THE UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AND
SOUTHERN AFRICA, AND THE
PROBLEMS OF NEO-COLONIALISM

by

P. MAKHURANG, UNIVERSITY OF ZIM.
THE UNIVERSITY IN EASTERN AND SOUTHERN AFRICA, AND THE PROBLEMS OF NEO-COLONIALISM

by

P Makhurane
University of Zimbabwe

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR SERIES

SEMINAR ON
INTELLECTUALS, THE STATE AND IMPERIALISM: TOWARDS INTELLECTUAL DECOLONISATION

HARARE
20-22 OCTOBER 1987
Please Note: These discussion papers have been reproduced as they were presented at the seminars, without editing. The papers do not necessarily reflect the views of the Co-ordinating Committee members, the Departments of Economics, Law, or Political and Administrative Studies, or the Ford Foundation who have sponsored the seminars.
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Let me start by making a confession. I am not a social scientist. I am a physicist by training and an administrator by accident. I am, therefore, both flattered and intimidated by the invitation to participate in this highly academic social science-based seminar. On the one hand I positively revel in the notion that inspite of my credentials, I have been given the opportunity to share with your distinguished selves my own humble and common-sense based observations on one of the most pressing questions facing our continent. On the other, paradoxically, I am keenly aware of my limitations in this field and I marvel at the very thought of my having accepted the invitation at all since my freedom of speech on the assigned topic is so circumscribed. My own ambivalence about my role as a participant in this discussion is a metaphor for the question that I am supposed to address viz the African University and the problem of neo-colonialism.

1.2 I shall confine my presentation to a brief consideration of the following four subheadings:

- The University's Mission (ie. its basic functions and the questions of autonomy and academic freedom).
- The characteristics of a neocolony;
- Africa's vulnerability to neo-colonialism; and
- the question "How can the African University intervene?"
2. THE UNIVERSITY'S MISSION

2.1. The African university may be defined as an institution of higher learning, set up by a statutory instrument of a given national state for the purposes of the acquisition and development of knowledge through research, the transmission of knowledge through teaching, the application of knowledge through service to society and the translation into reality of the genuine aspiration of the people (ATAT). In order to achieve these objectives the university is given a wide range of powers allowing it to do or cause to be done all such things as are consistent with the attainment of these goals. To quote myself, "men and women from all walks of life, from the cleaner to the Vice-Chancellor, are brought together to work side by side for the achievement of these objectives. No test of religious or political belief, race, ethnic origin, nationality or sex is imposed upon or required of any person in order that he/she may be admitted as a member of the academic or administrative staff, employee or student of the university, or to hold office within the institution. Thus the university is a multi-ethnic, multi-racial, multi-cultural and religiously heterogeneous institution whose main mission is to seek after truth and to assist society in finding solutions to the many practical problems of development." 1

2.2 As Harry Arthurs has observed "Intellectuals and especially those intellectuals who have organised themselves into powerful institutions such as universities, are in a sense "keynote" speakers of society. We influence society in many subtle ways, but we do not stand entirely aloof from, or indifferent to, its assumptions and expectations."
We record and preserve knowledge. We create, demolish and recreate knowledge. We even aspire to show how knowledge can be usefully applied in science and technology, human relations, the economy and all other dimensions of modern society. Nor are we concerned with knowledge alone: wisdom, moral values, aesthetic sensibilities are all grist for our mill." 2/

Where there is consensus on the political and social direction of a nation, as well as on the role of the university in the process of development, the institution can, in practice, enjoy a high degree of autonomy in its policy formulation and administrative procedures. The university's awareness of and sensitivity to national aspirations is essential if it is to ensure that it marches ahead in harmony with the nation. Its sensitivity to national priorities helps it in mapping out its own priorities so that decisions are taken which are most likely to promote the university's role as an agent of national development. Thus within the constraints of not deviating from or being on a collision course with government policy and direction, and within financial constraints, the university in Africa has autonomy in designing, constructing and maintaining its physical facilities, appointing its academic, administrative, technical, clerical and other support staff; purchasing, leasing, lending and borrowing property; and having access to all such rights and privileges as may be consistent with its mission.
2.4 The University also has powers to regulate for its academic life including its teaching and research activities. It is uncommon for governments to consciously seek to impose restrictions and limitations in the classroom, the laboratory or the library or on who should or should not be admitted as a student, and how students should be examined. All these factors do constitute a large measure of academic freedom.

2.5 However, academic freedom like most things can only be relative. There is no true freedom without discipline. Physics defines a "free" particle as one which does not interact with any other particle. Such a particle would remain in a state of rest or motion with uniform velocity (speed in one direction) indefinitely. No university could ever dream of academic freedom in the scientific sense - much as there is no such thing as a free particle in nature. The African University has to be responsive to and be influenced by its environment. The choice of teaching and research programmes must, as much as possible, be guided by messages reaching the institution from society. Pressures do bear upon the institution in its determination of academic priorities and directions. The questions of excellence and knowledge for its own sake are constantly being measured against the expediency of relevance to the needs of society.

2.6 To quote myself again, "There are also times when the fragile nature and the sensitivities of political systems in Africa dictate in favour of the diplomacy of not taking very strong positions against government policies. Such bending over backwards in order to accommodate these sensitivities and to avoid being regarded as hotbeds of malcontents and rockers of boats, do place limitations on the extent to which university can exercise academic freedom."
The unfortunate thing is that this "voluntary" suppression of the truth on the part of academics, or the deliberate pressure on them not to articulate the truth as they see it, is ultimately not in the interest of anybody and society is much the poorer for it. 1/

2.7 This then is the backdrop against which I wish to explore the question of whether the University in Africa can intervene in the daunting task of providing solutions to the problem of neocolonialism. If indeed the university is sufficiently autonomous and enjoys a reasonable degree of academic freedom, how can it assist the nation it purports to serve in combating neocolonialism. Indeed can it claim to be immune from the tyranny of neocolonialism in its own procedures and in its own performance.

3. **THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A NEO-COLONY**

3.1 However, let me postpone for a moment, the ideas that I wish to share with you regarding ways in which the African University can handle the problems of neocolonialism. Rather let me dwell for a while on what I understand by the "monster" itself. What are the characteristics of a neo-colony?

3.2 The last thirty years have witnessed a great phenomenon of change on the African continent as, one after another, the states which had fallen victim of colonialism during the scramble for Africa, gained political independence. However, this rapid decline in colonialism has given rise to new and alternative ways of domination and control by the powerful nations of the world. Rather than the direct and outright control that characterised the colonial era, the new domination is more subtle and yet almost equally devastating.
One may state without fear of contradiction that the age of the informal empire is a necessary development of and goes hand-in-glove with capitalism. It ensures that the rich nations continue to control the markets and have access to the raw materials which abound in the former colonies. After due processing into manufactured goods, these materials are re-exported into the informal empire and elsewhere.

3.3 The growth of the informal empire as a substitute for the outright possession of colonies, and the birth of new methods of influence and control, have been so real that this new phenomenon of power is now generally referred to as neo-colonialism.

3.4 For obvious reasons the powerful nations of the world refute the assertion of the Third World that they have become neocolonialists. For the sake of our discussion, therefore it is enlightening to give in a nutshell the definition of a neocolony. What are the characteristics of a neocolony? The following list, though not comprehensive, throws some light on the question:

3.4.1 the perpetuation of political and military influence and direction by the rich nations over nominally independent states of the Third World

3.4.2 the domination of the economic policy of Third World States by foreign business interests

3.4.3 the economic and financial dependency of the South on the industrial centres of the North

3.4.4 the preponderence of the culture and values of former colonial powers in politically independent former colonies
3.4.5 the existence of the ideological traditions of foreign countries in Third World situations

3.4.6 the continuation of the educational and civil service systems of the former colonial power after independence

3.4.7 the continued membership of currency unions, preferential tariff arrangements and quota systems for the purposes of marketing Third World exports to the former colonial powers.

3.4.8 the control of the resource allocation systems of Third World countries by foreign bankers, investors and merchants.

3.4.9 the maintenance of the system of the division of labour with the neocolony as the overseer of the production of food and raw materials and the former colonial power as the producer and marketeer of finished manufactured goods.

In even a smaller "shell", neocolonialism is characterised by:

QUESTION: "So your new job makes you independent?"

ANSWER: "Absolutely. I get here any time I want before eight and leave just when I please after five"

3.5 Perhaps the most ugly form of neocolonialism is characterised by the assumed role of a superpower as a virtual policeman of the so-called free world. By sheer force of a military and economic power and under the pretext of containing the spread of an unwanted ideology, the affairs of much of the world are being managed and organised so that they remain hospitable, politically and economically, to the continuation of the traditional patterns of trade and investment. The idea is to ensure that no developments occur which may lead to the nationalisation of foreign owned assets since this may in turn limit trade and investment opportunities and access to raw materials.
3.6 The control and influence of the rich nations over the poor ones may take place through such activities as grants, loans, technical assistance and other forms of economic and military aid. Economic aid is given, so it is argued, as part of an effort by the rich nations to share their wealth with the poor ones on humanitarian grounds. Military aid is given in order to "win" friends. Above all, aid does win political allies and may thus contribute to the perpetuation of the dependency syndrome upon which conditions which are most conducive to the creation of neocolonies thrive.

4. AFRICA'S VULNERABILITY TO NEOCOLONIALISM

4.1 Regrettably, most post colonial Africa is very vulnerable to the growth of neo-colonialism. During the colonial era, the debt burden of the colonies was not directly apparent to both the colonial agents and the indigenous population. This was mainly due to the following factors:

4.1.1 Colonial governments avoided the accumulation of budget and trade deficits in the colonies by merely making straight grants from their treasuries.

4.1.2 Any borrowing by the colonies was done on concessional terms from the money and capital markets of the colonial powers.

4.1.3 Investment by the private companies in specific activities such as mining and the production of export crops was encouraged and this investment was facilitated by common currency arrangements as well as by the absence of restrictions in the movement of capital.
4.1.4 Some of the colonies managed to accumulate healthy surpluses and reserves resulting from favourable commodity prices.

4.2 After independence these factors virtually ceased to exist. The former colonies began to lay emphasis on the improvement of the quality of life of the majority of their citizens. Grants and concessional loans which the colonial powers used to provide were drastically reduced, commodity prices became unfavourable, and balance of payments deteriorated as imports of manufactured goods began to exceed exports or raw materials. Foreign borrowing both from official sources in the rich world as well as from private institutions became necessary, and this has resulted in a debt burden of alarming proportions. The burden is aggravated by the fact that in many instances, debt servicing is rescheduled on the false assumption that there will be better days ahead.

Don't we wish we could just obey the words of the Psalms:

"Cast thy burden upon the Lord and he shall sustain thee. He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." 

4.3 However, in the circumstances dependency has not only been continued but it has also been increased. Thus the seeds of neolonialism have been planted deeper in the soil of Africa. Given the generally hostile international environment, the present management and performance of Africa's economies, its borrowing policies, its debt management and servicing capabilities, the rather low level of productivity and the general instability of the continent as demonstrated by countless coups,
counter - coups and other dissident activities, there is little hope that the vulnerability of the continent to neo-colonialism will ever disappear into the annals of history. The question is "What can the African university do about the matter?" i.e. Can the university cut the Gordian knot?

5. NEO-COLONIALISM - CAN THE AFRICAN UNIVERSITY INTERVENE?

Here I want to distinguish between neo-colonialism in the state in which the university finds itself and neocolonialism as it affects the university itself. It is probably more convenient to deal with the latter first.

5.1 NEO-COLONIALISM AND THE INTERNAL PERFORMANCE OF THE AFRICAN UNIVERSITY

5.1.1 Assuming that the state is a neo-colony in accordance with the definitions that have already been given, it follows that a university which depends on such a state for its sustenance will similarly be exposed to neo-colonialism in its own internal procedures and structures. First of all the university is likely to be modelled on the metropolitan system from which it was derived. Its objects, as well as its academic and administrative structure will most likely be similar to those of universities of the former colonial power. The economic situation of the state may be such that the university is as subject to aid, both financial and technical, as the rest of the nation. The books and ideas upon which it bases its academic programmes may invariable come from the metropolitan world. The majority of its staff both local and expatriate may have been trained in the metropolitan world. In short, the university may know only a trifle better than what it has learned and emulated from the former colonial power. In these circumstances the university may justifiably be described as an intellectual neo-colony.
5.1.2 However, what matters most is not whether or not the university receives foreign aid in order to achieve its mission. The crucial thing is that it must be sufficiently intellectually de-colonised to combat some of the worst dangers of dependency. It must set its own priorities in teaching, research and service and resist with all the powers at its disposal the attempts by outside "advisors" to dominate its choice of direction and policy implementation strategies. Blazing the democratic trail in all its procedures is one way of ensuring that whatever is done is first subjected to thorough internal scrutiny by as wide a cross-section of opinion as possible. In this way any undue pressure on the institution to adopt policies and procedures that may be in the interest of an outside power will be detected and resisted.

5.2 THE UNIVERSITY AND THE NEO-COLONIALISM OF THE STATE

5.2.1 There are several areas in which the African university can intervene in the fight against neocolonialism at the national level. Firstly, there is general agreement in the Third World that the goal of whatever political or ideological system is adopted must be to give a higher standard of life to the people through social justice so that we do not have very rich people and very poor ones in the same country. Maxism, socialism, humanism or social democracy are used as criteria to measure the degree of social justice. Even with regard to these ideological orientations, there is almost a general consensus that no single model can apply to all states in the same way. The university in Africa should have the right to analyse the relationships between the socialist oriented ideologies and capitalism and not necessarily insist that the two cannot
exist under the same sky. For instance neither socialism
nor capitalism can be built on poverty or scarcity of
materials. Whatever brand of socialist ideology we adopt
must be accompanied by a high level of productivity in
agriculture, commerce and industry. Wasn't it Max himself
who asserted that socialism must be built on a capitalist
base so that it becomes even better!

2.2 Secondly there is the problem of dependency.
The university in Africa must be in the forefront in the
struggle against dependency by acting as a "think tank" on the
question of South-South Cooperation in trade so that the control
of African commodity prices may revert to the hands of the
people. Since some of the policies of wholesale nationalisation
of enterprises and services have failed and thus lead to
the further growth of dependency and neo-colonialism, the
university in Africa must carry out research on the relative
advantages of eradicating bureaucratic capitalism so that the
state economy may dominate, while allowing small capitalistic
enterprises to survive. The ability of the state to
take over everything must, after all, be limited.

5.2.3 Thirdly, as a means of combating the perpetuation of neo-colonialism
resulting from the poor performance of African economies,
the university should provide intellectual analyses of the
advantages which may derive from the separation of the ownership from
the management of the major monopolies such as the airlines,
the railways, mining houses etc. Common sense would seem to
dictate that management should be left in the hands of the people
most closely involved in whatever enterprise is at stake eg.
- Universities in the hands of academics and administrators, agricultural enterprises in the hands of agriculturists, etc., and not in the hands of governments or government appointed bureaucrats. This must surely lead to efficiency and better performance of the economy as opposed to the inherent inefficiency of government managed enterprises.

Epigram: In government the next thing after planned economy is planned extravagance and the motive power is the taxpayer harnessed to a treadmill.

5.2.4 Fourthly the African university can assist with ideas on methods of planning which could alleviate the scourge of neo-colonialism. Very few universities involve themselves in terms of subjecting marketing forces to rigorous planning and making plans that may eventually become guidelines or reference points for development. Even a socialist economy must have money and markets and these should be subjects of much planning.

5.2.5 Fifthly the African university must initiate an intellectual debate in the quest of ensuring that our economies begin to contain the growth of even more subtle forms of neo-colonialism. This is the relationship between social justice and egalitarianism. While it has often been fashionable to say "from each according to his ability, and to each according to his needs", there would seem to be some merit in arguing that each person should have his share of the national cake according to his/her contribution. So long as everybody is accorded the same opportunities as everybody else is there anything wrong with adding the phrase: "to each according to his ability" to the above slogan?
Finally universities should do more research on food security issues and on industrial productivity. The production and distribution of commodities and the emphasis on the production of high quality grain in larger quantities should attract the greater attention of our Faculties of Agriculture and Social Studies. Thus the university in Africa must serve as a genesis of enquiry into the social and economic requirements of the continent. It must be a centre of innovation, bringing out solutions aimed at achieving the mental emancipation of the people from the cultural and social aggression inflicted upon them by colonial military conquest followed by political and social oppression together with economic exploitation. The African university must be capable of producing men and women with the highest level of social conscience sensitised to social justice in the community. It must produce expertise in guiding the continent in domestic (South-South) and international trade, and in meeting bodily requirements in the field of nutrition and health. The list is endless.
SUMMARY

6.1 This paper has attempted to describe the African university with emphasis on its relative autonomy and degree of academic freedom. It has argued that these privileges place the university in a unique situation to look critically and constructively at the problems of the continent. An attempt was made to describe the main tenets of neo-colonialism and the vulnerability of the African continent in particular, and the Third World in general, to the forces of neo-colonialism. Finally suggestions have been made concerning the possible reaction of the African university in terms of attempting to alleviate the evils of neo-colonialism both in its internal procedures as well as acting as a source of intellectual inspiration for the African nations to improve their economic performance and their managerial skills. In essence the solution to the problems of neo-colonialism boils down to continental self-sufficiency through improved efficiency, high productivity, good distribution policies and South-South Cooperation.

6.2 In view of the special condition of the university as the major generator of independent thought - a place where pebbles are polished and diamond dimmed - Africa should make every endeavour to ensure that the institution is as much as possible protected from undue pressures that may result from over exposure to forces which may promote its deterioration and degeneration into an intellectual neo-colony. As Professor Kamba has observed "The universities -- require more support than they currently receive from the governments of the South."
They need more financial support for their activities and they need less of the bureaucratic barriers which inhibit this. They need more "value space" to perform their critical function and less in the way of pressures for conformity and short-term pragmatic particularism." 4/

In a keynote speech entitled "The Strangulation of the university in Africa" delivered at a recent conference in Arusha, Tanzania, Professor Lameck Goma described the plight of the African university in such alarming phrases as "the arbatros round the neck," "the tyranny of excessive demand" and "the starvation diet." He concluded, "The university, as one of the primary institutions from which may flow some light on the great human problems that confront man in the contemporary world, deserves to survive and prosper in Africa. Therefore, anything which strengthens the university in Africa is to the good. Effective utilisation of the available university capacity and / or the provision of the needed capacity in areas of deficiency, must be counted among the favourable factors in this endeavour. But the principal actors in the university enterprise in Africa must stand higher, see farther and act with more wisdom than would be demanded by a less complex situation." 5/

CONCLUSION

It is indeed gratifying to note that by organising this conference you are acknowledging the fact that the African university must make a significant contribution to the efforts aimed not only at preventing the growth of intellectual and general neo-colonialism on the continent, but also at winning the struggle against it. That struggle must continue and truth must prevail.
There is just one problem I have with intellectuals viz the use of words which have no meaning to the ordinary person. At a panel discussion on "creative" education one speaker suddenly remarked, "I have discovered that if you have pupils of greater ability, you will get better results". Everybody rocked with laughter at this rather momentous announcement. Then some intellectual suggested that the speaker would have been better advised had he said something like this: - "If the correlation of intrinsic competency to actual numerical representation is definitely high, then the thoroughly objective conclusion may in-expugnably be reached that the scholastic derivations and outgrowths will attain a pattern of unified superiority".

Of course no one would have known what he was talking about, and he would thereafter have been regarded with awe as a real intellectual.

I hope that this audience does not judge me guilty of this "intellectual crime"

I thank you.
FOOTNOTES


2/ "Governance and Higher Education - the Legitimacy of Intervention" by Harry W Arthurs; Higher Education Group, The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

3/ Psalms 55:22


5/ "The strangulation of the University in Africa" - A keynote address to the University Capacity Study Conference, Arusha September 1987.

OTHER LITERATURE


5. Notes taken during a lecture by Professor Huan Xiang entitled "The Chinese Experience".