Transnational Education and African Universities

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Abstract
This paper examines the implications for African universities of the trade in educational services for higher education under the auspices of the General Agreement of Trade in Services (GATS) of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). This article argues that, insofar as GATS is an evolving process, it is imperative that African and other developing countries participate actively in constructing its legal, conceptual and operational architecture. It also suggests that African universities might meet the new challenges through a reconfigured Pan-Africanism: by strengthening the regional systems of student and faculty mobility and exchange; by setting up, streamlining and strengthening regional quality assurance and accreditation bodies; by establishing centres of excellence; and by mobilising Africa’s academic diasporas, both historic and contemporary, many of which are found in the North in some of the world’s greatest universities.

Résumé
Cette contribution se penche sur les implications pour les universités africaines, du commerce des services de l’enseignement supérieur, sous les auspices de l’Accord Général sur le Commerce des Services (GATS), à l’initiative de l’Organisation Mondiale du Commerce (OMC). Cet article soutient que dans la mesure où le GATS constitue un processus évolutif, il est impératif que les pays africains et les autres pays en développement participent activement à la construction du cadre légal, conceptuel et opérationnel de cet accord. Il suggère également que les universités africaines puissent faire face aux nouveaux défis qui se posent, à travers une reconfiguration du panafricanisme, en renforçant le système régional d’étudiants, ainsi que le principe de mobilité et d’échanges concernant les facultés ; mais

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également, en mettant sur pied, en rationalisant et renforçant des organes régionaux de contrôle des normes qualité, ainsi que des organes d'accréditation ; en établissant un centre d'excellence, et en mobilisant les diasporas académiques africaines, anciennes aussi bien que contemporaines, dont la plupart se trouve dans les pays du Nord, dans certaines des plus prestigieuses universités mondiales.

Introduction

It has become a cliché that we live in a globalising world marked by the rapid flow of commodities and capital, ideas and institutions, practices and people, visions and viruses—a world of unprecedented transnational connectedness and competitiveness. Old certainties and conventions are crumbling, yet the contours and content of the new remain fuzzy.

African universities are participating in these unprecedented changes and confronting the multiple challenges of globalisation, technological change, not to mention reconfigurations in the production and organisation of knowledge within the academy itself. Powerful internal and external forces—political, pecuniary and paradigmatic—are transforming all aspects of the university’s triple missions of teaching, research and service. The universities’ constituencies and competitors are more pluralistic than ever as expectations of access and accountability expand while simultaneously the universities lose their monopoly of knowledge production and public fiscal support diminishes.

The need for redefining the role and defending the importance of universities has never been greater. Questions abound: How are African universities trying to balance the demands of autonomy and accountability, expansion and excellence, equity and efficiency, diversification and differentiation, representation and responsibility, privatisation and the public purpose, community service and consultancy, internationalisation and indigenisation, in the face of liberalisation, and as they address the new challenges of knowledge production and dissemination, of Africanising global scholarship and globalising African scholarship? What innovative approaches can facilitate their own renewal from at least two decades of debilitating crisis and contribute to the sustainable development of African economies, societies and polities?

The challenge of internationalisation is driven internally by the growing complexity of knowledge and externally by the increasing commercialisation of knowledge. Universities are becoming more interconnected internationally for both epistemic and economic reasons, the first because universities have always been, or aspire to be, universalist and universalising institutions, and the second because trade in educational services is expanding rapidly and falling subject to the legally binding negotiations conducted under the General...
Agreement of Trade in Services (GATS) of the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

The implications of the emerging GATS environment and other forces behind the internationalisation of higher education vary, not only for different institutions within countries but also among different countries, especially along the enduring North-South divides of global development and underdevelopment. As a result, universities in different parts of the world will be unequally integrated into the new global system of higher education. The challenge, then, is to stem current and forestall future educational inequalities and hierarchies by fostering international academic mobility, exchange, collaboration, connectivity and regulation to generate and sustain knowledge networks that are guided less by the polarising and profiteering pressures of the market and more by the developmentalist and democratising demands of global “public good.”

I briefly explore the old patterns of higher education internationalisation, then examine the new. Next, I interrogate implications of the trade in educational services for higher education. Finally, I offer some suggestions on how African institutions of higher learning might meet the new challenges by going back to the future of a reconfigured Pan-Africanism.

Old Patterns of Internationalisation

Intellectual mobility and networking across variously constituted borders—political, cultural, or geographical—is as old as the first Islamic universities established in northern Africa between the eighth and tenth centuries and those founded later in medieval western Europe. It could in fact be argued that the ancient universities were transnational communities of scholars far more than the modern national universities founded in many parts of the world in the twentieth century. But if the latter were not always international in the composition of their students and faculty, they were in their missions and conventions. This was particularly true of the universities founded in the colonial and ex-colonial countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America, most of which were modelled on universities in the imperial metropoles of Europe, themselves partly adapted from the Islamic legacy. Almost everywhere universities in their mission statements have defined themselves in terms of the triple mandate of teaching, research and public service.

Internationalisation has largely entailed the unregulated mobility of students and faculty, formalized inter-institutional exchanges and collaborations, and the curricular incorporation of foreign subjects, themes, topics or languages. There were, and still are, great regional imbalances in the relative development and importance of each of these tendencies.
Three pertinent observations can be made. First, academic mobility has predominantly been from the rest of the world to the West, from the global South to the global North (Bollag 2003; Jacobson 2003; Lin-Liu 2003).

Second, the processes of knowledge exchange are uneven. The average student in an African university is far more exposed to European phenomena than the average student in a European university is exposed to African phenomena. Yet, outside each of the respective regions, knowledges from Africa, Asia and Latin America are more readily available in the West than in the other regions. While American students are notorious for their ignorance of foreign cultures and languages, American universities have the most extensive area studies programs in the world where courses on Africa, Asia and Latin America are regularly taught by sizeable numbers of faculty to numerous students, although they constitute minorities on their campuses (Zeleza 2002).

Third, the structures of institutional collaboration are unstable, particularly for networks outside powerful regional blocs such as the European Union, which has developed some of the world’s most effective programs: ERASMUS for student and faculty exchange, COMETT to support university-industry training partnerships, LINGUA, designed to boost the learning of foreign languages, and TEMPUS formed in 1990 to promote university cooperation with Central and Eastern Europe (Blumenthal et al. 1994). Research linkages between universities in the developed and developing countries tend to be particularly lopsided given the vastly unequal endowments of scholarly cultures, capacities and commitments. Whereas scholarly visitors from the South to the North tend to be predominantly natural scientists, from the North to the South they are mainly social scientists.1 There are few incentives for scientists and scholars in wealthy research universities to work with colleagues in poorly resourced institutions. This often means it is academics from the less prestigious universities or from the relatively marginalized area studies programs that engage in overseas collaborations, although the relations they foster are not always mutually beneficial (Zeleza 1997, 2003).

Clearly, the inequalities inherent in the old patterns of higher education internationalisation are rooted in the historical dominance enjoyed by the West or the global North more generally over the last few centuries that has dictated imitative modernisations elsewhere. Relations between universities in the rich and poor countries or developed and developing regions are marked by complex connections, contestations and challenges that recent developments connected to the growth of knowledge economies and societies are reinforcing and recasting in new and complicated ways. Western hegemony is as much economic as it is epistemological as western scholars often set the terms, themes, topics and theories of intellectual discourse and research.
Within Africa the scale of academic mobility pales in comparison to the highly structured programs that have been established in the European Union and other world regions since the mid-1980s, or the flows from Africa to the global North. Intra-African academic linkages have historically revolved around four axes: first, the regional universities that were established during the twilight years of colonial rule and nationalized after independence; second, distance education; third, inter-university links; and fourth, unregulated movements by students and faculty. Foreign institutions and correspondence colleges once dominated distance education. Now its main providers include universities, non-governmental organisations, and private entrepreneurs. The programs are becoming more diverse, reflecting the growing demand for skills beyond those required by teachers and civil servants, the previous patrons of distance education. Print instruction is giving way to more technologically advanced multi-media systems, including the development of open and virtual universities.²

As might be expected, given uneven levels of economic and educational development among African countries, the patterns of academic exchanges across the continent have been quite uneven. Egypt is dominant in North Africa, Nigeria was the magnet in West Africa during the oil boom years, and post-apartheid South Africa has become the hub in Southern Africa. Egyptian universities have signed hundreds of academic cooperation agreements involving student and faculty exchanges, secondments, joint degrees, curricula, research and technical collaboration with universities in North Africa and the Arab world more generally. Cairo University and Al-Azhar University also attract many students from West and East Africa (Nkrumah 2001). For its part, in the 1980s Nigeria even earmarked 5 per cent of total university enrolment for foreign students and entered into bilateral education agreements with about thirty countries, most of them on the continent. In 1989–1990 only 678 foreign students were enrolled in nine of Nigeria’s universities. If the 5 per cent target had been met, Nigerian universities should have had 8,600 foreign students that year (Akinpelu 1994). As for post-apartheid South Africa, the number of international students rose from 5,000 in 1994 to 40,000 in 2003, mostly from the SADC region and elsewhere on the continent (Jobbins and O’Leary 2003a). The inflows of thousands of African students and faculty triggered contentious debates for a country inclined to both xenophobia and regional hegemonic ambitions as it came out of long years of isolation and tried to address the nefarious legacies of apartheid education and come to grips with its African identity (Cross and Sepideh 2004).
New Patterns of Internationalisation

Globalisation as a process refers to more intensive and extensive global interconnectedness in ever-widening spheres: from the economic, political and cultural to the technological, discursive and iconographic. Globalisation as a project largely serves as a synonym for global capitalism and neo-liberal restructuring. These changes have altered the systems and stabilities of higher education in general and the possibilities and problems of internationalisation in particular.

Besides the acceleration of the old trends including the increased mobility of students, professors and researchers and the internationalisation of curricula and extra-curricular activities, two major relatively new trends can be identified: first, the growth of what is variously referred to as ‘transnational’, ‘crossborder’, or ‘borderless’ education; and second, the development of new international partnerships, networks and consortia.

‘Borderless’ education is growing at an unparalleled rate, facilitated by the new information technologies, massification of demand, pressures for knowledge commodification and commercialisation, and the internationalisation of the professions and skilled labour migration. Its proponents hail its ability to expand tertiary enrolments at relatively low costs and to reach groups traditionally excluded from the universities. Its detractors are wary of the lack of local quality control. Institutional dual-mode programs offer both classroom and distance instruction, while single-mode programs offer only the latter. In franchised international programs, foreign operators form partnerships, often commercial, with local tertiary institutions to offer instruction on a joint basis. In nonfranchised programs, foreign ‘virtual universities’ do not have local intermediaries (Saint 2003).

On-line education has changed the dynamics of distance education delivery. Since the 1990s, universities all over the world have established on-line programs, reaching new students at home and abroad. Countless networks and platforms are sponsored by universities, governments, donor agencies, publishers and private businesses that seek to encourage multiple-level partnerships among universities and research centres. Numerous national and regional virtual universities, e-libraries and e-books have emerged. These new information technologies support flexibility in curriculum design, enhance access and learning opportunities, and support research and innovation. They have also opened new possibilities for international scholarly communication and networking, even in poor countries, which face enormous obstacles such as low levels of infrastructural development, unfavourable policies and regulatory frameworks and a scarcity of telecommunications specialists. Still, scholars
are anxious to bridge the digital divide and create e-quality with the rest of the world (Beebe et al. 2003).

Not unexpectedly, there have been some setbacks. Several renowned online institutions in the United States and Europe have closed ‘due to falling enrolments, weak stock market performance, or regulatory problems’ (Uvalic-Trumbic and Zeynep 2002-2003:7). Various technical, organisational, pedagogical and regulatory challenges involved in transnational on-line education (course development, teaching and certification) still remain. The need for standardised platforms, an international quality assurance framework and effective assessment of learner outcomes is pressing. Moreover, professional fields such as business and computer studies and engineering are favoured over the humanities and social sciences. All too often, institutions in the developed countries use on-line education to export curricula and instructional expertise to developing countries, rather than developing truly cooperative and coordinated ventures that revolutionise the curriculum and processes of knowledge acquisition, transmission and validation.

Thus, on-line education has delivered less than its cheerleaders, but more than its hecklers, predicted. Zemsky and Massey (2004a) summarise ‘e-learning’s early promise’ as ‘most often reflected in three basic beliefs, each of which turned out to be wrong: If we build it, they will come, ... the kids will take to e-learning like ducks to water ... [and] e-learning will force a change in how we teach.’ The ‘reality’ they found is that ‘faculty members use the electronics to simplify tasks, not to fundamentally change how they teach their subjects.’ They predict:

Over the next decade, advancement in e-learning is likely to be slow, best described as plodding.... Yet despite the difficulties of the recent years, we count ourselves among the optimists who believe electronically mediated instruction can eventually become a standard mode of instruction.... Ultimately, the lure of learning anytime anywhere will prove irresistible. (Zemsky and Massey 2004a:B8. For their full report, see Zemsky and Massey 2004b.)

As the world has become more interconnected, the interrelations of events and involvement across multiple regions have increased. Correspondingly, popular and scholarly awareness and anxiety have risen about the global challenges, both natural and social, facing humanity. Out of this existential and epistemic angst has emerged some of the impetus for educational internationalism, the quest for collaborative research and knowledge production and the belief that no amount of research in any one country can fully comprehend, let alone resolve, global problems. Neither can any discipline by itself. Transnationalism
meets transdisciplinarity. Business practices increasingly flourish in academia as knowledge production ceases to be a monopoly of universities. As a result, academics in many countries enjoy mobility between campuses and corporations but also experience the collaborative problem-solving preoccupations of industry.

Thus, new epistemological and organisational forms of knowledge production and acquisition are emerging, predicated on interdisciplinarity and collaborative ventures among the academy, industry, governments, NGOs and foundations as part of the marketisation and eroding boundaries of higher education, also participating in the ‘complex thinking’ required to deal with the explosions of knowledges and epistemologies (Bernheim and Chaui 2003; Gibbons 2002). Disciplinary knowledges cannot be discarded without disastrous consequences, nor are they being replaced per se. Rather they are being combined and complemented with interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary knowledges in complex and dynamic ways (Subotzky and Cele 2004).

All these developments and the new institutional arrangements of transnational or ‘borderless education’ are quite evident across Africa although they vary in their specific configuration, not only from patterns in other regions but also among the African countries themselves. Three challenging trends are the expansion of distance education, the growth of academic networks and changes in the contexts and composition of knowledge production.

**Distance Education**

The growing number of distance education providers within and to Africa includes traditional universities and colleges as well as newly established ‘open’ universities and virtual universities, among them the Open University of Tanzania and the Zimbabwe Open University. The best-known example of an online educational institution is the World Bank-sponsored African Virtual University. Created in 1997, by 2001 it had established 31 learning centres in 17 countries and had trained 23,000 people in various professional fields. However, Maurice Amutabi (2003) finds the AVU falling short of its possibilities.

Many of Africa’s distance education institutions and initiatives, however, are focused on and operate inside their own national boundaries, while new foreign players are increasingly establishing ‘local branch campuses’ or ‘subsidiaries.’ Thus, African universities and colleges face the two-fold challenge of becoming effective providers of transnational education within the continent and of competing effectively against foreign providers setting up shop in their respective countries and regions.

Academic cooperation across the continent is expanding, principally through research networks. However, it needs to be broadened and deepened. Library
networks especially need to expand. Proliferating transnational research centres and networks seek to promote and coordinate research among African scholars and sometimes to provide graduate training. They include such institutions as the International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE) in the natural sciences (human, animal, plant and environmental health), the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), and the African Economic Research Consortium (AERC), all of which maintain active links with universities and which have been critical in building research capacities and promoting knowledge production on the continent.

Also crucial for academic research networking is the establishment of integrated national and regional library networks with efficient document delivery mechanisms. African libraries not only need to move from conventional to electronic libraries, but also to improve library cooperation at national, regional and international levels. Needless to say, retooling library staff and establishing information and communication technology infrastructures will be expensive (Asamoah-Hassan and Bannerman 2001). Cooperative library networks or projects at regional or continental levels are still grossly underdeveloped. The few initiatives have been led by South Africa, the Association of African Universities (AAU), or external donors. The perilous state of academic libraries in many African countries is one of the most tragic manifestations of the continent’s higher education crisis (Ama and Ama 2004; Awasom 2004; Simui 2004). African institutions cannot expect to become serious players in transnational education if the library crisis is not addressed urgently. It cannot be overemphasised that libraries are knowledge banks from which intellectual investments are derived and in which knowledge products are deposited.

Like other parts of the world, Africa’s processes and practices of knowledge production are undergoing profound transformations. Two interrelated tendencies are the pluralisation of sites and the reconfiguration of the disciplinary architecture of knowledge. The first refers to the fact that knowledge production is no longer a monopoly of universities but now includes business, government agencies and civil society organisations ‘that seek social legitimation through recognisable competence’ (Gibbons 2001:5). Academics increasingly enjoy mobility between universities and extra-university research sites.

This situation has been spurred by African universities’ inability to reproduce academic labour power. In many countries, faculty commonly work in multiple sites; in principle, this condition offers opportunities to form networks, partnerships and alliances that can simultaneously enhance their research capacities and protect them from the academy’s iniquitous tendencies. Undoubtedly, the proliferation of independent research networks and consultancy op-
opportunities have saved many African academics from the penury and repression of their structurally adjusted universities. But this institutional porosity has also undermined basic research and academic freedom. The ‘consultancy syndrome’, as the phenomenon is sometimes called in academic circles with resigned contempt, is here to stay; the challenge is to develop effective mechanisms to ensure that universities and interlopers upon them (or, more positively, partners in knowledge production) share their human and intellectual resources most productively.

The appropriation of some academic functions by institutions outside the universities, including business, is paralleled by the academy’s appropriation of some business practices. This is manifested, for example, in the growth of corporatist management styles in university governance and in the commercialisation of learning and the commodification of knowledge (Zeleza 2003: ch. 3). The resulting liberalisation of universities, combined with epistemological transformations within academe, has led to the reconfiguration of the systems and structures of knowledge production as seen in shifting disciplinary hierarchies, eroding boundaries and the emergence of new interdisciplinary fields.

The African university of today has many more interdisciplinary institutes, centres, programmes—the designations vary—organised on thematic and other bases than when I went to college in the early 1970s. All vie for prestige and resources with the traditional departments. Pressures for restructuring the epistemological and organisational forms of knowledge have been particularly pronounced in countries such as South Africa, where many initially accepted the thesis popularised by Gibbons that Mode 2 interdisciplinary study is more conducive to development than Mode 1. Several scholars have increasingly concluded that the Gibbons model is too narrow and dichotomous to account for the broader and heterogeneous range of knowledge production activities being generated out of the interactions among the academy, the corporate sector, government, NGOs and donors, in which disciplinary knowledges are not so much being replaced (indeed, they cannot be discarded in teaching without disastrous consequences) as being combined and complemented with pre-disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledges in complex and dynamic ways (Subotzky 2004).

Clearly, we need to know more about knowledge systems that are generated, taught and consumed in African universities. How are these universities and their scholars responding to the emergence of transdisciplinary modes of study and research deemed necessary to deal with complex and interrelated global problems? What is the state of the infrastructures of knowledge production (research and publishing) in various parts of Africa? How do they relate to the structures of scholarly authority and legitimation? To what extent are African
universities still replicas of western universities in their theories, themes and terms of knowledge production? Has globalisation loosened or tightened the tentacles of what Ali Mazrui (1977) once called the cultural multinational corporation represented by the western university? How are the afflictions and affectations changing from the unproductive culture of scientific consumerism, to use Paulin Hountondji's (1997) damning indictment of African intellectual production? How do African scholars and scientists communicate with each other and import and export research methodologies, concepts and discourses in different fields from the ubiquitous ‘posts’ of the humanities (post-modernism, post-structuralism, post-colonialism) running amok in the western academy, to the mathematisation of economics and the quantification of political science, to the new high-tech interdisciplinary frontiers of the sciences: information technology, biotechnology, nanotechnology and environmental technology? What indeed are the connections, contradictions and contestations between ‘indigenous’ and ‘international’ knowledges in the African academy in this era of globalisation and transnational education?

**Implications of International Trade in Educational Services**

The contexts in which these questions and issues can be and are being addressed are changing, not least because of the emerging environment of international trade in educational services that the World Trade Organisation seeks to regulate through GATS. From all indications, this trade is growing rapidly although it is difficult to measure its full scale and value because of data problems (Larsen, Mortin and Morris 2002). Rough estimates for OECD countries put the monetary impact of trade in international educational services at $30 billion in 1999, equivalent to 3 per cent of their total export services. The largest ‘exporters’ of educational services are the United States, followed by the United Kingdom, Australia, Italy and Canada, all countries with well-established and prestigious university systems, and except for Italy, speakers of English, the lingua franca of international business and scholarship, whose worldwide dominance is rooted in U.S. global supremacy and the Internet. Asia is the largest ‘import’ region of educational services, accounting for 40 per cent of all internationally mobile students in 1999, followed by Europe with 30 per cent, Africa 12 per cent, North America 3 per cent, South America 3 per cent, and Oceania 1 per cent (Philips and Stahl 2000).

Foreign students, whose movements constitute much of the available statistics on trade in educational services, comprised only 1.8 per cent of tertiary education enrolments globally in 1999, up fractionally from 1.5 per cent in 1985. Clearly, despite the exponential growth of international education, most of the world’s students for the foreseeable future will continue to be educated
at home. Most firms and jobs are also local, not global. Nevertheless, these students will increasingly be subject to a global environment of educational provision, regulation, delivery and certification. If the exploding academic and policy literature and anti-GATS resolutions by university and student associations in both developed and developing countries, including Africa, are anything to go by, there is already great anxiety, and for some excitement, about the implications of ‘borderless education’ in general and GATS in particular.

The inclusion of the services sector in the Uruguay Round of global trade negotiations was spawned by recognition of the growing importance of services in the world economy, which by the late 1990s accounted for close to 70 per cent of national output in the developed countries and more than 50 per cent in many developing countries including Africa. During the protracted negotiations many developing countries expressed fierce resistance, concerned that trade liberalisation in services would erode the pursuit of developmental goals, undermine public policy and infringe on their sovereignty. Still, GATS became effective in January 1995. It laid out a comprehensive legal framework of rules and disciplines covering 161 service activities across 12 classified sectors including telecommunications, financial, maritime, energy, business, environmental, distribution, tourism, and education services.

GATS distinguishes four different modes of services trade: (a) ‘crossborder supply’ (services such as distance education, e-learning and virtual universities that do not require physical movement); (b) ‘consumption abroad’ (people or firms that make use of educational services in another country; e.g., students studying abroad); (c) ‘commercial presence’ (the commercial establishment of facilities to provide services in another country by education providers in the form of subsidiaries or branches); (d) and ‘presence of natural persons’ (individuals like teachers or researchers who temporarily provide educational services in another country).

GATS contains general rules and principles and invites commitments in and across specific sectors. The rules contain many exceptions and ambiguities (Chanda 2002). The process by which countries commit themselves to liberalising services is voluntary and flexible in that they can decide which service sectors they wish to open and can specify the limitations and exceptions they want to maintain. Problems with the commitment structure include ‘overlap between market access and national treatment commitments’. For instance, limitations on national treatment such as preferential treatment of domestic service suppliers through taxes, subsidies or government procurement policies also affect market access conditions for foreign service suppliers. Furthermore, because of choice in selecting sectors for commitment, specific
sectoral interests and modal preferences are likely to dominate the negotiating process (Chanda 2002:9).

Such ambitions and ambiguities have made GATS contentious. Most of its supporters trumpet the economic benefits of liberalised trade, arguing that increased competition leads to lower prices, more innovation and increased investment, technology transfer and employment creation. In short, they claim that GATS increases national competitiveness and prosperity. Importing educational services improves the capacity, quality and innovativeness of domestic educational institutions, minimizes brain drain and reduces costs incurred in study-abroad programs. Exporting these services generates income, fosters international recognition and opens markets for other services, whilst both imports and exports promote cultural, political and economic alliances (Shackleton 2004a, 2004b).

For their part, critics emphasise the dangers that liberalised trade in educational services pose for the public good, educational quality, equitable access, research capacities, public support, state sovereignty and authority, cultural autonomy and national and regional development agendas (Chanda 2004).

Under GATS, education is classified as primary, secondary, higher, adult, and other. GATS signatories have to accede to several unconditional and conditional obligations, amongst them the most favoured nation treatment (a non-discriminatory principle that requires equal treatment for all trading partners), the national treatment rule (applies when a country has made a commitment to allow foreigners to operate and requires treating the latter and nationals equally), and the progressive liberalisation provision (which involves extending GATS coverage to more sectors and allows for negotiations across sectors—say, transport and education).

The range and level of commitments made thus far vary among countries and according to sector. In the Uruguay Round, developed countries scheduled 45 per cent of their service sectors and the developing countries only 12 per cent (Hoekman 1995). But even for the former, only 25 per cent of the scheduled services had no limitations; for the latter it was 7 per cent. Of the 155 service activities that could be scheduled, by 1999, 44 countries had committed themselves to 20 or fewer, another 23 to 21–40, whilst 32 countries had made more than 40 commitments and another 33 more than 100 (Adlung 2000). The distribution of sectors in terms of the number of countries scheduling commitments was as follows: tourism (125), business (100), financial (99), communications (94), transport (81), construction (71), recreation (60), environment (51), distribution (49), health (45) and education (43). In terms of distribution by mode, the bulk of the commitments are for Mode 2, followed by Mode 1 and Mode 3. Commitments for Mode 4 are almost negligible.
Notable differences are apparent in the levels of commitment among countries, sectors and modes as well as variations in the levels of commitments within countries and sectors. Trade liberalisation is least evident in the health and education sectors. This could be attributed to the fact that these sectors remain the heart and soul of public policy and provision, central to the claims of citizenship and to the social contract of national identity, development and well being. It is perhaps for these reasons that constituencies associated with these sectors have mounted the most spirited resistance against GATS, thereby constraining its intrusive tentacles.


The number of countries that have submitted requests or offers in education are clearly low—43 out of 146. Few are from the developing world, which could mean that they are trying to come to terms with the complex technical negotiations, have deliberately adopted a ‘wait and see’ attitude or are actively trying to resist GATS rules that counter their fundamental interests. The latter seems quite plausible given that, during the WTO ministerial meeting in Cancun in 2003, ‘twenty-two developing countries led by Brazil, Argentina and India took a firm stand on the issue of agricultural subsidies . . . and the GATS rules which have particular relevance to developing countries’ (Knight 2004:20).

Debate about international trade in educational services centres on four key issues: (a) dispute over the terms of discourse; (b) the question of international quality assurance and accreditation; (c) the impact of commercial values on education as the latter becomes ensnared in the sanctions and seductions of trade; and (d) developmental consequences for countries in the global South and, in our case, the implications for Africa.

The migration of terms from the business to the education sector is a clear sign of the ubiquitous, some would say insidious, creep of business rhetoric and models into contemporary social discourse and policymaking. Education mutates into an industry, students into consumers, and learning into a service. As Jane Knight (2004) has noted, this ‘creep’ has been a source of conceptual
confusion when the terminology has vastly different assumptions and meanings for the two sectors. A related complication is the lack of a generally agreed upon taxonomy or typology of the various forms of ‘borderless’ higher education, given the growing diversity and differentiation of providers, delivery modes, media and locations, curricula and content, expected outcomes and institutional configurations (Van Damme 2002:4).

The tendency is increasingly to use the GATS classification that distinguishes among four different modes of services trade outlined above. GATS seeks to promote trade liberalisation in educational services by encouraging the import and export of educational services and products. A major exception is services provided in the ‘exercise of governmental authority’, which has been a source of intense debate about whether education provided and funded by governments can be exempted. In fact, the very term ‘services’ and other concepts such as ‘national treatment’, ‘commitments’ and ‘transparency’, some of which are borrowed from previous trade goods agreements, are not well defined (Mihyo 2004).

Even more heated than the terminological debates are concerns about GATS’s implications in constructing an international regulatory framework needed to deal with the international registration of providers, recognition of foreign qualifications, quality assurance and accreditation. Much attention has focused on international quality assurance out of concern for protecting learners against fraudulent providers and bogus degrees, the academic integrity of local educational systems and national identity and sovereignty. Four trends and models have been identified in the international quality assurance movement and literature, each expressing rising aspirations for and degrees of integration. They encompass informal exchange and cooperation or formal mutual recognition agreements among national agencies and the creation of an international system of meta-accreditation or global accreditors (UNESCO 2002; Van Damme 2002).

The first model is the most developed. It seeks to promote convergence by strengthening or transforming national quality assurance and accreditation systems to deal with the new developments. In much of the world, quality assurance policies and mechanisms were established beginning in the 1980s to deal with the challenges of skyrocketing enrolments, cutbacks in government funding, expansion of private and foreign providers, increased mobility of students and faculty, the growth of distance education and e-learning and mounting public and ideological demands for accountability and transparency in higher education systems. Some countries borrowed from the American model, the oldest accreditation tradition in the world, but not always successfully given the varied contexts.
Indeed, exporting accreditation models from the developed to the developing world, sometimes as part of codes of ‘good conduct’ or ‘good practices’ to safeguard the quality of transnational programs, often elicits charges of cultural imperialism and dependency. The distance education sector has developed some innovative guidelines and models; and some progress has been made, especially in regions sharing common traditions or integration schemes and trade agreements. Still, comparability and compatibility remain daunting, given wide variations in national systems and legislation and differences over the very definition and measurement of ‘quality’ and diversification in quality assurance methodologies and systems—not to mention the stubborn protectionist claims of national autonomy.

Far less common are formal bilateral and multilateral agreements of cooperation and mutual recognition. The recognition can either be for the ‘equivalence’ or ‘acceptance’ of academic qualifications (degrees and diplomas or study periods and credits), or for professional qualifications conferring the right to work in nationally or internationally regulated professions such as law, accountancy, medicine or engineering. Europe has the most examples of these formal agreements, whilst the Washington Accord (signed in 1997 between engineering organisations from Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States, and later joined by South Africa, Hong Kong and Japan, among others) is the first major international professional recognition agreement.

Meta-accreditation academic agencies are still in their infancy, largely confined to associations with non-binding powers such as the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), the Commission on Global Accreditation of the International Association of University Presidents (IAUP), which has been planning a ‘global quality label’ for quality-assurance and accreditation agencies, and the proposed Worldwide Quality Register for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agencies. An attempt to create a global accreditor failed when the Global Alliance for Transnational Education, formed in 1995, was rocked by conflicts and corporate takeover. By 2002 no fewer than seven major global accreditation initiatives had been attempted (Williams 2002). Africa needs to take these developments seriously and participate in them actively.

These initiatives are largely driven by the universities themselves and their networks. For many, therefore, ‘intellectual globalisation is alive and well now and does not need the straitjacket of GATS and the WTO. We should be moving toward a globalisation based on equality rather than a new neocolonialism’ (Altbach 2002:5). The GATS environment represents a new phenomenon that to some reinforces and to others subverts university-led in-
ternationalisation efforts. Certainly it raises both economic and ethical questions. For example, the ethics of public institutions that become private providers when they set up branch campuses in foreign markets (whereby students in poor countries effectively subsidise institutions in developed countries) have been questioned.

As Mala Singh (2002, 2004) has forcefully argued, an ethical framework for internationalisation of higher education is essential because education is not simply an instrumentalist enterprise for the acquisition of marketable skills but is equally responsible for forging social values and citizenship; it is also a social process and practice embedded in specific cultural traditions and is critical for promoting development. In a world already divided into centres and peripheries, some warn, ‘globalisation in higher education exacerbates dramatic inequalities among the world’s universities’. While developing countries are likely to be the worst affected, as universities everywhere become ‘subject to all of the commercial pressures of the marketplace—a market place enforced by international treaties and legal requirements’, the very idea of higher education as a relatively autonomous and creative space of intellectual production and the future of academe as a vocation of critical contemplation is threatened (Altbach 2001).

Globalising African Higher Education: A Modest Proposal

African universities can neither afford to blissfully ignore the new forces of transnational education nor embrace them blindly. They must engage them as critically, creatively and collectively as possible. They must contest the GATS agenda vigorously whilst pursuing more productive paths of internationalisation, both old and new. But for internationalisation to succeed, the national revitalisation of African universities is imperative. The reform agenda for African universities is an exceedingly complex and demanding one as I have pointed out elsewhere (Zeleza 2003; Zeleza and Olukoshi 2004). Space precludes my pointing out more than the currently low international standing of most African universities.

It is indeed a travesty of monumental proportions that not a single African university made it into the list of the world’s top 200 universities recently released by the *Times Higher Education Supplement*, whatever one may think about the methodology, accuracy, pitfalls and usefulness of such rankings and international comparisons (Machanick 2004). As the editorial to the report put it, ‘Higher education has become so international that it is no longer enough for the leading universities to know they are ahead of the pack in their own country’ (O’Leary 2004:2). Underrated African universities will find it difficult to compete not only for foreign students but also for the best of their own
nation’s students. According to some estimates, more than 180,000 African students are already studying overseas (Kigotho 2003; OECD, n.d.). ‘More than 2 million undergraduates now study outside their own country worldwide, and this number is growing at about 20 per cent a year’ (Ince 2004:6). To be sure some do so because they cannot gain entry into local universities, but many also hope for a better education in the world’s top universities and are prepared to spend a fortune to attain it.

Moreover, unless African universities are revitalised and strengthened and their international standing and presence raised, they cannot expect to effectively compete against foreign institutions riding on the prestigious brands of their home institutions or national systems and eager to set up shop in African countries, even if their offerings may be shoddy. In short, without prompt action, Africa risks falling further behind in the rapidly growing and competitive international education market. As South African President Thabo Mbeki (2004) wrote recently with poetic urgency: ‘Our entire continent remains at risk until the African university, in the context of a continental reawakening, regains its soul.’

Beyond national rehabilitation, raising the international ‘brand’ names of African universities, requires specific interventions at regional, continental and global levels. First, the systems of intra-regional and intra-continental mobility and exchanges for students and faculty, and quality assurance and accreditation bodies must be set up, strengthened, streamlined and synchronised for each of the five regions and at the continental level. Second, centres of excellence must also be established where some of the continent’s best students and faculty can study, work and do research. These can include existing institutions or entirely new institutions designed to recall Africa’s once-great regional universities that were consumed by postcolonial nationalisms and designed to reflect contemporary regional integration projects and possibilities. Third, African academic diasporas, both the historic and contemporary, many of which are found in the North in some of the world’s greatest universities, must be mobilized aggressively (Zeleza 2003:ch. 3; 2004). Finally, African institutions of higher education must play a more active role in international higher education fora and agencies from GATS and UNESCO to such groups as the Association of Commonwealth Universities. They must also make linkages where none exist with universities in the global South and especially Asia, the emerging frontier of global economic power in the twenty-first century (Kigotho 2002; Maslen 2000; Tysome 2003).

None of these ideas is new. In fact, at its Tenth General Conference, held in February 2001, the AAU recommended, among other things, the need to explore ways of creating regional centres of excellence and of marketing their
degree programs abroad, as well as setting up regional university accreditation bodies to oversee standardisation in the five regions to facilitate student and staff exchange (‘Brief Report’ 2001; Kigotho 2001). Africa’s malady is indeed not the absence of good ideas, let alone prescriptions (of which it probably gets too many from friends, foes and foes pretending to be friends), but often the lack of the political will and economic wherewithal to act.

This is a call for a renewed Pan-Africanism, a new Pan-Africanism for higher education that seeks to build on the nationalist project that gave Africa its postcolonial universities and that seeks to realise the age-old dreams of regional integration and continental unification (Mkandawire 2004). The imperatives of the present require us to support national universities through greater transnational co-operation within Africa itself and the creation of new regional systems of institutional collaboration and accreditation, as well as new regional universities and colleges that tap into the vast human resources of Africa’s own academic diasporas that can compete with the best in the world.

The AAU has a responsibility to take the lead in promoting modes of transnational education that benefit Africa. But it cannot be expected to shoulder this mammoth task alone. The African Union, NEPAD and the regional bodies including SADC, ECOWAS, the Maghreb Union, and COMESA must be centrally involved in the process of revitalising and internationalising African universities. Only then can they face the world and the emerging environments of transnational education with greater confidence and competitive capacities. The revitalisation and transnationalisation of African universities is too serious a matter to be left to higher educational institutions and associations alone. All the organisations mentioned above must, as a matter of urgency, convene a conference involving all the key players from heads of state and universities and leading diaspora academics and benefactors to work out a plan of action for the renewal and internationalisation, on African terms, of African universities, including the adoption of a common platform on GATS and higher education.

Conclusion

Transnational higher education is here to stay. For Africa, the challenge is to minimize its costs and maximize its benefits. Insofar as GATS is an evolving process, it is imperative that African and other developing countries participate actively in constructing its legal, conceptual and operational architecture to take advantage of its opportunities and to limit its perils. At the global level, this achievement will require creating an international quality assurance and accreditation agency and regulatory instruments negotiated jointly by both the
developing and developed countries that can promote and monitor transnational providers to ensure the development of more equitable networks of collaboration among the world’s universities, As Singh has argued:

Higher education organisations in the developed and developing world need to mount a united engagement around this issue, seeing as it touches on many issues of common concern, including the right to conceptualise and operationalise education as more than a private good, issues of academic freedom and university autonomy, the problematic equation of companies vending education products with universities, the possible tensions between credible quality assurance on the one hand and marketing and advertising claims on the other. (2002:8; Newman and Couturier 2002:8)

And since ‘the GATS trade mode framework only covers commercial trade types of activities’, Knight (2004:41) reminds us, it is important ‘that the education sector begin to develop its own classification system and language to categorise cross-border education in a manner which includes all forms of mobility and all types of activity not just commercial ventures.’ ‘Instead of taking the view,’ to quote Bernheim and Chau (2003:7), ‘that a world academy already exists, with actual interchanges and universalised production, it ... should be seen as a task yet to be performed, a goal, requiring both critical reflection on the present and the mediation of the particular in the direction of the universal.’

The future of higher education linkages requires bold visions of internationalism and alternative globalisation that transcend the edicts of market accountability and narrow commercial calculations. These visions must embrace the ethics of social accountability and an expansive humanism that will elevate and empower all our people, enabling us to face the enduring and fresh challenges of our existence on this delicate, dwindling but delightful planet with greater confidence. We must resist the temptation to naturalise contemporary trends and ideologies that debase rather than elevate human dignity. We will have failed the future if we do not vigorously pursue the dreams of university education as an ennobling adventure for individuals, communities, nations and the world at large, if we do not strive to create universities that produce ideas rather than peddle information, critical rationality rather than consumer rations and knowledge that has lasting value.

For Africa the keys to productive and progressive internationalisation in higher education lie in a renewed and reconfigured Pan-Africanism, historically the anchor of Africa’s globalisation and the Africanisation of globalisation. But for this new Pan-Africanism to blossom, it must mediate the centripetal
forces of nationalism and the centrifugal forces of globalisation. Transnationalism provides that mediation. And so the question is: What systems and structures of transnational higher education must we create for Africa that meet the imperatives of national development, the interests of regional integration, and the interventions of neo-liberal globalisation? In the answers we provide lie the possibilities of transnational education in Africa, for Africa, and from Africa.

Notes

1 According to the Chronicle of Higher Education (10 December 1999), of the 70,501 visiting scholars in the United States in 1998-99, 83 per cent were primarily involved in research, 11 per cent in teaching, and 8 per cent in both teaching and research. Their leading fields of specialization were the health sciences (26 per cent), physical sciences (15 per cent), life sciences (15 per cent), engineering (13 per cent), social sciences (4 per cent), agriculture (3 per cent), mathematics (3 per cent), and computer and information sciences (3 per cent).

2 According to Adekanmbi's (2004:223) study on 125 institutions in 36 countries, 36 of the institutions are universities, another 36 are NGOs, 29 are public post-secondary institutions, and 24 are private organizations.

3 For example, the e-University in Britain, in which the government sank £62 million to promote on-line education to a global audience, was forced to close (Weller 2004). However, an analysis of financial data suggests 'that on average e-learning and related firms are edging closer to profitability' (Garrett 2003).

4 Market access refers to a negotiated market commitment in specific service sectors. Countries can make 'full commitment', 'partial commitment' or 'no commitment' across the four modes of supply. These commitments may be subject to such limitations as 'the number of foreign service suppliers; the value of transactions or assets; the total quality of services output; the number of natural persons who may be employed; the type of legal entity; and the extent of foreign capital participation' (Chanda 2002: 8).

5 The only African countries that have committed to between 60 and 100 sectors are Egypt, Lesotho and South Africa.

6 Among African countries, Congo, Lesotho and Sierra Leone 'have made full unconditional commitments in higher education, perhaps with the intent of encouraging foreign providers to help develop their educational systems' (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada 2003:8).
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