of 100 PhDs per 1 million of the South African population per annum by 2030. One of the aims of such targets is to significantly upskill the (South) African workforce to reduce poverty and inequality by 2030. A close link thus exists between the NDP and the AU's

expectation of universities to respond to the challenges experienced on the African continent.

However, the organic development of universities towards meeting their social engagement mission is not without difficulties. Within the South African context, UoTs face at least three significant challenges. *Firstly*, UoTs originated primarily from former non-university types which were known as “technikons.” Up to 1997, technikons were part of a binary higher education system which caused them to receive less funding and fewer subsidies because of their mission limitations. With the Higher Education Act of 1997 (as amended), technikons became part of a unitary higher education system which eventually resulted in a reconfiguration of university types. UoTs are therefore mostly the result of the merging of the technikon model with a former historically disadvantaged university (HDI) type related to the apartheid era of politics.

In consideration of the three core missions of universities, namely *discovery* of new knowledge (research), *transfer* of new knowledge (teaching), and *application* of new knowledge (social engagement), Du Pré (2010, p. 21) remarks that the expectation for UoTs was that their mission and vision statements should define each UoT’s exact position as part of the tripartite university typology described above. Van Staden (2010, p. 164) comments that the creation of UoTs was thus not about a mere name change but about the achievement of equality in the diversified university system with a specific space for their participation. The anticipation was that technology-focused programmes with attributes such as career-oriented education and technological competence together with research and innovation would inform these universities’ activities. Such activities were therefore further infused with an entrepreneurial and innovative ethos and viewed in terms of their national and international impact, recognition, and the sustainability of their engagement and practice (Van Staden, 2010, pp. 170–171). It is thus evident that the focus of UoTs lies in addressing the needs of the world of work.

A *second* challenge is that due to their complex history and origination as technikons, UoTs face the ontological difficulty of being universities regardless of mission differentiation or developmental trajectory. While this aim is being achieved by an increase in research output, it is also challenged by the relatively low rate of research output compared to other university types. For instance, for the reporting years 2021 and 2022, UoTs produced 6.23% of the total doctoral graduates in South Africa. The collective weighted output by the six UoTs based on publications and awarded master’s and doctoral degrees for these two years was 6052.80 credit units. The total research credit units for the university system were close to 93 000 credit units. For 2021 and 2022, the UoTs’ output represents 6.51% of the total research credit units produced by

all universities (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2023, 2024). The individual normalised weighted research output per UoT ranged between 0.32 (lowest) to 1.19 (highest) credit units in 2021 and between 0.39 (lowest) to 1.57 (highest) credit units in 2022. The UoT sector average was 0.76 credit units in 2021 and 0.93 in 2022. The Higher Education Management Information Systems [HEMIS] classification defines academic staff as staff who primarily have instruction (teaching) and research responsibilities.

The research performance of UoTs should be interpreted against the headcount of academic staff contributing to research output. The total number of academic staff (headcount) within the university sector was 23,691 for 2021 and 23,620 for 2022. During the same period, the UoTs had 3277 and 3266 academic staff members respectively. UoT academic staff comprises 13.83% of the academic staff at universities for 2021 and 2022. One possible interpretation of the UoTs' relatively low research performance is the difference in capacity available at UoTs compared to the total university sector. Another interpretation may be that the professoriate at UoTs is overwhelmingly occupied with undergraduate teaching, leaving insufficient time and resources for professors to engage in activities that contribute to research output, namely publications and postgraduate teaching.

The *third* important challenge confronting UoTs is that they must simultaneously comply with the policy regulations aimed at *transformation* and *nation-building* outlined in the White Paper on Higher Education (Republic of South Africa, 1997a, 1997b). A recent example is the DHET's report on the recruitment, retention, and progress of Black academics (DHET, 2019a). In this report, nineteen (19) recommendations were offered to address the obstacles associated with the career paths of Black academics. For example, collectively, Black professors are currently not sufficiently represented in the universities' ranks. Another recommendation (Recommendation 6) refers to increasing opportunities for doctoral studies by marginalised groups, especially at UoTs and historically disadvantaged institutions.

Apart from the three challenges mentioned for UoTs within the South African higher education system, there are other challenges as well. To mention two of these:

*Firstly*, as the South African university system is not functioning in isolation, UoTs should be contextualised within the African continent and the global community. For example, one cross-cutting university need is the training of doctoral candidates, presented as a new "revolution in the organization and funding of PhD training." In a recent editorial on doctoral training in *Nature* (2023), the argument was made that doctoral training is not focusing sufficiently on the needs of the 21st century society. This comment is valuable for

UoTs, among others, in considering the development trajectories of their doctorates. Jones (2023) raises another relevant matter, namely whether the professoriate is contributing to public policy beyond higher education. According to Jones, the professoriate's contribution is not limited to the development of policy but also affects how policies are interpreted through different professorial-related networks. He identifies three ways whereby the professoriate can interact with public policy: as *advisors* or *consultants* to the government, as professorial networks, or as *members* of an attentive public. Based on this observation, professors may be regarded as a potential "reservoir" of policy expertise. This demonstrates the value of professors and their expertise to the public at large as well as the importance for UoTs to orient their research training and professorial expertise toward future impact.

*Secondly*, the changing nature of the professoriate in local, regional, and global contexts confirms that professors have a broader function than teaching and research only (Teichler, Arimoto & Cummings, 2013). The question is raised whether the scientific output of the professoriate should not also be measured to include 'third mission' activities such as *institutional capacity-building* that will improve scholarly work, promote entrepreneurship, and foster social engagement. For UoTs this means that growing the capacity of academics at all ranks will result in more and better dissemination of research output in the form of publications and graduations which, in turn, can lead to improved social engagement and impact. In addition, a better-equipped academic corps can contribute to the future professoriate and thus extend the capacities of UoTs.

With these observations we do not mean to suggest that the above specified issues are the only ones UoT professors must deal with. Instead, they emphasise that whilst UoTs are continuously striving towards building their identity as universities, they must also participate in a changing African higher education landscape. The next section highlights the methodology of our research.

### 3 Methodology

Several data sets were explored to address the main issue, namely how UoT professors' research output is contributing towards strengthening UoTs and thus to capacity development within the South African and African context.

*Firstly*, audited quantitative data and institutional documentation on professorial research output at one South African UoT were analysed regarding two scholarly activities, namely publications and senior degree graduations. For this research, the Central University of Technology ([www.cut.ac.za](http://www.cut.ac.za)) was

selected as an exemplary institutional case study. (See Section 4 for background information on this university.) The institutional case was selected because of the general existence of in-depth knowledge of the institution in the form of archival/public data, thereby strengthening ecological data validity. In addition, exploring the leadership roles of the institutional professoriate in matters relevant to the future of the University seemed important. This focus includes important markers such as mentorship development, institutional reputation, integrity, public science communication, and sustainable development goals.

Research outputs for seven academic years were used based on three considerations. The first consideration was that the period 2016–2020 covered the University's Strategic and Research Plans for the same period. The second consideration involved the University's New Strategic and Research Plans (2021–2025), which enabled detailed reflection on at least two of these years (2021 and 2022). The motivation was to confirm the (sustainable) participation of the professors over time and for different or updated plans. The third consideration was that the analysis was based on publicly available quantitative data officially recorded and audited by the DHET.

*Secondly*, the professorial output was studied using purposeful sampling at the case university. Internationally, there are different requirements and expectations relating to the position and definition of the university professoriate, but quality scholarship is regarded as the prime qualification for becoming and serving as a professor. South African professorships constitute the highest academic rank at a university, and at most African universities research and teaching are two important defining pillars for the professoriate.

*Thirdly*, the qualitative data reflecting the numbers of publications and graduations were analysed by employing a retrospective-prospective approach that aims at exploring past trends to identify present contributions (Kumar, 2005, p. 113).

*Fourthly*, the professoriate's contribution to the research output was calculated based on the number of professors who annually contributed to outputs. The publication output was calculated against the list of approved publications by the DHET and the corresponding authors holding professorships during the year of publication. The professoriate's contribution to senior degree students who graduated was calculated based on the completed studies for the reporting period that were available on the University repository. The data were extracted from this platform as the information was not readily available. A template was designed to capture the data on an Excel spreadsheet to extract the required information. Three challenges existed in calculating the exact number of professors who contributed to this dimension of the data. The first challenge was that the DHET calculates a period between July and June of

the next year as one year for graduations. It is therefore sometimes difficult to assess precisely when a study was completed (which is different from the graduation date). The second challenge was that the University's promotion policy regarding the professoriate accommodates two periods, one from January and the other from July. Here, too, not all necessary information was available to exactly determine the number of qualifying professors. Thirdly, completed studies are either not submitted by graduates to the relevant institutional office or uploaded to the University repository with a time delay. Despite these challenges, the error of margin was expected not to impact the answer to our central question, namely measuring the professoriate's contribution through capacity-building to the development of the sample university.

For the discussion on senior degree graduates, data for the period 2016–2021 were used, as only a few completed studies for 2022 were uploaded to the University repository during the completion of the research. The reason for working with the repository is that it contains the actual names of supervisors and co-supervisors, the date of completion, and the department in which the study was completed.

#### 4 Profile of the Sample University

The selected institutional case, the Central University of Technology (CUT), was founded in 1981 as Technikon Free State (TFS). Technikons formed part of the former binary South African higher education system and have offered degree qualifications only since 1993. The first doctoral degree at the TFS was awarded in 1997.

The CUT was established in 2004 as a merger between the TFS and a campus of the then Vista University situated in Welkom, Free State Province, South Africa. With the restructuring of the higher education landscape in 2004, CUT received a new status, including the challenge of establishing a research environment and developing a research culture.

Institutional documents such as the University's *Strategic Plan, 2021–2025* (CUT, 2021) profile the case University as primarily teaching-oriented. Although not explicit, the role of professors was interpreted as supervising research degrees, contributing to publications, and promoting innovation and entrepreneurship via creative, social, and technical outputs. These tasks, however, are not the only ones assigned to the professoriate. Based on the University's promotion policy, there is an explicit requirement that professors should contribute to activities such as institutional and community engagement.

Within the cohort of academic staff at the case University, approximately 11% of staff was holding either associate or full professorships during the

reporting period. Within the professoriate, more than 88% of professors have primarily an instruction (teaching) and research responsibility whilst the remaining professors have executive or senior management responsibilities as their main task. For the present research, both categories of professors will be analysed as all the professors were engaged in research activities regardless of the focus of their appointment.

According to the official DHET research output reports covering the periods 2016–2022 (all published by 2024), institutional research outputs increased from 243 credit units in 2016 to 296.87 in 2022. Research outputs are defined as publications and senior degree graduations where one single-authored article represents one credit unit, a completed master's study one credit unit, and a completed doctoral study three credit units. For 2016, the weighted research outputs per full-time academic staff was 0.64 credit units, while an average of 0.92 credit units were reported in 2022. Also, by 2020, the University's supervisory capacity had grown to 41.43% of its academic staff with doctorates (DHET, 2024).

## 5 Analysis of Research Output

### 5.1 *Research Publications for 2016–2022*

#### 5.1.1 Results of the Professoriate's Contributions to Research Publications

The contribution of the University's professoriate to the publication output of the institution was based on the DHET-approved outputs for 2016–2022. Publications were analysed along three categories, namely (a) articles in scholarly journals, (b) conference proceedings, and (c) books and book chapters. According to these reports, the University earned 1077.28 credit units during this period. Table 10.1 presents the awarded credit units for all three publication categories. All outputs are rounded off to the second decimal number.

During 2016–2022, 67 professors contributed 429.85 credit units out of a total of 1077.28 credit units earned by the University. Professors were counted only once regardless of the number of years they had held their positions.

The significance of the professoriate's contribution to the total publication output by the University is evidenced in Table 10.3. From this table, it can be observed that professors are meaningfully contributing to the University's publication outputs. Their publications represent almost 40% of the total research publications during 2016–2022. This observation confirms what is expected from the professoriate as academic leaders.

The professors with primarily academic responsibilities (11% of all academic staff during 2016–2022) were quite productive in publishing their research

TABLE 10.1 Total approved DHET Research Publications credit units for CUT, 2016–2022

Research outputs	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
Articles	66.81	59.78	105.13	112.40	128.68	128.93	148.21	749.94
Conferences	40.39	44.23	58.89	49.13	38.8	27.21	28.68	287.33
Books & chapters	9.89	3.21	6.19	9.51	4.64	1.59	4.98	40.01
Total	117.09	107.22	170.21	171.04	172.12	157.73	181.87	1077.28

TABLE 10.2 Total research publications by professors, 2016–2022

Research outputs	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
Articles	24.36	28.08	56.78	41.02	48.20	52.15	57.50	308.09
Conferences	21.89	20.76	12.25	16.50	13.00	7.47	7.73	99.60
Books & chapters	2.39	1.21	5.79	6.91	2.16	1.41	2.29	22.16
Total	48.64	50.05	74.82	64.43	63.36	61.03	67.53	429.85

TABLE 10.3 Professors' contribution to the total of the University's publications, 2016–2022

Research outputs	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
Total output by the University	117.09	107.22	170.21	171.04	172.12	157.73	181.87	1077.28
Total output by professors	48.64	50.05	74.82	64.43	63.36	61.03	67.53	429.85
Relative contribution by professors (round-off)	42%	47%	44%	38%	37%	39%	38%	40%

and contributed 386.61 credit units against the overall output of 1077.28 credit units. Their production is reported in Table 10.4.

As indicated, these professors' outputs represent an average of almost 36% of all publications during 2016–2022. Table 10.5 provides the evidence.

The contribution to research publications by executive and senior managers as professors was also isolated from the total research publications produced by professors. The professors responsible for managing the University (as executive or senior managers) have no primary publication responsibility linked to their job profiles. Table 10.6 indicates the contribution of professors

TABLE 10.4 Total research publications by the professors with primarily teaching and research responsibilities, 2016–2022

Research outputs	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
Articles	20.49	23.81	50.67	36.04	42.92	48.86	49.73	272.52
Conferences	20.97	19.36	11.00	16.04	13.00	7.47	7.28	95.12
Books & chapters	2.39	1.10	5.46	4.58	1.74	1.41	2.29	18.97
Total	43.85	44.27	67.13	56.66	57.66	57.74	59.30	386.61

TABLE 10.5 Professors with teaching and research responsibilities contribution against the total of the University's publications, 2016–2022

Research outputs	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
Total output by the University	117.09	107.22	170.21	171.04	172.12	157.73	181.87	1077.28
Total output by professors with teaching and research responsibilities	43.85	44.27	67.13	56.66	57.66	57.74	59.30	386.61
Relative contribution by professors with teaching and research responsibilities (round-off)	38%	41%	39%	33%	34%	37%	33%	36%

TABLE 10.6 Total research publications by executives and senior managers, 2016–2022

Research outputs	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
Articles	3.87	4.27	6.11	4.98	6.44	3.29	7.11	36.07
Conferences	0.92	1.40	1.25	0.46	0.00	0.00	0.45	4.48
Books & chapters	0.00	0.11	0.33	2.33	0.42	0.00	0.00	3.19
Total	4.79	5.78	7.69	7.77	6.86	3.29	7.56	43.73

TABLE 10.7 Professors as managers' contribution to the total of the University's publications, 2016–2022

Research outputs	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
Total output by the University	117.09	107.22	170.21	171.04	172.12	157.73	181.87	1077.28
Total output by professors as executive and senior managers	4.79	5.78	7.69	7.76	6.86	3.29	7.56	43.73
Relative Contribution by professors as executive and senior managers (round-off)	4%	5%	5%	5%	4%	2%	4%	4%

as executive and senior managers relevant to the total research output at the University.

As reflected in Table 10.7, this category of professors' outputs represents on average just over 4% of all institutional publications.

### 5.1.2 Discussion of the Professoriate's Contributions to Research Publications

Several observations follow the analysis of the professoriate's contributions to publications at the case University. Firstly, the findings confirm that scholarly articles are the preferred outlet for publications, regardless of the academic rank. Based on the analysis, almost 70% of publications were in the form of articles while books and book chapters contributed less than 5% of the publications. Over time, contributions to conference proceedings grew, which is a

further indication of the mostly international dissemination of publications. These research publications pertained to relevant fields such as education, health, industry, and development.

Secondly, a tracer analysis of professorial publications revealed that the cohort under scrutiny contributed in different ways to publication outputs. A closer look at individual professors' publications revealed that 41 professors contributed between one to five credit units over five years, representing just over 61% of the professors. Seven professors contributed between six to ten and eight professors between eleven to fifteen credit units. Two professors published between fifteen to twenty articles. One professor published the value of 20.8 credit units in the interval of twenty to twenty-five credit units, and one professor contributed 28.88 credit units in the next interval. In the next intervals, three professors had respectively 32.16, 37.40, and 43.49 credit units. Table 10.8 captures this performance in intervals of five outputs.

In general, constant publication participation by the professoriate was confirmed for the period of analysis. The differences in output can be interpreted against the number of professors per year, especially in the academic category, or against the number of years as part of the professoriate. Output per discipline can also differ, and differences can also be ascribed to the type of research, the duration of time until an article is accepted for publication, whether a publication is part of a research team, and the category of a professor's appointment.

Deans, senior academic managers, and executives who form part of the professoriate, contributed an average of 10% of the total professorial output and

TABLE 10.8 Publication productivity of professors, 2016–2022

Intervals	Frequency
1–5 credit units	41
6–10 credit units	7
11–15 credit units	8
16–20 credit units	2
21–25 credit units	1
26–30 credit units	1
31–35 credit units	1
36–40 credit units	1
41–45 credit units	1

just over 4% of the total output by the University. These outputs indicate the meaningful role of professors as managers in new knowledge creation.

### 5.2 Senior Degree Graduations during 2016–2021

The University's performance in general should also be understood against the approved Programme Qualification Mix (PQM) for the University. The PQM contains 15 doctoral and 20 master's programmes that are offered in four faculties, namely the Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology (FEBIT), the Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences (FHES), the Faculty of Humanities (FHUM) and the Faculty of Management Sciences (FMS). Based on HEMIS records, the University awarded a total of 301 master's degrees ("M") and 127 doctoral degrees ("D") from 2016 to 2021. Table 10.9 shows the breakdown per faculty representing the total output.

Some slightly different completion numbers were reflected by the University repository for 2016–2021, as captured in Table 10.10.

Despite the differences between the numbers in Tables 10.9 and 10.10, the available information confirms that professors are aptly educating the next generation of researchers and contributing to developing the future fabric of the CUT and the university system in general, as further elaborated below.

Table 10.11 lists the Classification of Education Subject Matters (CESM) categories that the University is actively participating in. These CESM categories correspond with the PQM (Programme and Qualification Mix) offered by the University.

TABLE 10.9 HEMIS Master's (M) & Doctoral (D) graduates, 2016–2021

	FEBIT		FHES		FHUM		FMS		TOTAL	
	M	D	M	D	M	D	M	D	M	D
2016	17	2	15	1	10	6	13	12	55	21
2017	13	5	13	6	15	6	7	3	48	20
2018	21	4	3	6	8	4	8	4	40	18
2019	18	3	20	9	9	4	12	5	59	21
2020	15	8	20	5	7	7	10	4	52	24
2021	14	4	17	6	10	9	6	4	47	23
Total	98	26	88	33	59	36	56	32	301	127

TABLE 10.10 Completed Master’s (M) and Doctoral (D) studies recorded in the institutional repository, 2016–2021

	FEBIT		FHES		FHUM		FMS		TOTAL	
	M	D	M	D	M	D	M	D	M	D
2016	17	2	21	1	12	5	11	13	61	21
2017	13	4	6	5	11	2	7	4	37	15
2018	18	4	6	6	12	8	7	4	43	22
2019	17	4	18	6	7	6	13	4	55	20
2020	13	5	11	8	4	3	7	5	35	21
2021	10	5	12	4	1	4	5	1	28	14
Total	88	24	74	30	47	28	50	31	259	113

From the completed studies captured in the institutional repository, the total number of supervisors per senior degree study could be calculated. Tables 10.12 and 10.13 show the number of supervisors required for master’s and doctoral studies per faculty. These numbers are based on the studies’ supervisory needs and not the number of individual supervisors overseeing one or more studies as main and/or co-supervisors. The faculties are the Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology (FEBIT), the Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences (FHES), the Faculty of Humanities (FHUM), and the Faculty of Management Sciences (FMS).

Not all supervisors are necessarily employed by the relevant faculties or the case University. Faculty supervisors also included other staff employed by the University for the period 2016 to 2021 or staff who retired from a faculty but continued to supervise a study until graduation. “External” supervisors can be either from other universities or industries. Table 10.14 represents the number of internal and external supervisors. These numbers present individual supervisors regardless of whether one or more studies were supervised.

Table 10.15 shows the number of completed senior degree studies professors who participated either as main- or co-supervisors. From this table the high number of master’s studies professors participated in can be observed. Professors were part of the supervisory support for all doctoral studies.

Table 10.16 indicates the number and percentage of professors who participated in completed senior studies from 2016 to 2021. From this table, it can be noted that not all professors participated in the completion of senior degree

TABLE 10.11 Completed degrees per CESM categories, 2016–2021 as per institutional repository

CESM category	Master's	Doctoral	Total per CESM category	Total percentage of Master's and Doctoral studies per CESM category
CESM 01: Agriculture, Agricultural Operations, and Related Sciences	15	9	24	6%
CESM 03: Visual and Performing Arts	11	1	12	3%
CESM 04: Business, Economics and Management Studies	45	26	71	19%
CESM 05: Communication, Journalism and Related Studies	4	1	5	1%
CESM 06: Computer and Information Sciences	15	4	19	5%
CESM 07: Education	32	26	58	16%
CESM 08: Engineering	73	20	93	25%
CESM 09: Health Professions and Related Clinical Sciences	31	9	40	11%
CESM 13: Life Sciences	28	12	40	11%
CESM 19: Public Management and Services	5	5	10	3%
Total	259	113	372	100%

studies during the reporting period. This number excludes the executive managers as they do not participate in supervising senior qualifications.

#### 5.2.1 Discussion of the Professoriate's Contribution towards Senior Degree Graduations

The following relevant issues regarding the professoriate's involvement in senior degree supervision may be highlighted:

TABLE 10.12 Number of supervisors per Master's (M) study in faculties

Number of supervisors per study	FEBIT	FHES	FHUM	FMS
Number of master's studies with one supervisor only	26	12	19	21
Number of master's studies with two supervisors	50	49	24	25
Number of master's studies with three supervisors	12	11	4	4
Number of master's studies with four supervisors	0	2	0	0

TABLE 10.13 Number of supervisors per Doctoral (D) study in faculties

Number of supervisors per study	FEBIT	FHES	FHUM	FMS
Number of Doctoral studies with one supervisor only	5	3	15	15
Number of Doctoral studies with two supervisors	15	22	12	15
Number of Doctoral studies with three supervisors	4	5	1	1

TABLE 10.14 Total number of internal and external supervisors per faculty for completed studies, 2016–2021

Number of internal and external supervisors	FEBIT	FHES	FHUM	FMS
Internal	52	46	40	34
External	10	32	9	6
Total	62	78	49	40

TABLE 10.15 Professors' contribution towards completed master's and doctoral studies

Senior degree	Number of studies professors participated in as main supervisors or co-supervisors	Number of completed studies	Number of studies professors participated in as main supervisors or co-supervisors expressed as a percentage
Master's	186	259	72%
Doctoral	113	113	100%

TABLE 10.16 Total number of professors that acted as main or co-supervisors

Senior degree	Number of professors who acted as main or co-supervisors in completed studies	Total number of professors available to act as main or co-supervisor	The number of professors who acted as main or co-supervisors in completed studies expressed as a percentage
Master's	44	64	68.75%
Doctoral	40	64	62.5%

- The fields involved in senior degree graduations are reflective of the focus of UoTs, namely on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education. This is confirmed by the fact that 61% of completed senior degrees during 2016–2021 were in these fields. The graduations in STEM represent CESMS 1, 3, 6, 8, 9, and 13.
- Examples of research across disciplines could be observed. Examples include the recording of some professors who supervised across faculties, although limited examples of transdisciplinary supervision were recorded. An earlier analysis of the research at the case University suggests that activities are more multi- and interdisciplinary. Multidisciplinarity indicates the interaction between two or more disciplines whilst interdisciplinarity denotes research where disciplinary boundaries are permeated. Transdisciplinary research occurs when contributing disciplines are merged into a new discipline (Kokt, Lategan & Orkin, 2012). It can thus be concluded that the case University is slowly moving away from linear knowledge production processes and that professorial supervisors are increasingly willing and able to supervise across disciplines and faculties.

- In most faculties, sufficient capacity is available to supervise master's and doctoral studies. Although not all professors oversaw the graduation of students during the reporting period, their capacity is in principle available to lead students to graduation should the occasion arise. However, it should be noted that senior research students often exceed the time allocated to complete a study and thus consume more supervisory resources for longer periods.
- The reasons for some students having more than one supervisor can be attributed to aspects such as specialised knowledge required for a project and/or a senior academic mentoring a junior supervisor during the study.
- Internal supervisors include all staff either in faculties or academic support services on condition that they meet the requirements to supervise students. Professors, for example, with the necessary qualifications but not part of a faculty can be employed on a part-time basis to participate in the supervision of studies. In our institutional case, internal supervisors also included staff members who were part of the academic staff complement prior to retirement. External supervisors are those colleagues who entered into an arrangement or agreement as supervisors with the University. The high number of external supervisors in FHES is due to specific knowledge and expertise that is not available on a full-time basis in the faculty.
- Not all programmes on the PQM had an approved senior degree qualification available for the period 2016–2021. This is one possible explanation for why not all professors are active in supervising and graduating senior degree students. Another reason could be that there might be a relevant registered programme available, but a particular professor may not necessarily have the appropriate qualification or expertise to supervise students for the PQM.
- A further breakdown of the data suggests that some professors have (co-)supervised more than one student per programme, and possible reasons for this situation include factors such as the professors' unique field of expertise, a unique topic of study, and available resources associated with the study or a particular professor.

## 6 The Professoriate and the Fabric of the University

The central focus of our research was on the contribution of UoTs to the fabric of the African university. Based on the AU vision, sufficient research capacity and the training of next-generation researchers were identified as two prominent needs that will shape the African university system. To address this focus, the questions we posed were, firstly, how UoT professors' research output

contributes towards strengthening UoTs and, secondly, how their output contributes to capacity development which will further develop the African university system.

The data on the professoriate's research outputs confirmed that this group of academics productively participates in the core business of the case University, namely knowledge creation and transfer. The research also confirms that around 11% of the University staff who participated in publication production contributed almost 36% of the publications. At the same time, there seems to be ample evidence that the professoriate provides leadership in knowledge creation. The high number of conference publications (more than 23%) as a total of the professors' publication production further confirms the dissemination of the professoriate's scientific results to scientific audiences and networks while dissemination via scholarly articles is representative of both South African and international publication outlets.

The professoriate's publications further confirm a mixture of methods, data analysis, CESM categories, and results. The professoriate also remains part of scholarly debates and discussions as well as facilitating the potential transfer of knowledge to all kinds of industries and enterprises. Knowledge transfer is therefore influencing and meeting societal needs through new ways of interpretation and application of results to societal problems. In essence, based on the present case study, UoTs seem to be substantiating the goals that define the university of technology within the African context, namely *knowledge creation and application through dissemination*. As more national data become available, it may be possible to determine the scope of knowledge and technological transfer activities and their impact on society.

The research further confirmed that 61% of the completed senior degrees reflect the core focus of a UoT, which is STEM education. The research focus of these degrees is generally of a practice-oriented nature and confirms the value or potential strengths that UoTs bring to the fabric of the (African) university, namely research results that are more user-friendly and application-orientated. In general, senior degree studies at UoTs are less about basic research and more application-oriented and directed at solving material and societal problems.

A steady increase in the number of graduations also illustrates a growing differentiated university typology. In essence, each senior graduation represents more capacity added to the university system, either through the establishment of next-generation academics or valuable additional experience gained by the professoriate. The fact that in some CESM categories more external supervisors are required gives evidence that the collaboration between universities (regardless of typology or country) should become the norm rather

than the exception. Different university typologies and contexts can add to the learning and research experiences of graduates. With this approach, UoT graduates may contribute in a different way to university output and point to differences in how postgraduate students are trained.

The focus on how the UoT professoriate contributes to the fabric of a university opened two further perspectives. *Firstly*, the changing nature of the academic profession and the professoriate's "fit" within the academic profession and, *secondly*, the professoriate's active participation in building a more differentiated university typology. Both matters are important for what a university is and what it should contribute. The university remains an organisation that should be subjected to continuous self-renewal while remaining context-sensitive at the same time.

Although results from the institutional case confirmed the contribution or potential contribution of the professoriate towards strengthening the very fabric of the (African) university, the following three observations and comments may also be important.

*Firstly*, none of the generated evidence seems unique to the general idea of what a university is or could become. Different university types may embody what a specific focus of a university should or could be. One example may be a focus on applied research, which can steer a university to better meet the differentiated expectations and needs of society. A chosen research focus will, in turn, influence the research and research training agenda of any university that may serve as a case study.

*Secondly*, although a case was made (and hopefully illustrated) for how the professoriate at a sample UoT contributes to the operation of a university, differences in research productivity and relevance of output also became clear. This observation leads to another question, namely the role of research quality. Many institutional research and professorial-related outputs may refer to productivity but not necessarily to output quality. Quality of research has to do with meeting a particular standard, and this crucial matter asks not only what a university is but what it wants to be or become. This remains an ongoing debate within the (African) university context.

*Thirdly*, the professoriate plays a meaningful role in the development of the fabric of the university in general and the development of the UoT typology in particular. As far as publication output is concerned, more support for the professoriate may be needed to increase their research output over time. The supervisory performance of the professors suggests that UoTs should promote more graduations in the STEM CESM categories as these categories are representative of their institutional focus and imply institutional policy and capacity development through staff and curriculum development.

## 7 Conclusion

Our chapter focused on how one academic rank (the professoriate) at a particular type of university (a UoT) has contributed to the basic fabric of what a university is supposed to contribute, namely research output by its senior academics. A case was made that whilst the nature and contributions of its academic staff confirm what a university is and what it contributes to the development of an overall university typology, a clear-cut definition remains challenging. This is especially true for the African university within developing contexts characterised by the need for applied sciences and for solutions to vast and reigning problems. The suite of challenges is informed by both *internal* (university-based) and *external* (government, business, industry, the knowledge society, and networks) expectations and realities. For now, the claim can be made that the case University in this study does not only seem aware of such challenges but is striving towards making a meaningful contribution by addressing them – which could potentially be true for most UoTs within the African context.

In essence, institutional capacity should be made available to better contribute to the monitoring and evaluation of the performance of the professoriate. A key aspect of this capacity is that data should be readily available to track the performance and impact of professorial work. Professorial capacity development should thus not be limited to enhancing the ability to perform, for example, in research. Capacity development also means consistently ensuring an enabling environment and recognising the wider aim of strengthening the very fabric of the African university.

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# Negotiating the Fabric of the African University

## Volume 1 – Global Narratives and Local Models

Patrício V. Langa and David Kaldewey (Eds.)

This book is the first volume of two edited collections that critically assess the historical and contemporary processes that have shaped the formation and transformation of the African university. It provides general perspectives, reflections, and a selection of case studies from different regions and higher education systems, highlighting the vibrant debates on the social and institutional life of universities in Africa.

*“Negotiating the Fabric of the African University (...) is an outstanding contribution to the study of African higher education. Combining conceptual reflections and detailed case studies, the book provides a comprehensive analysis of the historical and contemporary processes that have shaped the establishment and transformation of universities in Africa. One of the great merits of the volume is to bring out the distinctiveness and nuances that characterize the interaction among a variety of key actors, including students, teachers, researchers, administrators, and university leaders. Professors Langa and Kaldewey should be congratulated for this excellent scholarly work which is set to become the most important reference for researchers and policy analysts interested in the evolution and transformation of African universities. The result is the weaving of a “negotiated social fabric,” to use the evocative notion shared by the authors to describe the powerful identities that connect the local and global dimensions of scholarship and institutional life.”* – Jamil Salmi, Global Tertiary Education Expert, Emeritus Professor of Higher Education Policy, Diego Portales University (Chile)

Cover illustration: University of Cape Town, September 2023. Photograph by David Kaldewey, edited by Andreas Sieß

ISBN 978-90-04-72269-9



ISSN 2666-2663

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