



The Zimbabwean University under Authoritarian Neoliberalism

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Abstract

The paper examines the unending crises in higher education in Zimbabwe by situating the discussion in neoliberal theories and literature. Authoritarian classic neoliberalism, neopatrimonial neoliberalism, and kleptocratic neoliberalism are the three neoliberal strains utilized to interpret and discuss views from Southern African academics, specifically from Zimbabwe’s university community. A recent survey study captured the experiences and perspectives of university teachers. Focusing on research and related academic activities, the paper examines and highlights the academe’s challenging experiences. The paper identifies areas of academic research and pedagogy that have deteriorated because of the adoption of authoritarian neoliberalism. The discussion is located within a critical perspective that considers neoliberalism as an authoritarian ideology enforced on peripheral countries by the Global North and adopted in various forms by ruling elites in the non-Western world. The conclusion is that there is a complete failure of Zimbabwe’s current economic and political trajectories resulting in the unending circle of crises in university education. Recommendations are suggested that question the logic of deploying neoliberal policies in peripheral countries such as Zimbabwe.

Keywords authoritarian neoliberalism · university education crisis · critical postcolonial · international economic sanctions · political instability · Zimbabwe

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Introduction

The changes that higher education has witnessed because of the adoption of free market principles, such as privatization, marketization, and economization (Carnoy, 2016; Connell, 2013; Marginson, 2016) have been different depending on the level of development and/or industrialization of the country under consideration (Slobodian, 2018). The application of free market principles has brought challenging circumstances among the poor (Monbiot, 2017). In the Global South, most countries were forced to adopt neoliberal practices, through structural adjustment programs by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to pay off debts they owed to the developed countries (Klees, 2012; Madeley, 2008). The impact of neoliberal induced transformations has also been dependent on the region of the world with increased poverty witnessed in some countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. The social services sectors, including education were negatively impacted by the principle of less government and more privatization (Stromquist & Monkman, 2014). To meet World Bank lending conditions, higher education was neoliberalized and this involved less government support and more privatisation and adoption of market related principles (World Bank, 1995). The consequences were disastrous to the low-income groups especially from rural areas who depended on government support to access education (Carnoy, 2016; Klees, 2012). The transformation of higher education from a social service provided by the state to a free market commodity (Ball, 2012) has attracted a lot of research on the universal applicability of neoliberalism with many questioning its tenets as capitalist and there to benefit the rich (Blaut, 2014, Spring 2015). The adoption of neoliberal principles appears to differ depending on a specific country's conditions. In Sub-Saharan Africa various versions of neoliberalism have been observed, for example, kleptocratic neoliberalism (Nonini, 2005), neo-patrimonial neoliberalism (Booth & Golooba-Mutebi, 2012) all claiming to be implementing free market principles. As a critical institution in the human capital development of emerging nations, the university is used in this study as an example to illustrate the sprawling institutionalized authoritarian, neo-patrimonial and kleptocratic neoliberalism. Locating Zimbabwe's university education as a case study is also done to narrow the subject of discussion and amplify the 'neoliberalisms' that have since been deployed in the region. The paper examines the impact of these different versions of neoliberalism, all considered authoritarian (Bruff & Tansel, 2019; Giroux, 2004; Harrison 2019), applied as policy and practice in Zimbabwe, and specifically in the Zimbabwean university as a case study illustrating the general trend in most of Southern Africa and other peripheral countries. The study intends to open discussions on the implementation of neoliberal principles in developing countries and the impact on university education. Furthermore, it is an attempt to initiate a debate on whether neoliberalism is the cause of the problem, or it is the poor or wrong implementation of neoliberal principles. The experiences and perspectives from the academic community are expositions of the impact of authoritarian policies on university teaching and research practices, with the rich potential to open future research initiatives in other related areas.

The Zimbabwean University and its Challenges

University education in Zimbabwe can be traced to 1957, with the establishment of the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, in the then Southern Rhodesia (Shizha & Kariwo, 2011). It later became the University of Southern Rhodesia, and in 1980 it changed its name to the University of Zimbabwe (UZ) when the country gained independence. This means in 1980, Zimbabwe had one university. For various reasons, including the need to correct historical imbalances, the demand for high skilled human capital, and the need to accommodate graduates from the secondary school system that had expanded at independence, new universities were needed (Shizha & Kariwo, 2011). There was expansion at UZ, which was done by increasing enrolments and introducing new faculties, departments, and programs (Nherera, 2000). UZ increased its enrolment from 2 240 students in 1980 to 9 017 students in 1990. According to the university website, the current 2020 enrolment figure is just over 20 300 students. The year 1991 saw the establishment of a second university, the National University of Science and Technology (NUST), in Bulawayo. This was followed by the establishment of the Bindura University of Science Education (BUSE) in 1996 and Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) in 1998 (Nherera, 2000). Many other universities have since been established, and today Zimbabwe has 13 state universities and seven private universities. Like most others across Africa, the Zimbabwean university was shaped by European colonialism and is organized according to the European (English) model (Teferra & Altbach, 2004). The president of the country is also the chancellor of all state universities (Runhare & Muvirimi, 2017). Contemporary neoliberal policies are observed across the university terrain in Zimbabwe. Besides the expansion of state university education, there has been the growth of private universities, a neoliberal trend seen across the world where education is becoming a market commodity, to be bought (Connell, 2013). This promotes the democratization and massification of education, as was the establishment of the Zimbabwe Open University in 1999. The idea of an Open University not only availed education to many who could not enter formal institutions, but it also corporatized education (Ball, 2012; Spring 2015) as Open University students do not get state grants for tuition. With an enrolment of over thirty thousand students, the Zimbabwe Open University is the largest in the country by the student population. While a lot has been written about neoliberalism and the changes in the university, there is not much analysis that has been done on the version/s of neoliberalism unfolding in the periphery. University education is largely funded by the government (Mpfu et al., 2013). By the year 2000, socio-economic, historical, and political policies and pronouncements, such as the structural adjustment programmes, the war veterans' movement, and fast-track land reform programme contributed to economic problems (Garwe & Thondhlana, 2019). Zimbabwe was also suspended or resigned from the Commonwealth (Dowden & Burleigh, 2003). In addition, perennial political violence during elections and disputed elections (Hofisi, 2018,) as well as the imposition of international economic sanctions from the United Kingdom, European Union, and the United States of America (Ogbonna, 2017; Hwami, 2021) increased the isolation of the country's university education sector. As Shizha & Kariwo (2011) illustrated, donors from these sanctioning countries, such as the Rockefeller Foundation, the Kel-

log Foundation, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) and the British Overseas Development Agency played a significant part during the first decade of independence in the spirit of reconciliation and reconstruction. The main areas where donors made an input were in research and manpower development. With the drying up of donor funds, universities encountered challenges. In 2012, 100,000 students in universities and colleges were seeking government support, while the government could only fund 39,000. The problem of under-funding resulted in the curtailing of research activities and procurement of teaching and learning materials, and in an inability to improve working conditions for university teaching staff (Mbizvo cited in Mpfu et al., 2013). Other challenges include curtailment of laboratory or practical classes, limited number of field trips, curtailment in the attendance of academic conferences, curtailment of the purchase of library books, chemicals and basic laboratory equipment, embargo on study fellowships, and reduction in research grants (Mpfu et al., 2013). Government responded by introducing the policy of cost sharing and this meant approving tuition fees and levies for state universities (Garwe & Thondhlana, 2019; Shizha, 2011). Universities were also required to embark on revenue generating projects and activities such as applied research and full utilisation of land as well as other resources allocated to them. This created push factors that accelerated brain drain, wherein highly qualified, experienced, and competent university professionals were attracted by other countries (Chetsanga, 2003; Hwami, 2012). Amidst all these forces and challenges, Zimbabwe's university education continues to expand and, in the process showing resilience and ability to adapt.

Neoliberalism in Southern Africa

Hoogvelt (1997) referred to some African countries as distinct colonial formations, colonial societies borne out of historical capitalist expansionism. This suggests the new nation-states are creations of struggles against the capitalist system. The neo-liberal narrative that dominates literature concerns "Western industrialized countries and their significant others" (Tikly, 2001, p. 151), and hence the analyses on neoliberalism and higher education utilize mostly Western lenses. The colonial formations (nation-states) that make up Southern Africa are very different when compared to the industrialized North and this necessitates a different examination of the challenges and triumphs wrought by the adoption of neoliberal policies. The Southern African region is organized under the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and comprises of 15 states: Angola, Botswana, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe (SADC, 2012). Some of these countries, such as Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe, obtained independence after protracted armed struggles against a European colonial system that was capitalist and racist (Smith, 2018). As a result, these governments are nationalistic, and their socio-economic development platforms are anchored on national resource ownership that links political and economic citizenship. Slobodian's (2018) work on neoliberalism observed how proponents of neo-

liberalism that include Ropke, Hayek, Friedman, and Davenport supported white supremacy in Southern Africa (South Africa and Zimbabwe) as it was an essential feature of securing the world economy. Their argument was that democratic rights for the majority Black people had to be restricted in order to preserve stability and economic prosperity. On South Africa and Zimbabwe, Slobodian noted that “the vanishing of the empire meant a recovered role for the reign of competition” (p. 148) but in the process “restricting political freedom, as commonly understood was necessary to preserve economic freedom” (p. 151), and that “to provide full political equality would be to commit national suicide” (p. 153). These views on Southern Africa from the founding brains of neoliberalism are fascinating and make the region an intriguing subject.

Authoritarian Neoliberalism

Many have observed the association between neoliberalism and state coercion. Harvey called neoliberalism “a hegemonic discourse” (2007, p. 22), while Bruff observed “the coexistence of free-market policies and strengthened security apparatuses” (2016, p. 106) and that neoliberalism “allocates the state a strong predisposition towards the enforcement of privatized and marketized social relation” (Harrison, 2019, p. 275). While these tenets of neoliberalism are observed even in industrialized countries, the use of force by the state to enforce neoliberal socio-economic policies is more overt and rampant in the peripheral developing countries, such as Zimbabwe. The absence of a strong propertied class or bourgeoisie in some developing countries is proffered as the reason by some (Radice, 2008), but that template does not seem to fit the Southern African narrative. The use of state security apparatuses by the Zimbabwe government to enforce neoliberal policies, vulgar neoliberalism, that some refer to as kleptocratic capitalism (Hwami et al., 2018; Nonini, 2005; Okafor et al., 2014) or neo-patrimonial neoliberalism (Abegazi, 2011; Huggins, 2017) is well-documented. Nepotism, military-run businesses, ruling party-run companies, corruptive tendencies, and distortions and manipulation of market fundamentals characterize the domesticated version of capitalism or neoliberalism. These observations were also made in Botswana, Ethiopia, and Rwanda (Abegazi, 2011; Huggins, 2017; Booth & Golooba-Mutebi, 2012), while cases of corruption have been reported in Southern Africa’s biggest economy, South Africa (Budhram & Geldenhuys, 2018; Mantzaris, 2018). Noticing these developments, former South African President, Mbeki, referred to what was unfolding as a rule “by a purely government class, parasitical on the rest of the population, acting as consumers rather than producers and employing state violence to stay in power” (Connell & Dados, 2014, p. 126). Zimbabwe’s higher education sector has not been immune to this system of governance and concomitant economic policies, and since the year 2000, universities have been encountering infinite crises (Gukurume, 2019).

Theoretical Perspectives

According to Connell (2007), modern society needs to be understood as having been shaped by imperialism. And considering the searing nature of colonialism in Southern Africa and Zimbabwe, the present situation is described as comprising of “persistent epistemic injustices and uneven academic standing” (Walker & Martinez-Vegas, 2020, p. 1) should help explain the crisis in the university. To Dados & Connell (2012, p. 13) the idea of the Global South, “references an entire history of colonialism, neo-colonialism and differential economic and social change”. Similarly, critical postcolonial authors have postulated the continued prevalence of inequalities and injustices in the modern era, particularly in the Global South. The possession of power by some sections of society because of class, race, North-South, developed, and developing categorizations among many others is recognized and exposed as these retain and entrench relations of dominance or hegemony. According to Andreotti (2010), post-colonialism’s main preoccupation is the epistemic violence of colonialism and the interrogation of European cultural supremacy in the subjugation of different peoples and knowledges ... make explicit the connection between assumptions of cultural supremacy and the unequal distribution of wealth and labor in the world. (p. 238) This suggests postcolonialists critique the existence of colonial relations, the domination of the Global South developing countries, and their representations in the diaspora through nonpolitical/military means, but covert economic and cultural processes and ordering of the world that undermine the non-Western Other (Said, 1979). Post-colonialists, like Southern theorists, unmask the sophisticated layering of stratified systems that continue to exclude and fail so many in so many contexts, and explore the epistemologies, patterns, desires, and dynamics of old colonial inheritances, with a view to re-visioning reform and change (Hickling-Hudson et al., 2004). This has led to the call for the pluralization of epistemologies (Andreotti, 2010) to promote subjugated cultures and peoples. While these are some of the mainstream ideas of the post-colonial tradition, recent critiques have expanded the scope of analysis, and on top of the neocolonialism that is still benefitting the Global North (Connell, 2014; Tikly, 2001), local systems evolving in nation-states have come under critical scrutiny. At times, dominant postcolonial literature fails to recognize the incompatibility of textbook neoliberalism with the developing nation-state borne out of an armed struggle, against most of what neoliberalism represents. In a world order that subscribes to the supremacy of the market, vulgar quasi-free market practices have been adopted. Kleptocratic neoliberalism and neo-patrimonial neoliberalism enable the local elites to amass wealth and, in the case of Africa and Zimbabwe, with the co-option of a new dominant economic powerhouse, China (Langmia, 2011). This paper utilizes these critics and analytics that question universalism in the field of knowledge creation and application. Universalism is an approach to knowledge that attempts to show that certain claims to knowledge are true regardless of time and place (Baber, 2003). They are true or false everywhere and always. This position seems to suggest that neoliberal principles apply to any society regardless of socio-cultural differences and other factors. Following this it can be argued that institutionalized authoritarian, neo-patrimonial and kleptocratic neoliberalism are distortions of universal neoliberalism that abuse, poisons and destroys the authentic universal. Others see these vulgar ver-

sions of neoliberalism as evidence that neoliberalism does not work in all societies (Blaut, 2014). Postcolonial thinking critiques the dominance of Western models by identifying alternative thinkers and particular issues that have been overlooked in the university and society in general. It seeks to empower thinkers beyond the trans-Atlantic metropolitan centres to focus on experiences particular to their place (Connell, 2007, 2014), and in this case Southern Africa and Zimbabwe's university. Crucial to these critiques is the concern that with low-income countries, the literature on the impact of neoliberalism on education often lacks a relevant theoretical basis (Tikly, 2001) grounded in the historical and contemporary struggles of the people. A southern theory (Connell, 2007) in the context of Southern Africa cannot ignore critical postcolonial approaches for they take into account the historical background to the adoption and deployment of neoliberal policies, cognisant of the fact that the founding figures of neoliberalism used South Africa and Zimbabwe as cases to lay down the trajectories of this radical capitalist system.

Methodology

Study Purpose and Research Questions

The current discourse on the Zimbabwe political economy is dominated by on one side the question of political instability that many think is wrought by corruption, political violence, disputed elections and general incompetency of the current government giving rise to kleptocracy and neo-patrimonialism, and on the other hand, sustained international neoliberal interference as seen by the imposition of economic sanctions by the international community. To Drezner (2015) and Transel (2017) sanctions are neoliberalism's instrument to discipline malpractices done by some rogue members of the international community. It is against this background that the study utilized the academic community in Zimbabwe to open a discussion on the implementation of neoliberal tenets (considering neoliberal's various versions) in developing countries and the impact on university education as a case study of a country that is considered rogue and undemocratic. Furthermore, the study encourages a debate on whether neoliberalism is the cause of the problem, or it is the poor implementation of neoliberal principles. The paper is from a more extensive study on the Zimbabwe university whose ethics clearance was provided by the Nazarbayev University's Institutional Research Ethics Committee (IREC). A mixed method approach was utilized where a quantitative study was carried out first, followed by a qualitative study to explain and elaborate on the quantitative data (Cohen et al., 2018). The study consisted of a survey of 268 faculty members from four universities, which is quantitative. The study had the following research questions: (i) What challenges do university teachers and researchers encounter while working in Zimbabwe today? (ii) How does the academe view the impact of political instability in the country and international economic sanctions on their work? (iii) What recommendations and lessons can local and international academics derive from the Zimbabwean experience? The questionnaire was designed to obtain first-hand data on the experiences of academics working in Zimbabwe. The survey was supplemented by 22 in-depth semi-structured interviews that

produced qualitative data. This was done to seek elaboration, enhancement, illustration, and clarifications of the results from the quantitative method (Greene et al., 1989; Buck et al., 2009). The data from the survey were used to develop and inform the purpose and direction of the interviews. The qualitative semi-structured interviews inserted an explanatory and feedback loop (Johnson & Christensen, 2019) into the quantitative data from the surveys as the interview respondents provided explanations and clarity to some of the figures obtained.

Data Collection

This was a QUAN-QUAL mixed-method case study of Zimbabwe's university. All university teaching staff were relevant participants. However, for feasibility considerations, the questionnaire was sent out to 665 university teachers at four public universities in Zimbabwe. Two hundred eighty-six responded and completed the questionnaire. Of the returned questionnaires, 18 were not fully completed, and these were not considered in the final data analysis of this study. Twenty-two interviews were held. This means the analysis and discussion contained here considered 268 questionnaire responses and 22 interviews. The survey had questions on research practices, access to online resources, institutional support, international engagement, and teaching facilities, areas that seem to be impacted by political instability and/or economic sanctions. The survey was electronically distributed using participants' institutional emails. The purpose of the survey and details concerning anonymity and data protection were outlined, as well as the fact that participation in the survey was entirely voluntary and anonymous. Together with the questionnaire, the email sent to participants had a consent form that respondents were expected to complete and return with the completed questionnaire. Some participants did not return the consent form but indicated in the return email that having completed the survey should be considered acceptable consent. The interviews were done over Skype. The principal investigator conducted sixteen of these, and a research assistant did seven.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for the qualitative data from the interviews started early by alternating between data collection and data analysis, which involved creating meanings from raw data. The cyclical process (Yeh & Inman, 2007) continued throughout the process. It was common to ask specific probing questions based on what was captured from the previous interview. Transcription was done manually. Data was segmented into meaningful analytical units, for example, sentences and paragraphs. Content analysis (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017) involved thematic consideration of interview responses, and 506 comments provided by the 268 respondents involved interpreting and meaningfully describing the written statements. Coding was done to organize the statements by labeling them according to themes in the text or only by the question that was being answered. The emerging themes from interviews and open-ended questions were matched against the themes addressed in the closed-ended items that were the majority in the questionnaire. All this was done manually. Most of the statements were after Yes/No answers, where respondents were invited

to explain their answers. In line with mixed methods practice, the content analysis helped assess the consistency of the answers from the respondents.

Limitations of the Study

The survey questionnaire intentionally left out most of the areas related to teaching and was directed mostly at research related aspects, such as international collaboration and conference participation. In a country with thirteen public universities, this study was only able to utilize four public universities, and a more generalized picture could have been obtained by utilizing a larger sample. The use of an email questionnaire due to the lack of online resources for most of the targeted respondents turned out to be cumbersome, and the response rate was not as initially expected. Out of the 665 questionnaires that were emailed out, 286 completed emails were returned. Also, only 22 academics were interviewed.

Emerging Themes (Results)

Professional Background

In Zimbabwe, university instructors are expected to have a minimum of a master's degree in their teaching area. Approximately 74% reported that they had a doctoral degree in their area of specialization. This is not surprising considering that most of the respondents for this study came from the fields of arts, education, and business and very few from the hard sciences. 31% were arts educators, while 26% were from subject areas that this study categorized as business. In terms of ranks, one starts as a lecturer, then senior lecturer, associate professor, and full professor is the highest position as is everywhere else. 68% were within the lecturer designation, and in this study, this combined all those referred to as lecturers and senior lecturers. In terms of experience in higher education (university) teaching and research, 28% of the respondents have been in higher education for 20 years or more, while 2% have less than five years of experience. Only 16% of university educators in the hard sciences had doctoral degrees. 92% of educators in education have PhDs, of which 72% are full professors. All the percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Acknowledging Authoritarian Neoliberalism in the University in Zimbabwe

94% of the respondents agreed that international economic sanctions were affecting their work in the academe. Considering the time Zimbabwe has been under economic sanctions, it is difficult, as was observed by Bezuidenhout et al.'s (2019) study in Sudan, to separate the impact of general poor economic climate conditions that are common in most developing countries from sanctions induced challenges in the university. Some countries that are not under economic sanctions have worse conditions in their universities than Zimbabwe if one uses UNESCO's country profiles (UNESCO, 2019). What was striking in this study was the minority 15% that said their work was not affected by sanctions. In line with the mixedmethod approach that

was followed in this study, those who responded ‘No’ were prompted to explain why their work in the academy was not affected by economic sanctions. The following are some of the reasons that were presented by the respondents:

I have not bothered to apply for some international opportunities when the eligibility criteria specify that one should be from a Commonwealth country. Sanctions are primarily aimed at governance and human rights issues by this corrupt ZANU PF government. Academics around the world sympathize with us and do their best to help, so ‘sanctions’ work opposite for us! Sanctions on foreign or USA investment in Zimbabwe industry might hurt us in trying to source equipment locally, but not so far in my experience.
I teach languages in the Faculty of Arts, and the issues you are raising in your study do not affect me.

The same question was addressed to the interviewees, and one professor said:

It might be correct to say sanctions cause our challenges, but the question is, what brought the sanctions in the first place? The system is corrupt; those in power do whatever they like. Even with the institution such as my university, the arrogance and sense of impunity among those who belong to the ruling party is sickening.

These responses indicate anger and frustration towards the government, acknowledgment of the presence of the sanctions while seeing the rationale behind them. Others appear not to know how the sanctions operate or lack of knowledge of what university faculty are expected to do and what international engagement entails for higher education professionals and institutions. A related question asked respondents whether they had ever been denied attendance at a conference outside Zimbabwe because the organizers, explicitly or implicitly, expressed their disapproval of the policies of the government of Zimbabwe. 85% of the respondents said they have never been denied conference attendance or related academic or research activity, but the minority that said Yes explained their answers and below are some of their responses to the contingency question:

I applied to summer school in Australia only to be told that Zimbabwe is under sanctions; thus, they withdrew the offer that I had received.
It is a no and yes situation in that NO there was no communication relating to that, but YES in that they just will not reply to your applications.
I had to meet one scholar in South Africa. He refused to come to Zimbabwe in 2015.
The organizers did not directly deny me attendance, but the restrictive Visa requirements indirectly barred me from attending some of the conferences.

These expositions do show that some Zimbabwean academics have been negatively affected by the current regime of international economic sanctions, although they are

defined as targeted (Ogbonna, 2017). However, one of the interviewees responded, saying:

What you are asking shows your privileged position, and you are failing to grasp the situation in this country. Are you saying I can be denied a visa to attend a conference, for what reason? Sanctions are targeted, and some of us can travel freely all over the world. For example, fellow Zimbabweans, those working in South Africa, travel all over the world with the Zimbabwean passport. I cannot do so because there is no funding for research-related activities here, and there is no way I can sponsor myself. It is because of the adverse economic conditions in the country and not sanctions.

This respondent entirely places the responsibility on the government of Zimbabwe's economic policies, that many views as kleptocratic neoliberalism and/or what Huggins (2017) refers to as neo-patrimonialism. Other areas such as the ability to access international research, access to peer-reviewed publications in highly ranked international journals, and access to research equipment in natural sciences or related disciplines were highlighted as some of the main issues faced by Zimbabwean academics. However, as is indicated, there is no agreement on the part of academics on the cause, although this paper argues that it is authoritarian neoliberalism in its local and international dispositions.

University Teaching in Zimbabwe

Massification and corporatization are among notable reforms one observes in today's university. In Zimbabwe, this means teaching big classes and at multi-campus, and under a string budget. These are some of the interviewees' comments on teaching conditions.

It is challenging. How do you teach in classrooms without power? What technology do we utilize in such conditions? Furthermore, students have no time to do the readings you assign them. They also do not have electricity where they live.

The research capacity for both instructors and students leaves a lot to be desired. Wifi networks are weak, including here on campus. Computers are a challenge for the majority of students. They do not have them because they cannot afford to buy them. Libraries do not provide access to the latest publications, especially journals.

Challenges such as these have been captured elsewhere. However, participants from this study mentioned material deficiencies, use of rented or borrowed premises as campuses, the brain drain that has seen the exodus of experienced academics leaving many faculties with inexperienced teachers.

Challenges With Regards to Computing Hardware and Research Software

Countries facing economic challenges that include being under international economic sanctions generally have problems procuring equipment from developed industrialized countries (Bezuidenhout et al., 2019; Hayati & Didegah, 2010). Developing countries such as those in sub-Saharan Africa tend to rely on technology from the industrialized world and in most of the cases from their former colonial powers. For university academics and researchers, computing hardware and research software such as SPSS, Nvivo, Atlas, Amos, and many others are difficult to procure. Respondents in this study demonstrated that they had no access to these essential instruments, they had difficulty in getting them, or they had no idea how to utilize them. 38% reported that they could not access necessary software updates, and 24% do not have the hardware needed for research. As a result, 63% of the respondents reported using free and open-source software as an alternative to licensed software.

Political Instability or Economic Sanctions: Variegated Neoliberalism

Another question directly asked the respondents to indicate whether the challenges they were facing in universities were due to economic sanctions or political instability that has been present in the country because of disputed elections and other political issues. These variants of neoliberalism are what the ordinary Zimbabwean talk about without mentioning concepts such as neoliberalism. The majority of the respondents, 42%, indicated that political instability affected their ability to work as researchers more than international sanctions. 31% indicated that both political instability and economic sanctions equally affected them. The majority of the respondents consider political instability and not economic sanctions as the cause of the challenges they encounter. This was corroborated by this interviewee, who said:

I think economic sanctions are used as an excuse. The media is reporting corruption by government officials every day. Look at their cars and houses, even our top administrators here.

Other interviewee respondents connected the economic problems that the country is experiencing and how these are affecting academics' work. One of the respondents said:

At my institution, the lack of foreign currency has negatively affected research work. The University does not have enough foreign currency to buy essential data analysis software. The university is affiliated with very few international journals. As an individual, I find it difficult to subscribe to the journals which do not offer free access to their articles. As citizens, we are told that this lack of foreign currency is due to international sanctions, which have negatively affected international trading.

Lack of foreign currency has also negatively affected attendance at international research conferences, where conference fees are charged in foreign currency.

Another respondent echoed similar views:

The critical issue is being cut off from the rest of the world and being unable to know what is available out there for use. The level of salaries is such that one cannot use their resources. Available resources are unknown to most Zimbabwean academics and researchers.

Although neoliberalism has been deployed in various forms in Zimbabwe, one observes that ordinary Zimbabweans, such as academics, feel the impact. This is what one of the academics had to say:

Political instability, corruption, and economic sanctions combine to create an economic environment wherein we, as academics, struggle to make ends meet. Frequent power cuts, unreliable internet connectivity, and fuel shortages are some of the challenges that impact on my academic work. For example, a whole day may be spent in a fuel queue.

Authoritarian neoliberalism has had severe repercussions on the economy of the country, and this has challenged academia in many ways including limitations to travel for attending conferences and conducting research, motivation as energy has to be diverted to pertinent bread and butter issues, incapacitation to purchase and pay for international obligations such as collaborations, professional research associations fees, among other professional essentials.

Discussion

The discussion in this article situates the challenges faced by Zimbabwe's academic community in universities or higher education in general in the context of the prowling neoliberal ideology, in whatever version, that is being used by the local and international elites to make a profit in the so-called free market system. The free-market ideology is viewed here as a modern instrument of coercion by those who believe that the market should be the organizing principle for all political, social, and economic policies (Giroux, 2004; Harrison 2019), including in universities. It is the utilization of this economic warfare that observers such as Harrison (2019) ended up coining the concept of authoritarian neoliberalism. Its hallmarks include centralized and top-down power and orientation towards a free-market society that renders it unable to accommodate alternative systems that are responsive to different nation-states' historical necessities and unique contemporary challenges. The respondents of this study though acknowledging the rampant and devastating impact of current economic policies on their academic work, also showed that Zimbabweans are divided over the variant of neoliberalism at play and/or are not aware of it. Regardless of failing to name the local or international, the view that economic policies, executed by top-down and undemocratic governance, generate instability in the nation-state (Bruff and Tansel, 2019; Harrison 2019) is emphatically confirmed.

Dominant Western Neoliberalism: Politics of University Education in Zimbabwe

As already indicated, from a critical postcolonial perspective, the deployment of targeted international sanctions is seen as attempts to enforce neoliberalism on peripheral countries by the industrialized center. Sanctions are an instrument of coercion employed by the developed countries to discipline ‘misbehaving’ in mostly developing countries (Drezner, 2015), leading to the conceptualization of disciplinary neoliberalism (Gill, 2002; Tansel, 2017). Some respondents indicated that Zimbabwe was not under sanctions, but it was the government’s incompetency and its undemocratic practices that were creating the crises and challenges in higher education. Such views are alluding to the existence of kleptocratic neoliberalism (Hwami et al., 2018; Okafor et al., 2014) and neo-patrimonial neoliberalism (Abegazi, 2011; Huggins, 2017). Again, it has to be mentioned that economic sanctions, corruption, and nepotism among many other ills in the Zimbabwean polity are manifestations of vulgar neoliberalism and all feed into each other’s narrative. Although economic sanctions are indicators of more significant problems in a country such as poor governance and human rights abuses (Bezuidenhout et al., 2019; Bowden et al., 2011), in Zimbabwe one cannot but concur with the conclusion that neoliberalism is at the root of the crises in the university (Monbiot, 2017). One respondent wrote:

Sanctions, what sanctions? The government of Zimbabwe is authoritarian and corrupt, and these are the problems the country and we in the university are facing. They are using sanctions as an excuse to loot and enrich themselves while the majority are suffering.

This is what kleptocratic neoliberalism entails. There were many other comments, such as the above, that rejected the notion that the university is struggling because of economic sanctions. However, 95% of the respondents answered Yes to the question: Do you feel that sanctions have impacted on your ability to function as an academic and researcher? One respondent captured the following to illustrate this point:

Look at international scholarships, post-doctoral funding, teaching, or research fellowship opportunities. Zimbabwe is left out of most of these opportunities. Why? These competitions are described as for those in developing countries, and countries such as Zambia and Malawi are on the list. Zimbabwe is left out. I know it is because of economic sanctions.

This shows that the idea that the sanctions are targeted (Drezner, 2015; Ogonna 2017) may not be essential, but the impact on the ground. Unfortunately, there is not much research that has been done on this topic even by Zimbabwean academics. While many academics apportion the blame for their problems on political instability and corruption, even those themes have not been taken up as areas of research. Comparative analysis of other African countries that have been subjected to international economic sanctions shows that higher education is affected in many ways. However, critical postcolonialists observe the operations of power, hegemonic practices in the deployment of neoliberal fundamentals in the African university as a continuation of the colonial. As one respondent put it:

The critical issue is being cut off from the rest of the world and being unable to know what is available out there for use.

What has been unfolding in the university in Zimbabwe is the creation of the market in this learning space with minimal state assistance mechanisms. Harrison (2019) observed that the capitalist transformation in Africa is all pain and no gain, and this seems to be a perfect description of the Zimbabwean academe's experiences.

Responsibilization: International or Localized Authoritarian Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is a hegemonic discourse (Harvey, 2007). To isolate the local and international versions of neoliberalism deployed in the university, respondents were asked whether sanctions or political instability was the primary cause of the challenges they were encountering. The majority 42% blamed political instability (local versions of neoliberalism) and not economic sanctions (representing global neoliberalism). 31% placed the blame on both economic sanctions and political instability. Again, one observes the failure to separate the strains of neoliberalism at work and attempts to reduce the discussion in terms of grand concepts such as democracy and freedom. That even though the academe fails to see the incompatibility of neoliberalism in a country with a historical background littered with denial of fundamental human economic rights, the majority appears to complicate the narrative. Can the people accept a system that ignores economic citizenship, ownership of national resources, considering their history? These are pertinent and difficult questions, but current struggles for democratic space, have been received with occasions of police brutality (Cassim, 2019) and continued profound economic challenges. When one considers the historical background of modern neoliberalism in Africa, it appears certain that it was going to be a gigantic failure as long as it failed to consider the local difference, the non-Western/European context. Utilizing Mbembe's analytics, Connell & Dados (2014) pointed out that violence, corruption, and deregulation led to the indirect private government where the state lost its capacity for redistribution but continue to operate as an instrument of coercion. The defunding and corporatization process in the Zimbabwean university has made research, access to modern software, among many other essentials difficult. Nevertheless, this Zimbabwean crisis was foreseen by one of neoliberalism's intellectual pillars, Milton Friedman when in 1976 he said,

Majority rule for Rhodesia today is a euphemism for a black-minority government, which would almost surely mean both the eviction or exodus of most of the whites and also a drastically lower level of living and opportunity for the masses of black Rhodesians (Slobodian, 2018, p. 178).

That this is what has happened in Zimbabwe makes one realize the complexity of the crises in the Zimbabwean university but further corroborating the critical postcolonial view that neoliberalism is colonial and the widespread understanding that it is

incongruent with the social, economic and historical circumstances at the center of most African nation-states.

Neoliberalism and Disciplines of Specialization

One of the aims of this study was to examine if one's specialization area made them realize the impact of authoritarian neoliberalism more or less than others. Fields such as medicine and other natural science disciplines that require modern technology and equipment were found to be more affected by the imposition of economic sanctions than areas such as humanities. Also, it has been established that the neoliberal university support STEM disciplines over humanities and that social science critical scholarship is shunned as it does not seem to help in contemporary ranking competitions (Gonzalez & Nunex, 2014; Thornton 2015). In general, this study failed to observe this trend, although the various study areas were almost evenly represented. 30% of the respondents were from arts, 28% from business, education had 19%, and the natural sciences had 23%. Also, one's level of education and views towards economic sanctions and higher education failed to show any significant association. Despite these findings contradicting what has been observed elsewhere, respondents showed that they had problems accessing the necessary equipment required to be a successful researcher in today's university. Challenges such as failing to access the computer hardware and research software, access to data, and international research and failure to join international research communities were unanimously pointed out by the respondents. Some of the respondents who acknowledged these challenges went further to deny the impact and existence of the existence of economic sanctions on their work. This means they attributed their challenges to political instability or both political instability and economic sanctions.

Conclusions and Recommendations

To turn the neoliberal rhetoric against itself, we may reasonably ask: In whose particular interests is it that the state takes a neoliberal stance and in what ways have those interests used neoliberalism to benefit themselves rather than, as is claimed, everyone, everywhere? (Harvey, 2007, p. 24) Studying the impact of neoliberalism on education in societies on the margins of global capitalism, the periphery, such as Zimbabwe, is a intriguing exercise. Classic neoliberal countries such as those in the EU, the US, Canada, and others are examples of well-developed societies for the rest of the world to emulate. The narratives from the academics captured here are an indictment of neoliberalism and all those who are benefitting from it, that is, the local government and state elites in Zimbabwe, local businesses operating as fronts of the ruling party, military aligned business working together with foreign corporates, mostly from China (Hwami et al., 2018; Langmia, 2011) not leaving out the neoliberal globalizers, such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, WTO, GATT, OECD, the EU, and the US as well as some UN sub-organizations (Carnoy, 2016; Klees, 2012; Marginson, 2016; Spring 2015). Participants were able to name corruption, dictatorship, and sanctions as causes of their crisis. While these

observations are correct, they fail to address the genesis of the problem. Utilizing critical scholarship and postcolonial analyses, the article exposed the disciplining and hegemonic nature of neoliberalism and deployed the concept of authoritarian neoliberalism to illustrate its various versions present in Zimbabwe. It is partly international authoritarian neoliberalism, deployed as an international instrument of the dominant industrialized countries as well as a local version, vulgar neoliberalism practised in the periphery to suit a minority elite in government and state (Harrison, 2019). The silence of the academics is alarming but could be considered complicity with a local and global system that is gradually destroying the education of Zimbabwe's young generation through the incapacitation of their teachers. Other studies have shown that many have voted with their feet and left the country (Crush et al., 2015). The brain drain is seen in the large numbers of inexperienced university professionals without doctoral qualifications, especially in the natural science disciplines. Zimbabwean academics and other international scholars should express themselves through research and hopefully inform domestic and international policy and practice. Consequently, this research study raises the following critical observations:

- i) This article addressed the neoliberal view from the 1970s when the country was known as Rhodesia and a rebellious British colony. With the help of Slobodian's (2018) much-acclaimed work, the template that illustrated the incompatibility of Black majority rule and the free market system at the end of colonial rule in Zimbabwe is outlined. To address the university's recurrent crises, a clear understanding of the fact that neoliberalism does not tolerate economic redistribution in favor of the majority has to be acknowledged. Economic citizenship and political citizenship do not equate in the neoliberal world (Harrison, 2019), and hence consideration of Zimbabwe's development trajectory has to accommodate this capitalist idea.
- ii) Much literature exists on neoliberalism and the university, most of it addressing the enforced changes and the resultant identity crisis of the modern "neoliberal" university. The Zimbabwean university faces a multi-faceted crisis that cannot be understood using the same theoretical lenses that examine and or critique neoliberalism elsewhere. The versions of neoliberalism at play in the university are more than one: Western neoliberalism, kleptocracy, and neo/patrimonial, and all of them represent an idea of accumulation by a few elites in the country and internationally. There is a need for more analysis of the way neoliberalism is deployed in the African university.
- iii) The need for further studies to understand the challenges in the Zimbabwean university cannot be overstated. To dismiss the university crisis as a question of democracy and/dictatorship, corruption, and the rule of law, is to simplify a more complicated postcolonial nation-state question. What kind of democracy would end the crises in the university? From this study, it means a new government. However, the Zimbabwean question would be, how do you align African postcolonial ambitions of economic independence with neoliberalism? Probably, experimenting with neo-patrimonialism as has been done in Rwanda, Ethiopia, and Botswana (Abegazi, 2011; Booth & Goloobi-Mutebi, 2012; Huggins 2017)

- could be the solution. Unfortunately, these ideas are missing from the captured conversations with Zimbabwean academics.
- iv) Conceptualizing neoliberalism as authoritarian as was done by Bruff (2016), Bruff and Tansel (2019), Harrison (2019), and Tansel (2017) and incompatible with most non-Western societies (e.g., Sub-Saharan countries) has the potential to be utilized and corroborate postcolonial perspectives (making it critical postcolonial as was attempted here) to provide a better understanding of neoliberalism and its decimation of the commons, such as the public university. At the same time, this would open up more southern or local-responsive alternative knowledges and theories to critique and/or improve neoliberalism as the struggle to achieve an authentic transformation of the less developed societies continues.
- v) Another consideration is not to place the responsibility on neoliberalism as an idea but those who are failing to properly implement neoliberal principles due to corruption and other factors associated with poor governance. Such lenses could be utilized as the effort to understand the infinite challenges in the university continues.

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