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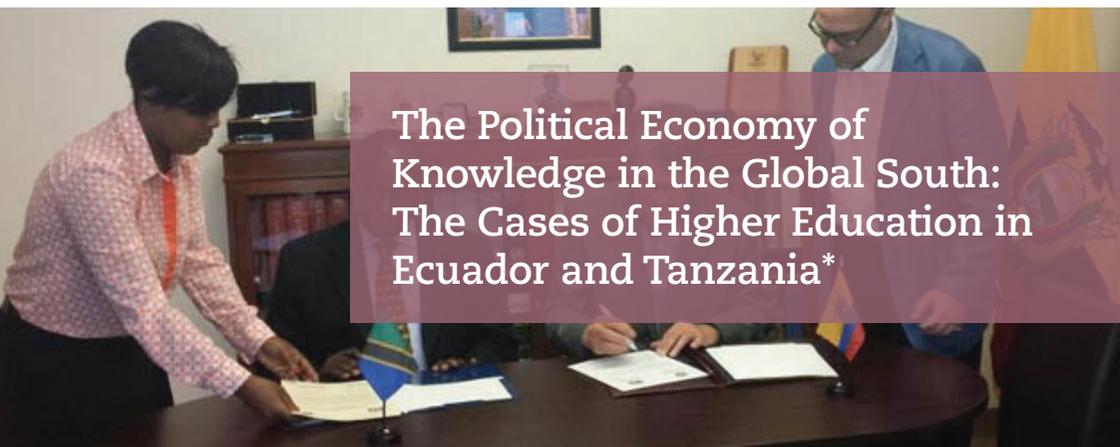


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The Political Economy of Knowledge in the Global South: The Cases of Higher Education in Ecuador and Tanzania*

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❖ **Presentation**

Political Economy of Knowledge implies the analysis of the production of knowledge and the role of actors, policies and programs which influenced higher education development during the developmentism (1970's), neoliberalism (1990's), and the current period of transformation for higher education in the Global South.

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◆ KEYWORDS

- Political Economy

- Higher Education

- Global South

- Ecuador

- Tanzania

Ecuador and Tanzania share postcolonial histories and dependent economies that have given their universities prominent roles in the construction of their respective states, societies and national economies. Just as classrooms and studies at the Central University of Ecuador, the University of Dar-es-Salaam became a key player in the democratization of the country (Campuzano, 2005; Lulat, 2005). In the 1960s and 1970s, during the euphoric period following the Cuban Revolution and the independence of many African countries, universities in Latin America and Africa committed themselves to the struggles against political and social inequalities and strengthened their ties to popular sectors. These conditions have changed through next decades.

From the standpoint of political economy, this research provides background for analyzing higher education in the context of the historical conditions in which capitalist accumulation and inequality have occurred at the global level. It also discusses the trajectory of the relationships among universities, politics and knowledge in Latin America and Africa, with special emphasis on Ecuador and Tanzania. The field work done at two rural universities, one in Ecuador and one in Tanzania. On the basis of work with documents and the positioning of various stakeholders (leaders, activists in social and educational movements, professors, politicians), the analysis makes it possible to understand the articulation between the production of knowledge within the universities and the shifts in designing educational plans within the frameworks of political disputes and the correlation of forces within the framework of globalization. We examine the 1960s to the 1980s, as Ecuadorian universities engaged with agrarian problems and professionalization, while higher education in Tanzania in that period aimed to serve development in the newly independent nation.



We look, in particular, at the establishment of research and teaching agendas for the provincial public universities of the State University of Bolivar in Ecuador and Mzumbe University in Tanzania, to understand the ways that these peripheral institutions defined and legitimized local knowledge in the context of national and global transformations. This research also examines the political economy of higher education in these two countries towards the end of the 20th century and into the 21st century. We analyze, on the one hand, the selected universities' distinct local responses to the impacts of structural adjustment. In this section we also look at the ways that these universities have responded to the globalization of education in the 21st century, focusing on the importance of social sciences in the reconstruction of the State in the 20th century, in the context of a globalized economy.

✦ Political analysis

In chronological terms the colonial and post-colonial periods in Latin America and Africa differ, but as ways of defining the specific configuration of the relation between production of knowledge and global accumulation characteristics shared by both regions. We can speak about capital accumulation and education in both colonial and postcolonial orders.

Universities and knowledge production play a crucial role in the constitution of national projects in countries of the global south. While universities



are widely valued for their potential role in social mobility - a role that emerged with the democratization and popularization of universities in the late 20th century - their contemporary importance to nation states is even more critical. In the current context of cognitive capitalism, institutions of higher learning are in fact entrusted with the economic development of the country and the nation's position in the global economy. In this new landscape, knowledge is expected to play a privileged role in productive structures and national economies.

In Tanzania as in Ecuador, then, the universities have had important relations with social and political actors, opening their teaching to popular sectors, investigating means of national development, and linking university activity with social sectors in fields like health, education, housing and the human rights. Despite their similarities, the universities of every country have adopted different approaches to their unique social, economic and political circumstances. In Ecuador, to accommodate the institutional importance of the student movements, public universities maintained solid ties with collective actors like trade unions and leftist parties. On the other hand, its relations with industry and government were distant, often antagonistic. In Tanzania, in contrast, the close ties between the national government and the most important public university, the University of Dar-es-Salaam, allowed for an intellectual and political synergy that produced significant works of African thought with international influence, such as Walter Rodney's book "How Europe underdeveloped Africa". The impact of structural adjustment shifted the trajectory of both regions.



Thus, the point of departure for a political economy analysis is the fact that it is possible to identify the key structures of the various specific ways to produce knowledge through the ways in which the work conditions of the actors involved in these dynamics were reproduced. Development programs of technological transfers are one entry point for examining the political economy of knowledge. Such a political economic analysis claims that it is possible to understand diverse and particular ways of producing knowledge based on the processes and conditions of the actors involved in this knowledge production. This hierarchical structuring occurs within an assessment scale not only based on the fact that modern systems do not recognize knowledge that operates from different premises, but also essentially based on ignoring knowledge that is not that is focused in unequal development.

* Proposals

The relationship of these structures to the increasing importance of knowledge and its formalization in higher education and academic research leads us to focus on the globalization of higher education, economies based on knowledge. The formation of large companies and the “scientific organization of work” was accompanied by the establishment of research laboratories and innovation. In the period of industrial capitalism, making knowledge functional



and commercial depended on the possibility of applying general and abstract rules to specific problems.

Education oriented towards innovation characterizes higher education in Ecuador and Tanzania from the beginnings of the 21st century. This process is part of the new political dynamics related to the character of capitalism based on the transformations of the role of knowledge in capital accumulation. Nevertheless, we see that the centrality of the State differs in each of the study cases. The process of higher education transformation has implied the implementation of accreditation, which has already begun to affect research agendas, and has shifted expectations for public universities. In any case, higher educational reforms require an analysis focused on the global transformations, and not only as local or transitory problem.

We have argued that the lack of social science programs is not only part of the political economy of knowledge production, but it also is a characteristic of the university and research structure in peripheral countries such as Ecuador and Tanzania that actively *prevents* the critique of that political economy based on unequal hierarchies of economies, politics and knowledge. Therefore, a specific action is that institutions in both countries, governing policies of higher education, encourage the production of knowledge in Social Sciences immersed in the historical perspective of the formation of the field in their respective countries. Thus, it is to overcome the view that local knowledge responds only to intrinsic processes in rural areas, to think, from the peripheral scenarios (within the periphery) negotiations between movements, state and international organizations. Each of these three actors involved in the paths of higher education.

As a proposal for research on paths of higher education in the Global South, it is possible to consider that:

- 1) It is essential to reconstruct the history of the formation of networks of local actors to establish negotiations with the state. In such networks it is important to consider that hierarchies are given by ethnic differences or social status there as well.
- 2) To understand the way policies shaped Higher Education, it is important to consider the state as a set of interactions between actors that respond to national interests and to processes of restructuring of the economy globally. Such national interests, in the case of peripheral countries, is the task of “including” rural regions in the dynamics of development, either by combining identity politics related to the production of knowledge, as in the training of technical personnel to boost industrialization. Therefore, higher education policies promoted by the State, should be given the multicultural character of the formation of states, but not only in terms of recognition of identities but endogenous forms of knowledge production. The higher education policy in the peripheral countries can not be made “from above” (as demonstrated in the neoliberal era that is still expanding in Africa and some places in Latin America), but “from below”; precisely, in the case of Ecuador and Tanzania, higher education was originated through projects carried out by the communities themselves.
- 3) It is important to know how peripheral countries have created the expectation that science and research carried out in universities would help resolve collective and national problems. However, higher education policy developed in countries such as Ecuador and Tanzania, have not considered the hierar-



chy of knowledge. Such nesting allowed disciplines related to “experts” implied a progressive fragmentation of the academic community as well as a dissociation from the immediate intellectual and political environment. Thus, the role of higher education institutions in the participation of public policies can not only be aimed at the “extension” of educational programs to rural communities, but to strengthen within the interdisciplinary construction. The fragmentation of knowledge replied to model detached university of their political role, so that the links between economics and fragmentation can only be reconciled to an intervention in the field of public policy involving local actors, participants of the intellectual environment in the Universities, and operators of state institutions.



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