REDEFINING AND RECONFIGURING THE IDEA OF A UNIVERSITY: TOWARDS AN AFRICAN UNIVERSITY OF CONSCIENCE, HUMANNESS AND WONDER

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ABSTRACT

Against the backdrop of an Africanisation imperative, universities in Africa seem to continuously redefine and reconfigure in search of social alignment, identity and relevance. It is for this reason that compelling processes, such as decolonisation, transformation and other higher education reform initiatives, are underscored by the primary imperative of pursuing social meaning and relevance. In post-colonial Africa, the imperative of Africanisation of the university has, though necessary, remained a contested topical discourse. This conceptual article seeks to contribute to the debate by drawing upon notions of conscience, humanness and wonder as possible anchors for the Africanisation of the university on the continent.

Keywords: Africanisation, conscience, humanity, reason, university, wonder

INTRODUCTION

Universities are continuously redefining and reconfiguring in search of social identity and relevance. It is for this reason that compelling processes, such as decolonisation, transformation and other university reform initiatives, are underscored by the imperative of pursuing contextual meaning and relevance. Accordingly, it is notable that for the past few decades, the "university" in Africa has come under scrutiny from the broader society (Waghid 2008; Kumalo 2018). Our view is that there seems to be three reasons as to why the university in Africa is in search of redefinition and reconfiguration. Firstly, the seemingly inevitable and potent issue of

decolonisation, which uncompromisingly demands for locally oriented worldviews, such as an integration of indigenous knowledge traditions and a transformed institutional culture that reflect local practices and values, entails that a university in Africa is compelled to pursue redefinition and reconfiguration initiatives. Consequently, the university in Africa endeavours to realign itself with the imperatives of a post-colonial African society. In so many ways, the current notion of a university in Africa has become alive to the fact that, as a product of colonial processes, it is guilty of culturally, symbolically and epistemologically alienating itself from its social context. Nevertheless, a cursory survey of the vision and mission statements of universities in Africa indicates that very few of them explicitly identify themselves as African universities. For Assiè-Lumumba (2006), universities differ in their visions and missions, as these often tend to be determined by the societies in which they are located. This point is important, considering that "institutional missions have become important ways through which universities can express their aims at institutional profiles, identity and their place in society" (Maassen et al. 2019, 15). Most universities in Africa do not include anything uniquely African in their vision and mission statements.

Secondly, the rising number of formally unemployed and, in some cases, "unemployable" graduates is a contentious issue, which consequently leads to questioning the fundamental purpose of universities in Africa (Hwang 2017). The rise in the number of unemployed university graduates is based on the presumption that higher education is regarded as a critical enabler for economic and social development in Africa. Moreover, the qualities and skills of graduates have become questionable in relation to the developmental needs of Africa (Prinsloo 2010). This situation has led to critical questions on the purpose of a university. Such questions include: what is the purpose of university education? What is the purpose of investing time and money in university programmes that do not guarantee employment and material success? Although these questions are not within the scope of this article, they remain pertinent to the inquiry about a university in Africa. Thirdly, a university in Africa is located in a social context that is characterised by dehumanising practices such as xenophobia, religious and political intolerance, and poor governance. Moreover, freedom of expression, which should guarantee academic autonomy, is often hindered by the state. These social ills inadvertently contradict the fundamentals of conscience, humanness and rationality as wonder. It is within the scope of these three interconnected factors that this article seeks to philosophically explore the meaning of an African university in relation to conscience, humanness and wonder. Accordingly, the guiding research question is:

- What constitutes an African university in relation to conscience, humanness and wonder?

To pursue this research question, the article is divided into five sections. The first section frames the context out of which the notions of conscience, humanness and acts of reason are drawn; while the second section outlines the notion of a university in its generic conceptualisation. This latter section is important because, often, a university's triple core functions, namely, teaching-learning, research and community engagement, are submerged into the perspective that regards a university as only imparting professional skills to students for formal employment purposes. In the third section, the focus is on the idea of an African university. In the foregoing parts of this introductory section, we deliberately used the term "university in Africa" rather than "African university", because a pursuit for an African university in relation to reason, conscience and humanness presupposes that such a university is a university-in-the-making. Moreover, there are contestations around the possibility of an African university (Horsthemke 2008; Alemu 2018). Such contestations have been energised by the discourse on decolonisation of the university. In order to avoid mere rhetoric on an African university the fourth and fifth sections discuss reason and conscience respectively within the guise of humanness in an African university. In this introductory paragraph it is important to state that an African university is not a point to be arrived at. Rather an African university is an understanding that recognises and appreciates African epistemologies without necessarily misrecognising "other" epistemologies from non-African contexts. Put differently the notion of an African university as developed throughout the article is one which remains in becoming.

THE CONCEPTUAL INTERTWINE OF CONSCIENCE HUMANITY AND RATIONALITY AS WONDER WITHIN AN AFRICAN CONTEXT

At the beginning of this article, it is critical that we provide a context out of which a conceptual intertwine of conscience humanity and reason as wonder is drawn. There are two spheres that shape contextual settings in which a university in Africa is located namely broader society and the university. On the broader society Africa is predominantly a politically and economically volatile continent. The post-colonial condition of Africa is marked by authoritarianism military coups corruption human rights abuses civil wars political upheaval and economic degradation which confine the majority of the population to live in squalid poverty. Moreover, Africa is persistently presented in negative terms such as "dark continent" or an "uncivilised jungle" (Nayak 2012; Thiam 2014). It is important to state that the negative perceptions (real and imagined) which can be traced as far back as the slave trade era to colonialism, have persisted. For instance, in 2018, Donald Trump, the then president of United States of America was quoted as describing African countries as "shithole" countries (Ali, Hunt, and Frank 2018).

Additionally, in October 2023, Joseph Borrell, a top European Union diplomat described Europe as a "garden" and the rest of the world as a "jungle", and it is incumbent upon the gardeners to go and develop the jungle. Ultimately, it is these negative perceptions that "justify" both colonialism and neo-colonialism as espousing the "civilising mission" mandate. Dladla (2017, 41) argues that "this has in actual historical terms not only meant the installation and development of white supremacy as an ordering principle within the political sphere, it has its realm of influence extend over all human experience in (South) Africa ever since the conquest of indigenous people in the unjust wars of colonialism".

On the other hand, there are epistemic contestations in universities in Africa that are presented in reactionary and corrective discourses such as decolonisation, Africanisation, Indigenous Knowledge Systems and transformation of higher education. The central claim in these discourses is an observation that since the first encounter between Africans and Europeans, there has been a systematic marginalisation and, in some cases, a total dismissal of African epistemologies (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013). African epistemologies were and still are categorised as superstitions, myths and unsubstantiated, as well as irrelevant claims that have no place in "formal" educational settings. It is for this reason that combative terms such as epistemic violence, epistemic genocide and epistemic insolence, among others, are descriptive concepts forwarded in an endeavour to capture and represent the continual disaggregation against African worldviews and experiences in universities in Africa.

The two foregoing paragraphs, though not exhaustive, serve to highlight the necessity of conscience, rationality and humanity as centrepieces for an African university. The systematic disruption of African worldviews, epistemology and experience, which is aptly represented in Eurocentrism, has had an effect of vandalising aspects of conscience, humanity and acts of reason in Africa. These three aspects can form the basis upon which transformative initiatives such as an Africanisation and decolonisation act as antidotes to Eurocentric epistemic hegemony.

A GENERIC CONCEPTUALISATION OF A UNIVERSITY

Before dwelling on an African university, it is important to deal with the concept of a university. What is a university? What is the primary purpose of a university within a society? These questions are critical, because we concur with the observation that "beliefs about what higher education is for tend to shape higher education systems, determine institutional identity and what they do" (Council on Higher Education 2016, 14). Accordingly, the main purpose of this section is to expound the concept of a university from a general perspective, so that the subsequent section of this article appropriates such a concept to an African setting. It may

appear redundant that in an era where scholars are proposing notions such as pluriversity and multiversity, rather than a university (Klinken 2020; Boidin, Cohen, and Grosfoguel 2012), the focus in this section is a conceptual exposition of a university. To such scholars, the idea of a university is outdated and excludes numerous sites of knowledge production and dissemination. Nevertheless, as stated in the foregoing section, a university is not a static and uniform institution. Rather, a university is shaped by the obtaining historical, political, social and economic contexts. According to Assiè-Lumumba (2006), a university is a formalised way of academic conduct in which knowledge production, knowledge dissemination and conferring of academic degrees are defining characteristics. By its very nature, a university plays a distinctive role in a society with different, and specific roles assigned to different people.

From a broad perspective, a university may be conceptualised from two fronts. Firstly, a university, as an autonomous institution, ideally pursues truth for the purposes of responding to the immediate local and global needs. It is aptly stated that a university that independently researches and values truth is "an institution that is embedded in its communities and becoming more engaged with real-world problems and concerns in both its practices and its scholarship" (Council on Higher Education 2016, 14). Secondly, a university is also conceptualised from its three interlinked functions, namely, teaching-learning, research and community engagement. In teaching-learning, a university performs co-construction of knowledge amongst students and educators, while in research, a university focuses on the production, validation and legitimatisation of knowledge. On the other hand, community engagement impels the university to interact with society, to facilitate the mutual exchange of ideas (Waghid 2009).

An abstract definition, as outlined in the foregoing paragraph, tends to neglect the cultural, political and historical contexts, which often gives a university some distinctive features. A university is a cultural, political and historical embodiment of the nation and region. For instance, universities in Africa are establishments that arise from the historical and political context of colonisation, in which colonial forms of knowledge and worldviews were imposed. It is for these reasons that universities in Africa are in need of reconfiguration to militate against western hegemony. Of course, we cannot say that an African university should rid itself of all western perspectives and epistemologies. Rather, universities in Africa, like anywhere else, should embrace diversity and constantly challenge orthodox ways of thinking and acting. In a nutshell, this section has shown that development, teaching-learning, research, transferable knowledge, knowledge for the sake of knowledge and social responsibility are some of constitutive aspects of a university. Nevertheless, rather than generic, the pursuit of an African university is central in this article. The following section attends to the possibility of an African university.

TOWARDS THE IDEA OF AN AFRICAN UNIVERSITY: HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY OVERVIEW

There are two affirmations that we need to state upfront in this section. Firstly, the notion of African university may be misleading into assuming that there is a homogeneous and unique institution on the African continent. We differ with the assertion that an African university "can be referred in a singular form because the universities in Africa generally speaking are all the same in form, content and character" (Motsaathebe 2019, 37). However, any suggestion of or about an African university is a re-imagination of an alternative university, informed by an alternative understanding of humanness, reason and conscience. An African university is predicated by the need to reclaim, re-assert and re-affirm African worldviews, values and epistemologies through minimising western hegemony. Furthermore, the quest for an African university is informed by the notation that "Africa desperately needs its universities. As the pace of technological and social change speeds up, the challenges of knowing ourselves as African people continue to change subtly" (Barnes 2007, 39). Nevertheless, universities that are found on the continent differ on many levels, such as infrastructural development, quality of education and other services provided, as well as academic standards of lecturing staff.

Secondly, the quest for an African university posits the fact that a university geographically located in Africa does not necessarily imply it is an African university. This point is aptly captured with the observation that "a university in Africa is not by necessity an African university" (Ramose 2005, 1187). An African university is an institution that immerses itself in the African context, draws its identity, vision and mission from the African context, appreciates African values and recognises African knowledge traditions and their collective histories. In addition, such a university does not just seek to conform to the African context, but challenges the society while permitting itself to be challenged by the society. An African university does not culturally isolate African students, but positions students in both the local and global contexts. In this way an African university advances glocalised knowledge interests (Waghid 2001).

The last few decades, however, have made it apparent that an African university is a troubled institution. Some of the challenges that have troubled an African university include violent student protests, sexual harassment, xenophobia, an epistemology that is western orientated and poor institutional governance. In other parts of the continent, an African university finds itself entangled in issues of poor governance and political state interference, which often compromises intellectual autonomy (Waghid 2024). Moreover, despite being endowed with an array of precious natural resources, the African continent has, comparatively,

remained economically underdeveloped and with the majority of the population living in poverty, as well as a high rate of unemployment (Olaniran and Uleanya 2021). It is also difficult to understand the fact that nearly thirty years after the last African countries gained political independence, decolonisation of higher education, a term that is all-embracing to include universities, has become a topical and seemingly urgent matter. In accounting for the plethora of challenges that exist in an African university, this article argues that an African university is undergoing a phase of identity and purpose searching. An African university has to confront itself in pursuance of contextualisation and reasserting its relevance in an era in which its relevance is questioned.

As noted in the afore-mentioned sections, a university in Africa is saddled with colonial legacy, which impedes endeavours towards the realisation of an African university. As Mazrui (1975) notes, one of the primary functions of a university in Africa was to socialise local personnel into western ways. This colonial baggage manifests itself through continuities of colonial culture, such as the predominance of colonial language, curriculum, university management styles, programme validation, prohibitive tuition, accommodation fees and so forth. Contrastingly, an African university is supposed to be informed by the predominantly communally-oriented perspectives that seek to establish harmonious co-existence, economic and social development. In other words, a university that perpetuates coloniality contradicts the objectives of an African university. An African university should, therefore, be conscious and on constant academic guard against perpetuating western epistemic hegemony. Therefore, it is not enough to be just conscious of epistemic hegemony, but concrete steps that reverse western hegemony should be undertaken. An African university is a home-grown university whose influence and reputation goes beyond territorial boundaries (Ramose 2005). Conclusively, this section is in line with the assertion that the "importance of recalling history is justified by the necessity of locating contemporary realities in the processes of changing rationalities of the various internal and external agents that played major roles in shaping African higher education" (Assiè-Lumumba 2006, 23). The most important point to state here is that an African university identifies itself with predominant African values and norms, and it is a university that holds itself accountable to primarily respond to the social, political and economic challenges that exist, firstly, in the local and, secondly, in the global spheres of societal life.

In this section, it has become apparent that the quest for an African university is besieged with a myriad of historical, political and social challenges. Assiè-Lumumba (2006) argues that an African university has not developed beyond basic emblems of sovereignty, such as the flags and national anthems. There is also an observation that a university in Africa is resistant to transform itself into an African university. Accordingly, "by inspiration, intention and

aspiration, the universities established in Africa by the sword of colonisation were fortresses of western civilisation. They have remained so in many parts of Africa. There are universities in Africa that resist the moral and political imperative to become African universities" (Ramose 2005, 1187). It is further argued that a university in Africa, which was imposed from colonial power and later adopted by African governments for the sake of economic necessity, is still to become an African institution (Kamola 2014). So, there is a general dissatisfaction with the current approach and values that sustain a university in Africa. As a contribution towards the realisation of an African university, the following three subsections delineate the characters of conscience, humanness and acts of reason. The fundamental guiding question in these three interlinked sections is: how would the notions of conscience, humanness and acts of reason contribute to the realisation of an African university?

CONSCIENCE IN AFRICAN UNIVERSITY

Conscience is the capacity to critically reflect, analyse, introspect and retrospect in relation to characteristic values, norms, beliefs, behaviours, actions and practices. Ideally, conscience acts as a moral guiding framework upon which lessons are drawn and deployed, so that past social errors are not repeated in their wholesome. By its very nature, conscience entails that one has to apply rationality or deliberation in analysis. In its ordinary usage, conscience is usually applied to an individual. Nevertheless, in pursuance of an African university, we apply the term conscience in reference to an institutional level. In the identification of an African university, we discuss and apply the concept of conscience from two perspectives.

Conscience is contextually informed and can, therefore, appropriately respond to injustice. Through conscience, an African university cannot afford to ignore culturally oppressive practices such as unquestioned patriarchy, gender-based violence like sex-for-grades, racism, tribalism, irrelevant degree programmes, corrupt practices which result in selling academic degrees and alienating institutional cultures. It is a paradox that the same university whose education purports to liberate humanity from dehumanising tendencies, can at the same time harbour and propagate oppressive cultures. An institutional conscience should enable a university to "step outside itself" and reflect on its practices. An institutional conscience for an African university is supposed to be informed by an African socio-cultural milieu.

Secondly, conscience implies that a university in Africa is conscious of its unique social role. Earlier, we discussed the point that an African university can only be realised if and when a university aligns itself with the existing humanising practices and values in Africa. An African university is not a university that imports values and imposes them on people whom it is supposed to serve. This begs the question, what is it that an African society seems to normalise?

In terms of conscience, an African university has to respond to both out-university and in-university contexts. In the out-university, it is indefensible that across Africa, most countries' social, political and economic development is thwarted by seemingly intractable practices of corruption, poor governance, nepotism and tribalism. On the in-university context, the university sector is saddled with corrupt practices such as sex-for-grades, sexual harassment, exorbitant tuition fees, irrelevant academic programmes and western hegemonic epistemologies. In a typical case of assumptions for educated conscience, a South African minister of education caused uproar when she suggested that education makes a person less prone to indulge in anti-social behaviour, such as rape. The minister claimed that "this government has prioritised education because it knows that it is only through education that we can deal with some of our challenges that are here. This is because an educated man won't rape" (Macupe 2021, 1). Ironically, there are many educators and teachers who are convicted for sexual harassment, misconduct, and rape against scholars and university students.

From the foregoing views, it becomes consequential to ask, what then is an African university with a conscience? Conscience, as conceptually referring to the capacity to distinguish between what is morally correct and incorrect, implies that the conscience of an African university is validated by the existing context of Africa. In other words, the conscience of an African university should be disturbed by all forms of social injustices, which seem to be "normalised" in Africa. Gender imbalance in higher education, the perpetuities of colonial and western epistemic hegemony, the increase in unemployable graduates, the lack of entrepreneurship orientation among graduates and all forms of social discrimination are some of the issues that should trouble the conscience of an African university. Bearing in mind that conscience is formed from within a context, it follows that the conscience of an African university should be communally-oriented. To this end, traditions that promote communal solidarity, such as *ubuntu* (humanness) and *ukama* (relationality), should underline the conscience of an African university. Moreover, the conscience of an African university should enable social criticism against corruption and other social ills that are prevalent in Africa. By implication an African university of conscience resists, in deliberative fashion, those unvirtues that seem to undermine what a university ought to be. It is on the basis of communicative practices that an African university opposes that which morally and intellectually undermines its conscience as a university.

HUMANNESS IS FUNDAMENTAL TO AN AFRICAN UNIVERSITY

Our point of departure in this section is to concur with the assertion that every human being can be subjected to legitimate knowledge forms (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013). The idea of a university

is essentially about humanness, and the advancement of material, social, political and economic conditions of humanness. In other words, whatever a university engages in should be commensurate with the advancement and sustenance of humanness. A university stands for the continuous endeavour of humans towards achieving ever-higher objectives. If universities discharge their duties humanely, then the nation and people benefit (Alemu 2018). In this introductory paragraph, it is important to point that humanness in Africa is predominantly defined from a communal perspective. So, this explains, for example, the fact that ethnic and racial conflicts that occur in Africa are premised on the misconception that those who do not belong to particular ethnic or racial groups are less human than others. Consequently, humanness is supposed to be a constitutive feature of an African university.

An African university is supposed to be predicated on the affirmation of humanity in Africa and beyond. We distinguish between humanity in and beyond Africa because of two intertwined reasons. It cannot be denied that the humanity of Africans has been a source of contention from the slavery, pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial/apartheid eras. It is aptly stated, "the African humanity had been doubted and their subjectivity articulated in terms of lacks and deficits" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013, 3). For instance, it has been noted that in the university sector, African languages were either placed on the margins of scholarly research or were contemptuously dismissed (Mazrui 1975). Moreover, in contemporary Africa, it is important to state that processes such as transformation and decolonisation of higher education in Africa, under which the university falls, are all designed to restore the sense of humanness among Africans. On the same note, it is important to state that with practices such as xenophobia in higher education, female genital mutilation and academic corruption, Africans have equally de-humanised themselves. Beyond Africa, the African university needs to recognise, appreciate and value humanity of all humans, including non-Africans. It would be incorrect for an African university to be constructed based on reactionary and "revenge" missions against non-Africans who orchestrated slavery, colonialism, apartheid and other such historical social ills that beset African communities. Accordingly, an African university ought to advance both cosmopolitan and local orientations.

It cannot be overemphasised that an African university needs to participate in the restoration of an African humanity. A common humanity across the racial, ethnic, religious or national divides needs to be recognised as a reflection of the social demographics of the broader African society. In this way, the dawn of universities that accommodate social diversity, multiculturalism and multiracialism, as contrasted with mono-racial and mono-cultural universities under both colonialism and apartheid, indicates an affirmation and acknowledgement that all humans possess the capacity to reason – that is, many people

engaging together can only get to know one another through a representation of their reasons, the focus of the following section.

TOWARDS AN AFRICAN UNIVERSITY CONSTITUTED BY RATIONALITY AS WONDER

This section is closely connected to the two foregoing sections. While some of the assumed distinctive hallmarks of a university of reason as wonder which are supposed to act as the indispensable guiding principles, a university in Africa finds itself in a predicament that is mainly associated with the context obtaining in the broader society. Waghid (2024, 2) cogently argues that, "university education in (south) Africa seems to be in a quandary: the waning of critical reason, academic posturing, and democratic illusion, a dearth of genuine scholars and presence of corruption". It can be stated that some of the practices and norms such as tribal or national and racial considerations in academic staff recruitments and promotions as well as student enrolment in the university in Africa are antithetical to reason and wonder. This further buttresses the point that "a university loses its capacity for critical reasoning if it no longer serves the purpose of an institution that uses and relies extensively on argumentation and debate to enhance its existential [realities]" (Waghid 2024, 5).

Reason refers to the capacity of exposing conduct and values to understanding. Reasoning premises human understanding – that is, without the proffering of reasons the unlikelihood of understanding might ensue. Hence, multiple ways of reasoning can engender heterogenous ways of understanding. It is our understanding that there are different reasons that constitute an understanding of an African university. It is claimed that "the ways in which an African comes to know or claims to know, that something is the case, might differ from the ways in which a Chinese or European, for instance, would arrive at and assert his or her knowledge claim" (Kaphagawani and Malherbe 1998, 87). And unless, people do not reason about what constitutes an African university they might not develop a plausible understanding of such an institution.

From the above, three points ensue: Firstly, independent reasoning that involves critical thinking is not explicit in most African traditional settings. What was dominant and popular was also considered as tenable and, therefore, there was little room given to individual reasoning. Children were not expected to critically reason issues with their parents or any elder. By extension, learners and students in most African educational systems are culturally impeded to express divergent perspectives from those held and expressed by teachers and lecturers, respectively. In fact, the reasoning tended to be value-based and biased towards the male gender. For instance, the ideas of economically wealthy men were more valued than those held

by the poor. Secondly, communal morality was more dominant than reflective morality in Africa. So, values were reasoned out and passed from one generation to the other. The thinking was that, that which is considered rational and valuable by the community should, consequently, be valued by an individual. It is for this reason that in Africa, it is common to come across people who would uncompromisingly hold on to an idea, because it is a product of their culture. Thirdly, reasoning is not an abstract exercise or, in other words, human beings do not reason without understanding and context. This point is in line with the observation that "while epistemology as the study of knowledge is universal, the ways of acquiring knowledge vary according to the socio-cultural contexts within which knowledge claims are formulated" (Kaphagawani and Malherbe 1998, 90). Rather, reasoning is drawn from context. For example, values and norms are configured within a specific social, economic and political contextual framework.

In cognisance of the above views, acts of reason are in reference to a university that is tended towards responding and resolving challenges. In other words, acts of reason are primarily acts undertaken within the frame of humanness and conscience. Generally, university education should "aim at initiating critical thinking through both teaching and research. This critical thinking is imperative to use resources better and to improve the human condition, with intelligence and for good judgment, to cope up [sic] with any eventuality" (Alemu 2018, 214). Ideally, a university should be a place of scholarly engagement with ideas arrived at through deliberation. Furthermore, the imperative for an African university should not be based upon the reactionary tendencies against the colonial perceptions such as, that Africans were/are not capable of reason (Nweke 2018). Acts of reason in a university are supposed to respond to local and global challenges. Besides the instrumental purpose, acts of reason are supposed to generate ideas and knowledge for the sake of knowledge advancement. As a result, universities constitute diverse scholars who are supposed to research and disseminate relevant knowledge, which can liberate human beings and the environment from oppressive conditions. The point is, reason ought to be constituted by a capacity to wonder. That is, if humans do not think through and about matters that concern them with the possibility to think beyond what is considered as apposite – a matter of thinking about things that could be otherwise – then reasoning seems constrained. We advocate for a kind of reasoning aroused through wonder whereby humans can enhance their capacities to see beyond the taken-for-granted and to come up with thoughts not previously considered. In this way, reasoning invariably extends into the realm of wonder (Waghid 2024).

Debatably, the contestations around the practical relevance of an African university have been concerned with whether universities are producing appropriate personnel for the processes

of economic and social development (Mazrui 1975). When universities are reduced to a role of training and producing skilled workers for the industrial and business sector, then it is undeniable that essential aptitudes such as critical thinking, deliberation and critical reasoning may suffer neglect. A university concerned with the production of labour may produce mechanical or robotic graduates. Acts of reasoning are supposed to instil critical reflection, so that graduates are able to interact and live with social and cultural diversity. In another work, one of us (Waghid 2024) advanced the argument that a university in Africa ought to be constituted by the notion of wonder – an instance of rationality. When university personnel wonder they pursue critical judgements about what makes a university what it is and concomitantly advance aesthetic judgements about what is good for a university, in particular how they can subvert hegemonic forms of colonised knowledge that seemingly deny humans' humanity. In Waghid's words, "[w]ondering students engage gracefully, distinctly, and aesthetically with ... [academic] work that lays a platform to decolonise university ... education" (Waghid 2024, 8). It is through wonder that university education can become much more enlarged and Africanised than what seems to be the case at present.

TOWARDS A CONCLUSION

In this article we examined and highlighted some imperatives for an African university. A search for an African university is necessitated by the realisation that universities in Africa have remained as conveyor belts of the colonial epistemological and value systems. It is also the case that some universities in Africa deliberately align themselves with a western epistemological worldview, and this is evident in their vision and mission statements. To reverse this trend, compelling processes, such as decolonisation and the transformation of higher education in Africa, have gained momentum in recent decades. In line with the quest for an African university, this article has discussed notions of conscience, humanness and acts of reason as wonder. From such an exposition, the point that has become apparent is that an African university can be realised if its humanness, conscience and rationality as wonder are informed by the dominant perspectives, cultures, values and epistemologies in Africa. A university is supposed to challenge and, simultaneously, allow itself to be challenged by the society in which it is located.

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