A University as a ground for Academic and intellectual exchange as well as an agent of social change

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Introduction

Reflection on the nature of universities as regards to scholarship and social engagement in Ugandan provokes a number of questions. They range from scholars' (students and staff) place in society and the role of university itself in society. What meets the ordinary eye, in our contextual society and university bodies, is a university dedicated to teaching, with a number of lecturers moonlighting from one university to the other, lecturers involved or yearning for winning consultancies, no or little time for research, strong devotion to personal welfare and insufficient devotion to academics, community outreach and concern for the good of social and political society. A university has thus been mainly rendered as a place where personal concerns, on the part of both staff and students, take lead on their welfare. It becomes even worse at the different campuses universities are opening in different towns. Consequently, there is decline on academics, the atmosphere of intellectual activity in some universities nonexistent and much less to the concerns in the social problems. Critical intellectual exchange, according to Terry Eagleton (2008), has shifted outside the university walls to journalists and artists. It is the latter who are landed with the unenviable role of acting as the custodians of humane values in a social order turning those values in theory and flouting them in practice (Terry Eagleton 2008). The universities voice is not heard.

The above mentioned changes have taken university life in Uganda by storm and raise a number of questions. Most of the questions that arise lead one to wonder whether a university in a liberalized higher education can still be called academic, or a university can still be referred to as a place with an intellectual culture or if a university can still be an agent of social change. My argument on this is that a university by its nature is an agent not only for generating and expounding knowledge, or a place where fascination with ideas is to be found, or a place where training of human resource and skill development is done, but also a place where the good of

society both politically and socially is generated and enforced. My argument is however not new. In the 19th Century, John Henry Newman (1852, 56) had already hinted on the role of a university in society as "a community of thinkers, engaging in intellectual pursuits not for any external purpose, but as an end in itself". Newman envisioned a broad and liberal education which exhorts students to think and to reason and to compare and to discriminate and to analyze not with narrow minds born of narrow specialisation but with a solid grounding in all areas of study mandated to serve the common good and to achieve what is required in order to be well prepared agents of social change. His argument has since died out in our old and probably in upcoming universities since today we are mostly concerned with teaching and earning a salary and allowances.

Where is the Academic and where is the Intellectual?

Eagleton (2008) thinking of the critical age says that academics spend their lives researching momentous questions (how many souls can dance on the nose of the needle). Currently there is a study going on in Russia on the effect of microgravity on sexual behavior. The body of adult animals and embryonic development" five geckos are in space for a study of the effect of weightlessness on their sex lives and development. This is an academic inquiry. Intellectuals on the other hand, Eagleton adds, have an "arduous job of bringing ideas to bear on society as a whole while universities are places where both academics and intellectuals are to be found in considerable numbers". He believes that this is long dead". In a live university, academics and intellectuals get involved in exiting thinking at universities' main campuses and their affiliated campuses. In the case where rhetorically a university has re-designed its focus and placed research on its top priority, what is expected is to see a vibrant engagement. However, it would not be an over statement to say that we do not have a vibrant and militant young brand of both academics and intellectuals at our universities.

We are operating in a mess of campuses without a research culture, without an intellectual engagement, but campuses that use notes from foreign researchers and critical of students poor researched work where lecturers' own researches are nonexistent. In addition, at our campuses, what we have is what Jonathan Jansen (2014) looked at as "people appointed at senior levels of

leadership who are ignorant of the purposes of the university and the threats to it". He adds that what we have is a university that has descended into endless confrontations between rival factions over all kinds of nonsense (the indecent salary of a vice-chancellor, the constant fight over leadership positions, the sleeping patterns of a lecturer, et cetera) that have absolutely nothing to do with the academic project.

What we have, further still, Jansen (2014) continues, is that young generation of academic staff has been taken up "in the economies of the state, juggling around consultancies, money making ventures and a university is reduced to a degree machine and diploma mill". A generation of money making in addition of the product of the intakes at our campuses affects the activity of the university. The toll is that public confidence in academics is dropping as the general public begins to understand that primary education, through its mismanaged Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme and in a similar mismanaged Universal Secondary Education (USE) programme, have reduced students' capacity to read, comprehend, reason as well as have general knowledge as it used to be the case. All this is happening at the cost that higher education reaps from. This is compounded by government failing to fund higher education. As a result, private universities some -for profit others with profit motives come into play that we begin to see the cost of education rising much faster than inflation, students being asked to pay considerably more and get considerably less (John M; Elliss et al 2012). As this concern of costs join with the growing concern about quality, the University must soon face a major crisis of public confidence.

We need to focus on whether liberalised third world societies have spearheaded Universities in developing academic cultures, intellectual exchanges, understanding and thinking critically about the social, political, economic, and cultural dynamics transforming the world. We make this focus with a mind that intellectuals and universities can only change the world which they understand. It is through academic research which is at the heart of a university. Research creates and feeds knowledge; it propels intellectualism and creates a vibrant academic and intellectual class badly needed by a university. Just like journalist and artists, academics and intellectuals can be militant to defend individual freedoms and civil liberties.

The Academic, Intellectual and Social Change in History

Deep research and informed thinking have been drivers in Institutions of higher learning in effecting social and political changes in the world (Rositsa Bateson & John Taylor 2004). Beginning with the medieval period, students of the University of Paris in 1229, through the "town and gown" power struggles led to a number of reforms of the medieval university and the French society where the patronage of the Church in the French society was broken by student protests (Brad E. Lucas - 2006). The brutal response of the police, which affected innocent bystanders as well as the rioting students, won the student movement broad popular support. Within weeks protests escalated and gained more popular support in huge protests against the repression. Students' power was able to pull doctors, lawyers, shop-workers and administrators to join the general strike and stage their own occupations of work places. This led the government to announce that there would be new legislative elections unless the people were prevented from voting by "intimidation, intoxication, and tyranny," clearly referencing the protests.

Similar situtuations happened among university students in German in 1815 where a student union that was concentrated on national and democratic ideas. In 1817, inspired by liberal and patriotic ideas of a united Germany, student organisations led protest to eventual revolutions in the German states in 1848. Madison Grant (2013) shows that the revolution stressed pan-Germanism, and emphasised popular discontent with the traditional, largely autocratic political structure of the thirty-nine independent states of the Confederation that inherited the German territory of the former Holy Roman Empire. For Priscilla Robertson, (1952) the revolution demonstrated the popular desire for increased political freedom, liberal state policies, democracy, nationalism, and freedom from censorship. Although the student power failed to unify Germany, it led to the Frankfurt National Assembly which finally was able to take up the issue of a German constitution.

In the 1960s, the worldwide uprising in student and youth radicalism manifested itself through the German student movement and organisations such as the German Socialist Student Union. The movement in Germany shared many concerns of similar groups elsewhere, such as the

democratisation of society and opposing the Vietnam War, but also stressed more nationally specific issues such as coming to terms with the legacy of the Nazi regime and opposing the German Emergency Acts. Students' uprising is marked as part of the Germany success against the Nazi regime.

In Belgium, it was no different in 1968. Belgium was the only country in Western Europe where the student protest movement brought the government to its knees. That says something about the power of the Leuven student movement, but it is also revealing of the country itself. Students' through-thought-lead activism made a lead in social change (Astin, A., et al. 1975). Even at its Theology faculty, student and staff academic debates ushered in new winds. Latin American students of the faculty began debates and intellectual engagements that led to Liberation theology. This began a string of changes in the body theological and in the most conservative church, the Catholic Church. This is intellectualism at its best; well focused, weighed and debated.

Cohen, Robert (1993) searching for student power in Britain finds that it was not until the 1960s that student activism became important in British universities. Like many other countries, the Vietnam war and issues of Racism became a focus for many other local frustrations, such as fees and student representation. In 1962, the first student protest against the Vietnam War was held (Cohen, Robert 1993). The 1960s also saw the first student teach-in at Oxford, where students debated alternative non-violent means of protest and protests at the London School of Economics against the government of Ian Smith in Rhodesia.

During communist rule, Tőkés, Rudolf L. (1998) asserts that students in Eastern Europe were a strong force behind several of the best-known instances of protest. Tőkés, Rudolf gives the example of the chain of events leading to the 1956 Hungarian Revolution was started by peaceful student demonstrations in the streets of Budapest, later attracting workers and other Hungarians. Tőkés, Rudolf further gives the example of Czechoslovakia, one of the most known faces of the protests following the Soviet-led invasion that ended the Prague Spring was Jan Palach, a student who committed suicide by setting fire to himself on January 16, 1969. The act triggered a major protest against the occupation first led by students.

Student-dominated youth movements have also played a central role in the "color revolutions" seen in post-communist societies in recent years. Olena Nikolayenko (2012) narrates at length how Serbian Otpor ("Resistance" in Serbian), formed in October 1998 by university youth as a response to repressive university and media laws that were introduced that year. In the presidential campaign in September 2000, the organisation engineered the "Gotov je" ("He's finished") campaign that galvanized Serbian discontent with Slobodan Milošević, ultimately resulting in his defeat (Bunce V and Wolchik S 2011).

American society saw an increase in student activism again in the 1990s with the ushering in of the neoliberal community service policies of Bill Clinton. The popular education reform movement has led to a resurgence of populist student activism against standardized testing and teaching, as well as more complex issues including military/industrial/prison complex and the influence of the military and corporations in education. There is also increased emphasis on ensuring that changes that are made are sustainable, by pushing for better education funding and policy or leadership changes that engage students as decision-makers in schools. Major contemporary campaigns include work for funding of public schools, against increased tuitions at colleges.

This explains that academic work, followed by intellectualism have spearheaded student activism. These that happen beginning on campus, have reflected to bring the change that people want. Felt experience is a very important part in change and development. This is so because all of the critical activities share a certain characteristic seriousness and energy; they act together to provoke people's curiosity about the world, to draw them into disciplined thought and discussion, and thus to create an environment of collective reflection. This has worked in history and today's society is losing out on this.

These are part of the success stories, however, there are other stories where students have been suppressed like China, and other autocratic societies and the human rights in those societies leave a lot desired.

The African story

At the inception of universities in Nigeria, Uganda and elsewhere in Africa beginning with 1930 to 1940s Pan African ideals were major academic, intellectual and activism activities at the young campuses. This culture brought to the front African leaders. Academic and intellectualism of the time gave birth to nationalists ideas borrowed from intellectuals of African descent France's Caribbean and African colonies (Thompson, Peter, 2002). Léopold Senghor, who propounded nationalism and pan-Africanism together with students from the Carribeans in university of Paris in 1933, is a product of this intellectual culture (Gary, Wilder, 2005). The pan-Africanists key idea was that all Africans, whether in exile or at home, shared an 'African personality'. In essence they began a Pan-African movement which became an argument for African nationalism that was peculiar to the French colonial context (Thompson, Peter, 2002). When its leaders eventually took power in an independent state, as Senghor did in Senegal in 1960, they held power on behalf of a Westernized, pro-French élite. Most prominent among the critics of négritude was the writer Frantz Fanon, a doctor from Martinique who put his own Pan-Africanism on the line by joining the anti-colonial struggle in Algeria. These ideas of shaping Africa were all created and nurtured in Universities.

Nationalist ideas were again groomed by Universities and brought to personalities like Kwame Nkrumah who soon became the voice and organizing force not only of Pan-Africanism but also nationalistic ideas (Felix Kumah-Abiwu, 2003). His time as a student in America showed him how a “Western country which stood refreshingly untainted by territorial colonialism in Africa” (Nkrumah 1965:1) It is this fascination to which the world he understood that led him in the late 1940s and 1950s promot the idea of an independent West African Federation, seen as the first step towards a United States of Africa. When, in March 1957, he became leader of the newly independent state of Ghana, one of his first thoughts was to use his new position to help other Africans transcend the old colonial boundaries and work towards uniting the continent.

At the university of Yaoundé Cameroon, Piet Konings (2002) believes that the struggle for political liberalization, starting at the end of the 1980s, unleashed an unprecedented wave of student rebellion on university campuses in West and Central Africa. University students were often in the forefront of these struggles, sometimes with the support of secondary school students, their teachers, and other socio-professional groups (Bratton & van de Walle 1992).

Reasons for their widespread revolt seem to be similar. Political liberalization allowed space for students to voice their longstanding grievances about the deteriorating living and study conditions at most African universities. The lack of basic infrastructure needed to cope with the massive growth in the student population since independence resulted in rapidly falling academic standards. The severe economic crisis and subsequent Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) aggravated the situation with an increasing withdrawal of state support for universities, university students, and university graduates (Albert 1995; Federici 2000). Governments were compelled to make further cuts in university budgets to request that students pay tuition fees and additionally levies and to virtually stop recruiting new graduates into already oversized state bureaucracies. Some were politically motivated, but most were prompted by the students' frequent worries about bourse et bouffe (grants and food), especially the quality and quantity of food and the number, amount, and timely payment of scholarships.

Uganda's share

High education in Uganda is counted among the old in the sub-Saharan Region. Beginning with Katigondo Major Seminary in 1911 followed by Makerere in 1922, rising to university level in 1952, Uganda does not have remarkable distinguished academic novelty as has been in most countries of the world. It is not until late 1960s that most academic engagements are seen involving Mahmood Mamdan, Ali Mazrui and others. The early contributions in the academic world was in art and literature, with prominent scholars like Ngugi wa Thiong, Okt p'Bitek and others who engaged scholarship in the context of nationalism and independence. John Stephen Mbiti also engaged vigorously in positioning African religion and philosophy in a context where western philosophy and religion were pausing threats to African way of life. A simple realization, is that very few Ugandans were imbued in serious scholarship at Makerere, while Katigondo up to day has remained in the periphery in academic endeavors except its graduates who have made significant academic contributions outside the seminary walls.

On the side of students, Fredrick Byaruhanga (2006) distinguishes three types of activism at Makerere: "welfare-related," ideological, and "survival." The first significant protest in 1952 was a boycott of the dining halls in a demand for better food, concerned student "welfare". It was a conflict that erupted over the seemingly innocuous issue of the quality of food. Ideology inspired

protest in the 1960s as students demonstrated against American bombing in northwestern Uganda (a spill-over from conflict in Congo) and the hanging of three African nationalists by the Smith government in Rhodesia. A decade later (in 1976), students plotted, bravely but unsuccessfully, to overthrow the Amin government.

Byaruhanga continues to show that "Survival" demonstrations, increasingly frequent from the early 1980s to the present, are a post-Amin version of the earlier "welfare" protests, with two differences. First, student leaders have emphasized the principle of self-determination. Second, both the student demonstrations and en-suing government repression have been characterized by serious violence. This process of "institutional liberalization" has been highly resented by the students in their pursuit of upward mobility. Comparing themselves with preceding generations who could count on getting government jobs because of their degrees, students were seeing themselves as an "abandoned" or "lost" generation (Cruise O'Brien 1996). In December 1990, Student Guild spearheaded a rejection of a Guild constitution imposed by the Ministry of Education. Even though they forward a host of economic "survival" issues--the abolition of allowances for books, transportation, and stationery the protests was also connected with the government's costly pursuit of war in the north and its tolerance of corruption. The government sent police to campus just as students were discussing calling off the strike. Police shot two students to death, and the university closed. Student leaders through history have learned to take power from repressive authorities and use it to make Makerere University—and other universities that they would influence more responsive to students and to society.

New challenges have emerged in form of private funded university education and the introduction of tuition fees in public universities, parallel to the emerging of a strengthening private higher education sector. This in a way has changed the traditional relationship between the university, the student an society since most students think much of their survival and how to make ends meet while at university. Rositsa Bateson & John Taylor (2004), have observed that a growing number of paying students covering the cost of their (publicly funded) education in part or in full or in private higher education sector in the region has strongly influenced the willingness of students to pay more for a different kind of experience which better meets their needs and expectations.

Though this choice offers innovation, educational choice, new instructional paradigms and higher education services, it also has serious consequences to the idea of a university as such: It has led to the degeneration of the universities. They have turned in-ward to students' survival. And so it is not a surprise to notice a shift over time; from pan africanism, to nationalism and now to individualism. The thinking today for professors is on salaries, not intellectualism or fascination of ideas. Students are on food and allowances. And as such, universities have produced the leaders we see; corrupt, insensitive of societal needs, and easily compromised. One should therefore not wonder if university students see corrupt and authoritarian regimes as responsible for their predicament and to perceive a "democratic transition" as a necessary precondition for change in society in general and in universities in particular.

Conclusion

I conclude by proposing what Oliver (1991) once proposed: "an institutional audit to inform us whether we either we remain stark with the old organizational practice by defying institutional pressure or actively adopting a new one". That is, we remain with the taken-for-granted cognitive schemas and inter-subjectively shared academic and intellectual cultural norms (Zucker, 1983, 1987; DiMaggio and Powell, 1991) which we are today lamenting, or we take exceptions and carry out institutional change in which a previously dominant institutional model, supported by a group of actors with vested interests in it. We could also think of remaining with the resent alternative that is about one to two years old at UMU, where academic life and intellectualism is regulated and controlled by the Finance Office. The Budget Office regulating what takes place in the academic arena and intellectual sphere. Believe me, this last alternative will be the end of the academic and intellectual life at our campuses. This definitely means that those in for change must be ready for conflicts among groups of actors who have different sets of interests at both university campuses and the broader Ugandan society. We must be ready to face the internal conflicts which must get rid of managers who do not know what a university is all about, those who are only occupying jobs and bring in a brand of personnel imbued with what a university does and ought to do. As we speak of social change, the larger society most especially the political arena may also need to have an academic population that sings its successes. Get an example of what happens on academic life in Rwanda where before the genocide the National university of Rwanda remained in support of the ruling party and they way academia is still operating in being less critical of political status quo.

Secondly, students need information from their first entry to university about existing programmes and activities, information about how to organise themselves, promulgate student initiatives, the things they can do, what are the limits and who can help them with the practical arrangements. There is need for a paradigm shift, the numerous student activities should incorporate information gathering through research and distribution through intellectual activities which are often lagging. Also, due to the highly decentralised structure of the separate faculties, the information is only available to the students enrolled in the individual faculty.

The above leads us to believe that giving students the freedom to form various associations, clubs, interest groups and to organise activities of their own — while a necessary pre-requisite — is only the beginning of a process of building a 'campus' climate that nurtures student involvement not only in the university experience but also in thinking about their stake in the bigger society which lies beyond the university campus. Hopefully this will lead to end of student indifference to the marked inequalities of access to Uganda's university and equal opportunities for both students in government aided and private universities. Why should a student be forced to join a university which is not his/her choice simply because university funding is targeted to public universities.

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