Knowledge and Change in African Universities
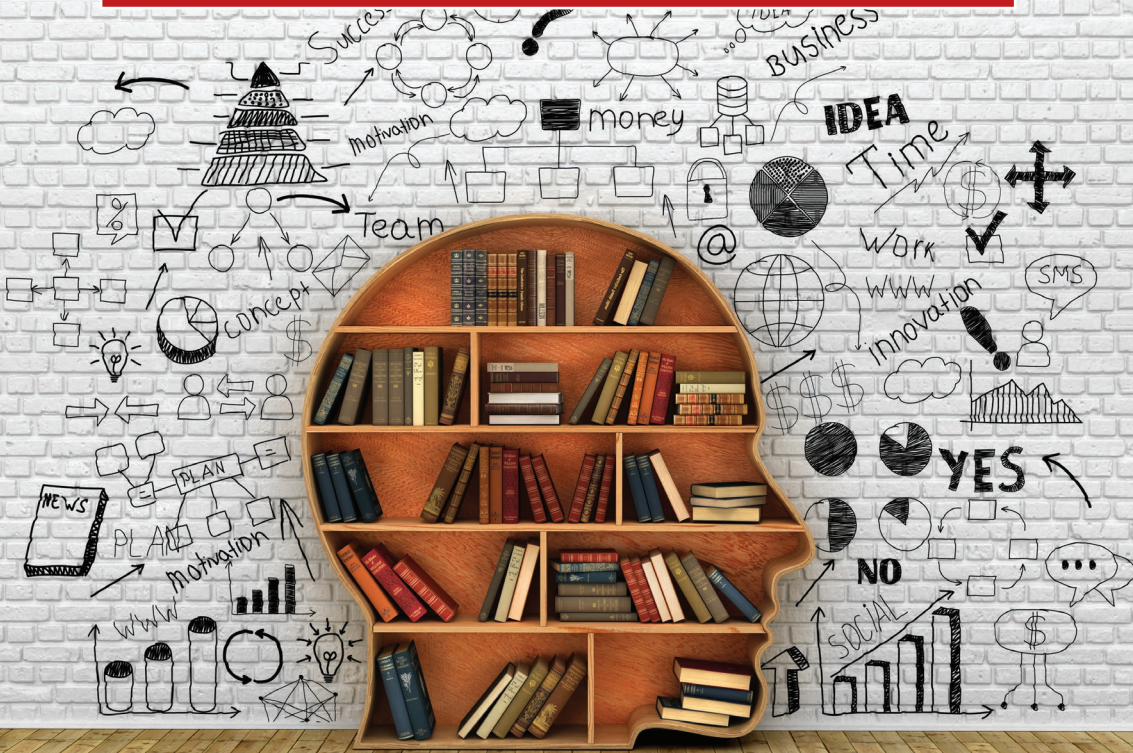
Volume 1 – Current Debates

Michael Cross and Amasa Ndofirepi (Eds.)

Knowledge and Change in African Universities

AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION: DEVELOPMENTS AND PERSPECTIVES

Volume 1

Scope

This book series focuses on the historical foundations and current transformations of African higher education. It is aimed at scholars, students, academic leaders, policy makers and key stakeholders both in Africa and around the world, who have a strong interest in the progress, challenges and opportunities facing African higher education.

A diversity of higher education themes and issues related to African higher education at institutional, national, regional and international levels are addressed. These include, but are not limited to, new developments and perspectives related to knowledge production and dissemination; the teaching/learning process; all forms of academic mobility – student, scholar, staff, program, provider and policy; funding mechanisms; pan-Africa regionalization; alternate models of higher education provision; university leadership, governance and management; gender issues; use of new technologies; equitable access; student success; Africanization of the curriculum- to name only a few critical issues.

A diversity of approaches to scholarship is welcomed including theoretical, conceptual, applied, policy orientations. The notions of internationalization and harmonization of African higher education complements the cosmopolitan outlook of the series project through its comparative approach as critical imperatives. Finally, the book series is intended to attract both authors and readers, internal and external to Africa, all of whom are focused on African higher education including those doing comparative work on Africa with other regions of the world and the global South in particular.

Knowledge and Change in African Universities

Volume 1 – Current Debates

Edited by

Michael Cross and Amasa Ndofirepi
University of Johannesburg, South Africa

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IMANOL ORDORIKA

FOREWORD

Knowledge and Change in Contemporary Postcolonial Universities

In *Knowledge and Change in African Universities* a noteworthy group of scholars have addressed some of the most relevant issues and challenges faced by higher education institutions (HEIs) in Africa today. In these two volumes, the authors have reviewed current debates and imagined possibilities for change, across a broad set of topics. These include the role of universities in promoting development and social justice; the production of public and private goods; educational and philosophical foundations of higher learning; Africanisation, decolonisation and global integration; institutional discourses and cultures; as well as scholarship, epistemologies and knowledge creation.

In most of the contributions, it is possible to trace the authors' underlying explicit or implicit reflections about existing tensions between the need to comply with global demands and views about scholarship, knowledge and the university, as opposed to local and national historical contexts, university traditions, and societal expectations. In my view, the attention to this divergence constitutes a backbone and an integrating concept throughout the chapters.

It could not be any different. Serious approaches to the understanding of contemporary African universities and their transformation, such as those included in this book, cannot escape the dilemmas that the vast majority of higher education systems and institutions all over the world are facing today. *Knowledge and Change in African Universities* is a significant contribution to current international debates about higher education, as it brings to our attention observations, analyses and theoretical perspectives that stem from rich and diverse experiences of university developments and conflicts in postcolonial and post-apartheid historical settings.

THE UNIVERSITY: A EUROPEAN AND COLONIAL INSTITUTION

There is evidence of higher learning arrangements in medicine, astronomy and mathematics, among other knowledges, before 500 BC in India, China, Egypt, Greece and other cultures (Cowdrey, 1998; Fulton, 1953). The University as we know it today, however, was originally a western creation, emerging as an institution in twelfth-century Europe. The first universities were founded in Bologna (in 1088), Salamanca (in 1134), Paris (around 1150), and Oxford (in 1167) (Le Goff, 1980; Rashdall, 1936). These universities were later chartered by the Church and

respective monarchies, at the beginning of the thirteenth century. The student-centered Bologna model had a strong influence in the foundation of universities in Vicenza (in 1204), and Padua (in 1220) (Perkin, 1984). A new group of universities emerged after the 1229 conflict at the University of Paris (Le Goff, 1993; Luna Díaz, 1987), through what has been called the "great dispersion" of scholars (Brunner, 1990). The University of Paris became very influential in Salamanca and Oxford, and inspired the creation of Cambridge (in 1209), as well as universities in Spain and Portugal, including Alcalá (in 1293) and Lisbon (in 1290), among others (Brunner, 1990).

Universities spread throughout the continent of Europe, becoming increasingly interconnected with political, economic and social changes. With the advent of modern European colonialism, starting in the sixteenth century, the university became an integral part of the cultural domination in most of the colonies. During three centuries of colonialism in the Americas, universities were established and chartered by the Catholic Church and the Crown in Spanish America and by provincial governments and religious denominations in British colonies.

By the mid nineteenth century, almost every country in the Americas had become independent. Distinct university traditions developed in the former British and Spanish colonies during the wars of liberation, and as they emerged as new nations (González & Hsu, 2014). Colleges and universities in the United States had been sites of political contestation and revolt against England, the majority of them remaining private after the end of the American War of Independence (Tucker, 1979). In Latin America most of the universities were conservative and stagnant; in spite of being public institutions, they had participated little in independence struggles and thus remained close to the church and traditional scholastic thought until the end of the nineteenth century (Lanning & Valle, 1946; Wences Reza, 1984). It was not until the 1918 University of Córdoba revolt in Argentina that Latin American universities moved away from church control and adopted an orientation towards autonomy, shared governance, social commitment and national development.

A new wave of European colonisation spread to India and the East Indies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. During British rule in India, HEIs were created from 1781 onwards. Following the 'Orientalist versus Anglicist' debate (Zastoupil & Moir, 1999), the so-called 'Indian Universities' were established in 1857 and reoriented towards an English model. They were based on the University of London organisation, as Oxford and Cambridge models were considered to be too expensive (González & Hsu, 2014)—nevertheless, upper class Indian men traveled to Britain to obtain their higher education. Even though these two strategies were promoted in order to Anglicise Indian elites, European and Indian university education played a major role in the struggles for independence (Ellis, 2009). During Dutch colonisation in Indonesia, three higher learning institutions were founded in Batavia between 1898 and 1924. Originally designed to promote Dutch culture and language, these institutions also became very important in the national struggle for independence (Vickers, 2005). French occupation of Indochina lasted until 1954.

Along the lines of 'assimilation' of local elites through education, France established the University of Indochina in Hanoi in 1906 (Vu, 2012).

European powers participated in the 'scramble for Africa' between 1881 and 1914. Coastal territories occupied by the Portuguese and British grew into large colonial holdings with the pretext of putting an end to slavery through "Commerce, Christianity and Civilization" (Packenham, 1992, p. xxii). While the French, Belgian, German and Portuguese powers exercised "direct rule", and a "highly centralised type of administration", the British "sought to rule by identifying local power holders and encouraging or forcing these to administer for the British Empire" (Khapoya, 1994, p. 126f). For Britain, the purpose of colonial higher education was to create a local elite, required to carry out colonial administration. Even though France and Portugal used higher education to implement their direct rule and 'assimilation policies', very few universities were created, and elite Africans were educated in Europe (Bandeira Jerónimo, 2015).

A few African countries gained independence between 1910 and 1942, while the majority succeeded only later, in the national liberation struggles during the 1950s, 60s and 70s, and two more in the 80's and 90's. On the verge of, and in the midst of independence struggles more universities were created. A particular case is that of South Africa, where disputes between Afrikaners and the British, and a long history of apartheid, engendered a differentiated and stratified system of universities. These included historically white Afrikaans-medium universities, historically white English universities, historically black universities in the Republic of South Africa (RSA) and historically black universities in the Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda, and Ciskei (TBVC) countries (Bunting, 2006). In the transition towards a post-apartheid society, South Africa has undergone a continuing and conflictual process of decolonisation and recreation of new university identities, traditions, policies and practices.

Colonial powers formulated various policies for the provision of higher education and the creation of colleges and universities in their colonies. In spite of their distinct ruling strategies and governing philosophies, they shared ideas about the role of education—and particularly of this essentially European institution, the University—for the dissemination or maintenance of western Christian culture, social organisation and economic interests. As a result, they were able to maintain their hegemony over colonised nations and peoples.

There is historical proof that universities, during different historical periods, contributed to the reproduction of colonialism in the Americas, India, the East Indies and Africa. There is also evidence, however, from the nineteenth century onwards, of intense conflicts between Church and State, and between distinct European colonial powers. These included battles over the nature of the universities and confrontations within them. In this context, many universities made significant contributions to the creation of, and participation in, national liberation movements. So, although the University has been an instrument of colonialism, in many cases, it has also served as a site of contestation, organisation and struggle for national liberation.

In the transition from the European core to the colonial peripheries, universities in different nations and regions developed new identities, assumed diverse social roles, shaped their scholarship cultures, and created distinct historical traditions. During the second half of the twentieth century, this distinctiveness was connected to the mass expansion of higher education all over the world. This, in turn, introduced innovative ways to think about colleges and universities, and alternative views for the creation of new institutions and the expansion of national systems.

A NEW COLONISATION OF THE UNIVERSITY?

Universities have always been global, in many ways. True to their common origins, they have inherited customs and traditions, retained scholarly practices and standards, and adhered, at least in some measure, to one or other of the European models. In spite of this, the national and regional differences previously referred to, have enriched and expanded notions and practices about the University.

At the end of the twentieth century, however, a new dominant view about the University began to emerge (Marginson & Ordorika, 2010). With the demise of the welfare states and the end of east-west world polarisation, a new era of structural adjustment, globalisation and neoliberalism became apparent. New public discourses and polices proclaimed the pre-eminence of the private over the public, stressed the overarching importance of competition practices and productivity, and promoted a reified view of markets as efficient regulators in every aspect of social interaction, politics, economics and even culture (Wolin, 1981).

Education, and particularly colleges and universities, did not escape the push towards privatisation, marketisation and the commodification of education goods and products (Marginson, 1997). Increased productivity, connection to markets, innovation, accountability, competition and new managerialism have become hallmarks in higher education policy all over the world (Ordorika, 2007) under the guise of the all-encompassing but vaguely defined concept of 'excellence' (Readings, 1996).

With the advent of globalisation and neoliberalism, the United States strengthened its worldwide ascendency. A relatively small set of HEIs in that country have been portrayed as 'exceptional'. An idealised model of the US elite research university has become hegemonic globally, and has directly or indirectly impacted higher education policies and institutions in almost every country (Marginson & Ordorika, 2011).

Among the most salient features of this hegemonic model of the University are the centrality of research and the international circulation of scientific publications; an emphasis on graduate studies over undergraduate teaching; attracting international students and faculty; establishing strong links with business; producing marketable private goods; the adoption of 'new managerialism'; and large endowments that provide financial security (Ordorika & Pusser, 2007).

Many postcolonial and other countries in the periphery have faced difficult transitions and development processes stemming from economic catastrophes,

starting with the debt crises in the 1980s and continuing with the financial collapse of 2008. In this context, contemporary colleges and universities face confrontation between local expectations—for example, responsiveness to their own historical traditions, social commitments, accomplishments and liabilities—and those posed by global competitiveness and dominant perceptions about the characteristics of so-called world-class universities. These conflicting demands have taken place in the midst of, and have also deepened, existing crises of identity in higher education systems and institutions.

IDENTITY AND CONFLICT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

In order to advance the reconstruction of university identities and higher education projects, it is necessary to acknowledge some of the most important tensions and challenges faced by HEIs today. Historically, colleges and universities have been both the object and the site of conflict over societal demands and expectations for democratisation, equality and inclusion, versus attempts to emphasise their role in increasing their contribution to capital accumulation (Carnoy & Levin, 1985; Ordorika, 2003). Confrontations over access, resource allocation and uses of knowledge have been salient expressions of this structural tension within higher education (Slaughter, 1990).

Battles over race, gender, socio-economic status and affirmative action policies for student admissions have taken place in various countries, including the United States (Pusser, 2004), South Africa (Hall, 2016) and Brazil (Lloyd, 2015). Students have struggled against tuition increases and fought for free higher education in Britain (Coughlan, 2015), Mexico (Ordorika, 2006; Rosas, 2001), Colombia and Chile (Observatorio Social de América Latina, 2012). In recent times, students opposing student loan and debt increases occupied Wall Street (Vara, 2014). Students demanding increased public investment in higher education have been paired against governments and policy makers that promote the authorisation and establishment of for-profit universities in the US, Chile and Colombia (Ordorika & Lloyd, 2014).

For many decades, the allocation of resources within universities has veered away from the humanities and the social sciences, into engineering, technology and some of the 'hard' sciences (Bérubé & Nelson, 1995). Global trends in university expenditures have become part of a larger ongoing debate about the production of public and private goods in higher education (Marginson, 2007), and more broadly about the nature of the University as a public good in itself (UNESCO, 2009).

These discussions are strongly linked to contemporary dilemmas over local and regional responsiveness, versus international orientation and worldwide competition. The arguments encompass the orientation of the University regarding the uses of knowledge, more precisely, existing contradictions between social commitment and community engagement, on the one hand, and market orientation, the production of private goods (commodities) and patenting, and university-business partnerships, on the other (Ordorika & Lloyd, 2014).

In many ways, these quandaries summarise the clash between historical and nationally grounded university traditions, and the hegemonic global model. They involve questions surrounding knowledge perspectives and the politics of knowledge, as well as issues regarding the preservation of indigenous languages against the domination of English as the language of knowledge and science. Attempts to promote internationalisation through foreign student enrolments and faculty hiring, have placed enormous strain on universities, as higher education systems and institutions fail to ensure proper coverage for local youth within the tertiary education age group.

There are also many contradictions involving the publication of academic work and research. Among these are the focus on local and national, vis-á-vis international cutting-edge research topics; the importance of local audiences against that of international circulation; as well as the complex interactions with multinational corporations like Thomson Reuters, Elsevier, Springer, Sage and others (Larivière, Haustein, & Mongeon, 2015; Ordorika Sacristán et al., 2009). These dilemmas also relate to international flows of knowledge; human resources (students and faculty); financial assets in peripheral countries and their universities; and the established centres of economic and knowledge concentration.

Starting in 2003, international university rankings became an overarching expression of the existing global competition among higher education systems and individual institutions, and the dominance of elite research universities, primarily in the US and the UK (Pusser & Marginson, 2013). International classification systems reproduce the hegemonic model that these institutions represent, as colleges and universities all over the globe, voluntarily or forcibly, attempt to comply with international standards. Rankings have become a symbol and instrument of the contemporary colonisation of universities intent on becoming world-class institutions (Ordorika & Lloyd, 2015).

KNOWLEDGE AND CHANGE IN UNIVERSITIES TODAY

Attempts at recreating identities in peripheral universities take place in this context of intense contradictions, alternatives, trade-offs and conflicts. Contemporary divergences have enlivened and reshaped existing tensions in exercising institutional autonomy in the face of increasing external intrusion and regulations (Enders, de Boer, & Weyer, 2013). Furthermore, internal contradictions have emerged between academic collegiality and new managerialism (Deem, 1998), with the latter's emphasis on productivity, efficiency, evaluation, assessment and measurement (Ordorika, 2007).

Attempts at decolonisation of colleges and universities today need to be strongly connected to a thorough understanding of the conditions in which these conflicts and contradictions are played out within national higher education systems and institutions. In our search for understanding, it is very important to acknowledge historical differences and commonalities in postcolonial and peripheral countries.

One of the most relevant topics for the transformation of higher education in the periphery is the re-politicisation of colleges and universities. We need to acknowledge that the recreation of alternative university traditions and identities is a political process in which many actors—within and beyond university campuses—will become participants; and that democratic participation in public debate and decision making is crucial in order to build favourable correlation of forces for students and faculty within universities.

This work, *Knowledge and Change in African Universities,* is an example of how to think about the decolonisation and regionalisation of universities, in the context of worldwide competition and the global hegemony of elite research institutions. Throughout the chapters of this book, alternatives to old and new colonialisms are imagined and framed on the solid ground of practice and experience, of academic research and intellectual thought, and of political theory and praxis.

The two volumes in *Knowledge and Change in African Universities* constitute a thoughtful aggregation of historical knowledge and the work of contemporary scholars. More significantly, they take an insightful step—a much-advanced, work-in-progress for the construction of new identities and transformation of universities in Africa. But this is not all—in generating knowledge and understanding about African universities, while setting the stage for the development of an alternative idea of the University, this group of scholars have also contributed to our understanding of the present and future of universities in other regions, in other nations, in other hemispheres.

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Imanol Odorika
Instituto de Investigaciones Económicas
Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México