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Conceptualising Higher Education and the Public Good in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa.

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Extended Abstract

Higher education has been the object of policy attention in sub-Saharan Africa in recent years. It has been seen as key to unlocking the potential of the youth bulge, responding to the demands of a growing middle class and to transforming commodities-based economies into knowledge societies (World Bank 2009; Cloete, Maassen & Bailey 2015; Chuks, 2017). Yet despite significant expansions of enrolment – including widening participation by women, major barriers to access exist, reflecting inequalities based on class, gender, geographical location, ethnicity, religion, language and disability (AAI 2015; Morley & Lugg 2009; Morley & Croft, 2011). There are quality challenges in relation to teaching and learning, research, and governance. While some comment on a 'renaissance in African higher education' (Higgs, 2016), and others on the effects and framings of colonial epistemicides (Nyamnjoh, 2012) key questions abound about relevance and power relations highlighting the need to decolonise the curriculum, structure, organisation and cultures of universities. The student protests in South Africa from 2015 highlighted problems of access and funding, but these are not isolated events. They expose an unresolved colonial legacy in these higher education systems. These processes raise questions not only of the *public good* relevance of higher education - beyond the obvious advantages conferred on those who manage to go to these institutions – but also of how higher education and its relationship with society may be conceptualised given these contexts (Lebeau and Milla, 2008; Mamdani, 2017). An overarching question is who is defining the public good and how?

While many of the above issues are global e.g. universities throughout Latin America, Australasia, Asia and Europe are involved in similar debates and protests, this paper explores the relationship between higher education and the public good in the sub-Saharan African context through a consideration of some connections and disconnections. There appear to be two distinct ways in which higher education and the public good have been conceptualised are discussed. Firstly, higher education can be portrayed as *instrumental* in shaping a version of the public good where its qualifications, knowledge production, innovation, development of the professional classes, and expertise are perceived to lead to particular manifestations of public good, delineated as economic, social, political or cultural (McMahon 2009; Stiglitz 1999). The key arguments that underpin this conceptual framing speak to different levels of the public good, whether individual and community levels or the provision of 'global public goods' (Marginson 2007; 2013; Menashy 2009). However, a contrasting set of arguments portray the relationship between higher education and the public good as an *intrinsic* one, where the intellectual, physical and cultural experiences enabled through higher education express and enact the public good e.g. prejudice reduction, democratisation, critical thinking, active citizenship (Singh 2001; Calhoun 2006; Leibowitz, 2013; Marginson, 2011; Locatelli, 2017). Important here are considerations of the historical conjuncture that shapes experiences of higher education at a particular time and what these may mean. In considering the

connections and disjunctures between these two formulations and the way writings on higher education in contemporary Africa have engaged with this debate, the paper makes an argument for discussing the importance of processes that link instrumental and intrinsic visions of higher education and the public good. The analysis of these from a rigorous review of literature leads to a delineation of some different views of time, space and evaluation.

The paper argues that these contestations need to be read contextually. Higher education in sub-Saharan Africa has moved through phases, from the establishment of flagship national universities in the post-independence period for state bureaucracy formation (Teferra, 2017), to the emergence of developmental universities with a commitment to indigenising knowledge and benefiting marginalised populations, through more recent tendencies towards the marketisation of public institutions and the significant growth of the private sector (Assié-Lumumba & CODESRIA 2006; ADEA & AAU 2004; Coleman 1986; Mamdani, 2007; McCowan 2016). Appreciating these contextual factors in shaping the role and functioning of higher education and thus its relationship to the public good is a central theme in our analysis. We suggest that mainstream conceptualisations of higher education and the public good are underpinned by particular understandings of the nature and form of higher education and how knowledge is acquired, developed and disseminated – orientations that may be very far from the reality of highly unequal, socially stratified, and politically complex societies within which higher education is deeply embedded. Thus a reconceptualisation of the *public* is required by these contexts and some challenge to conceptualisations of the *private*, given the strong obligations of individuals to extended families, and the sharing of the benefits of higher education amongst their communities of origin. The paper concludes with a consideration of what may be important in conceptualising higher education and the public good in the African context and the value of such thinking for broader debates on the role of higher education.

Introduction: Higher Education's Intrinsic or Instrumental Value?

This paper aims to examine some of the connections and disconnections which emerge in discussions of higher education and the public good in an African context. It considers the conditions of possibility are for higher education to play a role associated with public good, how plausible this is, given current evidence, and some of the contemporary conditions in sub-Saharan Africa. As part of this discussion we review two contrasting ways of thinking about higher education and the public good, but our conclusion leads us to the requirement to pay serious attention to different ways of thinking about public good in societies marked by deep inequalities.

The paper starts with an initial brief contextual overview regarding conditions in African higher education since 1991 providing some overview figures regarding higher education participation rates in Africa, the stratification between institutions (public, private, and different kinds of tertiary level institutions), and some ways of assessing research intensity. The second section delineates a number of different ways in which higher education and the public good are linked. We have selected a range of ways in which the definition of public good is argued for and posed questions about the form of higher education this presupposes. As many arguments about public good emerge from economics and politics these analyses tend to assume particular ideal types of higher education. One of our questions concerns whether actually existing higher education institutions are able to fulfil this role, and, if so,

under what conditions. We suggest that two types of argument are made for the relationships between higher education and the public good, however public good is formulated. On the one hand, higher education is portrayed as instrumental in shaping a version of the public good. These arguments tend to stress temporal and causal relationships. They assert that higher education will lead to particular manifestations of some formation of public good, which could be economic social, political or cultural, *in the future*. The temporal hiatus in realising a form of the public good, could be short-term, say 5 years or over decades. Sometimes these arguments tend to focus on what is learned formally and informally in higher education, and can be assessed such as critical thinking, subject knowledge and employability skills, but often this type of analysis is rather loose about the activities in higher education, and places most analytical concern with the public good outcomes of these activities. This form of analysis is often less concerned about what people say they understand by public good and higher education, and more concerned to begin with a framework that defines public good (or goods) or the forms of social contract that might ensure this, and then inquires into how higher education connects causally with this frame.

A second form taken in arguments about the relationship of higher education and the public good is that public good (often delineated in terms of critiques of forms of power and a site for open access to information) is an intrinsic part of the experience of higher education. These arguments tend to stress the psycho-social, the cultural, the relational insights and soft power developed in particular kinds of higher education or put under stress through particular relationships of colonialism, globalisation, neoliberalism. These arguments take the form of asserting that it is experiences of the physical, intellectual/cultural or affective *spaces* of higher education that express and enact public good through 'envisioning' and providing a language for or symbolic depiction of freedom, solidarities, alternative descriptions (Gamedze & Gamedze, 2016; Ndebele, 2017). These analyses tend to look at what is happening at a particular historical conjuncture regarding the experience of higher education and its relationship with other elements of the public sphere, and to draw out the implications of this for some broader discussion of public good, with temporal results often only loosely sketched. These analyses tend to give strong weight to how participants interpret public good, but there has been less theorisation of what outcomes are entailed associated, for example with participation in the public sphere or supporting forms of social citizenship, and how higher education, which will always be a setting in some form for elites, is positioned in these practices. A further consideration is that higher education is not monolithic, but like its socio-economic context, it is highly stratified and pluralized. There are multiple higher educations, often aim at educating different social groups. Many less elite universities have a strong applied focus and provide vocational training. Hence, their contribution to the public good is self-evident. However, the elite universities, in most national locations, tend to educate privileged communities and produce politicians, owners or senior managers in the economy, and senior civil servants or cultural commentators. Their engagement with public good is mediated through many of the relationships of inequality that characterize political economy.

We suggest that both forms of the intrinsic/instrumental argument rest on a notion of an ideal of higher education institution that possibly exists in elite forms of institution, or for elite groups of academics or students, but is very far from the conditions in many higher education institutions in sub-Saharan Africa. Scholarship is now emerging, but evidence discussed in this paper suggests that there are unequal geographies of knowledge and patterns of participation in higher education, apparent globally, but intensified in sub-Saharan Africa because of particular colonial legacies and post-colonial relationships (Morley & Lugg, 2009; Zeleza and Olukoshi, 2004; Ndlovu-Gatsheni., 2017). In a hypothetical globalised knowledge

economy, widening participation in higher education could be a force for public and private transformation including democratisation, personal, and economic growth. In an equally hypothetical state concerned with social services and improving the wellbeing of all in the society, even a small higher education system could serve the public through the graduates it produces and the research it conducts. However, it can also map on to elite practices and contribute to further differentiation and subjection, and indeed, objectification, of social groups. In short, the roles and functions of higher education in any society are constrained by and shaped by the social, political, and economic relations in that society. These tensions sometimes cohere around debates concerning academic freedom and the relationship with the state of African universities (Mamdani, 1993), sometimes consider the relationship between development/growth, equity and democratization, and whether it is possible to balance all three (Badat, 2004), and sometimes raise the question of institutional form and whether all higher education institutions should be universities or whether some other arrangement of forms, including better utilization of digital or virtual institutions needs to be considered (Zezeza and Olukoshi, 2004). In our analysis below we attempt to show that these are not primarily questions of governance or of positioning higher education on a longer continuum of the education system, but that they also problematize and require consideration of how to contextualise the notion of public, private, and ethical ideas about what is right and good.

Changing higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa and intersecting inequalities

The 2009 UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education in Paris adopted the resolution that higher education is a public good, and gave special focus to the challenges and opportunities for the revitalisation of higher education in Africa (UNESCO, 2009). There has been an enormous expansion in participation in higher education in Africa over the last twenty-five years, although the proportion of the population progressing through this phase of education is still relatively low by international standards. One feature of this expansion has been associated with a plurality in institutional forms, not just between private and public, although this has been much remarked on (Mohomedbhai, 2014; Morley, 2014; Oketch, 2016) but also between different kinds of tertiary level institutions. This includes universities; technikons or polytechnics; diploma-awarding institutions linked to professional practice such as in education, health, social work, and industrial, agricultural or commercial forms of work. This plurality of higher education institutions comes with its own hierarchies, and complexities in shaping ideas about the relation of higher education to the public good. A review of some key data sources illustrate some of the important changes that have taken place within higher education in sub-Saharan Africa and useful in developing a deepened understanding of the context pertinent to the concerns of this paper.

Student enrolments across all levels grew from roughly 200,000 about 40 years ago to an estimated ten million today. But only a minority of the estimated 1,500 public and private universities across Africa offer graduate programmes (Friesenhahn, 2014). In 1990, 2% of tertiary enrolments across the world were in sub-Saharan Africa. In 2000 the figure remained at 2%. However, between 2000 and 2010, higher education enrollment more than doubled, increasing from 2.3 million to 5.2 million (AAI, 2015). The World Bank (2017) therefore argues that sub-Saharan Africa has seen the fastest growth in its tertiary gross enrollment ratio (GER) during 1970-2013 at 4.3 percent annually, faster than the global average of 2.8 percent. But the proportions are low. In 2016 only 8.4 of the population between 18 and 22 in sub-Saharan Africa were enrolled in tertiary education – that is, the *Gross Erolment Ratio* for tertiary education (UNESCO, 2018). This compares to 75 for High Income Countries, 35 for Middle Income Countries and 8 for Low Income Countries (World Bank Income Groups, UNESCO, 2018). Moreover, that World Bank (2017) also asserts that despite the significant

growth that has occurred, it is insufficient to meet the demand that exists. This demand is driven by improved access to primary and secondary education, a growing young population, and employment shifting away from the agriculture to manufacturing and services (World Bank, 2017).

As a percentage of spending, African countries are not all low in higher education expenditure. Of the ten countries with the *Highest Share of per capita GDP per Tertiary Student between 2006 and 2012*, all ten were in sub-Saharan Africa. However, despite high spending as a percentage of GDP (from, of course, relatively small GDPs) all these countries have *Gross Enrolment Rates* less than 8%. This represents a high investment in the small numbers enrolled. Looking at completion, the percentage of 25-29 year olds who have at least completed four years of higher education is 8% in sub-Saharan Africa (UNESCO, 2016). Sub-Saharan Africa, alongside West Asia, has not experienced the so-called ‘feminisation’ of higher education and it has maintained a strong male bias in tertiary enrolments over time. Of the 10 countries with the *Largest Male Bias in Tertiary Enrolments* between 2008 and 2011, 9 were in SSA. Expansion has come at a price, with questions about whether the infrastructure has been adequately resourced and developed to accommodate increasing numbers. Overcrowding in lecture halls at some African universities is all too common. Statistics show that on average there are 50% more students per professor at African universities compared to the global average (AAI, 2015).

Sub-Saharan Africa has a long tradition of sending sections of its elites overseas for their higher education with the effect of entrenching colonial models of higher education (Nyamnjoh, 2012; Mamdani, 2017). In 2008, about 223 000 students from sub-Saharan Africa were enrolled in tertiary education outside of their home countries, representing 7.5 percent of the total global number of students who study outside of their home country (AAI, 2015). In the last ten year universities in China have become a key site for some African students to obtain degrees. (Ho, 2017)

Alongside internationalisation, private higher education has played its part in increasing student numbers (Morley, 2014). It is one of the fastest growing education sectors in Africa. According to the 2009 *World Bank report Accelerating Catch-up: Tertiary Education for Growth in Sub-Saharan Africa*, the number of private universities and colleges, including for-profit and not-for-profit institutions, mushroomed from 24 to an estimated 468 between 1990 and 2007, to reach over 1,000 in 2014 (Bloom et al. 2014 cited by World Bank, 2017).

A key component in many of the public good arguments relates to human capital. Africa is often described as facing a severe shortage of highly-skilled African talent—although the ways of calculating skills shortages are highly contested and it is likely that many of the problems in this regard emanate from labour markets, and not the supply of skilled graduates (Meagher, Mann and Bolt, 2016; Allais, 2017). Young people in Africa make up nearly 40% of the working-age population, yet 60% are unemployed. While employability is frequently invoked as an example of the public good, on average, it will take a university graduate five years to obtain a job in Africa (AAI, 2015),

The table below brings together some of the available data that speaks to issues of enrollment and successful completion in higher education in SSA. While this composite picture shows the expansion that has taken place, it also shows the continuation of key patterns of inequality with regard to both access and success, particularly in relation to gender and geographical location (urban/rural divide). While these figures are useful, there remain large gaps in the

data as the table below shows, reflecting the lack of reliable data around higher education that persists in a number of countries in sub-Saharan Africa. This makes developing a reliable and comprehensive picture of higher education across the region very difficult (Cloete, Maassen & Bailey, 2015).

Table 1: Trends in enrolment and completion in higher education in sub-Saharan Africa between 1990 and 2016.

Indicator	1990	2000	2010	2014	2016	Low income countries (2016)	Middle income countries (2016)	Europe & North America (2016)
Total enrolment in tertiary education (no of students) (both sexes) ^{1 & 2}	1,476,531	2,739,233	6,460,740		7,428	4,447	151,849	50,702
Gross enrolment ratio (both sexes) (%) ³	3,2	4,4	7,9	8,6	8,44	8	33	75
Gross enrolment ratio (female) ⁴ (%)	2,2	3,6	6,5		6,98	5	35	85
Gross enrolment ratio (male) ⁵ (%)	4,2	5,2	9,2		9,88	10	31	66
Tertiary completion rate (all) ⁶					8%			
Tertiary completion rate (female) ⁷					6%			
Tertiary completion rate (male)					10%			

¹ The total number of students enrolled at public and private tertiary education institutions.

² UNESCO defines tertiary education as comprising International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) levels 5, 6, 7 and 8, which are “labelled as short-cycle tertiary education, Bachelor’s or equivalent level, Master’s or equivalent level, and doctoral or equivalent level, respectively. The content of programmes at the tertiary level is more complex and advanced than in lower ISCED levels” (www.uis.unesco.org).

³ Total enrolment in tertiary education (ISCED 5 to 8), regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the total population of the five-year age group following on from secondary school leaving.

⁴ Total female enrolment in tertiary education (ISCED 5 to 8), regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the total female population of the five-year age group following on from secondary school leaving.

⁵ Total male enrolment in tertiary education (ISCED 5 to 8), regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the total male population of the five-year age group following on from secondary school leaving.

⁶ Percentage of population aged 25-29 who have completed at least four years of higher education

⁷ Percentage of females aged 25-29 years, who have completed at least four years of higher education

Tertiary completion rate (rural)					3% (2% f /5% m)			
Tertiary completion rate (urban)					17% (14% f /21% m)			

Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics/UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (2016, 2017, 2018) & Report of UN Statistical Commission, June 2016

While recognising that the practice of university rankings is a deeply contested issue, especially within the global South (Badat, 2010), existing ranking systems that are used in much policy discussion of higher education provide some sense of the ‘research intensiveness’ of universities in SSA in relation to other regions. Table 2 below draws on the new Times Higher Education University Rankings (THS) for ‘BRICS countries and emerging economies’ to provide a picture of the universities ranked as the top ten in SSA. While a number of indicators are used to rank the universities, the table captures in particular those indicators which are regarded as the central assessors of knowledge production. What is evident here is that the top six are all South African universities. Moreover, the top five are universities previously designated for white students (historically white universities) under the old Apartheid system, with long histories and a depth of resources. The University of the Western Cape is the only historically black university here. Only three universities in other African countries feature in this top ten: the University of Nairobi, University of Ghana, and Ibadan in Nigeria.

Table 2: Top ten ranked universities in sub-Saharan Africa according the 2018 Times Higher Education (THS) world ranking of universities in the BRICS countries and emerging economies

Name of University	THS: BRICS	Date university established ⁸	Research score ⁹	Citations score ¹⁰
University of Cape Town (RSA)	4	1829	36,2	87,0
University of the Witwatersrand (RSA)	8	1896	23,2	76,5
Stellenbosch University (RSA)	42	1918	36,1	60,0
University of KwaZulu Natal (RSA)	58	2004 (Natal 1910 + UDW 1960s)	30,8	49,8
University of Pretoria	74	1908	26,5	29,3
University of the Western Cape (RSA)	102	1960	17,6	35,9
University of Ghana (Ghana)	125	1948	18,3	20,4

⁸ As stated on website and may reflect the start up of a college or similar that then developed into a university.

⁹ Cumulative score drawn from ‘reputation survey’, ‘research income’ and ‘research productivity’

¹⁰ Regarded as indicator of research influence

University of Johannesburg (RSA)	141	2005 (RAU 1967+Wits Tech 1903 + Vista 1981)	18,4 (2017)	23.5 (2017)
University of Ibadan (Nigeria)	201-250	1948	11,4	7,4
University of Nairobi (Kenya)	201 -250	1956	9,4	21,1

If the THS World Ranking list, which considers the global picture, is considered, only one university in SSA features in the top 200 – once again an historically white university in South Africa. Table 3 below captures the ranking of those universities who constitute the top 11 in from SSA within this list (Makerere features here but not in the BRICS and emerging economies list as Uganda does not fit the criteria for inclusion in this list).

Table 3: Top eleven ranked universities in sub-Saharan Africa according the 2018 Times Higher Education (THS) World University Rankings.

Name of University	World (TH)
University of Cape Town	171
University of the Witwatersrand	251-300
Stellenbosch University	351-400
University of KwaZulu Natal	401-500
Makerere University (Uganda)	401-500
University of Johannesburg	601-800
University of Pretoria	601-800
University of the Western Cape	601-800
University of Ghana	801-1000
University of Nairobi	801-1000
University of Ibadan	801-1000

An alternative global university ranking system is the QS World University Rankings. Table 4 below captures the ranking of the top eleven universities in SSA within this list. It also shows the score given to these universities using the indicators of ‘academic reputation’ and ‘citations per faculty’ and the evaluation of their “research output”. What is interesting here is that Makerere University in Uganda is positioned higher than on the THS list.

Table 4: Top ten ranked universities in sub-Saharan Africa according the QS World University Rankings (2018).

Name of University	QS	Academic reputation (survey)	Citations per Faculty (SCOPUS)	BRICS (only South Africa)	Research output#
University of Cape Town (RSA)	191	60.2	35.9	19	Very high
Stellenbosch University (RSA)	361	34.4	52.9	47	High
University of the Witwatersrand (RSA)	364	34.7	33.7	36	Very high
University of Pretoria (RSA)	501-550	31.9	-	38	High
Rhodes University (RSA)	701-750	-	38.2	138	High
University of Johannesburg (RSA)	601-650	-	-	58	High
University of KwaZulu Natal (RSA)	701-750	-	-	80	High
Makerere University (Uganda)	801-1000	-	-		Medium
Northwest University (RSA)	801-1000	-	-		High
University of Ghana (Ghana)	801-1000	-	-		Medium
University of Nairobi (Kenya)	801-1000	-	-		Medium
University of the Western Cape (RSA)	801-1000	-	-	146	High

The research intensity of the university, based on the number of papers output relative to the University's size

While, this data and the associated ranking systems which underpins it, need to be approached with caution, the picture that is captured in these tables suggests that research capacity remains a significant challenge for most universities in SSA. This has important implications for knowledge production across the continent, for the impact and value of this knowledge within the global community and for ideas about how we understand public good.

This picture of expansion, plurality, and uneven distribution of teaching capacity and research intensity, needs to be placed in a context of some of the key challenges of SSA regarding political economy and social development. Some important features of this concern extensive intersecting inequalities associated with wealth, income, race, class, gender, ethnicity, and location, as well as the effects of austerity or global economic forces limiting some of the expansion of human development. In nearly all the countries of Africa there is a concentration of a large share of income and wealth with a very small number of people. There are notable flows of money, skill, raw materials, and knowledge from some countries to the Global North, but at the same time growing regional initiatives around development, co-ordination, policy, and institution building. Flows of investment, aid, technologies, and people from the global north to Africa are often associated with hierarchies in relation to

political and cultural influence, uneven partnerships, and limited concerns with equality and sustainability. Most of the autocratic rulers who governed many African countries in the 1980s have been replaced by democratically elected governments, but the process of democratisation and enhanced political participation is uneven, as is the process of establishing institutions of the state that are fair and free from corruption. This process of developing democratization nationally and regionally has happened side by side with an era of globalisation and neoliberalism, in which many of the areas of public policy, such as education, health, and housing, have been commodified to varying degrees, and the functioning of the state has been undermined through new public management and an emphasis on contractualization and awarding of tenders to the private sector instead of actual delivery by the state. Sometimes this has entailed partnerships with governments, and sometimes free enterprise undermining equitable state provision, or the state using the private sector to deliver services in ways that it does not have the capacity to manage or evaluate. The period has also been one of growing environmental fragility, associated with famines, shrinking water resources, and large scale urbanisation. Economic and other intersecting inequalities, the geopolitical significance of some areas of Africa, environmental and institutional fragilities have all contributed to some long-running areas of conflict, which in turn have displaced hundreds of thousands of people, intensifying the challenges of addressing poverty, inequalities and deepening democracy. Some of the key challenges of human development are in education, health, and socio-economic inclusion. While there has been an expansion in numbers accessing all levels of education this is unevenly distributed, particularly in the phases beyond very basic primary schooling or minimal literacy. While health and longevity have improved, as has the provision of housing, water and transport infrastructure, again this is unevenly distributed. Thus, addressing inequalities and building and sustaining democratic institutions are key challenges noted in some of the central policy documents for the region. (African Union, 2015; Henao, Moyer, and Namakula, 2017).

Researching Higher Education and the Public Good in Africa

There are multiple challenges involved in researching higher education and the public good in Africa. Literature focusing specifically on how to expand the public good roles of higher education in Africa, either emanating from African universities and scholars researching Africa has started to be published in the last ten years. But this body of scholarship is still quite small. Institutions have barely recovered from the ravages of the last three decades during which time external pressure was brought on them to implement market-oriented reforms. Much of the current focus in the literature seems to be on how to reform governance and management to foster ‘employability’ (AfDB, 2008, British Council, 2016, Blom, Raza, Kiamba, Bayusuf and Adil, 2016). ‘Employability’ usually focuses on teaching disciplines that are believed to enhance transition of graduates to formal and informal labour markets, or attempting to teach other skills and attributes which it is believed that employers require, and does not consider civic competencies, nor is it based in the main either on realistic ideas about what universities can actually do or any in-depth empirical and conceptual analysis of what is actually required at work. South African universities have integrated ‘transformation’ and ‘community engagement’ as part of their missions, although this has tended to focus on redressing past marginalization than any broad conceptualization of higher education for the public good. Recent public debates revolving around the issue of curriculum decolonization also signal a desire to have higher education institutions deliver a broad range of public goods beyond imparting technical skills, and a range of small and large steps to take to make this happen (Heleta, 2016; Leibowitz, 2017; Mngomezul and Hadebe, 2018). In work on the public good linked with human development and an ethical or normative role for the university, Boni & Walker (2016), drawing on examples from Spain and South Africa,

demonstrate how higher education can expand engagements with human development. Other writers within the human development and capabilities approach also look at experiences of being in higher education. These draw on Martha Nussbaum's work on the importance of arts and humanities education and Amartya Sen's ideas about equalities, capabilities and agency. Wilson-Strydom & Walker (2017) discuss higher education pedagogies and capabilities, and a number of other studies they have guided expand this area of knowledge (e.g. Wilson-Strydom, 2017). All conceptualise higher education as a site for the expansion of capabilities and experience of human development.

In all these accounts higher education institutions, or universities specifically, are noted as important settings to practice aspects of equalities and agency for students, staff and administrators. However, the experience of putting this into practice is uneven. Widening participation of socially marginalised groups such as poor communities in sub-Saharan Africa (as was debated, for example, in UK literature about the working classes) is one institutional practice associated with these ideas of higher education and human development. Widening participation is argued for on various grounds which range from the private graduate premium in earnings (Purcell & Tzanakou, 2016), positional advantage in the labour market, and particular perspectives including prejudice reduction (Morley, 2012a, b). Although widening participation has been critiqued because it can disconnect people from their communities and demand enactment of particular (middle-class) subjectivities (Leyton, 2017) as well as provoke a range of difficult emotions including shame, pride, anger, unbelonging (Read, Archer & Leathwood, 2003), Morley, Leach, Lussier, Lihamba, Mwaipopo, Forde, & Egbenya's, (2010) study found considerable evidence of students from low socio-economic backgrounds in Ghana and Tanzania wishing to differentiate themselves from the 'spoiled' identities of the masses by 'becoming a somebody'. Higher education was perceived as an escape route from the anonymity of poverty. Higher education was also aspired to as a way of extending the middle-class reach to include more socio-economically privileged women in higher education, for example (Morley & Lugg, 2009; Morley & Lussier, 2009; Morley et al, 2010, Morley, 2012a).

But of course, widening participation does not end inequalities. Research on these policies in practice has demonstrated that those with financial and social resources are able to decode and access new educational opportunities often in more elite universities or disciplines (Crozier, Reay, Clayton, Colliander & Grinstead, 2008; Heath, Fuller & Paton, 2008; Morley et al, 2010; Reay, David & Ball, 2005). International experience shows that the massification of ever-higher levels of education in many instances does not lead to greater equality of opportunity, but rather to ever-increasing distinctions about the education obtained (Teichler, 2009). We thus see that the plurality of institutional forms and widening access to higher education in Africa connect together. Unterhalter (2017; 2018) has written about a version of Piketty's perspective on capital formation and income inequalities emerging in education, so that we see simultaneously both a concentration of intellectual and social resources in research intensive universities, which offer pedagogically rich experiences, and widening inequalities in the experience of education for those who attend more minimal kinds of institutions.

There continue to be major concerns about quality in African universities (Mohamedbhai, 2011; Morley et al. 2010; Teferra, 2012). This is important in thinking about the public good role of universities because it raises the question of whether counting more students into an assemblage of under-resourced, over-crowded, frequently male-dominated universities with

under-qualified staff and outdated and colonial curricula provides an appropriate affordance for social, personal and public transformation (Cheeseman, 2015; Morley, 2011). In the discussions about higher education and human development questions also have to be posed about who is creating knowledge in and about higher education and from what ontological and epistemological locations. There is an extensive literature on these issues - both conceptual (Mamdani, 1997; Connell, 2007; Fricker, 2007; Badat; Mbemebe; ; Nyamnjoh, 2012; Heleta, 2016.) and contributions providing cases of particular initiatives (e.g. Leibowitz & Bozalek, 2014). The authors in Leibowitz's (2013) edited collection interrogate higher education as a public good from the view of the Global South, examining what is meant by a socially just institution, the role of curriculum in advancing public-good education, and the attributes of graduates for the public good. Some chapters looked at specific institutional experiences with this. In what follows we take a step back to look at some of the debates from the international literature, which we attempt to focus in relation to issues confronting African countries and African higher education today.

Public good & higher education: Real or ideal relationships?

A good is something of benefit to people. A good is public or common when its benefit extends beyond the confines of an individual or small family group and has some concern with a wider collective. The nature of this collective may be defined in 'hard edged' institutional terms by citizenship of a state, or in softer 'fuzzier' ways delimited by a set of social, cultural or ethical ties of affiliation. These may be narrow, and linked to a relatively small group, or, as in notions of human development, encompass everyone alive in the world and generations not yet born. Yet, that shared notion of public good is where the consensus ends. There are some very different ways of understanding what comprises a public good and some very different ideas about the forms of justice or acting 'rightly' to secure this. These different ethical views are associated with very diverse forms of higher education. Thus, mapping this field is complex.

The notion of public good associated with higher education is contested in terms of analytical questions of how the good or goods manifest themselves, what constitutes their private, public, common, or ethical nature, and whether and how they can be produced by universities or other kinds of higher education institution. There are further normative questions concerning the forms of public goods that should be prioritised, and how they should be funded and how distributed. Other questions concern what processes of redress of past, current, or future inequalities within and beyond higher education institutions are appropriate when making about assessments of the roles of higher education. As Oketch (2016) points out, questions of *how much* higher education is required for what kinds of public good are often not interrogated. This links with a further question which is concerned with the extent to which higher education can create forms of public good on its own. We will argue that we cannot isolate higher education's relationship with the public good, but in our conclusion we will discuss some of the conditions of possibility for higher education to play instrumental and intrinsic roles associated with the public good in particular societies.

An important distinction (and one not always acknowledged) is made by Locatelli (2017) between education *as* a public good and education *for* the public good. We draw on this in highlighting discussions of intrinsic and instrumental connections between higher education and the public good. In the first sense, attention is on the need to protect accessibility of all to education and thus is close to the notion of a (human) right. In the latter sense, the attention is

on how education can promote public goods, associated, for example, with improved health and well-being, citizenship or decent livelihoods. A similar distinction is made by Brennan and Naidoo (2008) in relation to the 'import' and 'export' functions of higher education in relation to social justice. Using an industrial frame, we can also view the public good in higher education in relation to inputs (equity of access), process (experiences within the institution) and outputs (impact on the broader society). One question we are concerned with in response to Oketch's question above, is whether the instrumental connections between higher education and the public good require only sufficient or minimal levels of experience of higher education, for this to count as a public good or whether some very expansive intrinsic experience of public good in higher education is also needed.

A primary consideration here is what might be distinctive about higher education, in relation to education generally, in the promotion of the public good. Universities are commonly considered to have three primary functions: teaching, research, and service or community engagement (Oketch, McCowan & Schendel, 2014). Universities, therefore, share some things with schools and other forms of education in providing spaces for learning and the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. What is particular to universities is the production of new knowledge through research and scholarship, although not all universities do this to the same degree, and many higher education institutions pass on forms of skill or professional knowledge that draw unevenly on research. Research, however, can often be very specialised, and its instrumental public good manifestations may be very slow burn. Corporate commissions for research, intellectual property rights and patents may temporarily restrict access to knowledge, but with time it is usually dispersed into the public domain. By contrast, teaching is the most obviously public role with instrumental effects. The benefits of teaching are to some extent dependent on the distribution of access (and are often restricted to the privileged, which, in turn, can cement their privilege in society). But it is relatively hard for knowledge and attitudes distributed through teaching to be corralled, and the growth of digital platforms and ICT has further expanded their reach (Lupton, Mewburn & Thomson, 2017). Thus the instrumental and intrinsic versions of public good have many connections.

In the discussion which follows we firstly look at instrumental arguments which consider that higher education has a role in bringing into being public good, which can be local, national, or global. These are temporal or causal arguments and in assessing the research literature establishing relationships of causality or association between higher education and public good are a challenge. This form of analysis also raises the question of how much higher education and in what form, generates some of the instrumental links with public good. In the next part of the discussion we look at arguments that assert that relationships within higher education express intrinsic relationships of public good. These often focus on documenting the space of higher education and the relationships formed there. While these are richly documented in some studies from Africa, long-term outcomes of particular forms of intrinsic public good, persisting over time as an outcome of higher education, rather than other cultural interactions, are harder to document. But the concern to pin down outcomes and causation for both instrumental and intrinsic versions of the argument about higher education and the public good may obscure the inter-relationship between them, and the ways in which particular contexts may require us to reconfigure the notion of public good.

Instrumental arguments: higher education brings about public

Arguments that connect higher education instrumentally with the public good take the form that higher education is linked, as a direct or associated cause, with various formations of the public good, which may entail singly or in some combination: economic growth, innovation,

improved distribution of income and wealth, more tolerant attitudes, better informed citizenry, better protection and use of environmental resources, a healthier population, the creation of new knowledge that can address social problems and challenges and expand human development or social solidarity. In this form of the argument, these goods are either amalgamated together as ‘the public good’ or are discussed separately as formations of ‘the public good’. But in whichever form, this type of argument positions higher education as an engine of these public good processes. These arguments are largely framed by a political economy orientation that draws out some of the public good benefits of higher education as a phase of deepening research and knowledge production. Many writers who work with this approach pay less attention to the expression of the public good *within* higher education institutions.

The instrumental version of the idea of public good is often linked with claims about the benefits of a knowledge economy, as well as benefits of research and innovation. These, it is argued, contribute to the public good in ways that are economic and non-economic. Some of these non-economic benefits claimed are enhanced democratic participation or deepened insights into equalities, although this is contested (Nixon, 2010). These benefits of public good (singular) it is sometimes argued, flow from higher education, without much assessment made of how many people and in what proportions participate, what is or is not taught to which people, and the pedagogic relationships that pertain. The nature of the arguments look at the correlation between high levels of participation in higher education in some countries; Korea, Singapore, and China are often quoted and high levels of economic growth, innovation and civic solidarity (Hanushek and Woessmann, 2015; Marginson, 2016). However, the causal links can be difficult to establish definitively, and some argue that the causality runs in the other direction.

The argument is sometimes made about a paradox of high levels of growth in GDP in Africa in the last decade, accompanied by high levels of poverty, unequal distribution, and limited development of productivity or research, some of which may be linked with poor numbers and inadequate methods of calculation (Fosu, 2015; Jerven and Johnston, 2015; Hope, 2016). This growth paradox is associated with apparently inadequate levels of higher education to ‘trigger’ a deepening of the public good, although there has clearly been an expansion of participation in higher education in Africa.

An early formulation is Samuelson’s (1954) idea of public goods. This derives from economic work¹¹ that defines public goods as those products or services that are non-rivalrous and non-excludable. Goods that are non-rivalrous cannot be used only by some groups and not others. These public goods therefore cannot be used in some exclusive way to generate profit only for some. According to Samuelson, increasing a public good defined in

¹¹ In Samuelson’s 1954 paper titled “The Pure Theory of Public Expenditure” he proposed a theory whose basic assumption was a clear distinction between the following two kinds of goods:

(i) A private consumption good whose total can be parcelled out among two or more persons, with one person having less if another gets more (Samuelson, 1955, p. 350). Hence, if X_1 is total good, and X_{11} and X_{21} are the respective private consumptions of Person 1 and Person 2, Samuelson said that the total equals the sum of the separate consumptions or --- $X_1 = X_{11} + X_{21}$ (Samuelson, 1954). This is condition of summation.

(ii) A public consumption good is one that is provided for each person to enjoy or not, according to his or her tastes. Hence, the public good can be varied in total quantity of X_2 for its magnitude. It differs from a private consumption good in that each person’s consumption of it, X_{12} and X_{22} respectively, is related to the total X_2 by a condition of equality rather than of summation. This is condition of equality. Thus by definition, $X_{12} = X_2$, and $X_{22} = X_2$.” (Samuelson, 1954). Samuelson acknowledged that realistically, many- though not all- government activity can be fruitfully analysed as some kind of a blend of these two extreme polar cases and he contended that “

this way for a national or global society “simultaneously increases it for each and every man, we must always be simultaneously at exactly the same longitude” (Samuelson, 1954, pp. 351). In the literature, the condition of equality of public goods rather than summation of parcels of private goods has been further discussed as non-rivalrous and non-excludability or where excludability would be very expensive. Thus, if we understand higher education as expanding public goods of this kind, widening access to higher education, widens the pool of people who have the experience of this form of public goods.

In relation to higher education, the clearest example of non-rivalrous and non-excludable public goods is knowledge generated through research and scholarship. For example, it is not possible to exclude certain people from the benefit of say literature or minimising cross infections, even though these insights may have begun in specialist institutions. The knowledge a teacher has about how to motivate a learner, cannot be confined just to that pedagogic interaction and the use of that knowledge by other teachers or learners, lovers of literature, or practitioners of high levels of hygiene in hospitals, does not detract from its insights, in fact it amplifies them. These kinds of public goods cannot (easily) be monetized, and restricted. However, we know that, although public goods are non-rivalrous and non-excludable, the history of education in just about every country has been one of making it very difficult for groups who are not privileged in some way to have access to the form of that ‘common’ knowledge that is certificated. There is nothing particularly context rich about the concept of public goods, but who can and cannot use public goods in practice will vary across socio-economic groups and be linked with forms of political power and participation. Thus, conditions in different African countries will determine who can and cannot make use of these public goods, notwithstanding their non-rivalrous and non-excludable form. Public goods are available to all, sometimes linked with the idea of knowledge, communication, and educational exchange that is open and accessible to all, not privatized or put behind pay walls or requiring expensive technologies.

Elements of public good are realised in connections between communities and collectives that work at a meso or micro level. An individual, for example, can study a degree in medicine and from that experience and the resulting diploma will reap the rewards of a high salary and a rewarding livelihood. Nevertheless, there are also public benefits accruing from teaching - in this case the positive impact on others’ health through the doctor’s work. For McMahon, “These include the uses of human capital in the community that serves the public interest. Both private non-market effects over the lifecycle and the benefits to society are, or should be, central to discussions of academic policy” (McMahon, 2009, pp. 6). McMahon notes that human capital is used to *generate earnings, but is also used at home or in the community to generate non-market benefits*. The notion of human capital as the flow of productive services that a worker can provide is highly contested (Fine, 2013), and it is clear that the health of people in a particular context depend on much more than the skill and training of health workers, as the latter generally work with people who are ill, while the aim of developing and sustaining health is to keep people from becoming ill. Thus, the instrumental dynamics of higher education and the public good entail wider relationships and processes than the skills imparted to individuals.

At the other end of the scale, the instrumental links of higher education are associated with global public goods, such as clean air, knowledge of public health, and support for human rights and conflict resolution. These are able to cross over national boundaries and are not dependent on a single bounded political authority for distribution. These global public goods require co-operation across borders that are economic, political, and supportive of research

and knowledge exchange. This concept of global public goods has attracted significant attention in recent years. For example, Stiglitz (1999) has provided an influential analysis of knowledge as a global public good. The idea has been applied to basic education by Menashy (2009) and this has implications for thinking about higher education. Global public goods have been endorsed within mainstream development thought and by agencies such as the World Bank (2007).

More recent literature on this notion focuses on ‘global public goods’ (UNESCO, 2018; Marginson, 2013, 2007) and raises the possibility of examining the contribution that public higher education systems would make to the realization of global public institutions. Part of the literature examining the global character of higher education examines universities as locations of world politics and seeks to better understand and theorize universities as significant political actors (Kamola, 2014). However, this literature largely draws on examples of higher education and global public goods working with models of institutions in the global north. We might consider this nascent work in relation to African higher education institutions and seeing them as critical providers of global public goods. But we need to pose the question regarding what conditions such institutions would need to satisfy to contribute to global public goods, as well as the possibility that they could contribute to and then evaluate the institutions we have.

Many discussions on higher education systems in the context of internationalization (Guri-Rosenblit, 2015; Hammond, 2016) focus on the emergence of what are seen as ‘World class universities’ with specific indicators used to denote the degree of ‘worldclassness’ of these institutions (Altbach & Salmi, 2011) and are focussed primarily on elite institutions. We need to unpack the link between higher education institutions, global public goods and national and global public institutions. In Africa many of these relationships are coloured by past histories of colonialism, continued inequalities in participation in research and knowledge production. Part of the characteristics that have been associated with world-class universities by Altbach (2015), is their capacity to craft visions that adopt a farsighted approach towards learning and imagination among faculty and students, through, for example, outstanding faculty members who can contribute substantively to teaching and research that responds to national and global societal challenges. The role of higher education as a public good would in this respect be examined in terms of how it contributes to the realization of various types of global public good services that are critical in helping especially poor countries benefit from global knowledge and skill assets, both by making such assets widely available and by building the capacity of countries to benefit from them (Warner & Fredriksen, 2013). The debate about decolonization of curriculum and re-centering ideas about Africa in these discussions raises questions about who defines global challenges and solutions (Heleta, 2016)

Even more extensive in scope than arguments about higher education instrumentally linking to global public goods are arguments about higher education linking to human development, which is a form of public good. Boni and Walker (2013; 2016) develop an analysis of higher education and human development, arguing for enhancing the social change orientation of universities. Drawing on the capabilities approach and concerns with equity, diversity, participation, and sustainability, they see universities contributing to ‘building decent societies which value creating human capabilities for all citizens so that they may benefit directly and indirectly from universities as a public good’ (Boni and Walker, 2016, pp. 9). Their discussion summarises some of the public good goals for universities (ibid, pp. 24-28) and some of the forces that create inequalities. While they do not develop a particular normative account of public good with a view to human development, they do delineate some

of the features of this, particularly a concern with the conversion of resources into capabilities, agency, human dignity, equality, and public deliberations. Unlike some of the work that makes claims about the public good outcomes of higher education without looking at conditions within higher education institutions, a lot of their work, particularly Boni and Walker (2016), presents detailed accounts of intrinsic experiences of public good in higher education. We now turn to look at this form of the argument. A key question concerns what we know around processes of causation between higher education and notions of the public good, and what insights we have on the sustainability of these relationships.

Intrinsic argument: higher education as a space to experience public good or human development

The notion of public good as something experienced in the mind or the body, both within and beyond higher education institutions, has a number of different facets.

A form of the link between higher education and public good is made experientially linked with the idea of the public sphere (Habermas, 1989; 1996; Taylor, 1991). The public sphere is a fluid space of media, local public meetings, and lectures in which public reasoning and critical commentary on society is aired. This is, ideally, a space of critique and the formation of attitudes of participation, citizenship, and critical belonging in and through higher education institutions. This includes ideas about building and sustaining the institutions that support greater equalities, social justice and democratisation. Both ideas have a bearing on what is taught in higher education, how it is taught, some of the spatial relationships in higher education and experiential features of working and studying in particular kinds of institutional cultures. Thus, these intrinsic ideas about higher education and the public good include discussions of widening participation and enhancing access, although these discussions are also often framed in terms of the instrumental arguments.

Marginson connects this notion of the university (but not necessarily the technical or vocational tertiary level institutions) with Habermas's depiction of the English coffeehouses of the 17th and 18th centuries, which were settings close enough to some centres of power, but also sites of critique of power (Marginson, 2011). Habermas' idea of a public sphere draws on Kant's (1798) ideas on critical reason, and the need for universities to maintain autonomy from the state in order to critically scrutinise politics, economics and society. For Rawls (1971), and political liberals, the space of the overlapping consensus is a public space in which we all need to co-operate, for the common good, regardless of what private and very different ideas of the good one might hold. While he derives this notion from the history of trying to deal with the legacy of ferocious religious wars in Europe in the 16th and 17th century, we need to consider the extent to which this form of overlapping consensus as a means to deal with histories of violence, racism and dispossession is appropriate in the African context, or whether other notions of a public sphere of recognition, forgiveness and acknowledgement of difference might be more appropriate.

The first wave of universities established in sub-Saharan Africa were elite institutions, designed for those who would be in government (Mamdani, 1996; Cloete and Maassen, 2015; Teferra, 2017), They remained far removed from the society in which these universities were located and were socially distant for the people these universities aimed to serve. They were found in the capital cities of African countries (Ajayi, Goma and Johnson, 1996; Teferra, 2017) and were sometimes sites of critiques of political centres of power, but

those studying and working in those universities were often socially closer to those in power than those experiencing intersecting inequalities (Mamdani, 2008) .

There is a dimension of the common good that is distinctive, and has some different features from this notion of public sphere. For some writers, common good is a shared space of collective construction—thereby having a procedural, in addition to a substantive meaning, and this emphasises the importance of some of the experiences of higher education as offering access to this form of collectivity. As stated by Deneulin & Townsend (2007):

[T]he common good is not the outcome of a collective action which makes everybody better off than if they acted individually, but is the good of that shared enterprise itself. It is the good of the community which comes into being in and through that enterprise.

In this way, UNESCO (2015b) and Locatelli (2017) employ the term ‘common good’ as a way of indicating the shared space for construction of education in practice by communities—and thereby as a critique of the individualist conception of public goods in economics. (This usage is distinct from the term common good in economics, indicating a good which is non-excludable but may be rivalrous). It is this term, in fact, that appears in the title of Marginson’s (2016b) latest work on the topic of higher education. It is employed here in the sense of “formation of common relationships and joint (collective) benefits in solidaristic social relations within a country” (pp. 16-18). This articulation of ideas about higher education linked with a common good as delineated by Marginson draws mainly on examples from Europe and the USA.

A resonance could be seen between this notion and scholarship about collective forms of belonging, epistemologies, culture and values, sometimes described as a feature of African ways of knowing (Waghid, 2014) or epistemic/ethical relationships (Hoffman and Metz, 2017) postcolonial epistemologies (Mamdani, 2017; Nyamnjoh, 2012) Mbembe, 2016) which identify common experiences of knowledge hierarchies , dispossession, racism, violence, and connected inequalities.

We need to emphasise that this form of the argument about the intrinsic value of public goods, common goods, or public sphere also has an instrumental dynamic, in that universities can provide a space for discussion, debate, and deliberation. In this sense, they can represent a public sphere and also have an instrumental role in promoting critical scrutiny of government and policy, and allowing for a creative rethinking of society. However, despite all of these potentialities, whether universities actually promote public good/s in these ways depends on their commitments and practices. Marginson (2007) argues that the public benefits emanating from universities do not necessarily correspond to their ownership or management, with both public and private institutions producing a ‘variable mix’ of public and private goods. Nevertheless, private institutions—unless blessed by a generous endowment or significant public funding—rarely have the financial autonomy to ensure open and equitable access, and to conduct research and sustained community engagement in the public interest. In addition to marketisation, Marginson also highlights ‘status competition’ and the rankings fever as a major impediment of the promotion of public good. McCowan (2016) has noted how positional inequalities between institutions in Africa may also have a bearing on realising rights and equalities.

There are a number of contemporary accounts (e.g. Singh, 2001; Calhoun 2006; Tilak 2008; Dill, 2011; Nixon, 2010 Naidoo & Williams, 2015; Williams, 2016) in addition to the ones listed above) addressing conceptions of public good in and through higher education. To a large extent these are works of advocacy, given the concerted undermining of the public dimension of universities in the context of marketisation of public higher education systems, the growth in the number and size of private (and particularly for-profit) institutions, and the intensifying public perception that the university is (and should be) a vehicle for furthering of private interests. Nevertheless, these accounts also expand our normative and analytical understandings of the relationship between university and public good. They raise as a central feature the question of how the institutional form of a higher education institution shapes its capacity to engage in critique and engagements from the perspective of the public sphere.

While a number of authors consider how universities are constituted in a way that they can contribute to the production of public goods (Brennan, Roger and Lebeau 2004), much of this discussion is anchored in institutional theory and largely focuses on examining processes of change that enable higher education institutions to accommodate change in the external environment in ways that ensures their continued relevance within the civic community (Clayton, Bringle and Hatcher, 2012), but does not ask questions about the issues of inequalities, poverty and politics that are a feature of many African institutions. The other dimension under this strand of intrinsic formation of public good in higher education concerns community engagement, and discusses how academic departments should create spaces within their structures for institution building activities for cultivating social and moral values in students and surrounding communities through the curriculum laying the foundation for social networks which can promote public goods (Clayton, Bringle and Hatcher, 2012). Some studies have focused on the behavior of higher education institutions and how they adjust both to be in synergy and at the same time to energize changes in the wider institutions of society as central to the public goods mission. Chambers and Gopaul (2008) in a study utilizing phenomenological and constructivist lenses to analyze descriptions of ‘higher education and the public good’ provided by 217 participants record that among others, the behaviours and decisions of institutions are reflections of their public good roles. These behaviours include values, policies, procedures, relations (internal and external to the institution), and institutional cultures that speak to the level of commitment to the public good especially with regard types of changes needed for higher education to significantly contribute to addressing the complex challenges and opportunities within society generally, as well as more specifically within institutions of higher education themselves.

In the United States, Fitzgerald et al (2012) argue that community engagement as a crucial aspect of gauging the public good impact from higher education institutions is undermined by political and economic circumstances such as funding limitations that force institutions to consider disengaging from their communities, as they must find ways to cut costs and privileges certain disciplines perceived to have higher returns to both individuals and institutions. Pasque (2006) traces the genesis of the disengagement of HE institutions from active community engagement, to the emergence of the post-war military-industrial complex and the negotiation of new relations with America’s research universities. The emergence of specialized research institutes outside the universities to support the military complex gradually shifted criteria for faculty evaluation from broad social needs to narrow disciplinary expertise . The concept of ‘optimal learning’ is used in the United States to refer to the capacity of universities to organize learning in ways that help strengthen democratic and civic institutions beyond the classroom to include higher education’s impact on societal organizations, businesses, corporations, and value-based organizations However, this

literature rarely looks at whether these networks are among elites who attend higher education, and whether it is social solidarity with the poor that is advanced.

A further term that has come to prominence in relation to the public good form of higher education the ‘commons’ – having been extended from its original usage as shared agricultural land to include the cultural and political realm, particularly knowledge in the digital age (Hess & Ostrom, 2006). The commons is an open co-operative space, non-hierarchical, where people come to use and share a commonly owned resource – and therefore is inimical to the market, but also possibly to the state. In education, the commons has manifested itself through the new opportunities for autonomous learning offered by the internet, as well as through the emergence of open access courseware. These can call into question the existing form of higher education institution as a particular situated space for the public good, and raise questions about the commons as a site for learning which dissolves some of the hierarchies of knowledge, pedagogies, and inequalities between institutions.

Connecting Instrumental and intrinsic ideas of higher education and the public good: problematising publics

While we can distinguish quite clearly between versions of the instrumental and intrinsic notions of the public good and higher education, it is also important to see how they overlap in particular contexts. In addition, a number of studies of widening participation, particularly in South Africa, have highlighted how both the notion of the public and the private good of higher education need to be problematised. Jansen (2017) documents the emergence of what he calls ‘the welfare university’ where higher education provides some of the income and services which some societies are distributed through the state. In this guise higher education is both instrumental and intrinsic to public good. Unterhalter (2017b; 2018) looking at forms of public private partnership (PPP) in education, including their utilisation in higher education delineates three forms the intermixture generates a reconfiguration of links with ideas of public or common good:

- i) causation idea where education in a range of sites (public, private or intermixed) brings about public good and this will enhance the conditions for common good
- ii) a conditional idea, where conditions in education (supported by public provision or forms of private engagement) may enhance public good, together or separate from common good, but only under certain conditions in certain contexts, possibly engaging with decolonization of the curriculum or enhancing democratisation
- iii) a critical communitarian idea that suggests the development of the relationships of care and community by enhancing the quality of relationships between people (a different set of relationships to those signalled by privatisation) which will generate common good, examine structures of injustice and through this possibly deepen experiences of public good.

These different formations suggest considerable overlaps in thinking about instrumental and intrinsic notions of higher education and the public good and the importance of paying careful attention to the contexts in which ideas are formulated.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that ideas about higher education and the public good can be divided into instrumental and intrinsic forms, and that there is some cross-over between them. While some writers formulate a notion of a single public good, or alternatively many goods which individuals benefit from, there are many who see this as a heterodox process, in which public

good may link with public bad. There are few longitudinal studies that consider causation in Africa. Secondly we have looked at how public good in higher education is substantive for those who experience it and how this can be expanded to a wider collectivity, or develop some sense of solidarity with those who do not share the experience of higher education.

The paper argues that these contestations need to be read contextually. Higher education in sub-Saharan Africa has moved through phases, from the establishment of flagship national universities in the post-independence period for state bureaucracy formation, to the emergence of developmental universities with a commitment to indigenising knowledge and benefiting marginalised populations, through more recent tendencies towards the marketisation of public institutions and the significant growth of private universities. We suggest that mainstream conceptualisations of higher education and the public good are underpinned by particular understandings of the nature and form of higher education and how knowledge is acquired and developed – orientations that may be very far from the reality of highly unequal and politically complex societies within which higher education is deeply embedded. Thus a reconceptualisation of the *public* is required by these contexts and some challenge to conceptualisations of the *private*, given the strong obligations of individuals to extended families, and the sharing of the fruits of higher education amongst their communities of origin.

Thus what may be important in conceptualising higher education and the public good in the African context and the value of such thinking for broader debates on the role of higher education entails paying careful attention to the relative and contextualised nature of the public goods that higher education brings how important this is relative to other pressing social concerns,. Contextualised assessments have to be made on this. Thus we cannot think of higher education and the public good without thinking about particular formations of higher education, in particular socio-economic and political settings, and how this problematises and animates the idea of public good.

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