



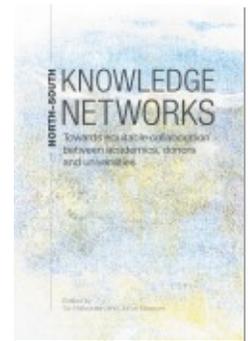
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## North-South Knowledge Networks Towards Equitable Collaboration Between

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## CHAPTER 5

### Undoing the effects of neoliberal reform: The experience of Uganda's Makerere Institute of Social Research

*Mahmood Mamdani*

I did my O levels at Old Kampala Secondary School in 1962, the year of Uganda's independence. In that year, the US government gave an independence gift to the Ugandan government, which included 24 scholarships. I was one of those airlifted to the US where I obtained several degrees over ten years. I returned in 1972.

Those who were given scholarships can be divided into two: those who never returned and those who did. Those who did were soon frustrated by the fact that the conditions under which they were supposed to work were so far removed from those in which they had been trained. Material amenities and infrastructure were minimal, as was a political and research environment conducive to intellectual work. Within a matter of years, sometimes months, many of those who returned began looking for jobs overseas, or moved out of academia into government or business or elsewhere.

I draw one lesson from this experience: the model does not work. It focused on selecting bright young high-school graduates for training overseas and assumed that, on our return, we would function as so many individual change agents or 'modernisers'. Today, academics in African universities must instead train postgraduate students in the institutions in which they will have to work. The next generation of

African scholars, or at least most of them, must be trained at home. This means that issues of institutional reform have to be tackled alongside those of postgraduate study, so that postgraduate education, research and institution-building form part of a single integrated whole.

I would like to put this in the context of the history of higher education in Africa. Rather than claim a single African history, I contrast the older colonies, such as South Africa and Egypt, with countries, such as Uganda, that were colonised after the Berlin Conference of 1884 and 1885. In the older colonies, Britain embarked on a ‘civilising’ mission (building schools and universities), whereas after the Berlin Conference, the colonial powers tended to regard the products of modern education as likely to subvert colonial rule.

### **The history of higher education in Africa**

The history of higher education in Africa began over a millennium ago. It is well known that centres of learning existed in different parts of Africa – such as at Al-Azhar in Egypt, at Al-Zaytuna in Tunisia and at Sankoré in Mali – prior to Western domination of the continent. And yet, this is of marginal significance when it comes to understanding contemporary higher education institutions in Africa, which are so rooted in our colonial experience. The fact that knowledge production is everywhere based on a disciplinary mode developed in Western universities during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is testimony to this.

Britain and other Western powers colonised the African continent in successive phases. The northern and southern parts of the continent were the first to be colonised in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As noted, the British initially thought of colonialism as a ‘civilising mission’; the schools and universities they built were hallmarks of this. By the early twentieth century, however, when they were colonising the lands between the Sahara and the Kalahari, the British authorities had become far more concerned with maintaining order and power, while

extracting raw materials and exporting their own rural poor, than with 'civilising' or 'developing' the lands they ruled.

Centuries of colonial experience – particularly in India – had taught the British that education can be double-edged. Thus, while teaching people to read and write and reflect might make them more productive, the risk is that their thinking is less easily controlled. In the older colonies, the educated elites were the first to demand independence. When denied this, the same elites began to organise the broader populations. This gave us the nationalist movement. Frederick Lugard, who headed British colonial missions in Uganda (from 1890 to 1892) and in Nigeria (from 1900 to 1906), wrote that Britain must avoid 'the Indian disease' in Africa, by which he meant that 'the natives' must not be educated (Lugard 1965).

It is unsurprising then that, by the 1960s, the whole of East Africa had just one university: Makerere; and the whole of Nigeria had only one university: Ibadan. This means that, unlike in South and North Africa, the universities that now exist in the lands south of the Sahara and north of the Limpopo are products of nationalism, not colonialism. In this region, no African country could claim to be truly independent until it had, alongside its national flag, national anthem and national currency, a national university.

## **Nationalism and the university**

Everywhere, the development of universities was a key nationalist demand. Nigeria, for example, had one university and a thousand students at independence. By 1991, the country had 41 universities and 131 000 registered students (Bako 1993: 150). The figures for countries in East Africa are similar. And yet, the very nationalists who created the post-colonial universities soon came into conflict with the new institutions. There are two sides to this story. Nationalists are seldom democrats. This is true the world over. George Washington saw opposition as treason, so did Indira Gandhi, Kwame Nkrumah, Gamal Abdel Nasser, and even Julius Nyerere.

The African political world of the late 1960s and early 1970s was about single-party nationalism. In this single-party world, universities were the only institutions that were free to run campaigns and hold elections. Naturally, opposition thinkers gravitated to these universities. At the same time, university students saw themselves – as they still do – as the leaders of tomorrow, born to rule.

Recall the language student leaders used when describing their present and imagining their future: students were organised in ‘guilds’; their leaders were called ‘presidents’; presidents’ assistants were called ‘ministers’; and together they called themselves a ‘cabinet’. For their part, the governments of the day saw such students as incubators of opposition – as both actual and potential political threats. No longer just hubs for producing knowledge, post-colonial universities turned into so many political nuclei. When governments silenced dissent at such universities, it wasn’t innovative research programmes that they saw as a threat, but the participation of students and academics in national politics.

In 1972, Makerere University celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. Idi Amin came to address us. He arrived with a battalion of soldiers. He stood right in front of the Main Hall. Amin was blunt. Pointing to the battalion surrounding the square, he said: ‘I brought the soldiers with me so when you lift your heads from your books, you know who has power.’ And then he added, mischievously and meaningfully: ‘On my way, I stopped in Mulago [the University hospital] to look at your records. I saw that most of you are suffering from gonorrhoea. I will not tolerate you spreading political gonorrhoea in Uganda.’

If African governments saw activist students and staff as potential opponents, many students and academics saw themselves as ministers-in-waiting, some even as presidents-in-waiting. Thus, even when their language and critique was radical, their practice was elitist, and their elitist universities were in constant conflict with ruling parties. As a result, the governments began to run the universities as if they were parastatal organisations, forgetting that they are meant to be public institutions. It is no surprise that successive governments have treated the universities like so many water faucets; taps that can be

turned on or off depending on political expediencies. Under such conditions, very little institutional planning worth the name is possible.

Like its sister campuses on the continent, Makerere University was an elitist and a colonial institution. Like the society of which it was part, Makerere was never intellectually independent. Before independence, it formed part of a colonial network that was subordinate to the University of London. After independence, this network soon became dominated by America, and held together by American funding organisations, mainly the Rockefeller Foundation. No matter how elitist it became, however, Makerere University was never seen as fit to run itself. Nor was it ever expected to become a research institution. Few departments had postgraduate programmes, as it was assumed that postgraduate work would be done in Britain or America.

Yet, Makerere is proud of its colonial legacy, thinking of itself as the 'Harvard of Africa'. If Makerere was ever this, it was a colonised Harvard. Harvard is a research university in two senses of that term. First, it is a site of research; second, it produces researchers. Every research university has to grow its own timber (whether it then uses or exports this timber is a secondary question), and the key sites for growing researchers are university PhD programmes. Ask anyone at a research university to identify the heart of its research, its vital and dynamic centre, and they will point to their doctoral programmes. Research universities integrate research and teaching in a single, organic relationship.

Makerere University, at least the part of it that I am most familiar with, the College of Humanities and the Social Sciences, has never been a research institution. The example of the Makerere Institute of Social Research (MISR) illustrates my point. Established in 1948 as the East African Institute of Social Research, and renamed a decade later, MISR became known globally as a research site. But MISR never produced researchers. The assumption was that those undertaking research at MISR, whether non-Ugandans in the colonial period or Ugandans after independence, would be trained elsewhere.

## Post-colonial visions

Two different post-independence visions of the role of higher education can be identified. One was state-driven. An example of this was Tanzania's University of Dar es Salaam, where I taught for six years in the 1970s. The downside of that experience was that the government tended to treat the university as a parastatal, and continually undermined academic freedom. The upside was the university's creation of a historically informed, inter-disciplinary, curriculum.

The second post-independence vision, which emerged later, was market-driven. Makerere University is a prime example of this. I spent nearly two decades at Makerere, from 1980 to 1996. During the 1990s, the university combined the policy of fee-paying students (privatisation) with the introduction of a market-driven curriculum (commercialisation). The effects were contradictory: income from fees showed that it was possible to broaden higher education's financial base; commercialisation opened the door to a galloping consultancy culture.

Both visions had a common failing: neither developed a postgraduate programme. Over nearly three decades, I do not recall a single discussion on postgraduate education at either Dar es Salaam or Makerere. To reflect on this is to realise that everyone assumed that postgraduate education would happen elsewhere, through staff-development programmes at overseas 'centres of excellence'. This assumption was so deep-seated that it became part of academic common sense.

### *Neoliberal reform*

MISR is a part of the university's College of Humanities and Social Sciences. The Faculty of Arts in the College has been noted for its enthusiastic and uncritical embrace of neoliberal reforms since 1990. Not surprisingly, most students at the university are enrolled in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. The neoliberal project has transformed the life of both students and lecturers in the College.

I will borrow a Malthusian metaphor to make my point: the rise in student admissions at the College of Humanities and Social Sciences

between 2000 and 2015 has been geometric, but the increase in the teaching staff and the physical facilities has been arithmetic. Lecture halls have burst at the seams, and tutorials have been discontinued.

Lecturers' lives have also changed dramatically. Payment varies depending on the number of hours they teach, with the result that the average teaching load resembles that of a secondary-school teacher. In addition, almost every activity has been monetised. Staff are paid an allowance to invigilate an examination or to mark a script, even to attend meetings (departmental, faculty, college or senate). Although not all meetings elicit a sitting or transport allowance, the general practice is that the higher your designation, the more eligible you are to receive such allowances. In 2012, Ugandan newspapers carried a story of millions that were paid out in allowances to the search committee for the post of vice-chancellor.<sup>1</sup> In the neoliberal university, there is no such thing as good citizenship.

In the late 1980s, with the government seeing the university as a parastatal, the World Bank began to play a role. From the World Bank's viewpoint at that time, university education was not only elitist, but a luxury that countries such as Uganda could ill afford. Two conclusions flowed from this. One, the cost of university education should be paid mainly by the (elite) families of (elite) students, and not by the state. Two, the government should shift its focus from higher to primary education where the costs are much lower and the same amount of money can apparently benefit many more students.<sup>2</sup>

The logic was elegant but populist, and faulty. It has had disastrous consequences for higher education, not just in Uganda but everywhere it has been applied. The World Bank's argument has two main problems. First, primary schools cannot thrive without a thriving university system. Without the universities, who will train the primary school administrators and teachers? Who will design the curricula? Second, it is nonsense to think that higher education benefits only, or even mainly, those who teach, work or study in the tertiary sector. This is like arguing that a hydropower plant benefits only the plant's management and the workers; it ignores the millions whose factories and houses, offices and streets, are lit by the power it generates. The point

is that every element of a country's infrastructure, whether it be a power plant, a road or a university, has a social benefit.

In the 1990s, with rapid development in East Asia, the World Bank realised its mistake. It has since changed its mind. It now preaches 'knowledge-led growth', but its converts in Uganda and elsewhere are lagging behind (as converts often do). That the World Bank has changed its mind does not mean it should shirk responsibility for its mistakes. The Bank claims to be a champion of the free market. Well, the first law of the market is that if you make a bad investment, you pay for it. The World Bank has a long history of making bad investments, but it is difficult to recall even one instance where this organisation has paid for its wrongdoings. Its default response has been to withdraw, leaving its clients to pay the bills – the bank has the luxury of not living by the rules it imposes on others.

### *Privatisation and commercialisation*

The World Bank's approach created three problems. First, it exacerbated the under-financing of Africa's public universities. The expectation was that students and their families would carry the costs of higher education via fee payments. Yet, the reality in most African countries is that cost-based fees would deny most citizens access to higher education, and governments have shied away from the political consequences of this. Moreover, it must be noted that nowhere in the world do universities cover most of their costs via fees. The bulk of their income comes from endowments bequeathed by wealthy donors or the public purse.

The second problem flowed from the first. The neoliberal solution to the financial crisis of Africa's public universities was to expand student enrolment. To enlist the support of the academic staff in this, Makerere University decided to let each unit keep the bulk of the fees paid by students, and allow the academic staff decide how to use this income. This created a division between different faculties, leaving

those with high enrolments cash-heavy, and those with low enrolments cash-strapped. The more the university divided into 'wet' and 'dry' faculties, the greater the disparities between the 'top up' allowances given to academic and administrative staff, both between and within units. Gradually, the university began to fragment from within.

The third problem has been the spread of the consultancy culture. Essentially, poorly paid academics morphed their research work into consultancy contracts as a way of making ends meet. For consultants, research is all about finding answers to problems defined by a client – consultants tend to think of research as finding answers, not formulating questions. Consultancy culture has been further institutionalised through short courses in research methods that teach students to gather and process quantitative information, from which they can cull 'answers'.

In response to the conditions created by these three problems, intellectual life in many African universities has been reduced to the bare bones of classroom activity. Extra-curricular seminars and workshops have migrated to hotels. Workshop attendance has to include transport and per diem allowances. All this is part of a larger process that I see as the 'NGO-isation' of the university. Academic papers have turned into corporate-style audio-visual presentations. Academics read less and less. A chorus of buzzwords has replaced lively debates.

Countering these problems calls for the building of a meaningful intellectual culture. To my knowledge, there is no model for this on the African continent today. It is something we must create. The old model looked for answers outside the problem, and it was utopian because it imposed externally formulated answers. A new model must look for answers within the parameters of the problem. For a start, we need to move beyond simply understanding the problems and begin to identify initiatives that seek to address the problems. In what follows, I describe two such initiatives at Makerere University: the first is an external programme introduced by the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency (SIDA), and the second is an internal initiative developed at MISR.

## The SIDA programme

SIDA is Makerere's largest donor. Since the mid 2000s, it has poured millions of dollars into graduate education at Makerere. In 2008, SIDA commissioned a group of three Swedish researchers to evaluate their assistance to Makerere. They worked with a Ugandan research assistant, Nelson Kakande, and published their findings in 2010 (see Freeman et al. 2010).

The researchers asked the right kinds of questions, including, how do you develop a research agenda, and why does money *alone* not solve the problem? Nevertheless, they were unable to answer any of the questions posed. When compiling their report, the study team began by admitting its own limitations. The main limitation, they said, was lack of time. SIDA brought forward the timing of their visit to Uganda which gave them hardly any time to prepare for their visit. As a result, the team 'was not able to develop questionnaires, perform surveys, or collect data prior [to] the site visit, nor to seek perceptions from Makerere participants about the survey and interview results from Sweden during the Makerere site visit' (2010: 10). Among other things, the study thus suffered from a 'lack of data about activities and outputs of SIDA-funded graduate students and senior researchers/supervisors' (2010: 10). In my view, even if the team had been given more time and more data, no external evaluation was likely to answer these questions; it needed to be guided by an internal reflection.

### *How do you develop a research agenda?*

Developing 'research capacity' is the main objective of SIDA's assistance. As a small country surrounded by powerful neighbours in a rapidly globalising world, Sweden understands that independent research is indispensable to maintaining intellectual independence, and forms the basis of social, economic and political independence. That is, the Swedes understand that if you want to act independently, you have to develop the capacity to think independently.

To this end, the study team made three recommendations: 'indigenous development of research themes', the formation of 'research

groups as foundations for continuing teamwork’, and ‘collaboration within and across disciplines and geographic boundaries’ (2010: 38). They noted that the first is the most important. Why this emphasis on ‘indigenous’ development? Why not import research themes from esteemed foreign universities or ask foreign advisors to provide them? The simple fact is that a decent research agenda can only be formulated on the basis of an understanding of one’s own reality. There is no recipe that can be shared. It has to be home grown. The first step towards intellectual independence for a research community is for it to develop its own research questions.

At the same time, no individual should ever develop research questions in splendid isolation. We all need the insights provided by peer-to-peer networks in all aspects of this work, from constituting research teams to holding seminars. These forums function as sites for internal debate and brainstorming. A question the SIDA study team asked but did not answer was: how can Makerere University play ‘a stronger role in developing Uganda’s research agenda?’ (Freeman et al. 2010: 49).

### *What money alone cannot do*

A conundrum lies at the heart of the report. The team gave a comprehensive account of what has been achieved through increased funding. Pride of place went to the development of an elaborate research infrastructure: ‘The enormous enhancement in *research infrastructure* (ICT, library, laboratories, and a Demographic Surveillance Site) has transformed the research environment’ they said (2010: 35). And yes, all the necessary artefacts are in place –information and communications technology, a library, laboratories, demographic surveillance facilities, academic networks, publications, external collaboration and support, journals, even research groups.<sup>3</sup> Only the live subject is not quite present. Certainly, the library has expanded, more journals are available, both as hard copies and online, yet the culture of reading is declining. The problem is deeper. Even as we rightly celebrate these advances in material infrastructure, we cannot ignore signs that the failure to

address the human factor may result in perverse uses of these very material advances.

The study team identified three major limitations when it comes to the human factor. The *first* was managerial: ‘starting “big” in a setting where resources are very limited and systems for managing grants and contracts across the university are very weak, increases risks of funds not being used for purposes intended and for inefficiency’. They warned against the temptation to start big noting that, ‘bigger investments may hold promise for significant gain in research capacity, but at relatively high risk’ (2010: 38). Needless to say, this is salutary advice.

The *second* problem has to do with thesis advisors: ‘Overwhelmingly the most frequent complaint,’ reported the study team, is ‘delay by overcommitted Ugandan supervisors’ (2010: 22). But this was a complaint to which the team had no response except to note: ‘External funds have not and cannot resolve the “overload” dilemma for researchers or those operating the research infrastructure’ (2010: 8).

Why can money alone not solve the ‘overload’ problem? Because no matter how much you pay professorial advisors, it will not change the fact that their days, like everyone else’s, consist of just 24 hours. The only way to solve the problem is to increase the size of the pool of advisors. Instead, both SIDA and the evaluation team looked for a short-term solution: collaboration with Swedish academics:

Collaboration with Swedish university colleagues markedly enhanced supervision, publication in the science disciplines, and preparation of a new generation of research mentors for growing numbers of PhD and masters students, including increasing the proportion of women ... (from 25% in 1990 to 46% in 2008). (2010: 7)

The result was also the introduction (or some may say cloning) of Swedish practices at Makerere. The ‘adoption of doctoral committees, the option of published papers to meet the thesis requirement, public thesis defences, and exclusion of supervisors from examination committees’ (2010: 7) are some examples. Will greater dependence on Swedish supervisors in the short run enhance the supervisory capacity

of Makerere's academics in the medium term? Or will it give rise to other, unintended and unanticipated, problems?<sup>4</sup>

Some negative effects are already evident. If a student has both a Ugandan and a Swedish supervisor, how should each be remunerated? Equally or in line with remuneration practices in each country? There is no easy answer to this. To reconcile two unequal standards of remuneration, Swedish and Ugandan, is difficult. SIDA decided to remunerate Swedish supervisors using Swedish standards and Ugandan supervisors using Ugandan standards. This means, however, that a Swedish supervisor is paid 'about US\$22 000 per student, which is 'about twice the entire salary of a senior Ugandan supervisor' (Freeman et al. 2010: 23). Naturally, Ugandan supervisors resent this. As noted in the report, 'Supervisors were very concerned about disparities in rewards for supervision between Swedish supervisors and themselves' (2010: 23).

The *third* problem concerned the students themselves:

Supervisors highlighted differences in today's students, many of whom they say read few books and articles, instead taking content from more generic web sources, 'regurgitating', cutting and pasting to assemble papers, rather than engaging in more rigorous analysis preferable to the 'old timers' – unless guided, and pushed, by supervisors. (2010: 23)

How much of this can be dismissed as a generational divide and how much needs to be seen as evidence of the university's failure to develop a research culture? Supporting evidence comes from students themselves: 'some [PhD students] expressed serious reservations about presenting their work [in PhD seminars], out of concern that colleagues could appropriate their ideas' (2010: 22).<sup>5</sup> What do you do when perceived solutions are turned on their heads? When some students fear their ideas may be stolen in seminars, and others use the internet as an alternative to reading books – indeed, as an easy way of stealing ideas, otherwise called plagiarism? How do you develop a reading culture among students?

The value of the SIDA evaluation is that it underlined the primacy of the human factor. Lack of money is a problem, but it is not the most important problem. More important than how much money we have is *how we use it*. If we fail to recognise this, throwing money at problems is more likely to exacerbate them than solve them.

### ***Sustainability***

The greatest shortcoming of the SIDA evaluation is that it failed to place Swedish assistance to the graduate programme at Makerere in the larger context of Makerere's own development. As a result, it made recommendations that were mainly timidly managerial- confined to areas of oversight and implementation. In my view, implementing these recommendations would simply increase bureaucracy without addressing the heart of the problem.

As explained, the university's lack of research capacity needs to be located historically. The heart of the problem lies in how the university has been conceptualised through the two main phases of its history. In the colonial period, it was assumed that Makerere's teaching and research faculty would be trained elsewhere, preferably in the UK. Then the cash-strapped post-colonial university became an entry point for the World Bank, which put the institution through the grinder of market-oriented reform, the main consequence of which was to destroy the quality of teaching and undermine existing research capacity. Some parts of the university, such as the arts faculty, participated in this initiative enthusiastically, and were wrecked; the science faculty, which resisted the reform, emerged with the least damage. I have written about this elsewhere (see Mamdani 2007).

If history is important in understanding the onset of the problem, it is perhaps even more important to an understanding of why the problem keeps recurring.

## The MISR initiative

When I arrived at MISR in June of 2010, we had seven researchers, including myself. I began by meeting each one for an hour and asking what research they had done since joining the institute. The answers were a revelation: everyone seemed to do everything, or rather anything: at one point primary education, the next primary health, then roads, then HIV/AIDS, whatever was in demand! This was when I learnt to recognise the first side-effect of consultancy: consultants have no expertise. They can lay claim only to a way of doing things, of gathering data and writing reports. They are Jacks or Janes – or Musokes or Mirmebes – of all trades, and masters of none.

Even though consultancies were MISR's main focus, some research was happening. However, it was all externally driven – the result of demands made by European donor agencies that the European universities they support to conduct research on Africa must also 'partner with' African universities. Rather than giving rise to institutional partnerships and collaboration, this has led to individual local researchers being incorporated into externally driven research projects. Too often, this resembles an outreach programme far more than a partnership between equals.

I suggested to my colleagues that we prioritise upgrading the library. The size of our collection had actually decreased over the previous decade. MISR's ten-year strategic plan called for purchasing about a hundred books over the ten-year period. This pointed to the second side-effect of the consultancy culture: consultants don't read, not because they can't or are not interested – but because reading has become a luxury, an after-work activity. Most consultancies require one to read nothing more than field data and notes.

My colleagues and I discussed these consultancy-related issues in meeting after meeting, and came up with a two-fold response. Our short-term response was to begin a programme of seminars, two a month. This required every staff member to present a research proposal that surveyed the literature in their field, identified key debates and located their query within those debates. In addition, we agreed to meet as a study group, also twice a month. As part of this process, we

prepared a list of key texts published in the social sciences and humanities over the previous forty years to read and discuss. For the long term, we decided to create a multi-disciplinary, coursework-based, PhD programme to train a new generation of researchers. In January 2011, we held a two-day workshop with scholars from the University of the Western Cape in South Africa and Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia to brainstorm the outlines of this programme. In the next section, I sum up the ideas generated at that workshop.

### *Reflections on postgraduate education in the humanities and social sciences*

The central question facing higher education in Africa today is what it means to teach the humanities and social sciences in the current historical context, and specifically in post-colonial Africa. What does it mean to teach humanities and social sciences in locations where the dominant intellectual paradigms are products, not of Africa's own experience, but of a particular Western experience that theorises specific aspects of Western history and is concerned, in large part, with extolling the virtues or expounding on the shortcomings of the Enlightenment? How can we teach this paradigm, knowing that, as it has spread to other parts of the world, it has done so mainly by submerging its own particular origins and specific local concerns in terms of (ostensibly universal) scientific objectivity and neutrality?

I have no problem with reading Enlightenment texts; in fact, I see this as vital. The problem is, if the Enlightenment is said to be an exclusively European phenomenon, then the story of the Enlightenment excludes Africa and most of the rest of the world. How can it then serve as the foundation of university education in Africa? The assumption is that there is a single model, and that this can be derived only from the dominant Western experience. Accepting this is to reduce research to no more than a demonstration that societies around the world either conform to or deviate from the one model. The tendency is to dehistoricise and decontextualise all discordant experiences, both Western and non-Western. The effect is to devalue original research and intellectual production in Africa. Thus the global market tends to relegate Africa to

providing the raw material ('data') to outside academics who process it and then re-export their theories back to Africa. Research proposals increasingly turn into descriptive accounts of data collection and of the methods used to collate this data; collaboration is reduced to assistance. The result is a general impoverishment of both theory and debate.

The expansion and entrenchment of intellectual paradigms that stress quantification above all else has led to a peculiar intellectual dispensation in Africa today. The dominant trend is for research to be primarily positivist and quantitative, carried out to answer questions formulated outside the continent, not only in terms of location but also in terms of historical perspective. This trend is directly reinforced via the 'consultancy' model, and indirectly through the ways in which research funds are channelled and through other forms of intellectual disciplining.

From this point of view, the proliferation of short methodology courses that aim to teach students and academics the quantitative methods necessary to gather and process empirical data are ushering in a new generation of native informers. In addition, the collection of data to answer pre-packaged questions can never be a substantive form of research as it displaces the fundamental practice of formulating the research questions that are to be addressed. When this happens, however, researchers turn into managers who supervise data collection.

This challenge to autonomous scholarship is not unprecedented. Indeed, autonomous scholarship was similarly denigrated in the early post-colonial states, when universities were conceived of as providing the 'manpower' [sic] necessary for national development, and original knowledge production was seen as a luxury. Even when scholars saw themselves as critical of the state, such as during the 1970s at the University of Dar es Salaam, intellectual work ended up being too closely wedded to a political programme. Thus, although that university nurtured a generation of public intellectuals, they failed to reproduce themselves. This same fate awaits future African academics if research is not put back into teaching, and if African PhD programmes are not seen as crucial to the training of the next generation of scholars.

Our initiatives at MISR were born from these reflections. We began with the conviction that the key to research is the formulation of a research problem. We reached consensus that the definition of a research problem should stem from both a critical engagement with society at large and a solid grasp of the disciplinary literature (world-wide), so as to identify the key debates and locate specific queries within those debates. Faced with a context in which the dominant model promotes consultants, not independent researchers, we decided to create a PhD programme based on significant preparatory coursework, thus instilling in students the capacity to both rethink old questions and formulate new ones.

Our PhD programme has been offered since 2012, and seeks to combine a commitment to local and regional knowledge production, rooting itself in relevant linguistic and disciplinary terms, and reflecting critically on the globalisation of modern forms of knowledge and modern instruments of power. Rather than opposing the local and the global, we seek to understand the global from the vantage point of the local. This means, we aim to understand alternative forms of aesthetic, intellectual, ethical, and political traditions, both contemporary and historical. Our objective is not just to learn *about* these forms, but also to learn *from* them. Over time, we seek to nurture a scholarly community that is equipped to rethink – both intellectually and institutionally – the very nature of the university and the function it should serve locally and globally.

### *The curriculum*

Coursework covered in the first two years is organised around a set of core courses taken by all students. These are then supplemented by electives grouped in four thematic clusters:

- Genealogies of the political: covering discursive and institutional histories of political practices and thought.
- Disciplinary and popular histories: ranging from academic and professional modes of history writing to popular forms of retelling the past in vernacular languages.

- Political economy: understanding global, regional and local power relations.
- Literary and aesthetic studies: consisting of fiction, the visual and performing arts, and cinema studies.

From a curricular perspective, the objective is for an individual student's course of study to be driven by investigation and not by orthodoxy. This approach gives primacy to the reading of key texts in related disciplines. In practical terms, students spend the first two years coming to grips with the literature and building a bibliography. In the third year they write a critical essay on this bibliography. In the fourth year, they embark on their own research year, and finally write this up in the fifth.

### *Interdisciplinarity*

In the nineteenth century, European universities developed three different domains of knowledge production – the natural sciences, the humanities, and the social sciences – based on the notion of 'three cultures'. Each of these domains was then subdivided into 'disciplines'. From 1850 to the Second World War, this pattern became institutionalised in three key ways, namely:

- Within universities, as chairs, departments, curricula and academic degrees for students;
- Between and beyond universities, as national and international discipline-based associations of scholars and journals;
- In the libraries of the world, as the basis for classification of scholarly works.

The intellectual consensus that sustained this project began to break down after the 1960s, partly because of the growing overlap between disciplines and partly because of a shared problematique. For example, the line dividing the humanities from the social sciences became blurred with the increasing 'historicisation' and hence 'contextualisation' of knowledge in the humanities and the social sciences.

The development was best captured in the report of the Gulbenkian Commission chaired by Immanuel Wallerstein (see Wallerstein 1996). As interdisciplinarity began to make inroads into disciplinary specialisations, the division between the humanities and the social sciences paled in the face of the growing chasm between quantitative and qualitative perspectives in the study of social, political and cultural life. However, because it is so difficult to shift strongly entrenched habits in organisations, these intellectual developments were not matched by comparable organisational changes. Thus, although the number of interdisciplinary and regional institutes has multiplied, collaboration has rarely bridged the divide between the humanities and the social sciences. The challenge of postgraduate studies in the African university is how to produce truly interdisciplinary knowledge without giving up the ground gained within the different disciplines.

We have learned a number of lessons over the past few years. The most important is that we need to deepen our understanding of what it means to ‘grow our own timber’. We could have started a PhD programme at MISR and borrowed the curriculum from Columbia or Harvard. We could then have become a satellite of those great institutions, but without the creativity that distinguishes them. In our very first semester, we confronted the question: what should we teach, at this time and in this place? What should be the content of our curriculum?

Our search for answers to that question has been protracted. Following a brainstorming session with colleagues from Ethiopia and South Africa, we held five workshops in 2011 under the umbrella title, ‘Contemporary Debates’ (see Mamdani 2013). Our idea was to invite scholars from around the world and from diverse intellectual traditions, whose works were defining the terms of the debate in the fields of gender in the public sphere, political economy, political studies, cultural and literary studies, and historical studies.

In 2012, we shifted our focus to hosting lecture series by key scholars. Professor Wang Hui of Tsinghua University in Beijing gave lectures on his four-volume intellectual history of the Chinese-language, *The Rise of Modern Chinese Thought*. Professor Partha Chatterjee from the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences in Calcutta gave a series of lectures

on political theory and the Indian school of historiography known as subaltern studies. Through such encounters we began to put together a new curriculum that is global in content but crafted from local, regional and continental perspectives.

The question of perspective is important because research is not about finding answers to preset questions. It is about formulating new questions in response to both the evergreen flow of life and ongoing scholarly debates. The questions we ask depend on who we are, where we are, and the dilemmas we confront. Our first batch of students began to formulate their research questions in 2014 and answering them in the course of 2015. Our first batch of PhDs graduated in 2016.

### **The kernel of reform**

I have two very practical suggestions for Makerere University. The first is to substantially reduce undergraduate admissions. This would be to acknowledge today's reality: Makerere is no longer Uganda's only university. Unlike in the past, we now share responsibility for undergraduate education with a growing number of other tertiary institutions. At the same time, as the country's leading public university, our first responsibility is to provide *quality* undergraduate education. Where courses are over-subscribed, we must combine lectures with tutorials. Where classes are so overcrowded that lecturers feel compelled to distribute study notes, we risk fostering nothing more than students' dependence on similarly superficial solutions, whether from study notes or the internet. Is it not then but a short step to plagiarism? Instead, a solid reading culture must be inculcated in students at undergraduate level.

In addition, postgraduate education must become integral to the university, not a stand-alone facility that requires endless injections of external funding and input. In practice, all PhD students should be required to teach tutorials as part of their overall training. Post-doctoral fellows, too, should be required to combine teaching with research and writing. Every great university taps its doctoral students for a supply of tutors. MISR expects its PhD students to spend half of their third year tutoring undergraduates in different departments.

The development of quality students requires quality teachers. Good teachers never work only for the money, but they must be paid enough to be willing to work with diligence. Teachers are not business people; those with an eye on making money will look for work in Kikuubo (Kampala's business hub), not in a university. The important thing is to reform the motivational structure at Makerere so it attracts and rewards scholars, and discourages those who are there mainly for the money. For a start, this would mean paying meaningful salaries for teaching and research work, rather than allowances for attending endless meetings.

In fact, Makerere University should abolish all allowances for meeting attendance, as well as all payments for invigilating and marking. The money saved could be used to increase the salaries of those who teach and do research, as well as those whose services support these core activities. My guess is that this would do away with 90 per cent of meetings, and dramatically reduce the time spent in the 10 per cent of meetings that remain necessary. This strategy might not substantially increase salaries, but it would surely send the right signals to all concerned.

The starting point of any critique of neoliberalism in higher education is the recognition that a university is not a business but a place of scholarly pursuits. Its objective is to maximise scholarship, not profits. Of course, no one can afford to be blind to financial realities. Universities are no exception. But if promoting scholarship is our core mission, we must be prepared to subordinate all other considerations, including financial ones, to the pursuit of scholarship. To forget this is to lose our way.

### **Clarifying the public interest**

The Ugandan government shirks fiscal responsibility for the country's leading public university, yet continues to claim the right to define the university's policies and appoint its top management. How can this be? Of course, public universities should be substantially funded from the

public purse, and their broad policies – including questions of fees and access – should be set by those who hold public power.

But who should be the custodians of the public interest in a public university? The tendency has been to see the state as holding executive power: Uganda's president was also chancellor of Makerere University before 2001. After the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act of 2001, the country's president was named as the 'Visitor'. This keeps the university's top management, and thus the institution itself, on a short political leash. The alternative is to cast the legislature – not the executive – as the custodian of public interest when it comes to public universities.

It is commonly thought that if a government is going to pay a significant part of a university budget, it should have a significant say in the affairs of that institution. This is wrong for two reasons. First, in principle, government funds derive from taxation. Governments are therefore simply custodians of public resources; they cannot behave as if they own these. Second, in practice, a look at some of the world's great public university systems, such as the University of California in the US, or the nearby South African universities, is instructive. At least when these were great public systems, their financing was organised in ways that shielded them from the whims of the government of the day. Although the government was their major source of funds, their funding was determined by long-term formulas agreed on by all the key social actors; it did not fluctuate with the government in power or changes in state policy. In addition, the councils or trustees who shaped university policy were not instruments of any particular government. Even if the government appointed key members of these bodies, both the modes of their appointment and their tenures – and the legislation that specified these – ensured the autonomy of the university's policy-making bodies and its purse.

The public interest cannot be equated with the interests of any regime. The public interest is the interest of society, of which government is one part. This is why no university council should represent the government. Instead, such councils should represent all the different interests in society, providing a forum in which the public interest is discussed, debated and formulated.

## Notes

- 1 For example, see, Makerere vice-chancellor search process to cost Shs185m, *Daily Monitor*, 30 July. Available online.
- 2 See Chapter 1, this volume, for more on the World Bank's 'return on investment' position.
- 3 The report lists these as follows: 'participation in networks', 'translating findings into publications', 'promotion of PhD completers and of senior scientists', increased 'initiatives to seek external collaborators and research support', 'several units now sponsor journals', 'translation of researchers into research groups' (SIDA 2010: 36, emphasis added).
- 4 It is worth reading the SIDA report alongside another study that was published by Uganda's National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) in collaboration with SIDA and the Embassy of Sweden in Uganda, entitled *Research in Uganda: Status and Implications for Public Policy* (Ecuru et al. 2008). The authors of this publication highlight three salient facts about the larger research environment in Uganda. First, in 2007/2008, the government contributed 42 per cent and donors 51 per cent of the country's research budget. However, as a percentage of GDP, Uganda's contribution in the preceding five years was low, between 0.2 and 0.5 per cent (Ecuru et al. 2008: 17).

Second, Ecuru et al. noted that, 'The number of new research projects registered at UNCST almost tripled, from 109 in 1997/1998 to 335 in 2006/2007' and that 'much of the research in Uganda is undertaken through international collaborations and sponsorship' (2008: 9, 3). The questions that remain are: how many of these are research projects in Uganda by Ugandan researchers, and how many are projects on Uganda by externally based researchers? Obviously, once we have answers to these questions, we need to consider what this means for how and where our research agendas are set.

Third, the largest proportion of research projects were in the fields of Social Sciences and Humanities (36 per cent), Medical and Health Sciences (31 per cent), and Natural Sciences (21 per cent). And further, 'In the field of Social Sciences and Humanities, most research projects were in the area of anthropology (40 per cent) and Governance (18 per cent)' (Freeman et al. 2010: 10, 12ff).

Ideally, SIDA's 2010 study team should have read this report and provided more detail, not only on how many PhDs were completed with SIDA support, but on their subject matter, and about what those candidates have done since they graduated.

- 5 Here is the full quote: 'Most [PhD students] expressed enthusiasm about PhD seminars at Makerere and in Sweden, but some expressed serious reservations about presenting their work, out of concern that colleagues could appropriate their ideas, citing little tradition of protection for intellectual property at Makerere' (Freeman et al. 2010: 22).

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