

WORKSHOP REPORT

Exploring an Interdisciplinary PhD Programme in the Humanities and Qualitative Social Sciences

A Collaborative Initiative Organized by

**Makerere Institute of Social Research
and
Centre for Humanities Research, University of the Western Cape**

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JANUARY 26

Morning*Introductory Remarks*

Faculty from the Makerere Institute of Social Research, the Centre for Humanities Research at the University of the Western Cape, and Addis Ababa University met at Makerere University on the 26th and 27th of January, 2011, to discuss the creation of a collaborative, interdisciplinary PhD programme in the humanities and qualitative social sciences.

The idea for a workshop between the Makerere Institute of Social Research (MISR) and the Centre for Humanities Research (CHR) originated at a meeting between Mahmood Mamdani of MISR, the CHR faculty, and the Arts Faculty at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in Cape Town in May, 2010. Subsequently, and independently of the first meeting, the Institute of African Studies at Addis Ababa University (AAU) communicated with Professor Mamdani that they intended to create a graduate programme in African Studies and wished to discuss their draft curriculum. MISR and UWC agreed to invite AAU to join them at a meeting at Makerere where faculty from the three institutions would discuss the intellectual dimensions of an inter-disciplinary doctoral project.

The workshop commenced with an introductory comment by Mahmood Mamdani in which he elaborated upon the intellectual justification for an interdisciplinary, collaborative PhD in the humanities and the qualitative social sciences and the importance of this programme to Makerere University. The central question facing higher education in Africa today, argued Mamdani, is the question of what it means to teach the humanities and social sciences in the current historical context, and in particular, in the post-colonial African context. What does it mean, he asked, to teach humanities and social sciences in a location where the dominant intellectual paradigms that are employed are products not of Africa's own experience, but of a particular Western experience? As a specific Western history has been theorized over centuries and given rise to paradigms concerned in large part with the enlightenment and the critique of enlightenment, this theory has also expanded to other parts of the world—but only by submerging its particular origins through describing itself in the universal terms of scientific objectivity and neutrality.

The expansion and entrenchment of Western-derived intellectual paradigms has led to a peculiar intellectual dispensation in Africa today: the dominant trend is increasingly for research to be positivist and primarily quantitative, carried out to answer questions that have been formulated outside of the continent, not only in terms of location but also in terms of historical perspective. This trend occurs either directly, through the “consultancy” model, or indirectly, through research funding and other forms of intellectual disciplining. Mamdani argued that the collection of data in order to answer externally-derived questions is not a substantive form of research if it

displaces the fundamental research practice of formulating the questions that are to be addressed.

There is a significant need therefore to minimize the impact of a “consultancy culture,” in which African researchers are merely paid to gather data or to manage the collection of data by “research assistants” on behalf of foreign researchers, donors, aid agencies, and NGOs. The consultancy approach needs to be replaced by an approach based on a two-fold objective: firstly, research problems should stem from critical engagement with the society at large and, secondly, research questions should be articulated with a critical grasp of the African and global disciplinary literature in order to identify key debates within the literature, and to locate queries within those debates. This is quite distinct from the current model at Makerere University which trains researchers in “social science methodology” through “short courses” oriented towards teaching quantitative research methodology. It is the conviction that this model creates consultants rather than independent researchers that explains MISR’s determination to create a PhD programme that involves significant preparatory coursework and which contributes to both re-thinking old questions and formulating new ones.

This would challenge the foundations of the dominant intellectual paradigm which often assumes that there is a single model derived from the dominant Western experience and conceives of research as no more than a demonstration that societies around the world either conform or deviate from that model. This dominant paradigm dehistoricizes and decontextualises other experiences, whether Western or non-Western. Instead, every experience, non-Western included, should be treated with intellectual dignity as itself the basis for theorization, which requires that we historicize and contextualize not only phenomena and processes but also the intellectual apparatus used to analyze these.

Mamdani argued that such an effort inherently requires an interdisciplinary approach since the dominant intellectual paradigms entail a range of unspoken presuppositions that reflect their own understanding of history. In order to rethink these paradigms, their presuppositions need to be thematized and interrogated, just as developing new paradigms will need taking into account distinct historical, cultural, economic, and political experiences. The very process of building conceptual tools thus requires an approach that draws upon *all the modes of inquiry* available to us today.

Premesh Lalu, the Director of the CHR, next presented a brief background to the formation of UWC and the CHR. He outlined the University’s historical association with the anti-apartheid movement in defiance of the apartheid state’s objective at the time of limiting its student population to one racial group in the society. Lalu also explained that the CHR, formed in 2006, had been reconstituted out of the Institute for Historical Research, and in order to address itself to the questioning of South African “exceptionalism,” the Centre’s first project had been a study of the humanities in Africa, intended to help open the debate on the reconstitution of the humanities in Africa within South Africa. As of now, there are four interdisciplinary research programmes currently running, namely, “War and the Everyday,” “Cities in Transition,” “Aesthetics and Politics,” and “Violence and Transition.”

A major commitment of the Centre, unlike most institutional models, explained Lalu, is to avoid reproducing the hierarchy between those in a university who conduct research and those who teach. The CHR specifically seeks to address the question of how to develop research that has consequences for teaching at the graduate and undergraduate levels. To this end, they have attempted to ensure that the competition between departments for both doctoral students and post-doctoral scholars is minimized in relation to the CHR, since students continue to register in their respective academic departments but come together as an interdisciplinary group in colloquia, study circles, and other collective settings where they can read and reflect on each others' work. The Centre has also endeavored to encourage students to shift from narrowly defined case-study PhDs, which tend to be conceptually limited, and towards projects that involve transnational or comparative work and thus can open up the conceptual apparatus itself.

Suren Pillay, also of UWC, added that the Centre is deeply interested in participating in expanding the debate over the reform of higher education in South Africa. He noted that this debate has largely been conceived of, over the last 15 years as mainly about the state of racial redress in a historically divided society. While this was important, he noted that it has been at the expense of concerted discussions and debates about the reform of the content of curriculum in the post-apartheid era.

Commenting on the interdisciplinary nature of the proposed course of study, Moges Yigezu and Asnake Kegale of Addis Ababa University explained that interdisciplinarity was highly relevant to AAU as well. Yigezu explained that the AAU had gone through a number of key historical moments: it had survived feudal monarchy, communism, and militarized neoliberalism and now is facing the challenge of massive state-led expansion. The Ethiopian state has opened 22 universities in the last decade and has ten more under construction, largely as an effort to provide training to its expanding bureaucracy. AAU has been assigned the task of training the human resources for this new university system, and it aims to produce 5000 completed PhDs in ten years. Within this expansion, Yigezu explained, there has been a willingness to move from disciplinary-based to multidisciplinary programmes. However, the casualty of this expansion has been intellectual rigor, in particular in the social sciences. Yigezu pointed out that, although in the natural sciences most PhD dissertations have led to academic publications, there has been an almost total lack of publications from PhD research in the social sciences.

In addition, noted Kegale, a number of new centres had opened at AAU recently—focused on specialized research areas, such as Federalism, Human Rights, Peace and Conflict, African studies, or Ethiopian studies. While these centres are interdisciplinary in name, they have yet to build interdisciplinarity into their curricula or courses. Nevertheless, the fact that the university has been willing to expand graduate education and offer some flexibility in disciplinary boundaries and curricular development is encouraging, as is the trend of turning centres into institutional homes for MA and PhD programmes.

The discussion that ensued explored a number of themes in greater detail: the status of research; the reform of higher education; and interdisciplinarity (although this last topic was addressed in more depth in the evening session). Significant attention was paid to the social context of the crises faced by autonomous research institutions and

reformed higher education in Africa, and the challenges that the context posed to taking those projects in proposed new directions.

Discussion

Lalu began the discussion by connecting research, education reform, and interdisciplinarity. Encouraging the disciplines to reflect on their own history, he suggested, could be a starting point for interdisciplinarity. He argued that this intellectual exercise could potentially raise important questions about the role of the university itself. Interdisciplinarity might not only be seen in limited terms as a reconfiguration of disciplines, or as an expanded listing of courses; it could be used as a way of keeping open the larger questions of the meaning of education and research at the university. The emergence of a research aristocracy and the denigration of teaching as mere drudgery are twin processes, resulting in a dilemma whereby the results of donor-funded research institutes are divorced from teaching.

Prof. Abdu B.K. Kasozi, the Executive Director of the National Council for Higher Education, described the challenges facing research in Uganda at present. He framed the problem as one that is part of the deterioration of academic debate more generally. In his view, the greatest challenge to research has come from neoliberal restructuring, the marketization of the university, and the withdrawal of state funding for university research. He recalled that when Makerere was first put under budgetary pressure, it was research budgets that were the first to be shrunk, and eventually cut. As a result of a focus on training “student workers,” the administrators of higher education institutions like Makerere could not envisage a role for research at the University. The focus on training students in “marketable” fields in order to produce graduates at a faster and more expansive rate had immediate negative consequences, including the degradation of intellectual content and rigorous coursework in university programmes as well as a decline in discussions and seminars. The pressure for such reform has come equally from the state, donors, and the market, none of which, he suggested, seemed to value universities as places of original knowledge production. As a result, since the 1990s Makerere has not allocated funding for basic research, and today the country lags far behind its regional neighbors in state funding to universities—he cited the fact that a mere 0.3% of GDP goes to higher education in Uganda, as compared to an average of 1% of GDP among Uganda’s neighbors.

Mary Ssonko of MISR raised the question of the social context in which researchers work as central to understanding what has happened to research at Makerere. She argued that it was not that Ugandan researchers are averse to conducting innovative and theoretical studies. The predominance of the consultancy model, she cautioned, should not be taken to be a reflection of the poverty of research capacity. Rather, the dominance of the consultancy model was the product of researchers’ pragmatic need to support themselves in the face of a market that rewards consultants but not original research. A similar problem is faced by lecturers—they are not themselves to blame for the degeneration of standards and academic rigor, but rather they are conforming to what the system demands from them in order to show that students are passing courses, and can obtain their degrees. If the research culture is to be altered successfully, and if there is a project to create more researchers who commit to a

period of study in a PhD programme, we will have to address these social conditions faced by researchers.

Sallie Simba Kayunga, the HOD for Political Science at Makerere, emphasized that the current weaknesses of many PhDs at Makerere could be remedied by a course-work component. PhD theses have become anemic theoretically, often needing greater intellectual rigor. To underscore the observation made earlier on, he noted that many current theses tend to be informed by positivist methodologies and insufficient theoretical reflection in the formulation of the research question of the thesis.

Fredrick Kisekka-Ntale of MISR emphasized the negative effects that the unregulated incursions of market imperatives had made on research at Makerere. He argued that the main task was to “wean ourselves” off the demands of the market so that research and teaching with intellectual rigor and independence could be made possible.

Okello Ogwang of the Department of Literature, and also a Deputy Dean at Makerere, drew attention to what he called a paradox of teaching at Makerere: the immense pressure to show that teaching produced successful results was the very pressure that was causing teaching to fail to do justice to its own standards. He cited examples of students outsourcing their writing and exam responsibilities to those who would do so for a cash fee, suggesting that transactional market relation had penetrated deep into the research and teaching enterprise. He gave the example of an MA student who was found to have hired a mercenary to take his exam in Research Methods, except that the mercenary was a secondary school graduate in Maths!

Lalu suggested that the debate on the Humanities should also be seen in the context of the larger question of the meaning of the university in Africa, which he said was fundamentally “up for grabs” at the present moment. He contended that it would be useful to raise a debate around the purpose of the university as a subject of disagreement, not agreement, within the university itself. Just as critical reflection within the disciplines on their history and present role should be undertaken, so should critical reflection take place within the university on its enterprise. Given that the university as an institution is under major threat from neoliberalism and structural adjustment, the very idea of the university needs to be rethought as part of the effort to reform higher education. The debate in the CODESRIA-sponsored *Journal of Higher Education in Africa* is a start.

Additional discussion followed over the funding difficulties faced by Makerere. It was at this point that participants were reminded that as much as the contextual questions were important, the focus of the meeting was to flesh out the conceptual and intellectual rationale for the proposed PhD programme. It was decided that while of key importance, these financial and administrative constraints could be dealt with later, and in some instances, internally to each university.

Mahmood Mamdani concluded the morning session by noting key themes of the discussion thus far. One theme was the political economy of intellectual production in Africa, and the need to recognize the practical problems imposed by the dominance of a market that devalues original research or intellectual production in Africa. The market, with its global determinants, has tended to relegate Africa to a specific place in the circuits of knowledge production: one of providing raw material (“data”) to

Western academics who process it and then re-export their theories back to Africa. Research proposals are increasingly descriptive accounts of data collection and the methods used to collate data, collaboration is reduced to assistance, and there is a general impoverishment of theory and debate.

But this challenge to autonomous scholarship is not unprecedented, he pointed out—indeed, autonomous scholarship was also denigrated in the early post-colonial state, when universities were conceived of as providing the “manpower” necessary for national development, and original knowledge production was seen as a luxury. Even when scholars saw themselves as critical of the state, such as during the 1970s at University of Dar es Salaam, intellectual work ended up being too wedded to a political programme, even if it was critical of the state. One result was that the post-independence generation of scholars has largely failed to reproduce itself. This is a fate that will repeat in the future if research is not put back into teaching and PhD programmes in Africa are not conceived of as training the next generation of African scholars.

Second, he noted that this raises larger questions of the parameters of knowledge in Africa, the meaning of higher education, and the point of the university. To this end, Mamdani suggested that we ask if we are talking about the African university or the university in Africa? He suggested this as the framework within which to rethink the question of the history of the university in Africa.

Thirdly, he suggested that, while we need to recognize the difficulties imposed by the market, we also need to think of what it would mean to get outside the dictates of the market and what agenda we would pursue. In other words, we should recognize the damage that the social, political, and economic contexts have wrought in higher education. However, instead of being debilitated until the wider social context changes, we should try to carve out a space that evades that logic and then use it as a vantage from which to understand critically that very social context.

Participants agreed that at stake in the current proposal is not the large scale reform of Makerere or of African universities as a whole, but the development of one modest collaborative PhD programme. This programme will have value in and of itself—because it will train a cadre of researchers and contribute to knowledge production and debate—but it may also end up representing an experiment to see what is possible in terms of rethinking and reforming research and teaching more broadly.

Afternoon

In the afternoon, Suren Pillay led a seminar on South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In particular, he examined the limits imposed by its espousal of a human rights discourse to define the harm of apartheid and the genealogy of that particular rights discourse.

In the discussion that followed, questions were raised about the dominant debates over the TRC and the paper’s contribution to those debates; the genealogical approach and its generalization from a consideration of human rights to other issues around

justice and reconciliation; alternative human rights framings; and the incompatibility of liberal legal norms with various forms of collective harm.

The discussion ended with an exchange between Pillay and Mamdani on the limitations of studies that focus exclusively on the TRC. Specifically, the fetishization of the TRC, it was argued, obscures the much more important political negotiations that led to the dismantling of the apartheid state and the inception of majority rule. Thus, seeing the South African experience as representing one answer to the dilemma of “truth or justice,” in which justice was excluded through amnesty in exchange for truth, misses the point. This conventional wisdom restricts its conception of justice to criminal justice and ignores the fact that what the perpetrators gave up in exchange for amnesty was not “the truth,” but the reins of power. Therefore, the “transitional justice” approach that is dominant and that endeavors to replicate TRCs elsewhere on the “South African model” draws on a limited understanding of the South African experience. It ignores the fact that the TRC emerged in the context of the transfer of political power from perpetrators/beneficiaries as a group to survivors of apartheid. It is this transition that explains the dismantling of apartheid as a legal and political project and at the same time its reinforcement as a social project.

Evening

The last session of the day came back to focus on the question of interdisciplinarity.

Pillay called attention to the tendency in universities today to “repackage disciplines as vocations,” which further entrenches disciplinary boundaries and restrictions. Given this context, he noted the possibility of unexpected spaces opening up from which such boundaries can be challenged.

Stella Nyanzi brought up the importance of connecting theory with research and bridging the gap between the two.

Adam Branch of MISR raised a concern around interdisciplinarity. In the pursuit of breadth, he noted, students may end up without a sufficiently rigorous grounding. He noted that a PhD should provide students with a significant grounding in ways of thinking, writing, and reasoning, and that, despite their obvious limitations and parochial histories, many disciplines are based precisely on decades or centuries of thinking and writing about how to think, write, and reason. Students should not be presented with the self-critique of disciplines as a *fait accompli*, but they should rather arrive at this critique through their own effort to engage the discipline on its own terms. He feared that without some such grounding, students could end up with a superficial eclecticism, reflexivity, and self-critique, a problem that seems to affect some anthropology departments in the US today.

Okello Ogwang agreed that this was a potential problem, but argued that it could be overcome by grounding students in disciplines while relating those disciplines to others.

Mamdani recognized the challenge that interdisciplinarity could be taken as a recipe for “anything goes,” but took another approach to address it. He argued it should be recognized that the most important critiques of the disciplines have come from within the disciplines themselves, examples being the cases of Anthropology and Geography. The key would be to ground students in specific subject areas, or clusters, which may be associated with traditional disciplines, but to teach them the histories of the disciplines and the debates that have prevailed in those disciplines. The cluster approach would be used as a way of historicizing the disciplines and different fields of knowledge while retaining thematic coherence. Thus, the disciplines are not abandoned but are contextualized and their putative subjects of inquiry—for example, politics—are opened up to an interdisciplinary approach.

Lalu shifted from a cluster approach to an approach oriented toward research projects focused on specific concepts or problems that cut across the disciplines, and which would necessarily lead to interdisciplinarity. This approach could also, he stated, go beyond the question of different “methodologies” and open instead the question of divergent “modes of evidence.”

Pillay agreed, noting that the point of the course-work based PhD programme, at its most fundamental level, would be to prepare students through a period of systematic reading, courses, and seminars to be able to ask interesting and innovative questions, which they would take up in their dissertations. If it were able to do this, then it would succeed in its aim to promote the kind of research we have envisioned for the programme.

Mamdani emphasized that the objective was for an individual student’s course of study to be driven forward by debates and not by orthodoxy. This approach would give primacy to the importance of reading key texts in those debates. In practical terms, students would spend the first two years building a bibliography and coming to grips with the literature that constituted it. In the third year they would write a critical essay on the bibliography, and they could then embark on their own research.

It was agreed that the workshop would adopt the cluster approach as per the concept note and that the four clusters would be addressed in turn on the following morning.

JANUARY 27

Morning

The morning session comprised presentations followed by discussions on the four thematic clusters.

Aesthetic and Cultural Production

Two presentations were made on the subject. The first addressed the conceptual framework for an interdisciplinary approach to the study of culture and aesthetics.

The second raised questions about how to institutionalize such an approach, and sought to answer that question in relation to the historical context of Makerere University.

In her presentation Agnes Kanya, of MISR, reflected on the split between social sciences and the arts which she had run up against upon returning to the African academy, a split that had disappointed her as both a social scientist and a filmmaker who is interested in drawing together these two areas of research. She argued that her disciplinary training in anthropology convinces her that it is a field well-suited to bridge this split and to make apparent the value of aesthetic studies to the social sciences. The field of visual anthropology, for example, examines the history and circulation of representations of Africa, from the European explorers to Nollywood. Within anthropological writing there is “a fine line between fiction and ethnography,” and so the supposed division between these academic and popular representations needs to be rethought. All cultural productions need to be contextualized within the global economy and in terms of the positionality of their producers. In short, the question of the parameters of art and culture in Africa needs to be raised, which can only be done through an interdisciplinary approach.

Okello Ogwang traced the debates over the meaning of African literature at Makerere. First, he noted, the early debates focused on the question of what we consider to be *African* literature. He reflected critically on these early post-independence efforts to Africanize the curriculum and to develop a Department of Literature out of what was called the English Department. In practice, his hindsight assessment was that this was done by simply grafting an African component onto the standard English literature curriculum. Questions over the adequacy of this approach led back to the debates on the question of what African *literature* was. For example, should oral literature or other supposedly specifically African literary forms be made part of the canon? If not, how should those sources be treated? Finally, Okello Ogwang noted, there was a more recent tendency to shift the area of focus so far towards Cultural Studies that texts themselves have decreasingly become objects of study. This shift has led him to the view that, when the very object of disciplinary study is lost as a result of the external critique of the method itself, there is a need to maintain some respect for traditional disciplines.

The subsequent discussion generally explored the question of the parameters of cultural production. Lalu noted that the CHR had a programme of studying institutions of public culture which focused on aesthetics and the arts. He also noted that the CHR was currently working towards a chair in “African image worlds” that would try to combine thinking on the relationship between aesthetics and politics. This proposed area of study is also interested in looking more closely at nationalist aesthetics and aesthetics and the everyday, on which more work is greatly needed.

Genealogies of the Political

Asnake Kegale of Addis Ababa University began with a presentation on this cluster. There is a need, he argued, to contextualize the Political Science curriculum as a starting point. Most important, in his view, are the questions of state and society in Africa and the relevance of the dominant disciplinary models of “state failure” to

understanding contemporary African states. More broadly, the thematic areas of Pan-African relations, African international relations, and the question of how to approach African IR from the perspective of standard IR theories would need to be addressed. Thirdly, he noted that in their discussions at Addis Ababa about the creation of PhD programmes along disciplinary lines, the relevance of disciplinary Political Theory to the African context and the question of what African political theory might comprise was being explored. A final and important focus of the study of the political in Africa would be on the problem of violence in post-colonial states.

Simba noted that the question of “African political thought” also raised the question of the boundaries of Africa itself. He argued that that many political concepts claimed by Western political theory have antecedents or parallels in Africa.

Kisekka-Ntale further noted that it was not just concepts but historical events themselves that need to be re-framed from an African perspective. For example, anti-colonial struggles could be seen, from one vantage point, as primarily emerging from local histories, such as collectivization and political movements. One important task would be to unearth these African histories.

Okello Ogwang questioned an approach that purported to find African antecedents or parallels for Western political concepts; that approach, he said, will inevitably only lead us to see ourselves as intellectually impoverished. Instead, it is the histories of political ideas that need to be investigated.

Branch agreed, arguing that a genealogical approach would require that we examine the histories of particular political concepts and in doing so unearth the history of violence that has led to the formation of supposedly objective, neutral political concepts. From this genealogy, the task would be to reform and rethink those concepts from the vantage of the African experience, retheorizing political concepts themselves.

Mamdani argued that basing an approach upon the opposition of African to Western political thought, an approach prevalent in the 1980s, even if—or especially if—it gave pride of place to the African, presented problems. Though sympathetic to it, he was not convinced by this approach. In Africa thinkers need to be even more critical of “the African,” he argued, since “we are more in danger of swallowing it as an article of faith.” The alternative is not to use the spatial as the starting point, but to use key concepts such as sovereignty or community as the starting point and to trace the genealogy of debates on these concepts outside today’s conventional narratives. Studied in this way, there is an opportunity for exploring “the African” and developing the reflection that contemporary political theory has been built on the history of the victor in the West. On this subject, he suggested, it is interesting to explore the debates around community versus sovereignty as found, for example, in the work of Quentin Skinner on pre-modern Europe and Partha Chatterjee on pre-modern India.

Fredrick Golooba-Mutebi of MISR brought up the need to teach Ugandan political history from an interdisciplinary perspective, which is currently lacking in Ugandan universities. This effort to make Africans understand themselves first, in his view, is key for avoiding some misunderstandings that have led to conflicts in the past. Agnes

Kamya agreed but said she would go further to argue that students also need to be provided with tools so they can interpret history critically themselves.

Pillay re-framed the debate, noting that there are three ways of addressing the desire for a post-graduate programme that has an “Africa dimension,” an issue which had come up in the discussion over aesthetics as well. One way was to insert Africa into the conventional canon. The second way would be to follow the conventional and dominant disciplinary route and to explore the research questions that emerge in the disciplines. A third would be to let the university in Africa become the vantage point from which to look at concepts and thematic questions. This had the potential to allow for an opening up that can lead us to think of the kinds of knowledge we need to think about. Instead of Africa becoming a disciplinary supplement, we start with the object of study and ask how to think about it from the vantage point of Africa. In that way we can draw on debates, concepts and discussions from a broad range of sources and contexts that are not bound to Africa, but doing so from an African vantage point.

Kegale pointed out that this suggestion raised again the question of the university in Africa versus the African university, a question that could be extended to the disciplines, to concepts, and to categories of thought themselves. This questioning opens up debates which will lead naturally to interdisciplinarity.

Political Economy

Fredrick Kisekka-Ntale’s presentation focused on the changing movement of capital over time at the global, regional, and local levels. At the global level, he recognized new energy demands. At the regional level, he drew attention to the faith in regional blocs as the chosen mode for solving contradictions of global capitalism in Africa, but raised the concern that such regional blocs were leading to Africa’s global economic integration on no better terms than in the past. And on the local level he called attention to the issues of agrarian change and urbanization.

Branch noted that there were two dominant paradigms for viewing Africa’s political economy from a global perspective today: the neoliberal developmentalist paradigm, in which politics becomes a matter of good governance versus inefficiency, market distortions, and corruption, and that accepts the model of the administrative African state; the second was the primitive accumulation paradigm, in which politics are seen to degenerate into violence and pathology, and that accepts the model of the predatory African state. In both of these, he argued, politics has been taken out of political economy, as it is reduced either to technique or to meaningless violent greed. He said he saw value in returning to the debates of the 1970s as a way of rethinking these highly reductive, one-dimensional accounts of political economy.

Pillay agreed that the debates in Political Economy in the 1970s represented an important moment because the contenders in those debates were seeking to geographically shift the economic history of the continent by asking if the dominant trends represented an example of a broader pattern or if it had a colonial specificity. He said that there is a need to go back to those debates and the impulse motivating them—but without reproducing the answers of that time. It was in the study of

political economy, he thought, that case studies could be used productively as a way to engage theory and re-write the general.

Finally, Mamdani asked how to go about this task. One place to start, he said, is the presumption that there is something called “the economy” that can be studied, a presumption that is based upon specific unspoken claims about history, but can be opened up by way of engaging key debates in economic history. One of these is the debate about the historical development of capitalism, in which both neoliberals and Marxists tend to assume that there was a necessity to capitalism’s development in Europe. Both ask the same question: why did capitalism develop in Europe? What was unique about European history or mentality? Although the answers differed, both entail a number of highly racialized assumptions, which can be interrogated by engaging with a set of recent economic history texts (he cited Kenneth Pomeranz’ *The Great Divergence* as one such text). Second, the dependency debate needs to be taken on board: while some of its conclusions—such as delinking—need to be rethought, its concern with the question of the political in the economic has been renewed by recent experiences of economic growth for example in India and China. Third, he suggested, the literature on “globalization” needs to be located historically so that we can study different forms of globalization, both modern and “pre-modern,” in specific historical contexts. Fourth, an area of research might be on the normalized distinction between the formal and informal sectors, so that we can see beyond the formal and the organized to the informal and the disorganized in different walks of life. Recent scholarship and the recognition of divergent experiences can thereby help historicize today’s dominant paradigms and the study of economics itself.

Histories

Premesh Lalu opened the discussion on this thematic area with a presentation on the question of historicism in African historiography. He noted that there is a specific kind of historicism which has led African history-writing to be caught in processes of entrapment and to engage with a reduced target of investigation. Most concretely, this has led to the event and biography becoming crucial modes of narrating history. This has been tied to a deep-seated politics of blame that restricts the way history can be written and has led histories to be unable to live up to the promises that are made on their behalf.

To gain insight on this dilemma, Lalu argued that colonialism should be seen not only as an act of conquest but more importantly as establishing a mode of evidence that brings with it an archive to which agency is subjected. Although historians have made efforts to retrieve agency from the colonial archive, the subject that is retrieved ends up being the subject that is kept in its place. The question therefore must be asked as to why nationalist histories fail again and again and are unable to go beyond the limits of the colonial archive.

Therefore, Lalu said, if there is no epistemic break with the way in which nationalism relates to the colonial archive, we have to think about how we think at that limit. Instead of just looking for alternative histories in the domain of the popular, we need to think about what it means to think at that limit, where nationalism is unable to go beyond colonial forms of knowledge production.

Following his presentation, a debate ensued concerning Lalu's assertion of fundamental epistemological limitations on the writing of history, limitations that were only reinforced by attempts to write "popular" histories. Samwiri Lwanga-Lunyiigo argued that we have come a long way since it was thought that there was no history in Africa, and that there still remained significant importance to alternative sources outside the official archive. Fredrick Kisekka-Ntale called attention to the effort to write history within the tension between the state and pre-colonial political institutions.

Pillay responded that we should recognize the desire to write into the past the history that has been suppressed, but at the same time be aware of the ways in which this desire can lead astray and end with no more than the victor's replacement. He insisted that colonialism needs to be understood as an epistemological event, an understanding that is particularly resonant in the case of South Africa. As he put it, in South Africa independence arrived when the critique of independence was already known, so that at the same time they celebrated their agency they critiqued it and saw its limitations.

Mamdani said that there was a deep crisis in history writing at Makerere, which had led to the subordination of history to development studies. In his opinion, however, the debate over the epistemological legacy of colonialism was limited because its legacy went beyond the epistemological to the institutional. The standard debate in African Studies is between two standpoints: an empirical one, associated with Ade Ajayi, that asserts that, given its short duration, Western colonialism should be seen as no more than an episode in African history; and a Foucauldian one that, associated with Valentin Mudimbe, that asserts that the real significance of colonialism is epistemological in that it introduced a particular and lasting way of thinking of Africa and the African. We need to open up this debate, said Mamdani, by taking other perspectives into account. For example, the debate on identity and history leads us to investigate the importance of colonialism's having written the history that is taken as self-evident today and question a number of assumptions. One assumption that may be questioned by the opening of the Timbuktu archive is the notion that Africa's history is predominantly oral. Another assumption concerns regional histories, especially of the Indian ocean, that can be read to unlock the notion that history begins with Western intervention. A third assumption is that historical developments in Africa are best understood as the result of an external impetus from North Africa, whether by light-skinned Hamites in colonial historiography or by darker-skinned peoples in nationalist historiography pioneered by Cheikh Anta Diop. There is therefore the need for a critical study of the nationalist imagination, especially of the state. Radical nationalists such as Nyerere critiqued the notion of African tradition and sought to build a centralized modern state and, in that context, a national citizenship. At the same time, they were unable to go beyond a Jacobin political project, whereby the centralized state was an authoritarian state, a reality that was exposed once the enlightened despot departed from the scene. With a sense of the genealogy of the modern state, Mamdani argued, new possibilities are opened for thinking about power today, possibilities that automatically lead us into interdisciplinarity. Indeed, history has always been interdisciplinary.

Lalu returned to the subject of epistemology, which, he argued, works at a number of different levels. The question of history writing can take a cue from what has happened to subaltern studies in India in order to arrive at the idea that history writing cannot be just a project of reclaiming history—for there is a surplus of history in many places. The epistemological needs to be engaged so that the question is framed around what would it mean to return the imaginary back to history.

Agnes Kanya brought up the place of women in history-writing. Mamdani suggested that the concern with gender in history-writing be located as part of a general tendency in history-writing to leave out the majority, whether as women, or as people of color, or as working people, and so on. Every attempt to inscribe a majority in historical writing has faced a familiar question: where is evidence to be found? And how does this change the way we think of history-writing? This is a question faced earlier by subaltern history writers and by those writing African history itself.

Lalu brought up the fact that there are strategies for writing those histories in different domains, with specific challenges in each. But that said, we do not want to replicate what history departments do, and instead want to identify what questions we seek to open up to a broader questioning. At one point, this was a matter of including excluded populations. But now, it is something different and more fundamental around how to think the very question of history. Lulu's intervention thus problematized the very idea of historicization itself, with important implications for the other clusters since their critical approach was based precisely upon the operation of historicization. It suggested that the process of historicization would itself have to be subject to critical reflection so that the effort to open the disciplines did not simply lead to new disciplinary formations.

Afternoon

In the afternoon session, Moges Yigezu presented a short history of graduate programmes at AAU which focused on the current dramatic expansion of those programmes. He attributed this expansion to the government's effort to provide lecturers for the new universities which were rapidly opening around the country. This expansion, however, had led to a lack of coherence between and within programmes and as well as to a decline in academic rigor. This was especially pronounced in the social sciences: while in the natural sciences most PhDs had led to academic publications, there had been a marked lack of publications that derived from PhD research in the social sciences.

The discussion that followed focused on the reasons for the expansion of graduate education in Ethiopia. Stella Nyanzi wondered about how PhD curricula are developed in such a short time. She also wondered what the political motivation behind the expansion might be, and whether there were academics who did not agree with the political programme behind this expansion. Okello Ogwang was also interested in where the push for expansion was coming from and what kind of mechanisms were in place, if any, to ensure academic rigor given such rapid expansion in the face of a dearth of qualified scholars. Simba contrasted the Ethiopian and Ugandan experiences, in which the Ethiopian state was displaying considerable interest in supporting graduate education, whilst in stark contrast the

Ugandan state withdrew financial support, resulting in a dire situation of graduate education having to be self-supported.

Yigezu responded that the expansion of the MA programmes in particular was the result of an initiative of the government, but that the expansion of PhD programmes has been the initiative of AAU. He said that the broader political programme behind the expansion needed further consideration.

Kegale put university education in Ethiopia in historical perspective: in the 1960s, the purpose had been to strengthen the power of the state; in the 1990s, the higher education initiative was driven by the previous generation's student movement. The current agenda of expansion is tied, in his view, to the massive expansion of the bureaucracy. This reveals both the positive and negative side to the massive state interest in higher education.

Mamdani asked whether the underlying objective for expansion could be attributed simply to the government's interest in administrative expansion, given that it has been coupled with outright repression of academic staff at AAU. Is the intention, he wondered, to undermine the possibility of a dissenting intelligentsia by creating a new intelligentsia more amenable to the state? Or is it to restructure the existing intelligentsia, perhaps along ethnic lines?

Kegale responded in the negative. He emphasized that the expansion programme was part of the state's developmental efforts, and should be understood as part of the anti-poverty strategy funded by the World Bank. Golooba noted that this could be compared to the Rwandan state's developmental ambitions: in Rwanda, an MA is needed for promotion in the civil service and the Rwandan government has been instrumental in sending large numbers of people to enroll for study abroad. Perhaps, he thought, the Ethiopian government is putting its short-term need for trained administrators before the long-term possibility that that educated class could form the basis of future political opposition.

Evening

The final session involved reflections on the discussion and a plan for how to move forward.

The participants from AAU thanked the hospitality of Makerere, declared their desire to move forward on the project, and reiterated the importance of examining similar PhD programmes elsewhere in Africa.

Stella Nyanzi agreed that the workshop had been fruitful, but said that the specific relevance of the initiative to each institution needed to be made more clear. She also suggested that the basis upon which each institution could move forward and enter into a productive collaborative relationship needed more clarity.

Lalu declared that he and Pillay had come to the workshop in order to get an idea of the possibilities for collaboration. He explained that UWC gets significant numbers of offers for partnerships from mostly northern institutions, many of which are not

intellectually productive nor conducted on equal terms. He explained that the possibility for rethinking the curriculum in Africa in collaboration with other African universities was a very appealing prospect. He considers the overall project a part of the effort to train a new generation of African academics, to think about what kinds of questions to pose, and to think about what it would mean to constitute a curriculum on Africa.

Okello Ogwang said that the workshop had allowed the participants to reflect on their own positions in a very helpful manner. Given the pressures faced at Makerere, where seminar rooms have been turned into offices and spaces for academic discussion have been shut down, the fact that this workshop had managed to open such a space was itself a victory. While different challenges would be faced by the different institutions, he felt that it is important to carry the discussion forward and to build a common intellectual agenda and commitment.

Simba also expressed his appreciation for a common intellectual agenda and for the effort to bring interdisciplinarity and theoretical rigor back into the center of discussion. He worried however that the power of the market remained a significant obstacle. Abby Sebina-Zziwa also emphasized the difficulties stemming from the possible influence of institutional politics on the success of the proposed programme. In particular, she was concerned about those who might see this PhD programme as competition.

Pillay also thanked Makerere for its hospitality. He recognized the daunting challenges faced by the institutions, especially in developing a coursework based PhD where there is none in existence in either South Africa or Uganda. But, he said, this meeting was an important consideration of whether the idea itself was worth pursuing in the long run. He expressed the view that indeed the project was an important one to take further because it is intellectually exciting. This is important because a programme that is exciting for the faculty from a research and teaching perspective will be equally exciting for students. These are the necessary ingredients for encouraging new students to undertake graduate study.

Branch agreed, noting that, given its illustrious history, MISR would provide an excellent institutional base in Uganda for developing this programme of study and renewing a research agenda that had atrophied over time due to the contextual pressures. If there is any academic location in Uganda where the laws of the market should attempt to be suspended, he thought, MISR is it.

Mamdani concluded the workshop on a biographical note. He explained to the meeting that he was part of the first post-independence academic generation, one that was trained overseas. Many of this cohort that returned to the continent found it difficult to remain since the conditions of their training and the conditions in which they now had to teach and conduct research were so different. Over time, he has become convinced that graduate students had to be developed in the conditions in which they would work, and so the next generation of African scholars would have to be trained here. This, of course, would mean tackling the question of institutional reform. However, until he joined MISR, he had not realized the scope of this task; in particular, he had not realized how far the inroads of the market had gone in creating a

consultancy culture. Therefore, the only way to create researchers is to create a PhD programme.

From MISR's vantage point, while there are certainly obstacles, there are also favorable circumstances at present. In particular the shift to a college framework could offer an intellectual advantage by bringing a large number of institutional researchers under a single roof, making it possible to build alliances across the Humanities and the Social Sciences.

Mamdani re-emphasized that the intention is not to create a large programme which seeks to reform all higher education. The question, he said, of the workshop was simply whether the institutions can share an intellectual project. The answer was affirmative. Many questions would remain—indeed, we have just opened the discussion among the participants and within our respective institutions—but we have agreed to move forward along a common path and to do so thematically, with each theme implicating a number of different disciplines. That said, he concluded, we should take it one step at a time.

In moving forward, it was agreed that the first step would be to constitute a group around each of the four thematic clusters made up of members from all three institutions. This group would put together a select bibliography and then hold a meeting, inviting important scholars on the topic from other institutions. This would lead to a process out of which particular courses could develop, with a course outline as the endpoint, all of which may take a year.

Appendix 1: Concept Note

An Interdisciplinary PhD in the Qualitative Social Sciences and the Humanities based at Makerere Institute for Social Research

Mahmood Mamdani

6 January, 2011

It is now well known that there existed centers of learning in different parts of Africa—such as Al-Azhar, Al-Zaytuna, and Sankore—prior to Western domination of the continent. And yet, this historical fact is of marginal significance for contemporary African higher education. The organization of knowledge production in the contemporary African university is everywhere based on a disciplinary mode developed in Western universities over the 19th and 20th centuries.

European universities developed three different domains of knowledge production—natural sciences, humanities, and social sciences—based on the notion of “three cultures” (Wolf Lepenies). Each of these domains was then subdivided into “disciplines.” Over the century from 1850 to the Second World War, this became the dominant pattern as it got institutionalized through three different organizational forms: a) within the universities, as chairs, departments, curricula, and academic degrees for students; b) between and outside universities at the national and international level, as discipline-based associations of scholars and journals; c) in the great libraries of the world, as the basis for classification of scholarly works.

This intellectual consensus began to break down after the 1960s, partly because of the growing overlap between disciplines and partly because of a shared problematique. For example, the line dividing the humanities from the social sciences got blurred with the increasing “historicization” and hence “contextualization” of knowledge in the humanities and the social sciences. The development was best captured in the report of the Gulbenkian Commission chaired by Immanuel Wallerstein. As interdisciplinarity began to make inroads into disciplinary specialization, the division between the humanities and the social sciences paled in the face of a growing division between quantitative and qualitative perspectives in the study of social, political and cultural life.

But these intellectual developments were not matched by comparable organizational changes, precisely because it is not easy to move strongly entrenched organizations. Though the number of interdisciplinary and regional institutes multiplied, collaboration rarely cut across the humanities/social science divide.

How to negotiate across this divide has become particularly important for the African university in the face of several developments. With the spread of consultancies at the expense of research, social research in African universities has increasingly been reduced to gathering data and providing answers to pre-packaged questions. The pressure is for more and more researchers to gather data in response to questions framed by “clients.” There is a proliferation of “short courses” on methodology that

aim to teach students and academic staff quantitative methods necessary to gathering and processing empirical data, ushering a new generation of native informers.

The initiative at the Makerere Institute of Social Research (MISR) is driven by multiple convictions: one, that key to research is the formulation of the problem of research; two, that the formulation of the research problem requires a two-fold endeavor: a firm grasp of key debates on the subject of research, and a contextual and historical understanding of the research problem.

Based on these objectives, MISR aims to offer a multi-disciplinary Doctoral programme that will bring the qualitative social sciences and the Humanities under a single institutional roof. This Ph D initiative is expected to develop in tandem with the formation of the College of Humanities that aims to bring the Faculties of Arts and Social Sciences and MISR under a single administrative roof.

The Ph D will be a five to six year programme based on two years of coursework leading to an M Phil, a year of proposal writing, and then two years of research and writing of a thesis. Students will work as part-time teaching assistants for large lecture courses in the College of Humanities in their third and final years.

Coursework during the first two years will be organized around a single set of core courses taken by all students, supplemented by electives grouped in four thematic clusters:

1. **Genealogies of the Political**, being discursive and institutional histories of political practices;
2. **Disciplinary and Popular Histories**, ranging from academic and professional modes of history writing to popular forms of retelling the past in vernaculars;
3. **Political Economy**, global, regional and local; and
4. **Literary and Aesthetic Studies**, consisting of fiction, the visual and performing arts and cinema studies.

MISR will seek to combine a commitment to local [indeed, regional] knowledge production, rooted in relevant linguistic and disciplinary terms, with a critical and disciplined reflection on the globalization of modern forms of knowledge and modern instruments of power. Rather than oppose the local to the global, it will seek to understand the global from the vantage point of the local. The doctoral programme will seek to understand alternative forms of aesthetic, intellectual, ethical, and political traditions, both contemporary and historical, the objective being not just to learn about these forms, but also to learn from them. Over time, we hope this project will nurture a scholarly community that is equipped to rethink—in both intellectual and institutional terms—the very nature of the university and of the function it is meant to serve locally and globally.

Appendix 2: Participants

Abdu B.K. Kasozi	National Council for Higher Education, Executive Director
Abby Sebina-Zziwa	MISR, Research Fellow
Adam Branch	MISR, Visiting Research Associate
Agnes Kamyia	MISR, Research Fellow
Asnake Kefale	Addis Ababa University, Department of Political Science
Fredrick Golooba-Mutebi	MISR, Research Fellow
Fredrick Kisekka- Ntale	MISR, Research Fellow
Lawyer Kafureeka	Makerere University
Mahmood Mamdani	MISR, Director
Mary Ssonko Nabacwa	MISR, Research Associate
Moges Yigezu	Addis Ababa University, Department of Linguistics
Okello Ogwang	Makerere University, Department of Literature
Premesh Lalu	University of the Western Cape, Centre for Humanities Research
Richard Kibombo	MISR, Research Fellow
Sallie Simba Kayunga	Makerere University, Department of Political Science
Samwiri Lwanga-Lunyiigo	MISR, Research Associate
Stella Nyanzi	MISR, Research Associate
Suren Pillay	University of Western Cape, Centre for Humanities Research