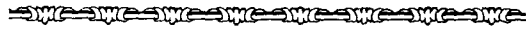


**THE ROLE OF THE  
UNIVERSITY AND ITS  
FUTURE IN ZIMBABWE**

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**INTERNATIONAL  
CONFERENCE  
PAPERS**



THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY  
AND ITS FUTURE  
IN  
ZIMBABWE



International Conference Papers

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The University is most grateful to:

The Carnegie Corporation of New York for their very generous contribution of US\$40 000 towards the cost of the Conference.

The Nedlaw Investment & Trust Corporation Limited for making available to the Conference the use of their staff bus.

The Mayor and City Council of Harare for welcoming our international visitors.

The Zimbabwe Promotion Council for providing us with Conference folders.



Published by Harare Publishing House  
cnr Baker Avenue Second Street  
Harare

Typeset by MSS (Pvt) Ltd.  
Printed by CTM Litho (Pvt) Ltd.  
73 Cameron Street, Harare, Zimbabwe

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## FOREWORD

by

Professor W.J. Kariba  
*Principal and Vice-Chancellor*  
University of Zimbabwe

This book is a record of the papers which were read at the Conference on the Role of the University and its Future in Zimbabwe, held on this campus in September 1981.

It was perhaps the most important Conference in the history of this University. It was attended by an impressive group of scholars from Africa and abroad, and Government leaders. The papers were highly scholarly and the debate which followed each presentation was very stimulating and thought-provoking.

This collection of essays constitutes a book of readings for students interested in problems of university development in Zimbabwe in particular, and in Africa in general, and those interested in university reform and the politics of higher education.

I must, on behalf of the University, express my gratitude to the Carnegie Corporation of New York for making it possible for us to hold the Conference, and subsequently for enabling us to publish these papers. To the participants who contributed immensely to the Conference; and to the Organising Committee for a job well done, I, also, express my profound gratitude.

# CHAPTER 5

## University Reform : Changing the University to meet new needs

by Dr. Herbert M. Murerwa

### Introduction

The legitimacy and mission of the African university has been challenged over the years not so much because the University is of foreign origin but rather because of its failure during the last few decades to adapt itself to the challenges of development faced by African countries.

This paper will discuss possible areas of university reform in Africa in general and more specifically in Zimbabwe. It is presented in two main parts. Part I tries to show that the imported 'model' has failed to respond adequately to the needs of African countries; notwithstanding the adaptations that have been made in terms of governance and learning content. Part II of the paper discusses the potential role of the university as an agent of change, focussing principally on the role of the university in the process of cultural transformation and the development of high level manpower.

### The University under Colonialism

It is important to note, at the beginning, that some of the oldest Universities are to be found on the African Continent. I refer to such universities as Quarawiyine in Fes Morocco which was founded in A.D. 859, and the University of Al Ashar in Cairo, Egypt, founded in A.D. 972. In Central Africa the University of Sankore in Timbuctoo had considerable reputation as a centre for Muslim scholarship.<sup>1</sup> The colonisation of West and Central Africa led to the establishment of the newer universities in the 1920's such as Makerere College in Uganda founded in 1922; the Gordon Memorial College and the Kitchener School of Medicine in Khartoum in 1924 and the Achimota College in Accra in 1927. Almost fifty years earlier Fourah Bay College had been established in Sierra Leone.

The orientation of the African university had always been of central concern to African Academies and educators, among them Dr. James Africunus Beale Horton, Edward Blyden and Rev. James Johnson of Sierra Leone and J.E. Casely Hayford of Ghana. These men spearheaded the demand for an African University that would preserve an African Culture and racial personality in order to restore self-respect among Africans: an institution that would "leave undisturbed our peculiarities."<sup>2</sup>

These demands fell on deaf ears. Colonial authorities argued that such a university would be of little value, since the priorities of African development included the development of teachers, doctors, engineers, etcetera. At any rate, such colonial degrees would have little value in terms of recognition unless they were based on the standards of the metropolitan country.

This is essentially still the main argument today: that, in spite of all the changes that have taken place in the African university to date, the University remains the clearest manifestation of cultural domination.<sup>3</sup> Others have denied that African Universities perpetuate cultural dependence and argue on the other hand that African universities have been a potential force for liberation; that graduates from these universities provided the leadership for the African Nationalist Movements that eventually led their countries to independence.<sup>4</sup> That the desire for independence was as a result of the values of liberty and freedom taught in these institutions. This line of argument is dismissed by Martin Carnoy who argues that there is little evidence that European education did teach the value of Liberty and freedom from European colonisation. He observes that it is more likely that Africans continued to resist colonisation despite European schooling: "The story of West African resistance to the Europeans in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries is one of local and widespread fighting by uneducated tribesmen who valued their independence not only from European domination but also from other Africans. Formal schooling

produced a new elite who could deal with the European. This elite attained the leadership of masses of people already opposed to European occupation and jurisdiction. These elites then translated what had been tribal and group resistance to the Europeans into "nationalists resistance."<sup>5</sup>

Mazrui, on the other hand, argues that because of the imported structure of the African university fundamental changes are really not possible and therefore the university is still capable of being at once a mechanism for political liberation and an agency for cultural dependency.

The main argument is that the African university's links with the metropolitan system has deeply affected the priorities of African scholars. For example, the association with the mother institutions made it impossible to change the curriculum. Modern universities in Africa, with a few exceptions, started as branches of European universities. Makerere College in Uganda, the University College at Ibadan in Nigeria, the University Colleges in Lagos, Ghana and our own university had their roots in London. Entrance to these universities was on the basis of the requirements of the University of London and the University of London approved the syllabuses and examinations. Even examination questions had to be forwarded to London for criticism and revision.

This state of affairs made it impossible for African branches of the university to determine their own direction and implement the innovations that were needed in order to make the African university more relevant to the African environment. Mazrui observes that in West Africa : "Greek, Latin and the history of Greece and Rome formed the core of the humanities. For many years no African Language, not even Arabic, could be studied at university level."<sup>6</sup>

African music is another area which was neglected by African universities. In part, colonialism and the spread of Christianity contributed to this neglect as African dance patterns were considered to be primitive and sexually suggestive. While westernised Africans were not openly hostile to changes that were being introduced, they in fact, easily accepted imported varieties such as ball-room dancing and so on.<sup>7</sup>

In some African universities, however, changes have occurred and African music and dance have been given their rightful place on the curriculum. In Tanzania, traditional music and dance (ngoma) are now considered important art forms and are taught in primary and secondary schools as well as at the university.

Another factor that has tended to inhibit the radical transformation of African universities is the subtle influences of the financial sponsors of University programmes. Edward Berman in his analysis of the role of African universities showed that these foundations shared mutual concern for controlling development in third world countries to promote American economic interests. The main foundations often acted in concert "to support educational projects and development models which would bind foreign nationals and their institutions to the dominant values of the American Corporate State."<sup>8</sup>

These values hold that radical politics are detrimental for economic development and political stability :

"In short, the measured and gradual development of African Nations serves the best interest of World stability and, at the same time, provides an international context within which the major American foundations play crucial roles in developing national politics. This involvement has the further advantage of binding leaders of the new nations through the aegis of foundation-sponsored educational institutions, so political doctrines which at the very least, are not overtly antagonistic to state-supported capitalist development."<sup>9</sup>

Berman further showed that to facilitate this, foundations identified and supported only those institutions which showed a willingness to adhere to the broad policy and guidelines of donor organisations. In some cases, carefully selected foundation representatives were placed in key departments, while African nationals were sent for advanced graduate studies in U.S. universities, the overriding assumption being that these "Universities would play important roles in the creation of the leadership which would help sustain the orderliness of economic growth."<sup>10</sup> The result of this can easily be anticipated, African universities become inhibited in what they do and continually ask : What will the donor say? Some observers have argued that constraints that inhibit the performance of universities may also be imposed by governments which use their 'financing' role to enable them to dictate the programmes universities should undertake in the national interest. It must be noted that the government is in a very different position from the foundations in that the long term interests of a National University are not antagonistic to

those of government.

The point that should be made, however, in respect of this last point is that the extent to which a university can be innovative is essentially determined by the resources made available to it by both the government and donor agencies. The more flexibility the university has in the management of financial resources made available for its use the more creative it is likely to be.

This brief discussion has attempted to highlight only a few of the problems that confront the African university. Our university is emerging out of entirely unique circumstances which are very difficult to generalise about, in relation to other African universities. The following section will attempt to focus a little more closely on how our own university could re-define its role and mission in order that it may respond more positively to the needs and aspirations of the nation.

### **The University and National Development**

This part of the paper will focus on the role of the university as an agent for social and cultural transformation in society. It will also discuss the importance of the university in the development of high level manpower.

There is no doubt that a fundamental re-orientation in outlook is required if a university is to foster cultural transformation in society.

Universities in Africa have become established as out-posts of Western culture and their students almost entirely dependent on such culture. African universities need to disengage from over dependence on Western models if they are to provide the social and cultural environment needed to evolve an African identity and personality.

The old questions by Blyden and Hayford are still very much alive today, but they have taken new forms. It is now demanded of the Universities that they become an integral part of the African social, political, economic and cultural environment. African universities should make up their minds as to which culture should be transmitted to the students.

Sir Arthur Lewis has observed that "Western universities have no doubt that their task is to promote Western music, Western painting, Western literature and so on. As the Western University spread into India, one hundred and fifteen years ago, it also assumed that it should promote Western Culture in India although India has its own superb traditions of music, painting, sculpture, architecture and so on."

In view of the total alienation of the African during the long period of colonialism in Zimbabwe, it is not unreasonable that we now should demand that our university promote the teaching and development of our own artistic traditions.

This bias in favour of African culture could be reflected in greater emphasis being placed on the study of African languages, history, philosophy, literature, music and dance.

However, we are not advocating a purely regional approach to our University curriculum; but we are advocating a distinct African bias so that our University, to use Wandira's words is one that is recognisably part of the African social and cultural environment.

It is acknowledged that there is something to be learned from the experience of the Romans and the Greeks. Human achievement, whatever its geography is indeed part of our heritage also. I agree with Lewis when he observes that:—

"The cultural gentleman who neglects the opportunity of benefiting from all nationalities of aesthetic experience is the poorer for doing so."<sup>12</sup>

We are not proposing a withdrawal from world culture, this would be highly undesirable. After all we are intimately linked with the rest of the world in our efforts to develop and modernize. We are indeed part of a world culture. It is acknowledged that modernity is here to stay; the objective should be to decolonise it. What is desirable is that African universities should move away from excessive Eurocentrism and move towards both increased Afrocentrism and increased internationalisation.<sup>13</sup>

With regard to the role of the university in developing highly skilled manpower, there is no better way for the university to express the practical relevance of its mission than through the development of people with the knowledge and skills to develop the country. The university should become the focus of training and development at the highest level in fields such as medicine, engineering, agriculture, administration, law, accountancy, etcetera. The efforts of the university in this regard should complement the efforts of government and therefore consultation is necessary in determining national needs in terms of high level skilled manpower.



A proper distinction should be made between skills taught at the university and those taught at lower level institutions. I am not sure that the university is the proper place for the study of such subjects as family planning or interior design unless they are provided as extra-mural studies. My own view is that such studies should be undertaken by lower level institutions.

Above all, the training provided at the university should be relevant to the needs of the country. It would not serve the country to educate persons who were so highly specialised that they could not be utilised in that country.

In this respect, I would like to suggest that the learning of students be structured in such a manner as to enable them to acquire some practical experience on the job as part of their training. Such practical experience could be organised during the vacation period or on a sandwich course basis. This would enable students to gain full appreciation of the environment in which they will work. Thus their training would combine both theory and practice which could undoubtedly contribute to more effective learning.

At this point I would like to endorse the idea of a National Service programme for the university students. This would enable them to participate fully in the life of the community. The future leaders of Zimbabwe need to have a full understanding of the aspirations, frustrations, constraints and limitations of the people and communities they will serve. They will be able to return to their studies with greater confidence and a more realistic appreciation of the scope and requirements of the development process. I have no doubt that with experience such as this, university students would become less alienated and thus much less elitist.

### **Conclusion:**

In a country such as Zimbabwe, where there is only one university, it is imperative that such a university's curriculum be relevant to the development needs of the country. Compared to other institutions, the university often has the greatest concentration of expertise and talent and this must be harnessed for the national good. In Zimbabwe, colonialism was finally crushed through war but its cultural, social and economic manifestations still remain. Our university should be a vehicle for dynamic change and not for conservatism. Wandira has observed that the university must pursue a cause that is relevant to development by establishing and maintaining close contact with agencies and institutions involved in development such as governmental, social, political and religious bodies.

However, for the African university to be innovative and creative, it must have some degree of autonomy. This is necessary if it is to remain objective and fulfil its role as a critic in national affairs. It must also be provided with the resources necessary to carry out its programmes. In turn the university has a responsibility to society. It must pursue knowledge that has some practical application and not merely esoteric knowledge nor knowledge for its own sake. It must conduct research into local problems with the aim of improving the quality of life for the ordinary man.

It will be some time before the African university is finally able to remove its shackles. Our own university in Zimbabwe will need to chart its own direction in order that it may respond more effectively to the challenges of development. As the only university, it has a tremendous responsibility to provide the kind of academic leadership which reflects the broad aspirations of the people. It must provide young Zimbabweans with the knowledge and skills which enable them to participate fully in the political, cultural and economic life of their country and above all ensure that they become the vanguard of the ongoing economic revolution and consolidate the revolutionary gains of the past.

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