

The Liberal Arts in Anglophone Africa

Dr Grant Lilford

University of Botswana

lilfordg@mopipi.ub.bw

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Abstract:

With a few significant exceptions, utilitarian concerns have driven colonial and post-independence higher education in Eastern and Southern Africa. This utilitarianism stems from the colonial conviction that a fully educated native is a dangerous and subversive native, a conviction which has its most succinct expression in HF Verwoerd's notorious 'green pastures' speech of 1953. Independent African leaders have, at times, expressed a similar paranoia about over-educated subversives and the threat they pose to national unity and security. Economic factors also drive utilitarian education, because of the conviction among both sponsors and students, that the best degree is one that provides training for a specific career, and thus reaps immediate rewards. A hierarchy in school-leaving results means that students apply to specific courses of study, and then do not demean themselves by studying lesser subjects. Faculties of science only accept students with high marks in the sciences, and would not open their laboratories to non-science students who would need to complete science requirements as part of a liberal arts degree. Students in the social sciences and humanities currently vastly outnumber those in the sciences, so Science Faculties could not accommodate the influx. Western Civilisation, a key component of general humanities courses, has, understandably a chequered history in Africa, where it is perceived as an alien culture, imposed during the colonial period and instrumental in the denigration of indigenous African culture.

In spite of these obstacles, the Liberal Arts have both a past and a future on this continent. The University of Botswana introduced general education requirements and other electives as part of the Semesterisation initiative in 2002. Subsequent research in Botswana reveals that employers are seeking graduates with more general skills, and importantly, with excellent writing skills and passion for their vocations.

Biography:

Grant Lilford holds a BA (Vassar College), MA (University of Sussex), and a PhD (University of Cape Town). He has taught in South Africa, the United States, Uganda and Botswana, and has worked in industry as a technical writer and process consultant. The liberal arts taught him critical thinking, effective writing, and cross-cultural understanding; this, in turn, allowed his employers to improve their products and to respond rapidly to customer expectations. His liberal arts background enabled him to move to different industries while underscoring the discernment which brought him back to full-time teaching.

Ghanzi 2010

In March 2010, I spent a week in Ghanzi, a town of 9934 people in Western Botswana. I was part of a team of researchers working in different parts of Botswana to identify the employment destinations for humanities graduates. We noted both underemployment and graduate unemployment. Businesses identified a shortage of skilled personnel, and cited communication skills as a key attribute. Since 2000, the University of Botswana has produced more secondary education graduates than the schools can absorb. The primary schools have openings, and therefore hire the surplus graduates on term-by-term contracts. Some are leave replacements; others are temporary placements until a diploma candidate is found. In the latter case, a contract teacher may work for a period of years, one school term at a time.

The situation in Ghanzi reflects the primary weakness of higher education of higher education throughout Anglophone Africa. Students are admitted to a specific course of study based upon examination results. That course of study qualifies them to do a particular job, which, in government service, requires a specific degree or diploma certificate. Before radical increases in university access throughout the continent, governments applied “manpower planning” which targeted funding to particular courses to meet government personnel needs. As late as 1990, Botswana suffered a severe teacher shortage and extensively employed expatriate teachers. To address this demand, the knowledge factories ramped up production and, within ten years supply outstripped demand. Because of the oversupply of humanities teachers and scarcity of science teachers, schools and universities teach more humanities students. The lack of other jobs means that these students enter the PGDE after graduation and become humanities teachers themselves, thus foiling government and university initiatives to increase the number of science graduates.

Among a group of contract teachers we interviewed at a primary school were two BSc graduates, each with a Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Education, teaching Standard 4 and Standard 6. The University of Botswana currently plans to expand the science and commerce faculties while merging and freezing humanities, education and social sciences. A new Botswana International University of Science and Technology is under construction in Palapye, following the trend of universities with names ending in UST popping up across the continent. National presidents extol science and technology as the means to jet us from subsistence farming into the information age. Although we have not yet begun to produce scientists, these two science graduates do not believe that they have any career options beyond primary school. Their predicament recalls Howard Clark's observation that, after massive increases in science enrolments throughout Canada during the 1950s and 60s, the University of British Columbia was starting to produce unemployed science graduates by the early 1970s. Because science education was so narrow in its scope, graduates lacked the "understanding that ... they had a range of problem-solving skills that were valuable in themselves and that could be applied in many fields" (55).

Another teacher complained that she has trouble teaching Setswana, because her students use the wrong words, and she must teach them the correct ones. I mentioned that she was witnessing dialectical variation in a language which had not been standardised until the early twentieth century and even then amid considerable controversy. I suggested that the teacher send these words and usages to a University of Botswana colleague who specialises in lexicography. Her need to force students to conform to an arbitrary standard in their own language, illustrates the persistence of colonial education. Rather than building upon existing local knowledge, education remains the imposition of an external standard, even in the student's home language.

The Liberal Arts in Pre-Colonial Africa

African traditional knowledge systems blur the disciplinary boundaries which have been a feature of European education since Aristotle. Medicine, theology, psychology, music, dance and poetry were all features of healing. Cultural knowledge and literature were inseparable, as oral praises, applying a poetic formula served as the repository for history and genealogy. Al-Sa'di refers to the oral recounting of history as a popular pastime among his ancestors in Songhai, and laments that these historical discussions have given way to gossip and slander (1-2).

The diversity of social, political, economic, legal and linguistic systems in pre-colonial Africa, combined with the erasure or distortion of many of those systems under colonialism, resists generalisations about pre-colonial African education. However, most social systems developed general technical and cultural knowledge, while providing for specialist skills in such areas as metallurgy, medicine, poetry, music and the arts and crafts. In some communities, certain families jealously guarded specific arcane skills such as metallurgy. Usually, advanced skills developed from a baseline, known to all community members. Opland notes the prevalence of poetic skills in Xhosa society. Most children could recite their own praises, as well as praises of family and of cattle. A few select talented praise poets then went on to praise larger groups, and different levels of chiefs (Opland 42-43, citing Jordan 1973:71-2, 51-52).

Medicine follows the same pattern. Communities provided a broad, general medical education, acquired in stages by children in the homestead, by initiates in initiation schools and by new brides, adapting to the particular beliefs and norms of their husbands' families. Most people possessed a baseline of medical knowledge, but specialists emerged in areas such as midwifery and divination. For example, in traditionalist Zulu homesteads, the family provides the initial triage when illness occurs, and most people know where to find herbs

and to prepare them to provide symptomatic relief (Ngubane 100-101). The family refers more serious matters to diviners and other traditional doctors. Because medical symptoms often have metaphysical causes, the diviner would have to identify and treat the root cause, which could include an underlying medical problem, sorcery, or ancestral anger because of impurity or negligence. In addition to treating disease, healers also had to educate the patient in both curative and prophylactic methods. Compare this to the notorious failure of western-educated doctors to discuss cases with their patients, and to explain treatment options. Traditional medicine bears close investigation, given the recent rediscovery of holistic, as opposed to clinical and symptomatic medicine, in the West. Ngubane identifies medical expertise in the mastery of “black medicine” to purge darkness from the body and the environment, “red medicine” to provide strength during the vulnerable period between malaise and cure and “white medicine” to restore health (109-117). The prescription and delivery of such medicines requires considerable skill and training. However, she also identifies the symbolic elements in this medical view in a traditional tale about how chameleon brought death to the world (134). Narrative, history and medicine are thus related elements in a comprehensive worldview.

Law similarly requires a shared baseline of knowledge. Traditional Tswana justice and governance takes place at a gathering place which resembles the Athenian assembly. The *Kgotla* serves a judicial function, judging cases according to precedent (Schapera 40) and a legislative function, in that it ratifies any decision taken by the chief (41). Participation in the *Kgotla* thus requires knowledge of precedents, preserved through the oral tradition, as well as understanding of the responsibilities of citizenship. African traditional politics represent a diversity of systems which have adapted to meet the changing needs of society, and some have survived colonialism and post-colonial democracies. They provide fertile grounds for

study, in the specialised sense of academic study, and in a broader education in the rights and duties of citizenship.

Africa's Place in the Liberal Arts

The universities of Europe owe their origins largely to two scholars, Augustine and Aquinas. Augustine converted to Christianity after receiving a thorough grounding in classical philosophy. Through his *City of God*, he brought the then rapidly expanding Christian faith into contact with Platonic philosophy and set the stage for Christian higher education. Augustine lived most of his life in Africa. He was a Berber by ethnicity and, after a brief visit to Rome, whose educational institutions fell short of his expectations, established a school in his native Carthage. In Augustine's lifetime, Northern Europe was seen as utterly devoid of any form of learning and culture. Civilisation resided around the Mediterranean and included Northern Africa and Ethiopia as equal partners. After Augustine's death, ignorance and anarchy extended into Italy and Greece and it was not until the late middle ages that Europe rediscovered the classical education that was to form the basis of the Trivium. Diop cites the *Tarikh-al-Sudan* revealing that Arab scholars introduced the trivium into sub-Saharan Africa, at the University of Sankoré, in Timbuktu, at the same time as they were reintroducing it into Europe (Diop 178). Islamic African scholars used the Koran as their central text and Arabic as the language of instruction and discourse, just as European scholars focused upon the Bible and deliberated in Latin (177).

Islamic higher education was part of the madrasah system, which included primary and secondary instruction as well. It covered all of knowledge, placing theological knowledge at the pinnacle of learning. The basic education aimed to teach all Muslims a fundamental understanding of the Koran and the Arabic language. The more advanced instruction made provision made for talented scholars to continue with their studies, to the equivalent of post-graduate level:

The curriculum of the madrasahs was typically made up of three categories: the first dealt with the fundamental Islamic sciences: Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*); the traditions of Prophet Muhammed, namely behavioural precedents (*sunnah*) and public utterances (*hadith*); and Islamic law (*Shari'ah*), which itself was made up of two components: Islamic law proper (*al-fiqh*) and the sources of this law (jurisprudence—termed *usul al-fiqh*). The second comprised elements of language, namely: the Qur'anic language (*al lughah*)—which in this case of course it was classical Arabic; grammar (*al nahw wa 'l-sarf*); literary style and rhetoric (*al balaghah*); literature (*al-adab*), and the art of Qur'anic recitation (*al qira'at*). The third category, which was usually considered to be of slightly lower level of importance included subjects such as astronomy, history, medicine, and mathematics (Lulat 2005:65-66).

In this system, we can detect elements of the medieval European liberal arts, including theology, grammar, law and science. In Europe, as in the Islamic tradition which preceded it, science was of less significance than the foundational subjects. The es-Sayouti family collection holds “an extraordinary astronomical and optical treatise dating back to the 1300s, which contains drawings of the motions of the planets in red and black inks” (de Villiers and Hirtle 175). The Islamic university resembles the later European university, but differs in one crucial respect. Like the orally-based traditional African education, literate Islamic education provides a baseline of knowledge for every individual, and to make allowances for further study by those with the necessary ambition and talent. Europe developed universities first, and then began to develop preparatory schools to equip potential students to study there. Mass literacy was never a priority. Sa'di praises his teacher, Baghayogho (born AH 930, AD 1523-4; died AH 1002, AD 1594), not only for his extensive knowledge but also for his infinite patience in dealing with the “dull-witted” (Al-Sa'di 62-64). Individual teachers received licenses to teach specific texts and the universities could not achieve corporate status, since Islamic law does not recognise corporations (Hunwick lix). This model resembles both traditional African skilled training, where students would travel great distances to seek out specific teachers, and early European higher education, where colleges were initially buildings to house the scholars, who were the main attraction.

Ashby and Anderston assert that “higher education is not new to the continent of Africa, but the modern universities in Africa owe nothing to this ancient tradition of scholarship” (148). Subsequent developments in European higher education owe something to Islamic higher education. It is convenient to imagine the liberal arts as an unbroken European tradition, beginning with Aristotle and continuing to the present day. However, the conversation has flowed around and across continents.

Thomas Aquinas entered into dialogue with classical philosophy, then in the hands of Islamic Scholars in Arabia and Persia as well as northern and eastern Africa, and Spain. Catholic universities thus rediscovered the Aristotelian system, which incorporated everything we now think of as Arts and Sciences. They also encountered Arabian mathematics, including Algebra and, more fundamentally, the numeral system we currently use, which includes the Indian concept of zero. The Islamic tradition enriched the classical tradition. Aquinas was in debate, not only with Aristotle and Averroes, but with the intellectual traditions they represented. The dynamics of pagan, Muslim, Jewish and Christian interaction across Europe, Africa and Asia paved the way for the renaissance and the enlightenment.

Higher Education in British Imperial Africa

British colonial governments in Africa had little to do with education until 1945. Education was in the hands of missionaries. Missionary institutions were prone to conflict between denominations, paternalism and even outright racism on the part of the educators. Their course offerings were often restricted, although sometimes surprisingly broad since the missionaries also worked as engineers, medical doctors, builders, dentists and teachers. Missionary education did not offer a planned and coherent system. This is not, in itself, negative. Education in North America, particularly in the United States, arose from hundreds of local and disparate efforts. By contrast, the British Empire attempted to bring disparate

primary, secondary and tertiary educational institutions into a common system on the eve of independence, once British enthusiasm for the imperial adventure had waned, Britain itself was under considerable economic duress and it had not yet begun to expand its own system to accommodate the aspirations of all learners.

Higher education in Anglophone Africa follows an organic pattern of growth, with the same institutions, ideas and actors resurfacing throughout the narrative. The earliest moves towards higher education in British Africa were in Sierra Leone, with extensive development in education at all levels for emancipated slaves, and the founding of Fourah Bay College in 1827. The college expanded its mandate in 1841, as the mission societies became aware of the need for African missionaries, given their greater immunity to malaria (Ashby and Anderson 151).

Ignoring the dominions and India, the 1948 Asquith report notes the existence of four universities in the British Empire. These were: Malta (founded 1769), Jerusalem (since 1918), Ceylon (1870-medical college, UC 1921, University status 1942) and Hong Kong (1911) (Asquith 7-8). The African colonies had no universities and few facilities for higher education (Asquith 6). The report identifies three institutions offering university-level courses in West Africa. Fourah Bay in Sierra Leone was founded 1827 by CMS, as a theological college. It had 16 students in 1944. Achimota, the Ghanaian secondary school had 98 students, including 2 women. The higher college at Yaba, Nigeria, which was originally an agricultural training college, had about 100 students. Ashby identifies "... the remarkable Achimota College near Accra, which covered education from kindergarten to first-year university courses; for a short time, in engineering, its students were even eligible to take the examinations for the external degrees of London University.(Ashby 14).

Apart from Gordon Memorial College, Khartoum which offered some tertiary courses, Makerere served all of East Africa. Since 1937, it had offered courses as a university

college, and, by 1943, it had 114 resident students. Fort Hare had 220 students in 1942, and receives a favourable mention in the report, even though South Africa, as a dominion, fell outside the report's terms of reference (Asquith 9). Lulat (2005:6) asserts "the biggest indictment of the education that the imperial powers brought to Africa was not so much that it was tainted (which it was), but rather that *even in its tainted form it was not enough!*" The spread of capitalism required a local entrepreneurial class, educated as producers and consumers of capital and its products and so the failure of imperialism stems from the failure to provide universal education to imperial subjects. According to Lulat, then, imperialism failed to even achieve its own objectives. Mamdani discusses the notorious scarcity of university graduates in African states as they achieved independence from Britain and Belgium (256).

Fort Hare

Fort Hare is the first South African institution which did not deliberately restrict its admissions to those who identified themselves as Europeans. Even for white settlers, university education was highly restricted. While the Dutch had been present in South Africa since 1652 and the British since 1795, the first university did not come into existence until 1829. The University of Cape Town, which grew out of the South African Collegiate School, did not admit any black South African students until the 1920s. Even these were a tiny minority until the 1980s. Fort Hare, by contrast, was non-racial from the outset, including two white students in its first class.

The Liberal Arts at Fort Hare

Fort Hare offered both BA and BSc degrees, following the curriculum and examinations of the University of South Africa, with little variation from the courses offered at the white university colleges:

The general direction of the major studies was towards the standard of the matriculation examination of the South African universities, for the conduct of which at the time there was a common board for all the nine or ten European colleges. From the list of subjects recognised for this external examination we selected six—English, a Bantu language, South African and European History, Latin, Mathematics and Physical Science (Kerr 39).

Initially, the college lacked the staff and facilities for a full BSc, but that did not deter it from offering a very successful pre-medical programme (Kerr 109-110). From 1920 to 1925, at least 84 graduates completed their medical studies in “Edinburgh, Birmingham, Durham, Liverpool and even Frankfurt-am-Main” (Kerr 81). After 1925, the university was able to expand its range of offerings to allow for both a general education and a specialised major. Within the restrictions set by the Ministry of Education, and the students own “selection” of secondary school subjects, Fort Hare was able to achieve a breadth and depth of study, incorporating a deliberate emphasis on African language and culture, without excluding any aspect of the western liberal arts and sciences (Kerr 156-157). It also included social sciences and politics to provide a more critical approach to the study of history, for example. The word “selection” requires some scepticism. As in many current African secondary schools, a student’s course of study depended less on his or her individual choice than on which subjects the schools had the staff and facilities to offer, and the ability of primary schools to provide effective preparation for secondary schooling, especially in mathematics and the sciences. Fort Hare differed from many subsequent African universities in making science classes available to humanities students, and vice versa. It is an indictment of the modern African university that Fort Hare, with its basic laboratories and limited funding, could provide science and mathematics to BA candidates, whereas contemporary universities, with extensive laboratories and funding from national and foreign governments, as well as international agencies like UNESCO, have made the curtain between Arts and Science into a Berlin Wall. ZK Matthews asserts that effective and passionate teaching, not expensive facilities or well-prepared students, is the key to mastery of even a difficult subject like

mathematics: "...it had been regarded as a fluke, if not a miracle, to do well in mathematics. But when Murdock took over, the subject ceased to hold any terrors for us" (Matthews 64).

Kerr also defends the emphasis on philosophy at Fort Hare on the pragmatic grounds that it met University of South Africa requirements. Unlike other subjects, it did not require that a student had completed it in secondary school. It was also attractive to mature students, especially ministers in training (Kerr 157). The college instituted the Wednesday Assembly, a 45 minute College Meeting where visitors or members of staff could address the entire student body on any topic:

Matters grave and gay were dealt with, new trends in literature and philosophy, scientific marvels and mathematical puzzles, musical appreciations, descriptions of sports not generally within reach of African students, descriptions of visits to foreign countries and of the customs of their peoples, flashbacks to ancient times, archaeological discoveries, superstitions and quackeries of our own and other countries and ages—anything in fact that could be subsumed under the maxim in Terence: *humani nil a me alienum puto*. As the studies in the course of time developed into more and more specialisms, this common forum provided an intellectual link between students of different faculties and between staff members, put a brake on centrifugal tendencies, which are all too frequent in university work, and emphasized for all the encyclopaedic character of collegiate study. (43)

Fort Hare consciously, as a small learning community, emphasised the universality of the university.

Funding

Fort Hare was able to achieve a comprehensive education, albeit for a small number of students, with minimal expenditure. South Africa in 1915 was prepared to dedicate few resources to African higher education. The college planners had the cautionary example of the white university colleges, which struggled to survive because too few resources were spread across too few institutions (Kerr 23).

However, Fort Hare's resources were limited. The University received various pledges of annual support. The Union Education Department pledged £600; the Native Affairs Department earmarked £250 for Agricultural studies; and the United Free Church offered

another £250. The college therefore could only afford two instructors (Kerr 15). Kerr himself took on a substantial teaching load. The community contributed generously to the college, as General Louis Botha, Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa, acknowledged in his speech at the opening of the college: “The Natives of certain districts of the Transkeian Territories were in a position to take united action, and through the Transkeian Territories General Council contributed the substantial sum of £10,000” (25-26).¹ Given the limited number of black South Africans in wage employment in 1915, the limited earnings of those who were employed and the economic restrictions due to the First World War, that sum is indeed substantial. The contributions of state and church look extremely parsimonious compared to the money raised by the community. The Transkei community generosity recalls Casely Hayford’s 1911 vision for the Mfantsipim National University in his novel *Ethiopia Unbound*:

The people did not wait for endowments from the rich and the philanthropic, of for money-making syndicates to start the work; but quickly collecting a few enthusiastic young men, these went about from province to province and from village to village trying to instil into the commonality what the country lost by the neglect of education. The people began to understand and to talk about the matter in the wayside places. So that when Jubilee Day came round, and from province to province throughout all the states of Fanti-land the gong-gong of the *Amahin* went round for contribution by the people to the National Educational Fund, great was the enthusiasm of high and low, and there was not a hamlet throughout the land which did not send its fair share of contribution (Hayford 16).

Hayford’s vision seems naïve in an age of state and corporate university funding, but the formula of community support for liberal arts colleges continues in North America and is not unknown in Africa. In 1977, when the government of Lesotho decided to convert a multinational university to a national one, and students from Botswana and Swaziland returned home, the government of Botswana launched an appeal, entitled “Motho le motho kgomo” (one man one cow) towards the building of the University of Botswana. The

¹ According to www.measuringworth.com, this is equivalent to £597,000.00 using the retail price index or £3,220,000.00 using average earnings in 2008 pounds. Using oanda.com to convert to 2008 South African Rands, the Transkei contribution is equal to between R8 597 710 and R46 372 900.

proceeds of this campaign are commemorated with the statue of a man leading a cow towards the University of Botswana library.

Limited funds meant limited facilities. Initially, a house on the Fort Hare grounds served multiple purposes:

This cottage, which was to play an important and varied part in the early years of the College, had three sizable rooms, several smaller apartments and a rather unhandsome kitchen. Facing the front door, and closing off the entrance passage, was the pantry. This seemed the heaven-appointed place to house the three typewriters we had acquired for the commercial group in Mrs Fairlie's charge, while the kitchen seemed equally predestined to be the science laboratory, as it boasted shelving and a lockable annexe in which chemicals could be stored. The rest of the dwelling was available for 'liberal arts', for various studies, such as book-keeping and shorthand, and for the library, which had still to be purchased. (38-39)

In addition to restrictions in space, Kerr discusses problems of ventilation, since evening classes required paraffin lamps, and the resulting advantages of outside instruction. Fort Hare recognised no dichotomy intellectual development and manual labour. ZK Matthews discusses Kerr's insistence on regular Bible study and manual work as essential to a liberal education and recalls: "We were called to the high task of launching the college academically. We were also called to the no less useful task of laying some its physical foundations" (Matthews 51). He and his fellow students completed specific tasks, in assigned work groups, under the supervision of their instructors. Just as the community contributed sacrificially to the building of Fort Hare, the first generations of students laid out its physical landscape. Fort Hare students did not experience the dichotomy between Booker T Washington's emphasis on physical labour and technical skills and WEB Du Bois' insistence on the development of the mind. Their education was both academically rigorous and intellectually demanding.

Nationalisation

Starting in 1951, the National Party government in South Africa moved to bring all education of black South Africans under the direct control of the Department of Bantu

Administration and Development. For all its supposedly Christian National orientation, the government specifically targeted missionary institutions. By 1960, the government sought direct control of Fort Hare, in spite of submissions by both Kerr and ZK Matthews. Kerr, in particular, was cross-examined over whether “Europeans” and “non-Europeans” could work amicably and effectively as part of a common governing council. He replied that his experience on Fort Hare Council had been a model of effective interracial co-operation, and that he had not witnessed any of the racial politics the Parliamentary Select Committee anticipated in organisations governed by interracial bodies. The Union Government dissolved the council and nationalised Fort Hare (Kerr 280-283). Apartheid could not allow even the possibility of effective interracial co-operation. Fort Hare had been effective as a community-funded institution, providing a high quality education at minimal cost, and engaging in extensive outreach and development programmes. It also provided economic growth and expertise for a rural South African community. The apartheid government, all the while making pious proclamations about community self-determination, rural values, Christianity and anti-communism placed an independent, rural college, founded on Christian principles and supported by an African community under the direct control of the state.

The end of Apartheid presented an ideal opportunity to return Fort Hare to its former glory. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, The National Working Group, charged with the rationalisation of South African Universities, provides a near post-mortem for Fort Hare.

The University of Fort Hare has had a proud history in South African higher education. However, in recent times a number of factors have had a detrimental effect on the institution. As a rural institution in a small and remote town, it is not as attractive for staff and students as other institutions based in larger towns and cities. In recent years there has been a sharp fall in the university’s intake of first-time entering undergraduates, which has affected its enrolment stability. It has been able to maintain a total head count enrolment of about 4 200 only by registering large numbers of teachers for in-service programmes in education. Its graduation rates and its research outputs have been low. In 2000 Fort Hare produced a total of only 536 graduates; of whom only 12 obtained masters or

doctoral degrees. Its research publication total has been below 50 units for a number of years. (National Working Group 16)

The National Working Group reveals its bias in favour of large, urban research institutions, and its inability to envisage other models of higher education. Fort Hare's size, location and emphasis on undergraduate instruction are the hallmarks of an effective liberal arts college. The report condemns Fort Hare for its low research outputs and small numbers of graduate students, as well as its low degree completion rate. The latter is a cause for concern, but it reflects the appalling legacy of Bantu Education, more than the effectiveness of Fort Hare. Like other predominately black institutions, Fort Hare attempted to educate less-prepared students in large classes. By 2000, the best qualified black students were being accepted at Cape Town, the University of the Witwatersrand and other leading historically white institutions. The criteria of research outputs and number of graduate students would not apply the most selective of American liberal arts colleges, which pride themselves on offering a higher standard of undergraduate education than the most selective research universities. Instructors at liberal arts colleges conduct high quality research, and encourage undergraduate participation in research, but they are not judged solely on the quantity of their research outputs.

Fort Hare benefitted from its distance from the larger communities, such as Johannesburg or Cape Town, particularly for white members of staff who, in closer proximity to a large white community, may have been sucked into its prejudices. Many liberal arts institutions in North America use their the relative cultural isolation, which allows them to form a common community, bridging cultural, economic or ethnic division; Berea and Oberlin Colleges, with their anti-racist heritage going back to the abolitionist movement, are small campuses within small communities.

Makerere

Makerere started as a technical school in Kampala and, following the suggestions of a committee convened by the Ugandan Government in 1924, upgraded to the status of a junior college (Ashby and Anderson 192). In 1933, the Curry report recommended that it be upgraded towards university status (194). Makerere's progress reflected a difference of opinion between colonial officials in East and West Africa. During and before the 1920s, West Africans, notably Horton, Blyden and Hayford, proposed various schemes for the provision of higher education. The Governors of Nigeria and the Gold Coast rejected these proposals because each believed that primary and secondary education should receive priority. Both governors were liberal proponents of the Africanisation of the civil service, but each rejected university education as a means of achieving that objective. They also ignored the historical record: "universities flourished in Europe before there was a comprehensive system of secondary education" (Ashby and Anderson 182). They anticipated the World Bank, whose "... studies claimed to show that the rate of return on investment in higher education was much lower than that in secondary or primary education, and that the benefit was mainly private" (Mamdani 261).

While East African officials acknowledged the need for increased access to primary schooling, the 1933 Currie Report and the 1937 De la Warr Report, tipped the balance in favour of higher education in East Africa. The Commission included ZK Matthews as its only African member, and Alexander Kerr as the only other member with experience of African higher education (Matthews 105). It offered a comprehensive vision of a rigorous liberal education, which specifically incorporated African culture and thought, striving towards a "synthesis of both African and European elements" (cited in Ashby and Anderson 198). Because Makerere prepared students for external examinations, and had acquired a reputation for excellence, the 1945 Asquith Commission promoted Makerere's as a template for the

“special relationship” with the University of London. Between 1945 and 1972, Makerere became the most prestigious institution on the continent. It was home to two warring impulses, each of which contributed to its prestige. On the one hand, it out-Londoned London, in setting very high admissions standards, admitting the most qualified students from East and Central Africa, and having them pass the external examinations with distinction. It also introduced some creative and dynamic programmes of study. In 1955, for example, a group of Makerere social scientists published an article in *Universities Quarterly* on an interdisciplinary social science course which emphasised East African examples of politics, sociology and economics (Ehrlich et al 56-63). This course did not survive the “special relationship”:

The course was a brave experiment destined to extinction because it was not “examinable” by London, yet its underlying premise—that enquiry into local topics should be the bedrock of East African higher education—grew stronger and, as research accelerated exponentially in the 1960s, resulted in curricular change. (Sicherman 29)

The “standards”, as set by the University of London, clashed with the intelligence and creativity needed to respond directly to African curricular needs. A few programmes, such as the Medical School and Music, Dance and Drama remained outside London’s influence and managed to be both excellent and innovative.

The highly specialised “Honours Degree” became the de-facto standard. Ashby documents the trend in British education, from a “general” degree to ever greater levels of specialisation. By the 1960s, committees in Britain began to question the wisdom of such specialised degrees, and Ashby predicts “a broadening of the curriculum,” which has come to pass as British universities offer more interdisciplinary programmes and the polytechnics achieve university status and offer a wider range of degrees. However, Ashby concludes “at the time when Britain was exporting universities to tropical Africa, the fashion of specialisation was at its height” (Ashby 9). An historical anomaly in England and Wales has

become the norm in African universities. In a footnote, Ashby (9n) mentions that the broader Scottish degree was not subject to the same criticism, implying that it may have provided a more appropriate model.

The single honours option also reflects severe restrictions on university admission in Britain. Ashby contrasts the highly selective British system with the more accessible US one. The Britain had limited university places and assigns them on the basis of exam results. Students had already effectively specialised in choosing subjects for their A-level exams, university merely confirmed that specialisation. American students took a more general secondary school course and did not specialise until the second year of university. As Ashby observes: “The statistical chance that a Boston boy or girl born in 1945 is now receiving full-time higher education is about 1 in 3; the equivalent chance for a London boy or girl born in 1945 is about 1 in 12” (Ashby 10). Because such a small proportion of the population would attend university, specialisation made sense. Even as it served all of East Africa, Makerere’s enrolment numbered in the hundreds until 1960, and in the thousands until the mid-1990s.

The history of Makerere reveals a series of articulate responses to specialisation. The AIDS pandemic of the 1990s, revealed one risk of overspecialisation,” in which a colleague’s death might require a shift in responsibilities with little notice” (Sicherman 51). At the formation of the University of East Africa, in 1963, a committee called for a more general degree structure. Makerere responded by allowing more combinations within the honours degree and ensured the continued absolute separation of Arts and Sciences (Sicherman 61). Ironically the University of London initially represented a clear break with the restricted course offerings at Oxford and Cambridge, where Modern History was considered a dangerous “novelty” in 1849 (Ashby and Anderson 26). At that time all Oxbridge BA candidates wrote the same examinations, covering the Greek New Testament, Latin and Greek Literature, the English reformation and some Euclidian mathematics (Ashby and

Anderson 25). The radical innovator in 19th century Britain became the fossilised standard in the colonies a hundred years later.

Commercialisation

Makerere's staff, students and facilities suffered appalling abuses under Idi Amin and in the subsequent period of anarchy. By the 1980s, amid the relative freedom and stability, Makerere's reputation for excellence remained intact, despite crumbling buildings, looted libraries and dead or exiled scholars. The promise of increased funding compromised the quality and integrity of the institution. Using university records, interviews and other primary data, Mahmood Mamdani documents the privatisation and commercialisation of Makerere at the instigation of the World Bank (Mamdani 9). He reveals that market-driven reforms at Makerere were at least as devastating as the nationalisation of Fort Hare a generation earlier.

From Makerere's inception, the government provided each student with comprehensive support, including a living allowance. In 1990-1991, due to the rapid depreciation of the Ugandan Shilling, the government attempted to introduce "cost sharing," requiring that all students pay for a portion of their education (19). The result was an immediate and protracted student strike. Government and the university retreated on the idea of cost sharing, instead proposing that, in future, faculties and departments could become "income generating units" by admitting entirely self-funded private students, who would attend classes in the evenings. Faculties then went into competition to attract private students. The Faculty of Arts was unexpectedly successful in offering programs that combined traditional humanities subjects with marketable commercial subjects, such as "Religious Studies and Conflict Resolution, Geography and Tourism, Linguistics and Secretarial Studies, History and Development, Philosophy and Public Management" (Mamdani 53). The new programmes quickly overwhelmed the university with private students. They also

continued the trend towards greater specialisation, since departments competing for funds and students stopped any interdisciplinary collaboration.

In 2005, a reporter for the *Sunday Vision* in Kampala roamed about the Makerere. He entered and wrote examinations without a student ID (*Sunday Vision*). The reporter correlates Mamdani's thesis, that commercialisation has rendered Makerere impersonal and that the pursuit of cash has taken precedence over any notion of academic quality and integrity. The University responded by immediately denying the allegations. The scandal represented a severe blow to Makerere's reputation. It was also symptomatic of an institution which had abandoned its central mission in the name of personal enrichment. While commercialisation has expanded access, employers can no longer rely on the integrity of a Makerere degree.

Beyond Asquith

The University of Nigeria, Nsukka and the University of Zambia were the first post-independence universities. Accordingly, they took their inspiration not from the University of London, but looked further afield for models. An important model, particularly given its role in national development, and the expansion of educational opportunities and research outputs to artisans and farmers, was the American land grant university. In the United States, from the late 18th century, land was more plentiful than money, so municipalities and states had developed a tradition of granting land to various types of educational initiatives. In 1862, the US Congress passed the Morrill Land Grant Act, which expanded this tradition, giving land, not only for campuses, but also in lieu of an endowment. The states could apply their land grants to provide for the ongoing support of universities and colleges. Many of these are the "A&M" colleges, dedicated to the "useful arts" (Thelin 76).

Africans who studied in the United States developed a more critical perspective on the British system of higher education, its standards and exclusionary practices (Ashby and Anderson 263). Both Kwame Nkrumah and Nnamdi Azikiwe attended American

Universities. Azikiwe applied the model of the American land grant university to the University of Nigeria-Nsukka, the first post-independence institution in Nigeria. Nsukka resembled an American Land Grant University in its combination of liberal and useful arts, and student choice:

In place of the specialisation already to be found in the sixth form courses at secondary schools, the University of Nigeria offers a year's course in general studies, including English language and literature, social science, natural science, and the humanities. Thereafter follow in the prospectus—in true American style—literally hundreds of courses covering subjects as esoteric as *The Rise and Fall of the Ottoman Empire* (3 credits), *Igbo Phonology and Morphology* (2 credits), *Advanced Tectonics* (4 credits), *Vector Analysis* (9 Credits), and *Ethnomusicology*—including Eskimo music (2 credits); to subjects as down-to-earth as *Seed Testing* (4 credits), *Insurance* (3 credits), *Woodwork* (9 credits), *Household Sanitation* (2 credits), *Planning and serving of meals* (4 credits); *Shorthand* (9 credits); and *Techniques of Dancing* (3 credits). The conservatives—African graduates of British universities—shake their heads reproachfully at this exuberance. They cannot conceive how the serious business of a university can be conducted in such a supermarket of education... (Ashby 66-67).

The range of courses is one attribute of the American public university; another key attribute is a strong degree of autonomy from government. During the nineteenth century, Congress voted down bills to establish a national university (Thelin 42-43). The independence of American colleges and universities, both private and public, was established by the 1819 Supreme Court Decision in *Dartmouth College v. Woodward*, where the United States Supreme Court overturned a lower court decision, and agreed that Dartmouth was accountable to its governing board, not to the State of New Hampshire (Thelin 70-73).

The University of Nigeria Nsukka, in particular, attempted to implement the range of course options associated with an American university without the practical autonomy that came with the land grants. The University was founded by Dr Azikiwe, the first President of the Republic of Nigeria, who had himself appointed University Chancellor for Life, and who loaded the council with political appointments (Ashby 83). Perhaps his attempt to load the decision making bodies of the University can be understood charitably in light of the

University constituting a new model on the African continent, and one which could expect fierce opposition from the academic establishment. Certainly, the founding presidents of American Universities showed a similar strength of determination (Thelin 33-34), and we can possibly see parallels in Jefferson's influence on the University of Virginia (Thelin 51). However, Azikiwe's influence was limited. He was deposed in a 1966 coup and thereafter associated with the Biafran secession. His political legacy has tainted his academic legacy, and so the Nsukka model has not received the wide analysis and propagation it deserves in Nigeria, and hence in the rest of the continent.

The University of Zambia was formed in response to the dissolution of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, whose Asquith College was located in Salisbury, Rhodesia, and was therefore no longer accessible to Zambian students after the Rhodesian Declaration of Independence. It had no "Special Relationship" with any sponsoring British University. Tembo comments on the range of choices available to the first generation of University of Zambia students, and applauds the university's resistance to "over-specialization" through its rejection of the single honours model:

There is a dearth of educated manpower in the country, and the university's graduate may find he is called upon to perform a number of duties which require a broad preparation (Tembo 240-241).

In 1964, Zambia abolished A levels, allowing for a general, rather than specialised, university admission, thus allowing a greater range of major choices (Tembo 229-230). Lulat also endorses the flexibility of the curriculum, but laments its exclusion of the performing arts, calling for still greater flexibility.(Lulat 258-259nn).

The University of Zambia came into being with some guarantee of non-interference, Tembo cites President Kaunda's installation address: "The University is not a government department, and the government has no intention of creating it as one ... we appreciate that the University cannot meet its heavy responsibilities to the nation unless it is able to grow and

prosper within an atmosphere of freedom” (234). The University Council had not more than three government representatives, as opposed to six members drawn from the academic staff, and three international representatives. However, in 1971, demonstrations on campus led government to close the university, expel student leaders and deport expatriate staff, all without consulting the University Senate (Tembo 235).

The University College of Dar es Salaam also applied an interdisciplinary model. From 1964, it required “a locally focused, broad-based three-year Common Course” (Sicherman 52). The course was required of all arts and social sciences undergraduates, so science and commerce students, who require a greater level of critical thinking and adaptation of technology to local conditions. Mamdani writes from the experience of teaching at Dar es Salaam after his exile from Amin’s Uganda, emphasising the centrality of decolonisation to the curriculum (257). He also identifies the shortcomings of the Dar es Salaam curriculum:

But there were also problems. The main problem with the agenda for decolonising the curriculum was that its historical vision was limited to that of the colonial period. Ironically, those who critiqued the colonial period came to share its time horizon. Studies in political economy treated pre-colonialism more as a point of departure than as an object of study. No wonder the point of departure often lacked depth, texture, and dynamism, in short, [257] history. Second, political economy was preoccupied with objective processes. The three-year program in Development Studies ended with a blueprint on ‘development’ in the third year. As an off-the-shelf blueprint, it claimed validity for every newly independent colony; there was little room for acknowledgement of differences in local capacity, whether defined by organisation or vision. From this point of view, there was much in common between this left-wing blueprint and the right-wing alternative that the Bretton Woods institutions would market in the decades of conditionality that followed; both claimed that one size fits all (257-258).

According to Mamdani, the narrowness of focus reflects the narrowness of the nationalist project. He decries the tendency of African professors to get involved in partisan squabbles, and to present themselves as “Ministers-in-waiting and sometimes even Presidents-in-waiting” resulting in an adversarial relationship with government (Mamdani 259).

Towards an African Liberal Arts

Much of the history of African higher education remains to be written. I have offered a brief, and at times sketchy, discussion of its origins. Currently, higher education on the African continent is undergoing transformation and renewal. At its best, it engages with the pre-colonial past, across the national boundaries which are the most pernicious colonial legacy. The University of Cape Town and the South African National Archives are helping to preserve and catalogue library holdings from Timbuktu and the southern Sahel: (de Villiers and Hirtle 173-185). Private, faith-based institutions in Uganda and elsewhere offer a new pluralism in thought and pedagogy. Botswana's legacy of the Brigades and Education with Production, can develop a system of community colleges which expand practical experience and academic instruction. The risk is, as it always has been, that narrow concerns will continue to produce over-specialised graduates who lack the wisdom and skills to take on the challenges currently facing Africa. Government and the market have both failed to meet the needs of students and society, and, if left to determine university priorities, will continue to subordinate the full intellectual, vocational and spiritual development of Africa's greatest resource to immediate needs and ideologies. The market only thinks ahead to the next quarterly or, at best, annual report. Political leaders think ahead only as far as the next election. In the liberal arts, we draw upon thousands of years of human experience, and try to look ahead to the next few thousand years. We are the antidote to the culture of instant gratification, which is as much a fact of life in the developing world as in the west.

The solution is a comprehensive and independent higher education network, which promotes a plurality of approaches. Community colleges, research universities, faith-based colleges and state-funded institutions each have a role. Articulation agreements should allow for movement within and across national educational networks. The liberal arts have a critical role to play in this development. Programmes within larger institutions, distribution

requirements and small colleges can each help to provide the breadth of thought, which has been present in every proposal for higher education on the African continent. Only the liberal arts can take us deeply into African traditions and languages and break down the barriers between science and humanities which are a feature of western, not African, thought. The liberal arts also provide a means for Africans, secure in the firm understanding of African history and society, to engage with the west not as aid recipients or cheap labour, but as equals in the transmission and creation of wisdom. I am proposing nothing new, merely reiterating the long neglected words of Casely Hayford, in 1911:

I would found in such a University a Chair for History; and the kind of history that I would teach would be universal history with particular reference to the part Ethiopia has played in the affairs of the world. I would lay stress upon the fact that while Ramses II was dedicating temples to 'the God of gods and secondly to his own glory,' the God of the Hebrews had not yet appeared unto Moses in the burning bush; that Africa was the cradle of the world's systems and philosophies, and the nursing mother of its religions. In short, that Africa has nothing to be ashamed of of its place among the nations of the earth. I would make it possible for this seat of learning to be the means of revising erroneous current ideas regarding the Africa; of raising him in self-respect; and of making him an efficient co-worker in the uplifting of man to nobler effort (Hayford 194-195).

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