**Internationalisation of Higher Education and National Development: The Case of Zimbabwe**

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**Abstract**

The discourse of the internationalisation of higher education continues to grow in influence. Whilst the bulk of the IHE literature has been Northern-focused and dominated, there was an African strand a decade or so ago that has sought to understand what the discourse means in African contexts, shaped profoundly as they have been by colonialism. This debate is ripe for revisiting given the very different context of the post-2015 period and a return to debates about the decolonisation of African higher education. Through an exploration of the case of Zimbabwe, we question of whether IHE discourses and practices can be placed at the service of development alternatives in spite of their Northern neoliberal roots and whether, therefore, there may be a new notion emerging of a development university that is grounded both in local and global contexts.

**Keywords**

**Domesticating the Internationalisation of Higher Education to be a Servant of National Development Agendas: The Case of Zimbabwe**

## Introduction

Internationalisation of higher education is a growing phenomenon, though its particular manifestations change over time and space. As reflected in the commonly-understood notion of IHE, it reflects both a specific set of institutional practices and a discourse of a 'global war for talent' in response to increasingly global flows of capital and labour, and this impacts discursively even on polities where such flows are muted.

Research on IHE takes place at different scales. Some looks at global or national systems levels at a high level of abstraction. More commonly, the unit of analysis is the institution, particularly in the sub-field of educational management; or the individual (whether student or staff) in parts of the economic, sociological and geographical traditions.

As De Wit and Hunter, and Knight (both 2015) note, IHE has evolved as a notion and practice since the 1990s. Knight argues for two main elements to this: cross-border education, where programmes are increasingly online and offered beyond campuses, and campus-based internationalisation, where international branch campuses are established in other jurisdictions. She suggests that this modern notion of internationalisation has evolved from notions of staff/student mobility, largely of a short-term variety, through more systematic mobility of programmes (e.g., joint and franchised degrees) and providers (branch campuses, etc.) into the emergence of key hubs where both advanced and middle-income economies become hosts to particular concentrations of IHE activities as part of national economic strategies. For polities and institutions, IHE is inextricably linked to the discourses and practices of globalisation (Marginson and Rhoades, 2002; Stromquist, 2007; de Wit et al. 2017).

However, universities have been international in staff-student composition and outlook throughout their existence, whether in Buddhist, Christian or Islamic traditions (McGrath, 2018). From the 1500s, colonialism transplanted European models of higher education into the South, always with strong ties back to the 'mother' country. Later, anti-colonial struggles saw networks of scholars and activists emerge in diasporas with regional sensibilities, such as in Pan-Africanist tradition. This reminds us that IHE is simply one form of how higher education is international.

Returning to the IHE debate, Jones and de Wit (2012) suggest that a new literature is starting to attempt to understand institutional, national and regional IHE strategies that are not simply reactive to globalisation and Northern strategies and discourses but show a greater sense of Southern agency. De Wit et al. (2017) take this further in an edited collection that includes accounts of IHE in the South. We wish to build on this by insisting that this approach needs to be more firmly grounded in a reading of the historical trajectories and tensions that shape how the interplay of the national, international and global dimensions of higher education is currently understood. Thus, any focus on IHE needs to be extended to a consideration of wider imaginaries and histories of higher education and the place of the international and global therein (cf. Marginson and Rhoades, 2002) that draw on comparative education as well as IHE traditions.

Southern agency needs to be stressed, but without neglecting structural effects at material and discursive levels. Discussion of Southern agency regarding IHE also must inevitably take us to the longstanding debates about Southern knowledge and its decolonisation (Smith, 1999; Connell, 2007) and attempts at alternative formulations of development (Williams, 2014; Kruss et al., 2016). This leads on to the question of whether IHE discourses and practices can be put at the service of development alternatives in spite of their Northern neoliberal roots.

We address these debates through reflections on interviews with academic staff and leaders at six Zimbabwean universities, arising out of a collaboration between an English

university and the Zimbabwean Council for Higher Education, the sector's regulatory body. We focus primarily on the national system level, building on our existing work at the individual and national levels of internationalisation (McGrath, Madziva and Thondhlana, 2015; Mertkan, Gilanlioglu and McGrath, 2016). Specifically, we ask three questions:

1. How do Zimbabwean universities understand and strategise about the internationalisation of higher education?
2. How do discourses of internationalisation interplay with national agendas and discourses in Zimbabwe?
3. What does this tell us about the wider processes of the internationalisation of higher education in the South?

Part of our contribution is to address the IHE debate's tendency to concentrate on certain localities and generalise therefrom. Quite reasonably, the non-metropolitan IHE literature has focused on settings where IHE is a quantitatively significant element of overall national provision and, indeed, in some cases, of the national trade statistics. Thus, the IHE 'hubs' of the Gulf States, Hong Kong SAR and Singapore feature prominently (Becker, 2009; Sidhu, Ho and Yeo, 2011; Wilkins and Huisman, 2012) whilst North Cyprus reflects the extreme case with international students making up more than 20% of the population (Mertkan, Gilanlioglu and McGrath, 2016, 891).

Zimbabwe is a very different type of case, that of a medium-sized country, with a relatively well-established higher education system but low current attractiveness to international students. Yet, as we explore below, colonialism, Pan-African resistance and, later, socialist solidarity after independence generated elements of internationalisation practice over the 60 years of Zimbabwean higher education.

We suggest that such a case is more relevant to the experiences of much of the South than are the current cases of IHE hubs. Many Southern countries are attracted to the globalising discourse of internationalisation. However, this may be less about the potential to reap major benefits in terms of attracting international students and staff in large numbers as is happening in the hub countries, than about attempts to limit the existing marginalisation of most Southern higher education systems from the 'global' higher education system.

The Zimbabwean case also allows us to start thinking more deeply about how global higher education dynamics and discourses might be operating in different settings and how they interplay with the distinctive elements of national political economies, historically-grounded higher education systems and national discourses. It also helps to remind us that much of what is apparently 'new' in IHE is of an older vintage, assisting us to better analyse what is novel and why. Whilst it cannot be separated from globalisation, IHE always takes place within national contexts, and often at points of connection between multiple national systems and regulatory frameworks. Thus, it is always a conscious strategy of institutions that are based in particular locations and which are motivated by contextual factors. Southern countries inevitably have to weigh up a series of costs and benefits linked to specific forms of this internationalisation phenomenon that relate to how they intersect with national development agendas, social imaginaries and regulatory frameworks. Moreover, at the institutional level, internationalisation is understood both by their own staff and in the localities in which they are situated as a process that reshapes their implicit social contract with their host communities. In the Zimbabwean case, this tension between local-national considerations and internationalisation possibilities is reflected in particular ways specific to Zimbabwean colonial and post-colonial history.

Strikingly, this does not result in a simple replaying of the decolonisation discourse so prevalent in neighbouring South Africa, although a form of decolonisation discourse can be detected that reflects older Pan-Africanist traditions. Rather, as we shall show, the story emerging is one in which a modern, entrepreneurial version of the developmental university is seen as a national solution, and elements of internationalisation as a tool to support this.

The lack of populist decolonisation discourse may sound strange given some of former President Mugabe's rhetoric, as reported on in the Western press. However, such populist rhetoric about control of the economy was always in tension with a strong personal valuing of Anglophone culture.

We address our research questions sequentially in the second half of the article. However, we must first spend some time addressing the historical and contemporary Zimbabwean context. This leads on to a brief and necessarily selective discussion of how this context contributes to the mobilisation of a particular set of discourses, which we explore in our conceptual framework section. This is then followed by a methodological note. Here again, context is crucial, as our project spanned a moment of regime change in Zimbabwe.

**Historical context**

The internationalisation of higher education is not new to Zimbabwe; it can be traced back to the colonial era. Formal education was first introduced by European missionaries and further developed by British colonialists. Education policies in colonial Zimbabwe were designed to maintain the separation of different racial groups and were characterised by strongly unequal provision of education between white and black communities. Whilst primary education was widely available for blacks by the mid-20th century, there was very little secondary provision and, thus, very few Africans were trained at a higher level, and almost entirely in lower status professions (Chung, 1988; Zvobgo, 1994).

Higher education in Zimbabwe commenced with the establishment of the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (UCRN) in 1955, evolving into the University of Zimbabwe by 1980 (Shizha and Kariwo, 2011). Although the student body was predominantly white, some black students did attend UCRN, whilst even fewer attended institutions such as Fort Hare in South Africa or, very rarely, Northern universities (Nherera, 2000). During the liberation war, it became increasingly common for Zimbabweans to receive higher education in Socialist countries.

UCRN was located within a wider British colonial model of internationalisation in which issues such as curriculum development and quality assurance were regulated through relationships with the 'mother' university (in UCRN's case, the University of London, but the University of Birmingham for Medicine). Distinctively, the high quality of education and favourable working conditions in Zimbabwe attracted international students and staff. Expatriate whites, mostly from the University of London, dominated UCRN's academic and administrative staff, reproducing much of the curriculum, culture and heritage of the mother university. Moreover, those few black students that did 'make it' acquired the colonialist's way of life and became role models for black society to aspire to, an Africa-wide phenomenon (Mazrui, 1978). In post-independence Zimbabwe, UCRN graduates played a prominent role in providing leadership, academic standards and much-needed top-end skills, thus perpetuating colonial educational practices (Gaidzanwa, 2007). Whilst the school curriculum saw significant moves away from the colonial past (Zvobgo, 1994), the forces described by Mazrui served largely to insulate higher education from change, save in the Africanisation of the staff and student bodies (though with significant white participation) and a greater emphasis on African languages and history.

The University of Zimbabwe flourished in the 1980s. It continued links with British universities, especially around programme external examination, but also saw large influxes of Eastern European staff into some departments. Its high quality and the overall strength and stability of the Zimbabwean economy encouraged considerable inflows of staff and students from the rest of Africa. Sanctions imposed on the settler government in the 1960s were lifted, resulting in increased international support for university teaching and research projects; staff development schemes; and student exchange programmes. Notable schemes included a project that trained more than 2 000 Zimbabweans in Cuba as maths and science teachers, and a presidential scholarship scheme that saw more than 40 000 students being sponsored to study in South African universities. In addition, many

black graduates who had studied abroad returned and joined the University as academics and management. They brought with them international practices from their exposure to various higher education systems. The University was clearly highly international in this period.

However, this situation changed dramatically in the 1990s. Whilst new universities were opened, initially in a filial relationship akin to UCRN's historical relationship with London, post-independence optimism began to erode. Marketised reforms resulted in economic collapse and greater political polarisation. By 2010, several million Zimbabwean nationals were living in the diaspora. Many of these pursued higher education in their new locations (McGrath, Madziva and Thondhlana, 2015). Meanwhile, political and economic problems meant that fewer international staff and students entered the country. The attempt to revise the Constitution in 2000 and increasing political violence led to Zimbabwe's suspension from the Commonwealth, followed by EU and US sanctions. Inevitably, this increased Zimbabwe's higher education isolation, affecting the extent to which Northern IHE discourses could find resonance.

Yet, even this story of a period of isolation can be overstressed. The diasporic explosion sowed the seeds for a future reintegration into the international higher education community. Moreover, the likelihood of migration led students to push for curriculum reforms and access to qualifications that could better prepare them for international employability. In responding to these pressures, Zimbabwean universities have been engaging in another new form of internationalisation, distinct from that in the mainstream literature.

Notwithstanding this caveat, at the time of beginning this project in 2016, Zimbabwe appeared to be one of the least promising sites globally in which to consider IHE, as commonly understood. Yet, as this brief historical review makes clear, Zimbabwe's recent marginalisation contrasts with a complex and historically vibrant involvement in international higher education processes, new manifestations of which are still present.


**Conceptual framework**

We explicitly locate this work within debates about IHE whilst trying to move beyond these, drawing on our comparativist sensibilities. As we noted above, IHE in its narrow sense emerged in the 1990s and is inextricably linked to the discourses and practices of globalisation (Marginson and Rhoades, 2002; Stromquist, 2007; de Wit and Hunter, 2015). Whilst Knight (2015) notes the power of national and institutional responses to neoliberal globalisation, she stresses that there are a range of other motivations for IHE including academic and individual arguments about interculturalism and global citizenship, as well as calculations of personal positional advantage to be gained from an 'international' degree. As we will demonstrate below, classic elements of IHE discourse were very evident in our interviewees' responses.

However, this largely Western, indeed Anglocentric, debate tends to overplay the pervasiveness of a monocultural globalisation and underemphasise other discourses at play in national higher education debates in the South. Crucially, our respondents broadly drew also on an Afrocentric approach, grounded in three longstanding accounts.

First, an orthodox human capital argument that higher education contributes importantly to economic development (McCowan and Schendel, 2015), reflected largely in policy emphasis on developing indigenous high-level manpower (McGrath, 2018) but increasingly also acknowledging the potential benefits of highly skilled migration (Thondhlana, Madziva and McGrath, 2016). We will not dwell on this account given its pervasiveness.

Second, an African strand of a wider Southern notion of the 'development university' (Yesufu, 1973). This approach called for the grounding of universities' teaching and research agendas in the 'real' problems of African development, around rural marginalisation, poverty and the emergence of urban informal settlements and work. In

more recent forms this has become intertwined with arguments that see universities' development role as lying in the promotion of social entrepreneurship. One prominent network in this respect is the Talloires Network of 'engaged universities' (http://talloiresnetwork.tufts.edu; Watson, et al., 2011), to which two Zimbabwean universities belong.

Third, the older anti-colonial struggle is reflected in continued calls to 'decolonise the university'. Much of the current debate remains hugely dependent on the analyses of Fanon (1965), Nyerere ([1963] 1966), Mazrui (1978) and Ngugi (1986 and 1993). Taken at its broadest, the decolonisation discourse seeks to rebalance the hierarchy of 'powerful knowledge' in favour of indigenous content and ways of knowing and against the domination of the Western tradition (Connell, 2007). In South Africa in particular, the new wave of decolonising the university has been largely activist in nature, reflecting the still highly contested political economy of that country. However, in an important intervention, the post-colonialist theorist, Mbembe (2016) has sought to critically engage with the movement from a stronger theoretical position. In this, he insists (following the footsteps of the earlier writers cited above) that decolonisation cannot be understood as simply Africanisation in which a new form of domination is substituted for the old at the institutional and national levels whilst the global power structures remain unchanged. Rather, Mbembe argues that a 21st century decolonisation of the university requires resisting the neoliberal, globalised form of the university (which includes the dominant model of internationalisation of higher education) and building an African humanism that is internationalist in its outlook.

The combination of these concerns about national cultural, societal and economic development provide a set of distinctively African thinking tools for Zimbabwean academics (and for us in engaging with them) when they encounter the global IHE discourse. Whilst these resonate broadly with some Northern accounts, this Africanness makes them distinct.

It is to the complex meanings respondents make of this set of influences that we will turn. However, first, we must make more explicit our methodological approach.


**The study and methodology**

The project arises out of a formal partnership between the University of Nottingham and the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education to support higher education development. One theme that emerged from earlier work was a growing university management concern with internationalisation. This led to the current study, carried out collaboratively by a team of three researchers: the Zimbabwean acting CEO of ZIMCHE, herself a former international student in Scotland; a Zimbabwean academic who has worked in the higher education system there but is currently based in England; and an Irish academic who has worked both in Zimbabwe and England.

We developed the project, including sample frame and interview topic guide, through the use of cloud-based document management and face-to-face and online meetings. We gained ethical approval through the University of Nottingham. A sample of six universities was created to reflect differences in institutional age, public-private status and specialism/comprehensiveness, and a stratified staff sample reflecting different ranks and responsibilities for/awareness of internationalisation issues (Vice-Chancellor, Registrar, International Office Director, Dean, academic). We then conducted 30 interviews in English. In the following analysis, each interviewee is referenced by role and a number within that category. Mindful that discursive resources are sometimes implicit in initial formulations of interviewees, we were concerned to explore both their stated accounts of internationalisation and to probe further and explicitly regarding the influence, or not, of the African discourses outlined above.

We then transcribed the interviews. A further collaborative discussion produced a draft coding framework informed by the existing international literature and national debates.

We divided the transcriptions by interviewee type so that each coded interviews from all institutions sampled. We then discussed initial codings at a further online workshop, revised the coding frame and agreed emerging major themes.

We then divided up by theme and section the writing of a draft report for ZIMCHE. This was presented at a workshop with ZIMCHE staff in Harare, leading to further discussion and revision of the analysis. Then we re-presented the revised report to another workshop in Harare, comprising of Vice-Chancellors or their nominees. Again, this led us to revise our analysis. From this, we then further discussed the key arguments to be presented here and divided up writing and editing tasks.

Given recent events in Zimbabwe, something must be said about timing. The project began when the Mugabe government still appeared unassailable. Fieldwork proceeded through mid-2017 and at the time of the ZIMCHE workshop in September 2017, there was little inkling of regime change or Zimbabwe's readmission into the international community. Internationalisation, therefore, was largely understood as happening in spite of powerful wider constraints and as being severely limited as a result. Yet, as we continued to work on a research report and prepare for the Vice-Chancellor workshop, the remarkable events of late-2017 unfolded and Robert Mugabe fell suddenly after 37 years in power. Indeed, we had to delay the workshop as it clashed with the inauguration of the new President. Thus, we came 10 days later to a Harare in which the discussion with Vice-Chancellors was now shaped by imaginings of a future that included the lifting of sanctions, readmission to the Commonwealth, and the prospects of a new era for higher education both domestically and in terms of internationalisation. Whilst exciting, this brought a new methodological challenge for us of thinking about our continued analysis of the data in a moment that was highly febrile and discursively radically different. In particular, we needed to take account of how interview transcripts from six months earlier should be read in the light of revised imaginaries regarding the future of Zimbabwean higher education. We explicitly discussed this in developing this article.

Student voices are absent from this paper, an important limitation. Whilst students may have been more radical on decolonisation, our sense from our engagement with debates in the sector is that this still would have been far more muted than in South Africa or, indeed, England.

**How do Zimbabwean universities understand and strategise about the internationalisation of higher education?**

Internationalisation has a variety of meanings for Zimbabwean HEI staff. More senior academics and management showed a broader and more nuanced understanding than more junior colleagues, and, inevitably, were clearer about institutional strategies. As noted above, where our participants were not always immediately clear about the meaning of internationalisation, we prompted them towards a deeper reflection of the concept. In some cases, we led them from discussion of practical activities and strategies towards questions of vision and purpose.

The bulk of what we heard was at a practical level, where understandings emerged from practices rather than being driven by broader visions. The range of understandings across the 30 interviews is summarised in table 1 and then fleshed out beneath.

Table 1: Internationalisation of Higher Education Understandings, Strategies and Rationales

| Understanding | Strategies | Rationale: |
| --- | --- | --- |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Internationalisation is about having international students | • Growing a south-south focus to international student recruitment<br>• Opening satellite campuses in neighbouring countries<br>• Using online provision to attract international students<br>• Developing partnerships with African governments and through churches to recruit international cohorts | • Primarily financial<br>• Some mention of enhancing national students' learning experience |
| Internationalisation is about having a diverse group of academic staff | • Recruiting and retaining international staff<br>• Drawing back home academics from the Zimbabwean diaspora<br>• Creating international sensitivity among staff through overseas exposure during contact and sabbatical leave and participation and engagement in international platforms | • Predominantly, academic knowledge exchange is part of being a quality university<br>• Some sense of this supporting overall staff satisfaction and retention<br>• Some references to international rankings and benchmarkings |
| Internationalisation is about having international institutional agreements | • Expanding international research collaborations<br>• Building new collaborative teaching and learning arrangements<br>• Improving information and resource sharing<br>• Promoting exchange of students and staff<br>• Developing joint degree programmes<br>• Jointly organising international conferences and workshops<br>• Growing membership of international associations | • More varied distribution across responses than from above categories<br>• Can help access resources in a constrained environment<br>• International visibility should be a goal of all universities<br>• This supports capacity building of staff<br>• Networking is likely to lead to the capture of a range of intangible benefits |
| Internationalisation is about broader and less formal processes of international engagement | • Extending the opportunities for national staff to spend time attached to international universities<br>• Increasing staff participation in international conferences and workshops | • Same arguments about visibility, capacity building and networks as in the previous category |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Internationalisation is about internationalising the curriculum | • Transforming the curriculum to reflect the latest thinking internationally<br>• Seeking international programme accreditation<br>• Strengthening the role of ZIMCHE to support these processes | • Strong concerns about relevance<br>• Argument that these actions would assist mobility and employability of graduates |
| Internationalisation is about relevant frameworks | • Establishing internationalisation structures<br>• Creating suitable institutional and national policies<br>• Advancing regional harmonisation of programmes | • Widespread view that internationalisation can't take place without the relevant structures and policies<br>• Some reflection of the strong SADC agenda on regional harmonisation of programmes and qualifications |

As we will examine below, there are powerful echoes of global IHE discourse here. Nonetheless, there are also hints of greater complexity, as we shall explore later.

*Recruitment of students*

This was the predominant understanding of internationalisation. A range of strategies were being employed to attract international students. Realistically, the focus was overwhelmingly on recruitment from the region:

> We accept any student who qualifies irrespective of their nationality. This way our university is viewed as a global institution. Examples of countries where our students come from are South Africa, Mozambique, Lesotho, Swaziland, Malawi, Botswana, Namibia, and Zambia. (REG5)

Whilst the dominant understanding and strategy was of international students coming to Zimbabwe, two universities had established international campuses in the region and one had established a virtual campus to attract and cater for international students.

The actual recruitment process was varied. Rather than being the more individualised and marketised processes common in classic IHE, here the focus was more on formal agreements to recruit cohorts, signed with partner institutions, churches or through government-to-government arrangements:

> We are recruiting students from all over the world, using a two-pronged approach, where we can recruit students individually from any country to join our university, so that we increase the diversity of the student population and the university. We are also working with the sister organisations in collaboration in terms of student recruitment. (REG6)

Another respondent noted that "We have government-to-government contracts, for example with the Swaziland and Namibian governments." (AC [Academic] 2).

Across all responses, financial rationales predominated. What appears to be happening here is that most individual conceptions of the international were locked in an understanding reflecting the early stages of IHE in the North, at least if they were asked

directly about internationalisation. However, local practices are evolving to reflect a different context in which attracting international students directly is difficult.

*Recruitment of staff*

However, a number of respondents did move quickly on to a more expanded notion. This was particularly noticeable amongst the most senior ranks (registrars and Vice Chancellors). They stressed the interlinkage between internationalising students and staff, and that both were important in terms of broadening institutional outlooks and cultures. As VC [Vice Chancellor] 1 noted: "it cannot be an internationalised university, when you only have Zimbabweans teaching". Most VCs and Registrars stressed the importance of a mix of international staff and the learning that this could bring. Specifically, a diverse staff was highlighted by one VC as crucial to the enrichment of the student experience:

> if you don't have a mix of cultures that come as a result of internationalisation, you are the poorer for the experience that your students should be having from globalisation. (VC2)

More pragmatically, some noted that the feasibility of this was low, given the prevailing socio-economic and political constraints. The few who were able to recruit expatriate staff typically made use of their existing networks. This was particularly strong for private church-based universities:

> Our staff body has an international flair. Current countries of origin are the Philippines, Madagascar, Nigeria and Bangladesh. (REG2)

Consequently, institutions were focusing more on attracting Zimbabwean diaspora academics through incentives such as free housing and vehicle loans. Given the hostile international recruitment environment, some were seeking second-best solutions like short-term staff exchanges and connecting to international lectures through video links.

Thus, senior staff appeared more likely to have a broader conception of what internationalisation meant, and one that was less narrowly instrumental than their junior colleagues. However, structural constraints meant that they had to seek to operationalise internationalisation in pragmatic ways.

*International institutional agreements*

In keeping with trends elsewhere, there was some understanding of internationalisation as a particular form of external engagement through formalised agreements for purposes of international visibility, capacity building and resource mobilisation. Thought not expressed by all respondents, such responses did spread across the staff categories. For instance,

> It's to do with linking our institution to the external stakeholders, which can include other universities, and other research organisations, or other such higher education institutions that can mutually help ourselves and that organisation outside in terms of delivering on its strategy goals (IO [international officer] 4)

As in early stages of internationalisation in the UK (Ayoubi and Massood, 2007), there was a sense that quantity of MOUs mattered, rather than quality of interactions or strategic importance.

Partnerships with wealthier neighbouring countries or the North tended to be stressed:

> We have a number of Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs), with a number of universities outside Zimbabwe. For example, we have an MOU with the University of Botswana; we have an MOU with the University of Witwatersrand. In Spain we have an MOU with the University of Catalonia. There is a university in Italy where we have an MOU. (REG3)

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Some partnerships were potentially very wide-ranging, though still in development:

> We have looked at jointly delivering of our degree programmes via telematic education facilities, with a university in South Africa. We have looked at curriculum review, teaching and administrative support, apart from that, we are looking at mutual assistance in the establishment of new programmes staff and student exchanges, joint research projects, sharing information and publications, organisation of conferences and workshops sharing library resources, and lastly, organisation of joint programmes (AC6).

Zimbabwe wasn't always the junior partner in such arrangements. We've already noted the role of one university in training staff for neighbouring countries, and a distance provider gave an example of an international agreement that was ensuring that their content was being shared, and paid for, internationally:

> We are making our courses more accessible to the outside world through an MOU signed with eLearn Africa (facilitated through our membership with AAU), an organisation that specialises in e-content development, and hosting of that e-content on their website, and then they make the content available to, really, anyone who is willing to take that course, for a fee (VC3).

Although exchanges were currently almost entirely in-bound, all institutions saw the potential opportunities exchanges bring to local staff and students through mixing and mingling with international counterparts:

> We have also been into quite a bit of exchange programmes for both staff and students. We have had some professors from Wits coming here to assist our academics on research writing, how to craft a proposal for PhDs, how to conduct research (REG3).

Some respondents mentioned membership to regional and international organisations as good strategy for collaborating and networking. Most of the universities were members of the Southern Africa Regional University Association and the Association of African Universities, and we noted earlier that two leading universities were members of the Talloires Network. This had become even more important with the coming of sanctions:

> Although we are not a Commonwealth country right now, we are getting help and spill-over benefits from the Commonwealth of Learning through our sister colleges, like BOCODOL in Botswana, who are full members of the Commonwealth. (AC6)

Here the discourses encountered were very consistent with the Northern IHE literature, both academic and practical. Such partnerships were clearly valued for the institutional and personal benefits they could bring even though the language of international partnerships appeared to be one of function over purpose at the superficial level.


*General international engagement*

All the respondents indicated that their institutions were sending staff on contact visits, sabbatical leave as well as participating at conferences and workshops outside the country:

> We believe in exposing our staff to environments that enrich their capacity to deliver in what we seek to achieve - the new state of mind (VC1)

The choice of partners was determined by factors such as existing relationships (e.g., church connections) and common purpose of institution (e.g., distance provider). As with universities worldwide, there was also an emphasis on benchmarking with more highly ranked institutions, such as Stellenbosch. However, there was a realism that this would necessarily be limited given the unattractiveness of Zimbabwean partners at the present

time. Whilst these Northern discourses were drawn upon, they were not really actively articulated in what appeared to be an unfruitful context.

*Internationalising the curriculum*

A critical aspect of internationalisation is curriculum change (cf. Leask 2005). Whereas discussion of many of the more institutional aspects of internationalisation was predominantly with senior management and international officers, Deans and academics were more likely to refer to curricular matters, in three ways.

First, it was argued that Zimbabwean curricula were internationalised in the sense that ZIMCHE ensured that curricula were standardised and benchmarked to international norms:

> As a response to the requirements of our regulatory body, ZIMCHE, we are ensuring that any new programme that we introduce is internationalised, inclusive and accredited. (AC2)

This was not simply a matter of ZIMCHE imposing its view of international standards, however. One Dean recalled,

> When we came up with our peace and conflict programme … we also consulted internationally in terms of looking into what others were offering. So we have those particular modules that look at our own context in terms of Zimbabwe, then Africa, then we also have a global outlook. (D [Dean] 5)

Second, some disciplines saw international accreditation as important (which also was significant for employment experiences of the diaspora, as we have shown elsewhere-McGrath, Madziva and Thondhlana, 2015):

> We also ensure that some of the programmes that we have are accredited by international organisations. Say for instance for an accounting programme, accounting accrediting institutions internationally accredit that particular programme. (AC2)

Third, one Dean was far more effusive about the possibility of Zimbabwe leading the world:

> we are trying as much as possible to export knowledge in terms of content and skills, in terms of culture, language as well, we influence and we impact across our borders, that's our understanding of internationalising of education. We want to export our best practices to other countries in terms of our education system. (D2)

The first two of these, again, are very typical of such responses internationally and reflect the travelling of international education policy tool kits. However, the third is an appropriation of international discourse but with a nationalist twist. However, this was very much an outlying comment.

*Internationalisation operationalisation frameworks*

Internationalisation was also seen in terms of the structures and strategy that facilitated its operationalisation. The two recurrent examples were an international office and an internationalisation strategy document. Whilst many talked of these, they were typically lacking. This was partly seen as due to lack of a national vision in this regard:

> To the best of my knowledge, there is no clear national policy on what Zimbabwe expects its higher education institution (HEIs) to do in the global arena. My recommendation is that it would assist institutions greatly if a national framework on internationalisation of higher education was in place because of the vast opportunities that exist (REG6)

Harmonisation of programmes was considered to be another operationalisation strategy. In this case, participants argued that in order for internationalisation to be effective, especially with regards to the recruitment of students, there had to be some kind of harmonisation between collaborating institutions:

> We may face challenges with regards to commerce and education programmes because they may have differences in collaborating universities. Sometimes students fail to identify any other courses that they may do during exchange periods (IO4)

As one VC noted: "if it's a global market, then our standards must also be comparable with those found elsewhere in the international community" (VC4).

Unsurprisingly, this theme reflects a clear appropriation of the global discourse. There was very little sense of any localisation, unlike some of the themes above.


*Section conclusion*

Overall, whilst there appears to be a nuanced understanding of internationalisation at the level of senior university management in Zimbabwe, this is shallowly rooted in the university community as a whole. When pressed, many saw this as a monodimensional issue of attracting more international students or increasing international sabbaticals for academic staff. Both clearly are important issues but a sense of the potential mutually reinforcing benefits for university finances, for institutional cultures, for staff development and for student satisfaction and employability only was evident in a few of our interviews.


**How do discourses of internationalisation interplay with national agendas and discourses in Zimbabwe?**

In keeping with our brief discussion of an Afrocentric account in the conceptual framework section, our data shows that the official systemic priority is higher education for national development, not IHE. Here, the guiding policy was the *Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation*, *2013-2018* (ZimAsset) (Government of Zimbabwe, 2013). The need for universities to serve national development needs was far more apparent in the interviews than were individual, institutional or national accounts of internationalisation.

This led several respondents to couch internationalisation in terms of how it could be used to serve the predominant agenda. In this sense, apparently hegemonic global tropes were being domesticated. As one very senior academic noted at our workshop with Vice-Chancellors, the priority should be national development, but international resources should be mobilised to support this agenda:

> The positive impact on the international scene should also be felt at home by contributing positively to the socioeconomic development and enterprise development, hence the need for innovative research and community engagement.

Practically, internationalisation, in part, was seen as a way of benchmarking. For instance, the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development had organised a one-month long learning tour of recently-industrialised countries for Vice Chancellors. As REG3 reported:

> VCs, the Minister and other relevant stakeholders embarked on a benchmarking trip to learn how other universities were leveraging on research to industrialise their countries.

There was also a sense that internationalisation was partly attractive as it could bring supplementary resources to further the national development agenda, a position most visible at the senior ranks of universities. This issue was particularly pressing as access to

international resources was hampered by sanctions. Several universities were consciously piggybacking on universities in neighbouring countries or taking advantage of continued membership of organisations such as the Association of Commonwealth Universities and the Commonwealth of Learning to secure access to international resources:

> Politically our country is under sanctions … We have resorted to using partnerships to get round the problem. Take for instance, although we are not a Commonwealth country right now, we are getting help and spill-over benefits from the Commonwealth of Learning through our partners, who are full members of the Commonwealth. (VC1)

One important strand of the higher education for national development discourse was that of the entrepreneurial university. This was not about entrepreneurially recruiting large numbers of international students, as in the IHE model, but was grounded in an argument that the possibilities for economic development will only be realised though teaching students' entrepreneurial skills and values. This resonates with the older development university discourse, although it clearly intersects with Northern trends towards exhorting universities towards entrepreneurship and innovation.

For a small number of respondents, this entrepreneurial university discourse could also be couched in decolonisation terms:

> there's a lot of dimensions in decolonisation of higher education, firstly if you approach from the angle that the education for blacks was meant to create a workforce to serve white interests, or white capital, and not necessarily to create someone who'd create their own enterprise. It's from that dimension alone, you can see that then the approach to pedagogy and the approach to content creation for programmes would have been very different when you are just aiming to produce a workforce, than when you are now not just aiming to produce a workforce, but rather an entrepreneur. So by decolonising our higher education system, we have moved now … from a curriculum that creates employees to a curriculum that creates job-creators, entrepreneurs, and enterprise-creators. So, the new content is one that encourages ideation, idea creation, and encourages entrepreneurship. And it's a different curriculum altogether, it's a curriculum that frees the mind, and curriculum that does not place the mind in bondage and removes the mind from a cage into an open space, and the way it is free to roam and wander and create (VC3)

The language used here is fascinating. Rather, than just draw on entrepreneurial education discourse, there appeared to be a conscious evocation of a Ngugi-like 'decolonisation of the mind'. As VC2 put it:

> when we talk about decolonisation, it's saying how will these programmes benefit our people, how will they serve as transformational instruments

Although the language (at least of VCs 2 and 3) drew on decolonisation tropes, and is couched in post-independence language of 'self-reliance', it is clear that this entrepreneurial university notion was also drawing on a wider international discourse and involvement in networks that bring together 'engaged universities' from very different settings.

There was little sense of a South African style populist decolonisation discourse, talking of replacing the Western canon and transforming pedagogies. In part, this is contextual. As one respondent noted wryly, to talk of a decolonisation imperative 37 years on seemed to imply little had been done in the interim, and that the responsibility for change lay outside. There was a strong sense of a pragmatic discourse that saw the way forward in steering a course between the extremes of borrowing from the West and autarky. Of course, this is nothing new, and the most nuanced of Africanisation arguments have long made this point. For instance, speaking 55 years ago, Julius Nyerere cautioned:

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> There are two possible dangers facing a university in a developing nation: the danger of blindly adoring mythical 'international standards' which may cast a shadow on national development objectives, and the danger of forcing our university to look inwards and isolate itself from the world (Nyerere, [1963] 1966: 218-9)

Any national-international-global tension is also complicated in Zimbabwe by the complexity of interactions with the diaspora. Whilst there clearly are issues for some about others' decisions to migrate, there is a general sense that the diaspora contains many erstwhile colleagues and is a significant resource for Zimbabwean universities to draw upon. The return of some academics from international universities was seen as helping to educate students into wider possibilities for their work:

> I'm a living example of somebody who has been able to operate in different environments, different cultures, and also infuse this idea that, as Zimbabweans or Africans we are also capable of inventing things, we are also capable of generating knowledge, and we should be able to generate knowledge and export it to other countries as well, instead of waiting for something to come, maybe from the Western world (AC1)

Though not a major part of the interview discussions, there was a small sense, as in some of the international debates, that there were potential dangers in recruiting international students if it was, or was perceived to be, at the expense of locals:

> [community leaders say] This is our university in our community, for these subjects you are, for these courses, we want someone to be able to take them after doing Shona and Ndebele English. ... So you want to bring people from other regions to come and enjoy *our* university (VC1)

However, for the present, numbers of international students are too low to make such tensions powerful.

This section suggests that once we dig beneath the surface of talking about IHE in Zimbabwe something more interesting emerges. Although some of the rhetoric of IHE, located as it is neoliberal globalisation and faith in human capital solutions, is obvious in this section and the previous one, there is fairly shallow ownership of it. Rather, IHE appears to be attractive pragmatically for the possibility of it generating additional resources with which to pursue personal, institutional and national agendas. Being on the margins of the global knowledge economy makes IHE both less of a risk and less of a potential benefit for Zimbabwean higher education.

Some decolonisation language does emerge but it is far more muted than in South Africa and is more in line with a longer Zimbabwean, and wider Pan-African, discourse of mutual self-help. It also draws to some extent on global discourses about engaged universities but this itself has long-established African roots.


### What does this tell us about the wider processes of the internationalisation of higher education in the South?

As we noted at the outset, Zimbabwe is not a typical IHE national case but it is of greater relevance to realities in most countries. The familiar aspects of IHE are present in our interviews, particularly with senior university leaders. However, more interesting things appear to be going on regarding why internationalisation may be useful. On one level, there is nothing fundamentally different from how IHE is understood in host or hub countries. In all cases, it is seen as serving broader national interests. What does differ is the context. At least for the foreseeable future, countries like Zimbabwe are not likely to have internationalisation as a major source of foreign currency or a tactic in the 'global war for talent'. Rather, more limitedly, lower income countries are likely to see IHE as a modest contributor to national development strategies.

The story is more interesting when it comes to how national and international notions and influences come together around a vision for higher education more generally. What emerges from some of the interviews is that there is a Zimbabwean debate about the purpose and character of higher education. This has two international strands that combine to support a discourse of the engaged university.

On the one hand, the Zimbabwean notion of making higher education of greater practical use and linking it particularly to entrepreneurship over employment reflects the initiatives of international alliances such as the Tallories Network, which situate entrepreneurship strongly in civic engagement rather than atomised individualism.

On the other, this ontological underpinning is highly compatible with Zimbabwean hunhuism (Samkange and Samkange, 1980- closely related to the more widely known Ubuntu). It also reflects a Pan-African tradition of 'self-reliance', as propounded by the first wave of post-independence leaders such as Kenyatta, Kaunda and Nyerere. Historically, this tradition made Africa fertile ground for the notion of the development university. Whilst early post-independence universities in Africa were understood officially as a means to modernity and industrial development through the creation of high level human capital, this was contested from the outset by those who believed that such institutions were maintaining Western forms of knowledge and power that would prevent Africa from successfully transforming.

The decolonisation of higher education debate has periodically waxed and waned over the last 60 years. It has reached a renewed height in the recent past in South Africa. Whilst a handful of our interviews did engage with a decolonisation discourse, this always appeared to be part of the older Pan-African tradition than influenced by the populist readings from contemporary South Africa. In part, this perhaps reflects a natural Zimbabwean distrust of the influence of its much larger and richer Southern neighbour. Of course, whilst both were settler economies, the proportion of white Zimbabweans is far smaller and their power in the labour market is far less profound than for white South Africans. Thus, the populist drive for Africanisation is simply not there in Zimbabwe, yet there is a distinct African flavour nonetheless.

The Zimbabwean case also serves to reinforce the key comparativist point that history matters. IHE is simply one phase in how higher education operates across national boundaries and Southern higher education systems are not simply blank slates on which IHE has been inscribed since the start of the new millennium. Pre-colonial and colonial encounters with the North ensured that Zimbabwean education has long had international influences and that there have been long-standing flows of educators and students in and out of the country. The University of Zimbabwe, like many Southern universities of the colonial era, was established in a filial relationship with a metropolitan university, and patterns of international influence were thus written into every aspect of its policies and practices. In the post-independence euphoria after 1980, the University of Zimbabwe was attractive both to academics across Africa for its wealth and limited state control, and to international progressive academics for Zimbabwe's anti-Apartheid and pro-Socialist stances.

All of this historical context makes the Zimbabwean case unique. However, this is in itself is less a limitation of presenting the Zimbabwean case and more an important finding. All other Southern higher education systems also have important histories that are shaping them and these need to be understood if we are trying to understand higher education as an international phenomenon. IHE exists as a powerful international discourse but it needs to be translated and instantiated in specific contexts to have real effect and meaning. Whilst IHE to date has primarily been studied in those host and hub settings where it appears most powerful, it cannot be adequately understood without grasping how it operates very differently in other settings. Moreover, although Zimbabwe is unique, much of the discourse present has resonance across Africa and is informed by Pan-African discourses of both higher education and development, as well as deeper ontological affinities.

## Conclusion

Asking direct questions about IHE elicited well-developed answers from many Zimbabwean senior university leaders but not from their more junior colleagues. The latter, however, could build from concrete IHE practices to talk more abstractly about IHE as a process. However, what is very clear is that asking a fairly standard set of questions about IHE gets a fairly standard set of answers. This reflects the relatively well-established IHE 'tool kit' of attracting international students, signing MOUs, creating international offices, etc.

Nonetheless, something much more interesting happens when the attempt is made to ground the debate about IHE in questions of its engagement with national priorities. What is hopefully apparent in what we have written above is this step change from the discussion of our first question to that of the second and third. As we transit to the second, we see that the centrality of the national development agenda was emphasised. IHE is then couched in terms of the (limited) role it can play in supporting this through mobilising international resources. The only positive mention that we found of looking out of Africa for lessons comes from the latest phase of the previous government's 'look East' strategy that had seen university leaders travel to Asia to learn how higher education had played a role in successful economic development. Yet, international partnerships were lurking in other parts of the story, whether this be the role of international networks in thinking about the engaged university or the attempts to keep Commonwealth partnerships alive in spite of sanctions. Through all this, the international is seen to be at the service of the national.

Decolonising the university is far less of a 'live issue' than in neighbouring South Africa. When the subject was raised, respondents typically linked it to the case for the engaged university, keying this back to long-established African critiques of the over-academic education inherited from colonialism, and drawing on a tradition of self-reliance.

There are two potentially interesting implications of this more muted decolonisation discourse. First, away from the particular context of South Africa (and its resonance for African minorities in the North), what is needed is a consideration of how decolonisation discourse is of use to thinking about how African universities may be made more responsive, critical and democratic actors in a wider attempt at new forms of African development that can both improve material conditions and draw on calls from Fanon through to Mbembe to construct an African humanism that is open to the rest of the world.

However, second, we need to consider further how discourses of engaged universities offer a meaningful alternative to the dominant neoliberal model and a viable and attractive means of supporting human development. Distinguishing between neoliberal and indigenous strands here is beyond us in this article but is an important challenge.

Work on IHE has been too Northern-centric conceptually, both in the intellectual tools used and in its emphasis on global processes flowing from the North. We noted earlier that some, like Jones and de Wit (2012) and de Wit et al. (2017), have sought to stress Southern agency in IHE more. However, this needs to go much further. Here, we seek to contribute to and motivate for such a move. This requires us to consider both wider historical processes linked to colonialism, independence and globalisation, and to draw on African knowledge as well as Northern if we are ever to generate a full theoretical account.

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