A Critical Reflection on Neoliberalism Policies and Neo-colonialism at African Universities

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Abstract

This article aims to explore the challenges that institutions of higher education in Africa continue to encounter following the implementation of neoliberalism policies, which brought major changes to the structure and management of higher education. The most notable changes were the re-conceptualisation of education from being a public good to a private good and the introduction of cost-sharing policies. This shift had implications for the funding and restructuring of higher education. Literature is replete with examples of a myriad of challenges faced by students and higher learning institutions due to the disruption. Besides, academic freedom has been compromised and at some institutions courses deemed 'nonmarketable and less attractive' have been terminated. Freedom to explore, think and educate has been hampered by impositions from donor nations. In view of this, the article argues that, although entrenching neoliberalism in African universities has changed the structure and management of institutions, it also resulted in an increase in the cost of education related businesses. The article notes that the policy shift continues to make higher education inaccessible to the majority of students from poor families. The trajectory of these changes started in the 1980s, when the World Bank championed a new economic model that introduced a new cost-sharing mechanism based on Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPS). The orientation of this shift was towards marketisation, and the privatisation of higher education affected students and universities in different ways. Outside pressure from multinational agencies continues to shape the operationalisation of higher education in Africa. This article views such pressure negatively as it is reminiscent of colonialism and can cause universities to lose their identities and autonomy. Based on a conceptual analysis of secondary literature and data, the article concludes that African universities have to problematise and engage critically with neoliberalism policies and resist secondary colonialisation by exercising greater autonomy regarding decisions that affect their constituencies, the courses being offered and the general goal of education to promote the public good. The disruption of academic programmes and needy students' lack of access to higher education ought to be addressed.

Key words: Neoliberalism, public universities, policies, funding, challenges

1. Introduction: Conceptualising Neoliberalism in Public Higher Education Reforms

Higher education and education in general undoubtedly play a pivotal role in the well-being of individuals and the development of nation-states as it is intricately linked to human resource development, the advancement of human rights and democracy, and social, economic, and political development. Its efficacy in promoting general well-being, individual freedom and upward mobility is also well theorised (Badat 2011; Naidoo 2010; Nussbaum 1999; Sen 1993). Yet, as a public good, higher education is positioned to serve the public and drive a developmental agenda for individual nations (Bozalek & Leibowitz 2018; Naidoo 2010; Vally 2007). Therefore, the aforementioned relations between education, individual well-being and human resource development provide strong and convincing associations between education and human development theorists (Sen 1993). Buoyed by these assertions and the unique positioning of higher education, post-colonial nations have continued to invest heavily in higher education (CHE 2004: Muricho & Chang'ach 2013; Naidoo 2010; Shahjahan 2012). An exploration of the implementation of neoliberalism policies indicates that the restructuring of African higher education had significant effects on access, management, and funding. As a result, I note that buttressing higher education in sub-Saharan Africa to enact such policies was premature and did not take into cognisance the lived experiences and contexts of the various stakeholders. Most African countries were emerging from an era of colonisation and were in the process of rebuilding and repositioning themselves.

In the 1980s, many African public universities were impelled to simultaneously adopt neoliberalism policies based on marketisation, corporatisation, commodification and consumerism rationale without significant differentiation (Hahn 2007; Oanda Ogachi 2011). Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) constituted a new vehicle for the mitigation of the financial woes of the 1980s. Cost-sharing and marketisation of higher education were instituted without taking cognisance of the impact of the policy due to geospatial differences between, and the histories of countries on the continent (Brock-Utne 2003; Peet 2002*)*. The World Bank's unorthodox involvement in higher education marked the dearth of government funding. Prior to the World Bank's involvement, education was considered to be an inherent public good and had been heavily subsidised by governments in the former dispensation (Brown 2015; Ward 2012). The shift to neoliberalism reconceptualised education in terms of funding, management, teaching and learning, and knowledge production and dissemination. By applying the market logic, education was viewed as an economic venture and investment (Murunga 2007; Saunders 2015; Ward 2012).

Collins and Rhoades (2010) believe that involving the World Bank in managing higher education was a bad idea due to its stringent economic policies. Citing the adverse effects of implementing such policies in Uganda and Thailand, these authors state that applying the market logic to higher education is not only implausible, but also fluid. Opponents of the policy equate it to secondary colonialism (Collins & Rhoades, 2010; Hanh, 2007). The perception that Africa has always been needy is misconstrued and entrenches negative discourses levelled against the continent (Sawyerr 2002). On the contrary, Africa is endowed with many natural resources, favourable weather conditions and a young population. It is paradoxical that despite facing a myriad of challenges ranging from corruption and bad governance to the consequences of colonialism, some African economies have simultaneously enjoyed prosperity and poverty (Murunga & Nasong'o 2007; Osei-Kofi, 2012; Sawyerr 2002). After emerging from wanton colonialism, many countries on the African continent were keen to strengthen their democracies, develop their economies and revamp their education systems.

However, the post-independence epoch has been characterised by senseless spending and the squandering of public resources that have plunged public institutions into financial oblivion (Hanh 2007; Mamdani 2007). The challenges have been galvanised by bad governance structures and leadership, poorly formulated economic policies, and corruption by the elite class, which gave lending institutions the impetus to tighten their grip on the continent. Some scholars have argued that the continued involvement of those institutions after independence is tantamount to propagating colonialism and neo-colonialism (Collins & Rhoades 2010; Torres 2011). It is equally troubling when the same lending institutions extend loans that are not well checked and secured to third world countries. I therefore argue that relations of dependency created by the loaning systems can be viewed as an asymmetrical mechanism for sustaining colonial-era machinations and domination. The effects of the nexus between the two imperatives have been witnessed in Argentina and Brazil (Murunga & Nasong'o 2007; Torres 2011).

The aforementioned tumultuous shifts that occurred in the 1980s continue to inform the current structure and management of higher education. Subsequent sections in the article will deal with some of the issues raised such as, the effects of the advent of neoliberalism, which gave rise to a new tangent that moved education from being a public good to becoming a private good, an investment with expected returns and dividends (Boyer, 1990). The mundane changes have also stimulated debates regarding the role and place of African universities, which are drawn between two fault-lines: whether universities should be aligned to an instrumentalism / liberalism agenda that serves the needs of the market, or to the social functional role of education that is aligned with extending the general public good and the well-being of a nation and its people (Brown 2015; Leibowitz & Bozalek 2018).

2. Neoliberalism in Public Higher Education

The past few decades saw a proliferation of neoliberalism policies that overturned national economies to pro-business ventures deemed to be economically viable and efficient. Against this backdrop, public institutions were targeted by the new movement and were revisioned, shrunken and professionalised (Boyer 1990). The underlying rationale was based on minimising losses and maximising profits. Public institutions, such as health, housing and education were identified as *black holes* into which public money was being poured with very few economic returns (Rhoades 2004). Seen as wasteful expenditure ventures, they were without incentives, unproductive and wasteful (Rhoades 2004; Slaughter & Rhoades 2004; Ward 2012).

Privatising higher education meant that more fee-paying students were admitted with little regard to whether their academic performance actually merited admissions. This decision was based on the cost element. The commodification of higher education meant that fewer private students qualified for government subsidies. This move can be perceived as incredulous and unpalatable since substantively relegating governments from adjudicating over education matters is problematic (Mamdani 2007; Murunga 2007; Wangenge-Ouma 2012). Peter (1992) observes that education is no longer distinctive or special as it is viewed like any other product or service to be traded on the marketplace. The proponents of neoliberalism felt that by alienating universities from market forces, knowledge production and dissemination, had been rendered too public and over-socialised. Therefore, it was argued that universities, as engines of innovation, should rather work closely with the markets and avoid public ventures (Bebbington, Chatterton, Routledge, Swain, Tickell, Tyfield, & French2013; Hendrigan 2017; Rhoades, Maldonado-Maldonado, Ordorika, & Velazquez 2004; Ward 2012). The institutionalisation of policies that required universities to operate like private enterprises, regardless of the perils, ushered in a new era in higher education. For instance, pressure to publish under the slogan *Publish or Perish* is commonly experienced at institutions of higher education faculties and has become a dominant discourse in higher education (Anderson 2017; Slaughter & Rhoades 2004).

The effects of publishing are reflected in international rankings, staff appraisals and connectedness and proximity to market forces. The undue pressure to publish could affect the quality of research publications due to the perception that it is a mere tick-box function for monitoring and evaluation purposes. Anderson (2017) argues that academics have been complicit in not challenging neoliberalism in their institutions because their subjectivities, research and knowledge have been privatised and commodified. Nuanced subject positions, spaces and states that intricately intersect with power relations are produced and sustained in multiple and complex ways through neoliberalism and need to be explored in detail (Allen 2003). Some of the pertinent questions to be engaged with are: How many international journals are published on the continent, and what is the pain and cost of publishing? I argue that the limitations and benefits of publishing should be appropriated in order to account for African scholarship. The most immediate effect has been increased competition between institutions and departments in designing courses and research outputs that attract funding from the private sector (Anderson 2017; Mamdani 2007; Stone 2003).

Under the purview of a theory of academic capitalism, many stakeholders work closely together for the good of the institution. These teams include academic staff, administrators, researchers and students who use state resources to create and share knowledge that link universities to the new economic order (Rhoades 2004). According to Rhoades, academic capitalism goes against the fundamental social roles of education. The ubiquitous promise of equal development has become tacitly elusive for minorities. I consequently suggest that the emphasis on the marketisation of education and its service to the competitive corporate world has scattered the dreams of upward mobility for many underprivileged students who are unable to afford the high cost of education (Slaughter & Rhoades 2004).

Saunders (2015) examines the salient logic that defines the acceptance of excellence performance frameworks by post-secondary institutions and concludes that the fluidity of the logic makes it susceptible to greater scrutiny. It should therefore not necessarily be treated as a neutral, universal, natural and legitimate goal of education. Moreover, neutrality obfuscates an in-depth analysis of underlying ideologies that entrench commodification and marketisation, which are channelled through accountability, evaluation and competitive tools (Peters 2016: Saunders 2015; Stone 2003). Stone (2003) finds the lack of critical engagement with neoliberalism policies problematic. Other scholars liken the dynamics in the shift in policy to Foucault's governmentality (Davis & Bansel 2007; Foucault 1994; Hindess 1998). The reality of the intersection of power and knowledge is evident in how knowledge is produced and appropriated. This phenomenon has raised questions regarding who produces knowledge, how it circulates and who the audience is (Anderson 2017; Foucault 1994; Slaughter & Rhoades 2004).

With the reality of advancing a public good agenda through civic engagement and civil societies being in jeopardy, universities have been put in direct confrontation with the government pundits. The disruption of one of the key tenets of higher education, which is to produce and freely share knowledge with the public, has been devastating (Peet 2002; Peters 2016; Stone 2003; Ward 2012). The reshuffling of faculties along disciplinary, professional and epistemic alleys has been very divisive to academia. Some scholars have argued that interdisciplinarity is ideological and represents a political problem that is re-organised and presented in a simple scientific language (Bebbington et al. 2013; Mamdani 2007; Murunga 2007; Torres 2011; Ward 2012).

Although the emergence of new relationships and identities has been realised through the policy shift, the dilemma of the emergent relationships being contradictory and distanced from the values and norms of universities is surreal. Mamdani (2007) theorises the relations along two planes: a soft version (limited) and a hard version. The priorities in the soft version are set by the public, whereas in the hard version (commercialisation) they are set by the market forces (Mamdani 2007; Peet 2002). It is apparent that, while a limited relationship between higher education and marketisation appropriates the market for public ends, commercialisation subverts public institutions for private ends (Rhoades et al. 2004; Tabulawa 2017; Ward 2012). Furthermore, the idea of university spaces shrinking and becoming increasingly stressful environments where lecturers and teachers work very hard and have no time for themselves is real (Berg & Seeber 2016), while students are viewed as self-directing and enterprising, competitive, and enhancing their human capabilities. Public universities are increasingly turning to online and distance learning (Davis & Bansel 2007; Smith, Jeffery & Collins, 2018;) which, compared to contact teaching and learning, are considered to be time saving and require minimum resources.

Contrary to this view, prevalence and preference are poignantly perpetuating further marginalisation for poor students who have no access to online platforms due to a lack of connectivity or the requisite gadgets (Anderson 2017; Calafell 2012; Jones & Calafell 2012). Saunders (2015) argues that the obsession with neoliberalism is contentious and must be challenged in post-secondary education if minorities are to survive and benefit from the available opportunities.

3. Theoretical Perspectives on Neoliberalism

Peters, Liu and Ordercin (2012) assert that the new managerialism that is being championed through neoliberalism was informed by an amalgamation of theories from the model of corporate managerialism and private sector management styles, public choice theory and new institutional economics, agency theory and transaction cost analysis. These models have been very influential in the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Neoliberalism is broadly viewed as a structural force that affects people's life-chances, and as an ideology of governance that produces and shapes subjectivities (Davies & Bansel 2007; Ganti 2014). It is also seen as a definitive top-down imposition management strategy that was meant to retool and reorganise education. Neoliberalism was championed by the World Bank and adopted by many universities across the globe (Brown 2015; Davis & Bansel 2007; Ward 2012;).

The model was underpinned by a competitiveness rationale and flexible labour laws. It was argued that the two imperatives would elevate education to market status and, as such, would operate like a competitive business venture (Smith, Jeffery & Collins 2018). Regarded as a methodical move to preclude education from being a public entity sponsored by governments, it succeeded in turning higher education into a private enterprise and its locale was transferred to the hands of consumers of knowledge for market presence and acknowledgement. As demonstrated by Brown (2015), the market agenda mostly drives a neoliberal agenda.

Neoliberalism does not merely privatise—turn over to the market for individual production and consumption—that which was formerly publicly supported and valued. Rather, it formulates everything everywhere in terms of capital investment and appreciation, including and especially humans themselves (Brown 2015: 176).

Brown (2003) opines that neoliberalism targets the restructuring of education in general in order to produce individualised and responsiblised subjects who take on the role of entrepreneurial actors across various dimensions of their lives. The migration to a consumer model of 'consumer choice' and 'user pays' was aimed at making students more responsible—a highly contentious and debatable move. Welfarism, which supposedly promoted entitlement, was discontinued and in its place a new social contract was invented that, instead of making funding available for higher education, required student loans or own funding to be implemented (Bebbington et al. 2013; Rhoades, Maldonado-Maldonado, Ordorika & Velazquez 2004: Ward 2012).

Neoliberalists envisaged several reforms that would see the cost of higher education move from government to private individuals or institutions (Hanh 2007). The exegesis was premised on the monopoly of education by nation states that had allegedly produced entitled and incompetent, unmotivated and complacent teachers (Hess 2013; Leibowitz & Bozalek 2018). Schools and universities were seen as having failed in their key function of preparing learners and students for their entrepreneurial roles in the economy. Their perceived ineptitude to deliver on future roles as national, regional, and international agents was also scrutinised (Hess 2013; Saunders 2015; Ward, 2012). Increasingly, internationalisation, withdrawal of government subsidies and the entry of strategic partners in public institutions in Africa imbued entrepreneurial culture (Mamdani 2007; Murunga 2007; Wangenge-Ouma 2012). Oanda-Ogachi (2011) further notes that neoliberalism, perceived as a benevolent project, has changed how universities were initially conceptualised. As centres of academic freedom and knowledge, universities are charged with the responsibility of inculcating critical thinking in the minds of students. This has since changed with the new metric of the co-opted role of universities as exclusive entrepreneurial enterprises that serve a private agenda and no longer focus on the advancement of the general public good (Murunga 2007; Osei-Kofi 2012; Sawyerr 2002).

Currently universities require protection against the censoring of teaching and learning materials, decline in infrastructure and a lack of intellectual freedom. Mamdani (2007) explores these contradictions by discussing two major developments in East African institutions of higher learning. In 1990, the Makerere and Dar es Salaam declarations called for the protection of the sanctity of academic freedom and social responsibility through the Dar es Salaam Declaration on Academic Freedom and Social Responsibility of Academics and the Kampala Declaration on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility. Mamdani explains that the two declarations were aimed at protecting the sanctity of universities and securing the freedom of academics from political harassment (Mamdani 2007; Oanda Ogachi 2011).

Notwithstanding the above views, I also reference the institutionalisation of neoliberal policies in higher education as new threats to internal faculty management and governance structures. Universities are exposed to various forms of tensions as different sectors jostle to deconstruct old orders for their relevance and survival (Baatjes 2005; Wangenge-Ouma 2008). The first area of tension is related to the incongruity between managing relations created by the binary between public versus private goals of higher education. Despite the fact that education is seen as a private venture and entity that is supposed to compete at the same level as other market enterprises, it is subjected to public audits, monitoring and evaluation (accountability mechanisms). Furthermore, the widening gaps between disciplinary and interdisciplinary conundrums continue to precipitate relevance wars that have inadvertently affected unity among faculty members (Baatjes 2005: Mamdani 2007)

The differentiation between public versus private students has also elevated debates about the exclusionary nature of higher education (Baatjes 2005: Osei-Kofi 2012; Torres 2011). These tensions point to the need to rethink and recalibrate public higher education so that the role of serving the customer does not dominate and overpower the role of serving the citizens, which is an aspect of extending the public good/common good domain. In view of these tensions, I argue that when education is viewed as a privilege and a choice, as opposed to a right, access is curtailed, especially for poor but deserving students. Consultant-client relationships are entrenched, which is polarising and makes them unfit for the intended purpose. Hence the majority of underdeveloped countries that experience extreme abject poverty are finding it difficult to meet the demands of neoliberalism, which have to compete against the needs of the citizenry (Mamdani 2007; Wangenge-Ouma 2012: Ward 2012).

4. Neoliberalism in South African and Kenyan Higher Education

An analysis of South African higher education serves as an example of how neoliberalism policies have been entrenched in higher education policies. Primarily, universities in South Africa are tasked with producing graduates who are sufficiently skilled to steer the country into the global economy, which resonates with a 'viable enterprises' penchant. However, universities are also expected to play the public good role of producing critical citizens for a vibrant democratic society (CHE 2004; National Plan 2001). In South Africa, the alignment between higher education and market demands is outlined by the CHE (2000) as follows:

> Higher Education must play a central role in meeting the difficult realities of international competition in an environment of rapid global change, driven, as it is, by momentous changes in information and knowledge production systems (CHE 2000: 5).

The DoE's White Paper (1997: 10) emphasises the responsibility of higher education in South Africa to address the needs of the labour market 'in a knowledge-driven and knowledge-dependent society, with the ever-changing high-level competencies and expertise necessary for growth and prosperity of a modern economy'.

Beyond this understanding, the shift in education policy in South Africa can be attributed to the Foucauldian (1994) notion of changing governmentality and global hegemony (Peet 2002). Furthermore, this is an aspect of the emergence of neoliberalism and globalisation rationality in government. Governmentality deals not only with politics and structures of governance, but also engages with the act of directing the conduct and behaviour of people or groups and structuring the possible actions of others (Foucault 1994). It is a calculation of a mode of action by those in government and others in positions of power (Davis & Bansel 2007).

The internationalisation of higher education in South Africa has been driven by the need to simultaneously attain global identity and national identity. It was used to transcend the apartheid era exclusion from the rest of the continent and the world. Subsequent reforms to the curriculum have been undertaken to respond to the requirements of the political economy and globalisation (Knight & De Wit 1997). Peters (2004) demonstrates this by giving the below explanation of how university education is aligned to market needs:

> Signifies the corporate bureaucratization of the university. Universities have become sites for the development of "human resources". Guided by mission statements and strategic plans, performance output is measured, and total quality management (TQM) assures quality outcomes (Peters 2004:7).

Even though South Africa is an advanced liberal state, the realities of deep racism and entrenched inequalities cannot be ignored (Leibowitz & Bozalek 2018 Peet 2002; Tikly 2003). Baatjes (2005) notes that the confluence of neoliberalism and historical injustices in South African higher education has obfuscated the realisation of the goals of neoliberalism. Naidoo (2010) argues that as a result, the implications of neoliberalism in South African higher education cannot be ignored. Emerging from a segregated regime, higher education has, on the one hand, grappled with finding a balance between democratising its institutions, and on the other hand paying attention to the demands of globalisation and marketisation (CHE 2000; Leibowitz & Bozalek 2018). Ideally, by bowing to international pressure and entrenching policies that were akin to neoliberalism, South African higher education had disrupted one of the key tenets of transformation, namely the principle of access to equal opportunities (DoE 1997; Ndlovu 2017; Subreenduth 2013).

It is therefore apparent that higher education has become an incubator for producing and impacting knowledge and skills that are needed in global economies, in other words, as training for employability (Naidoo 2010; Subreenduth 2013). Critics of this point of view have noted that it is problematic to link higher education to the global economy without critically engaging with the implications of the policies in relation to historical factors that have entrenched marginalisation. With regard to neoliberalism, critics have pointed to subtle and consistently negative repercussions, especially in low-income countries and impoverished communities. Socioeconomic inequalities have been heightened, the quality of education has been compromised and the development of research has been stifled (Baatjes 2005; Mamdani 2007; Torres 2011; Vally 2007).

Young (2003) observes that individual countries need to interrogate international tools such as the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) before implementation as they are not devoid of criticism. For instance, the idea of having a coordinated NQF originated in Scotland in 1984, followed by the UK in 1986, and has become a globalised phenomenon. In the case of South Africa, the NQF was formulated to meet the goals of international competitiveness in conjunction with democratising and transforming a fractured, elitist and undemocratic education system. Allais (2003) points out the incompatibility of juxtaposing democracy to neoliberalism by allowing the latter to occupy a dominant position. The incongruity in the SANQF (South African Qualifications Framework) are lucid and make it untenable to have a unified qualification framework for higher education. The SANQF framework for higher education was conceptualised to meet the demands of a non-compulsory, pre-tertiary industrial training. This goal is contradictory to the demands of formal education and training which is based on a different epistemological structure and socialisation (Ensor 2010).

Vally (2007) is of the opinion that South African higher education is dealing with a multiplicity of past and inherent inequalities that have not been succinctly addressed. The operationalisation of neoliberalism is impeded by the inability of the South African government to fully realise the right to education for its citizenry as envisaged in the Constitution and the National Plan (2001). Impediments to this realisation can be linked to the class nature of the South African society and the prevailing political economy that puts immense pressure on the education system to produce individuals with the skills required to boost the economy (Vally 2007). Similarly, historical factors (race, gender, sexism and classism) that continue to shape South African society in general and the education landscape in particular, are part and parcel of the challenges that currently hamper the full realisation of education for all in South Africa (Baatjes 2005; Badat 2010; CHE 2000). In his thesis, Peet (2002) suggests that the South African government should adopt a political policy that will take care of the most vulnerable members of the society.

Finally, Kenya's higher education is also replete with examples of the effects of implementing neoliberal policies. Pertinent literature from Kenya asserts that the burgeoning of higher education through parallel and night programmes (vocationalisation) for fee-paying students compromised the quality of education and overstretched the existing human and physical resources. Coalescing differentiated systems along paying and non-paying planes has been detrimental to Kenyan universities (Murunga 2007; Murunga & Nasong'o 2007). The differentiation has espoused the difficulties and levels of marginalisation of non-paying students (Mamdani 2007; Wangenge-Ouma 2008). Apart from lecturers paying more attention to students in the parallel stream than to those in the conventional stream, it has been alleged that the quality of courses being offered is questionable. Universities have been accused of teaching courses that are poorly conceptualised and planned and lack alignment to any discipline-related knowledge (Murunga 2007; Wangenge-Ouma 2012). Examples from the two countries demonstrate the complexity and fluidity of implementing neoliberalism policies in higher education.

5. Perils of Neoliberalism in African Public Higher Education

Although neoliberalism may have positive effects that this article has not engaged with in detail, reviewed scholarly work shows that students, staff and management in higher education have experienced negative effects. The education sector has been plunged into crises, and higher education has been at a crossroad for the past three decades. This dilemma was exacerbated by the incongruence in new systems of management that were borrowed from different sectors of the market and incorporated in the education sector without considering the uniqueness of the sector (Leibowitz & Bozalek 2018). As professionalism and autonomy were undermined, more accountability tools and assessments were adopted by institutions of higher learning to ensure that outputs were in line with the demands of the business model (Collins & Rothe 2019; Jeffery & Collins 2018; Shahjahan 2012).

The undue pressure on professionals has compromised teaching because professional judgements have been obstructed by market logic (Jones & Calafell 2012; Osei-Kofi 2012). Pertinent decisions relating to what to teach, who to teach, who does research, which research should be undertaken, who belongs and who does not are no longer taken by the academics. I argue that systemic exclusion of minorities is bound to escalate when the day-to-day activities and experiences are decoupled from the management of public institutions (Jones & Calafell 2012; Mbembe 2016; Ndlovu 2017). Moreover, the pervasiveness of the straight-jacket approach that exemplifies a single narrative is understated. Homogenising and capitalising higher education institutions regardless of spatial, contextual, and individual differences affects the subaltern (Anderson 2017; Boughey 2005; Collins & Rothe 2019; Stohr 2003).

> Neoliberalism's collision with late capitalism creates an ostensible level playing field, but only for those with the monetary capital to enter the game; countries and people are brought closer through technology and trade, but the digital divide and neo-colonialism reinforce the longstanding hegemony of the West; and, finally, from all these practices results the epistemic and physical violence inherent in a system that privileges some and oppresses others (Jones & Calafell, p. 964).

Public universities have experienced a proliferation of individualism due to aggressive competitiveness. A new form of barbaric individualism, which can be likened to a dog-eats-dog mentality, continues to produce people who are more detached and lacking social solidarity (Jones & Calafell 2012; Shahjahan 2012). Furthermore, the same spirit thrives in students and alumnus organisations that have been reduced to customers (Anderson 2017; Collins & Rothe, 2019; Shahjahan 2012). The decision to treat students as customers has led to high increments in tuition and residential fees. Some have questioned the motive behind the exorbitant charges and linked them to plans devised to exclude those who lack means to pay for higher education. Alternately, those who apply for loans to enable them to pursue higher education are subjected to market interest rates, which has led to their escalating indebtedness when they are unable to repay their loans. This is notwithstanding the reality of unemployment that compounds the problem for graduates who might not find employment (Collins & Rothe 2019; Torres 2011).

As part of embedding the customisation of students, universities spend large amounts of money on marketing their institutions' products and services to prospective students and allied partners. Since institutions have assumed this new role as *marketers,* steep competition has developed between various institutions that strategically produce and provide products that are attractive to a particular group of clientele. Furthermore, through the merchandising of university paraphernalia, logos and trademarks, students' identities change to customers to captive market (Levidow 2002; Slaughter & Rhoades 2004). The heightened relationship between knowledge and capital has penetrated all facets of universities' activities and the implications can be seen in terms of the quality and quantity of education; patents of generic material; intellectual rights; digitisation of material and privatisation of public domain knowledge; shifting universities activities to online platforms; research outputs; and privatisation of cultural artefacts (Anderson 2012; Bebbington et al. 2013; Slaughter & Rhoades 2004; Ward 2012). Equally troubling is the astronomical expansion of higher education, the surging numbers of business schools post 1980 and the upscaling of certain subjects and courses due to their relatedness to industry and market rationale (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)). At the same time, the mutation and credentialisation of courses have seen campuses sprouting as industry training camps (Collins & Rothe 2019; Shahjahan 2012).

I intimate that interdisciplinarity, which gives preference to neoliberal subjects in higher education is market driven. It is neither apolitical nor neutral; rather, it is a technical re-organisation of knowledge, which is a factor of the knowledge economy. It is also a case of a nuanced and deliberate political manoeuvre aimed at promoting monopoly of processes and products of higher education (Berg & Seeber 2016; Tabulawa 2017). Through this initiative, the academic is rendered powerless. In the same vein, the centring of consumerism / instrumentalism diminishes the intrinsic value of education as knowledge for its own sake. I maintain that professionalism is impacted when professors are pressurised to produce the best product at a lower cost and the value of knowledge is compromised. Embedded market forces determine the kind of knowledge and skills that are required in the economy (Berg & Seeber 2016; Ward 2012). For this reason, new identities and subjectivities that are attuned to the demands of the market are constructed and sustained. This has largely impeded academic freedom and innovation (Mamdani 2007; Thornton 2009).

Commercial forces such as income and profit maximisation strategies were introduced at universities to generate more money for departments. To achieve this, universities do not hire more staff or expand facilities. Instead, the principle of maximisation of profit supersedes the public good role of public higher education (Collins & Rothe 2019). The question of decentralisation of funding is divisive because faculty members are pitted against each other (Collins & Rothe 2019). Furthermore, market logic is related to staff remuneration. Determining salaries on the basis of revenues that faculties attract from industry is flawed because all courses do not a share a similar currency (Baatjes 2005; Collins & Rothe 2019; Shahjahan 2012).

Eurocentrism and Western knowledges have dominated curricular across the African continent for decades. As a result, African universities have been grappling with how to remain committed and relevant to the needs of the continent. Sawyerr (2000), and Gyamera and Burke (2018), maintain that the African university must be assessed on the quality of knowledge that it produces and imparts, the openness of the democratic space and the critical thought that is inculcated in its graduates, the calibre and commitment of the teaching and research staff, the range and quality of the curriculum and pedagogy, and the quality and extent of educational facilities, including the means of accessing both traditional and world-wide knowledge (Sawyerr 2002). Concerns have also been raised regarding the lack of critical engagement in questioning the realignments of national and global goals to mimic neoliberal bureaucracies in African universities (Collins & Rothe 2019). In the following section, some suggestions will be offered regarding how African universities can reclaim their position in society.

6. Towards Reclaiming an African Higher Education

It has been established that neo-liberalism heralded the undermining of the roles of public universities, government sponsorships and, by extension, the public good caveat. By institutionalising efficiency and accountability, accreditation and universalisation, international competitiveness and privatisation measures, public higher education has shifted its initial allegiance to the public (Torres 2011). An assessment of the shift reveals that it has been very significant; however, the African university needs to reclaim its position.

In the past, higher education was considered to be a developmental partner with nation states in the creation and dissemination of knowledge (Mazrui, 1978; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015; Sefa 2007; Wa Thiong'o 1992). To reclaim this position, the critical engagement that has been alluded to ought to be reinstated. This is crucial to ensure the concrete countering of the new identities and subjectivities that have developed as a result of the neoliberal ideology. Therefore, I argue that universities should not be seen as production sites for instrumental knowledge, and academics as knowledge workers or entrepreneurs (Collins & Rothe 2019: Tabulawa, 2017). African universities should assume an *Africa for Africa* strategy, which will enable the incorporation of African values in higher education policies and scholarship. This will assist in annulling the individualism that is inherent in neoliberalism bureaucracies. The endeavour is aimed towards a turning point that seeks a return to African communalism (Ubuntu) (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015; Sefa 2007; Waghid 2018).

The Ubuntu philosophy is one of caring for each other and is based on a maxim of affirming one's being and humanness by recognising the humanness of others, simply put, the wholeness and oneness of existence, *umuntu ngumuntu nga bantu (motho ke motho ka batho),* I am because we are. A transformation discourse that is based on Ubuntu respects diversity, acknowledges lived experience, and challenges the hegemony of Western forms of universal knowledge. Hence adopting the Ubuntu philosophy in education through knowledge generation can free African scholars and education from the singularity of Eurocentrism by centring Africa in knowledge discourses (Higgs 2012; Metz & Gaie 2010; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015; Sefa 2007; Wa Thiong'o 1992).

Mazrui (1978) is critical of a non-reciprocal and skewed relationship between Western and African nations. Whereas African universities have authenticated Western knowledge claims, African knowledge claims have had no effect on Western thought and values. This further demonstrates the mechanistic and skewed power relations between the West and underdeveloped nations. In view of this, I observe that the extent to which neoliberalism serves the interests of implementing countries is minimal and debatable. For example, the keepers of knowledge, research outputs, digitisation and patents reside outside the African continent (Mazrui 1978; Naidoo 2010; Peet 2002; Stone 2003). It is also apparent that the corporatisation of higher education must be resisted, and new conceptualisations should be engaged to develop critical consciousness, political awareness and agency (Baatjes, 2005; Leibowitz & Bozalek 2018). Importantly, as a holistic endeavour, intellectuals, students, and civil society must be part of the trajectory. Achieving this will suffice in making higher education institutions protected spaces, working together to promote democratic values, free expression of thought and open spaces where contestations and debates about the place of education as both a public and a private good can exist side by side. In order to incorporate new ways of knowing, being and creating new identities, the strategies that were used to fight colonialism should be deployed by faculties and administrators to resist neoliberalism in higher education. Thus, using agency to subvert subjugation by the new political order and ideology is inevitable (Shahjahan 2014).

Kamola (2011) examines the erosion of the fiducial role of African universities by arguing that *teaching Africans* at African universities should be reimaged in a manner that will enable universities to come up with pedagogies and curricular that can resist neoliberalism. More broadly, I note that while Mamdani's views on neoliberalism and globalisation seemed radical immediately after independence for some countries, they have been reinvigorated by the *fees must fall* and decolonisation of the curriculum debates across the South African higher education terrain (Kamola 2011; Mamdani 2007; Ndlovu 2017). Nevertheless, the same can be noted with regard to the shift in political ideology that laid the foundation for the submerging of theoretical frameworks such as Marxist functionalism and feminist multiculturalism. In their place arose more agency-based paradigms that are based on constructive and performance-based processes in the social sciences, which are undergirded by a nuanced understanding of institutions, social positioning and hierarchies (Hess 2013).

Part of the antithesis with regard to knowledge production under neoliberalism can be attributed to hierarchical power relations between the Global North and the Global South (Leibowitz & Bozalek 2018). For instance, funding of research was stifled at Makerere University in Uganda because the World Bank perpetuated the view that Uganda was not in a position to contribute to knowledge (Collins & Rhoades 2010; Kamola 2011; Mamdani, 2007; Stone 2003). I argue that African universities must rethink funding research strategies and move away from being over-reliant on the Global North to prescribe the African research agenda. Leibowitz and Bozalek (2018:2) suggest Slow scholarship as an option to enhance teaching and learning scholarship in the Global South. Slow scholarship deals with issues of inequality, quality of education and matters of differences at the individual, disciplinary and institutional levels. One of the pillars of Slow scholarship and pedagogy is the emphasis on what matters and what is meaningful, rather than on what is economically expedient and efficient (Leibowitz & Bozalek 2018).

Pertinent scholarly work has suggested that moving towards a developmental prism that encapsulates poverty-reduction strategies is a positive conjuncture compared to the tyranny of structural adjustment programmes, privatisation and marketisation. This will culminate in rebuilding viable institutions, decentralising governance and incorporating local partners (Craig & Porter 2006). Finding an alternative to neoliberalism requires a two-pronged approach, expanding access to all while at the same time supporting education as an investment (Rhoades et al. 2004). This can be formulated along the foundation of independent institutions, which will concurrently contribute to sustainable national and regional economic and social development.

It is also imperative for countries to preserve their salient cultural distinctiveness and identities away from the utopian tendencies that are propagated through globalisation, universalism and neoliberalism. Finally, tenacity is required to address equity of access and opportunities. I therefore suggest that, instead of having differentiated systems for self-sponsored and government-sponsored students, post-secondary institutions must build a complementary relationship in order to have stronger faculties and a student body that can act as champions for the sanctity and preservation of the right to quality education (Baatjes 2005; Collins & Rothe 2019; Shahjahan 2012).

Conclusion

In summary, the discourse of neoliberalism has heightened marginalisation by imposing high tuition fees, which make access to higher education impossible for those from the peripheries. It has entrenched class, race and sex domination. Diversity and the homogenisation of students in higher education has undermined minority identities and intensified and embedded dominant cultures, languages and races through othering that goes against politics of difference (Leibowitz & Bozalek 2018; Peet 2002; Shahjahan 2012; Taylor 1994). The noted challenges require the strategising and problematisation of neoliberalism policies by all stakeholders in order to once again make public higher education viable and attractive.

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