**Globalisation and Academic Freedom**

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**"Will there be 'electronic academic freedom', like we have e-democracy?"**

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## Abstract

This paper attempts to analyze the impact of globalization on higher education in general and academic freedom in particular. It indicates that the link between the knowledge revolution and globalization is an obvious two way link, one aspect of which is the ICT revolution being an engine and an expression of globalization.

The paper suggested a number of submissions for the conference to be further debated and analyzed by the participants and considered them important for understanding the link between academic freedom and globalization.

The first is that academic freedom, within the context of globalization has become a global issue since there is no region of the world where academic freedom may not be raised. The second submission indicates that globalization has changed both the ways and the conditions under which teaching, research and dissemination of knowledge are carried out. It is based on this that the terms of debates on academic freedom have become less clear. In the third and last submission, the paper indicates that neo-liberal globalization has, in some ways, increased possibilities of academic freedom, but it poses many formidable challenges to this freedom and the concept of institutional autonomy.

The paper has devoted a good part in analyzing the factors with which globalization has changed academic freedom and the global and political environments and practices. These changes may require a redefinition of academic freedom within a global context rather than the presently adopted nationally oriented concepts.

Today is 11 September. The events of which have become of a global significance. The inter-connections between situations and problematics in different parts of the world are usually quite easy to see. In a number of cases, however, they need to be highlighted. The impact of the fall of the Berlin Wall on research or, more recently, 9/11 on research funding and on academic freedom may well be felt far beyond the USA, as new fields of interest emerged (e.g. terrorism, its connections with poverty and religious extremism, etc), while others are devalued.

The struggle against terrorism and religious fundamentalism, both of which have posed serious problems to academic and intellectual freedom, has led to violations of academic freedom in a number of countries, including the United States of America—harassment of certain professors and students, restrictions on the granting of US entry visas to Arab and other Muslim scholars; the imposition of some kind of political correctness that has made it difficult to debate certain issues as openly as ought to be.

One other problem is the way in which research may be made to serve the 'emergency of the moment' (e.g. 'terrorism', or poverty), and on terms defined by the policymakers, particularly those of the global hegemons, who usually want to decide what was the emergency to be addressed.

In this presentation, we use the concept ‘globalisation’ mainly as a shorthand for the time-space contraction, increased and accelerated flows of capital, information, and certain goods, the spread of certain values and cultural traits, etc, and the increased polarisation, that characterise our world of today. We leave aside the discussion on how we got here (i.e. to this kind of world); and that of when globalisation has emerged, because there is a huge body of literature on these aspects.

Academic freedom has been defined in the Lima and Dar Es Salaam Declarations (adopted in 1988 and 1990, respectively) as "the freedom of members of the academic community, individually or collectively, in the pursuit, development and transmission of knowledge, through research, study, discussion, documentation, production, creation, teaching, lecturing and writing"[31]. It has also been defined by the Special UNESCO-World bank task Force on higher education and Society (TFHES 2000) as "the right of scholars to pursue their research and teaching and to publish without control or restraint from the institutions that employ them"[32]. Such a freedom is a prerequisite for serious research: "without it universities are unable to fulfill one of their primary functions: to be a catalyst and sanctuary for new ideas, including those that may be unpopular"[33].

The autonomy of higher education institutions, particularly the universities, is closely linked to, and as important as the academic freedom of members of the academic community. In the French and francophone traditions, the notion of ‘franchises universitaires’ invokes the autonomy of the academic institution, and a kind of *immunity* that borders on the extraterritoriality of the academic space through which freedom and immunity of individual academics are guaranteed. In fact, Rene Degni-Segui compares the ‘franchises universitaires’ (academic freedom) to parliamentary immunities, in the sense that they are meant to protect the academy from undue pressures that might come from politicians or other actors in society (Degni-Segui 1996). However, although one can imagine a group of scholars choosing Academic Freedom is more commonly associated with individual scholars or students, but can in fact also be an issue for groups of scholars working together as, for instance, the CODESRIA NWG’s do, for such groups can have their choice of research topic, or publication censored or opposed on political or other grounds. Autonomy, however, is more for institutions.

The link between globalisation and Academic Freedom is a complex one.

Academic freedom, as we have already seen, is a precondition for well functioning universities involved in teaching, research and scholarly publishing and dissemination, and community service; therefore for scientific knowledge production. And the link between the knowledge revolution and globalisation is an obvious, two -way link, one aspect of which is the ICT revolution, itself being an engine and an expression of globalisation.

These days, knowledge is therefore said to be as important a factor of production as physical capital. A few years ago, the very prestigious Special Task Force on Higher Education in Developing Countries convened by UNESCO and the World Bank even argued, "the world economy is changing as knowledge supplants physical capital as the source of present (and future) wealth"[34]. As for wealth, a high premium is placed on knowledge for a variety of other reasons. Not least among these is its centrality to the social and spiritual life of every society that goes far back into human history. There are several types of knowledge, produced under different kinds of conditions. The question is: what are the requisite conditions for the production of scientific knowledge? And how are some of these conditions evolving? Academic Freedom is a condition, but also a condition that is realised under a set of changing local and global social, economic and political conditions.

[31] Dar es Salaam Declaration on Academic Freedom, 1990; see also Diouf & Mamdani, 1994, Academic Freedom in Africa. Dakar: CODESRIA.
[32] The Columbia Encyclopaedia; cited in the report of the The Task Force on Higher Education and Society (TFHES), 2000, Higher Education in Developing Countries. Peril and Promise. Washington: The World Bank TFHES, p. 60.
[33] TFHES, p. 60.
[34] TFHES), 2000 p. 9.

We would like to make a few submissions to this conference.

The first is that academic freedom is a global problem:

There is no region of the world where academic freedom issues may not arise, on political, economic, cultural, gender, religious etc grounds. Philip Altbach demonstrates this in a recent overview of the state of academic freedom worldwide (Altbach 2005).

The second submission is that globalisation has changed both the ways and the conditions in which teaching, research; publishing and dissemination of scholarly publishing are carried out.

For that reason, the terms of the debates on academic freedom have thus become less clear, as questions such as what constitutes violations of academic freedom, where violations are committed, who are the perpetrators are, and who victims of violations of academic freedom are?, what instruments to monitor all that?, what would be appropriate remedies?, what are the responsibilities of the state?, academics themselves, donors and civil society etc in regard to the state of academic freedom, in what ways the evolution of cultures and values make the enjoyment of this freedom easier or more difficult within this context, and so forth and so on. All these questions become more difficult to answer with globalisation.

The third submission is that neo-liberal globalisation has in some ways increased possibilities for academic freedom, but it also actually poses many formidable challenges to academic freedom and the autonomy of higher education institutions.

In the rest of this presentation, I discuss these submissions one after the other.

**1. Academic freedom is a global problem**

We will not spend much time on this issue, because it is very easy for each one of us to reflect and see that like democracy, academic freedom is never a given, once and for all: even where the traditions are very strong, as economic and social conditions, and gender relations, governments, and policies, etc change, and as people move from one society to the other, the risks of academic freedom being challenged or contested, or violated in some way or other become real. The reason is simply because the potential violators of academic freedom are not only the dictatorial governments of some far away 'banana republics'; we, the scholars also run the risk of infringing upon the academic freedom of our junior colleagues, or on that of our colleagues of the other gender, or those of the other religion or party, or tribe, or ideological leaning. Market forces are strong nowadays, and the market tries to impose restrictions on what to teach, study, research, publish upon etc. The situations may change with changing circumstances: the Cold War, the Fall of the Berlin Wall, 9/11, the waves of political liberalisation in the early 90s, the outbreak of civil wars in the Balkans, in Algeria and Sudan or in Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea Bissau or the Congos. What we perhaps need is to make the traditions of academic freedom as universal as possible.

**2. Globalisation is changing the academy and academic practices, as well as the environment (socio-economic, technological, cultural and political environment) within which academic pursuits are carried out.**

- Changes at the Academy and in Academic Practices
    - Hybrid/variegated institutional landscapes: cosmopolitan institutions and student and staff bodies; New institutions—diversification: traditional higher education institutions, as well as Virtual, corporate, franchise, confessional, etc HEIs

- Mixed Modes: Old/traditional New Modes—of knowledge (the so-called Mode II-specialised, more 'market sensitive' i.e. practical etc); or delivery: changes in the basic paradigm of the university: the contact mode of delivery—distance learning, mixed modes (Pretoria); trans:/Cross-border provision: satellite campuses etc.

- For research, a diversification of sources of documentation: digital libraries, websites, online publications…But also greater possibilities for collaborative work, using the e-mail, cell and IT-based phones, etc to co-author papers and books, co-edit journals and books, etc.

- Increased possibilities for dissemination, particularly through the websites; online journals, newsletters, etc;

- Much of this is driven by the ICT revolution, but also by changing paradigms in development, ideological shifts etc.

- The big question, of course, is: in what ways do such developments constitute increased possibilities for academic freedom, and what sorts of risks of restrictions or violations of academic freedom and related rights are associated with the developments that are very clearly part of globalisation?

We suggest a few possible answers below (our third submission). But before then, we look at changes in the broader socio-cultural and economic environment related to globalisation that impact somehow on academic freedom.

- Changes in the Broader Socio-economic Environment

  - Explosion of media outlets: I take the following quote from the report of the Commission for Africa: *"The mobile phone is creating virtual infrastructures and raising the possibility of un-thought of transformations in African culture, infrastructure and politics: studies show that when 20% of a population have the ability to exchange news and ideas through access to cell phones and text messaging dictatorial or totalitarian regimes find it hard to retain power" (CFA 2005:31).* Possibilities of easy access to information (FM stations), including international, scholarly or other information; but also possibilities for scholars to write OP-ED pieces in newspapers, take part in local and regional debates etc; e-mail access and the cell phone have also made communications among academics for academic purposes much easier—recall how difficult it was to communicate with scholars in countries where phone lines where not so good—Zaire/DRC, Nigeria etc.

  - Growth of civil society—many human rights organisations, some of which have been even more prompt than academic staff unions in defending academic freedom (e.g. KHRC, writing on University of Nairobi, a 'Heaven of Repression'; filing what is perhaps the first complaint to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights – ACHPR—related to academic freedom); these CSOs have a need for research based knowledge, and many actually work with scholars—teachers and students.

  - Many more democratic governments: democracy and human rights have become global values. NB we are not advocates of any kind of so-called 'end of history' thesis: democracy, as a concept is a contested concept; and as a socio-historical process, is always a contextualized process, and a site of bitter struggles. However, the improvement of the political environment and the establishment of democratic governance systems in many parts of the world –whether as part of the so-called 'Third wave of democracy or not--has had a positive effect on academic freedom'.

- But there are problems as well

**3. Neo-liberal Globalisation Poses Challenges to Academic Freedom**

Neo-liberal globalisation was spread to many parts of the developing world with the liberalisation that came with some kind of structural adjustment programme (SAP):

- Globalisation is selective; how easy is it for African and Arab students, teachers, and researchers to get funding and/or obtain visas to travel to Europe and North America?[35]; granted, the southern academic Diasporas are now huge; but academic migration is becoming more and more difficult. Reverse flows do exist but care need to be taken in regard to risks of some policies designed to attract academics in the diasporas to favour them more than those who stayed behind;

- Globalisation has increased in many ways the polarisation of the world between Norths and Souths, between halves and have-nots, between genders, and between scholars of the Norths and the Souths;

- The relations between the state and the public universities changed somewhat, with states being less inclined to provide support for the universities as much or as well as they used to do; the case of South Africa—state steering v/s state interference.

- The states themselves become weaker;

- The business-like management of universities: public universities forced to do cost-recovery, raise fees, privatize certain services etc.;

- The rapid growth of private universities—soon to outnumber the public ones; more important, they add to the pressures on the public universities. Challenge of : a) proper regulatory framework; quality assurance etc.;

- The risk of imposition of free trade rules to higher education, through WTO/GATS (particularly problematic causes include the 'Most Favoured Nation' clause;

- Autonomy more difficult;

- Political correctness: la pensée unique certainly, one of the effects of the dominance of the Washington Consensus and neo-liberal ideologies has been some kind of shyness among African academics to challenge the dominant paradigms and frameworks, let alone explore alternative pathways to development. When in 1989 the UNECA and the OAU adopted an African Alternative Framework for Structural Adjustment, there were virtually no academic debates provoked; Mafeje's discussion of it in CODESRIA Bulletin (Mafeje 1995) had no rejoinders in the English or French versions of the Bulletin;

- New Kinds of violations of Academic freedom;

- Violators more difficult to identify and to call to account: accountability for abuses—see debates in HR defendants circles;

- Finally, there is also the rising threat of marginalisation from the rest of the global community of scholars through lack of access to IT and other modern means of research and publishing.

[35] Within Africa itself, getting a visa to attend an academic workshop in South Africa, for instance, could be quite difficult.

## 4. Some Reflections

If in a number of countries of Europe and North America, the freedom of research can, to a certain extent, be taken for granted, in many other parts of the world, it simply cannot.

One good thing about the knowledge revolution is that it has led to a complete change in attitudes at the level of some of the erstwhile archenemies of higher education in Africa such as the World Bank. One of the casualties of structural adjustment in Africa was higher education, for it was said to be an expensive luxury. These days, every country is said to need at least one research university, ideally fitting in, or rather, constituting the core of a "knowledge system" conceived of as a coherent whole (TFHES 2000).

This change in attitudes vis-à-vis higher education in developing countries is a welcome development that comes as a source of relief for African scholars who have had to endure the severe restrictions on funding for higher education occasioned by the economic crisis and the implementation of SAP.

However, with the conflicts and violence in countries such as Sierra Leone, the university system itself has in some instances collapsed.

Scholars are however faced with numerous resource constraints in a number of countries. The more common situation in Africa today is actually one in which the main forms of restriction to the freedom of scholars are of an economic nature: teachers are poorly paid or not paid at all; universities are overcrowded but under-resourced; student stipends are low and often not paid; teachers become consultants, taxi drivers, etc. The economic problems often lead to prolonged strikes, which are generally brutally suppressed. The paradox is that the more liberal political systems and the much stronger civil society that we have today make it possible for scholars to organise and protest more easily. However, the capacity of the state to respond to the needs of the scholars is very weak, which partly explains its nervousness and repressive attitude. There is also a problem of scale: the magnitude of the economic problems is such that the state finds it difficult to provide adequate solutions.

With SAP and the rise of neo-liberal ideologies, a major form of risk to serious scholarship is the drive for "marketability". The quality and relevance of the outputs of academic institutions and scholarship are defined more and more in terms of their so-called market value, or in terms of the ability to provide immediate solutions. The importance of disciplines and course contents, including in subjects such as law, is judged more or less in terms of their market value. *"On its own, the market will certainly not devise [quality higher education systems]. Markets require profit and this can undermind some important educational duties and opportunities. Basic sciences and the humanities, for example, are essential for national development. They are likely to be underfunded, unless they are actively encouraged by leaders in education who have the resources to realise this vision"*[36].

It is however important to remember that academic freedom is not a problem for "developing countries" alone, and least of all still a problem for African intellectuals only. Elsewhere, particularly in the industrialised countries, it is with funding and the problems of political correctness that the problem is posed. Private funders claim a right to have a say in the determination of curricula and the content of courses taught and research carried out in the universities, and to determine their quality or relevance. This puts into question the very central notion of peer review, which has always governed academic institutions and activities. *With the arrival of private higher education institutions, however, the main challenge facing the universities, Cardoso argues with regard to the case of Mozambique, is not financial, but the capacity of the state to regulate the higher education sector. With globalisation, he further argues, there is a need for well thought out national strategies, and for that there is a need for: "political will and autonomous political thought". Indeed, the independence of the mind is a precondition for the independence of the nation.*

[36] TFHES, 2000, Higher Education in Developing Countries, p. 11.

We know that with the combined development and spread of neo-liberalism in higher education and of Mode II type of HEIs', utilitarian conceptions of higher education are becoming more widespread, and universities are being pressurized to become increasingly vocational. Furthermore, many of the universities of the 'first world' are extending their reach and powers across the globe. The question is whether the traditions of academic freedom that are cherished in the main campuses of these universities are extended to their 'Third World' affiliates or satellite campuses. This process, sometimes called "cross-border provision" of higher education, is likely to be enhanced by the application of free trade rules to higher education under the WTO's General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). The full consequences of that for higher education, academic freedom and knowledge production in Africa are yet to be understood.

In the immediate post-independence years when several universities in Africa were emanations and affiliates of universities in France, the UK and Portugal, the laws governing the universities were basically the same as those in Europe, but the traditions of academic freedom, as Degni-Segui has argued, did not always follow (Degni-Segui 1996). These days, as can be seen in the debates over the problems of accreditation and control, the powerful and prestigious universities that go 'global' may not be so strict about standards when it comes to their outposts in the South. This may be the result of a combination of a search for material gain through investments in higher education, and what Steve Fuller has called 'Academic Caesarism' and 'Academic Imperialism': "the former points to changes in the internal structure of universities, the latter to changes in the university's relationship to the rest of society" (Fuller 2004). Fuller argues that "in the 21st century, universities will become more state-like. They will expand their governance functions across society, with the more ambitious ones taking on global governance functions, ranging from the certification of overseas degree programmes to the establishment of physical campuses on the model of 'spheres of influence'. At the same time, rank-and-file academics will cede more institutional control to the university's chief executive, whose legitimacy will rest on the ability to insulate academics from the day-t-day- need to justify their existence…" (Fuller 2004). The model academic Caesars are to be found in the USA. This may well be the model that is being pushed more or less subtly with managerialism in Africa as well. In the 1990s, the spread of campus violence, partly as a result of the existence of campus cults, led the military regime of General Sani Abacha to abolish the democratic structures of university governance in a number of universities and replace them with "sole administrators", who often were retired generals. In both cases—Caesarism as described by Fuller, and the imposition of sole administrators by military regimes, the implications for academic freedom were very serious.

Beyond academic freedom, however, the issue is that of the status of knowledge as a public good (Singh; Jonathan; Sall, Kassimir & Lebeau), and social status of knowledge producers. It may be that the Humboltian concept of the university that, as Altbach reminds us in his article, is research oriented, with the freedom to teach and to learn as its core values, is becoming more and more difficult to uphold. What Ken Prewitt calls the "threshold question" is therefore posed more and more acutely. Prewitt (2004) argues that over the past five 500 years, there have been many changes in the world--in the societies, states, ideologies, technologies, etc—in which the universities exist,

> "*yet during this half –millennium, the basic model of higher education has changed hardly at all: direct, face-to-face exchange between the learned and the learners, heavy reliance on written texts that summarize previously established knowledge, and physical sites to which faculty and students come to reside. And at least since Wilhelm von Humboldt, three core principles have been generally accepted: unity of research and teaching, protection of academic freedom including both the right of free inquiry by scholars and the right of students to choose their course of study, and the centrality of arts and sciences or liberal education"* (Prewitt, 2004).

The questions which can be raised: are we now witnessing a major change in the basic concept of the university? At least in the South, that question now has to be asked, as the modes of delivery and institutional types are evolving so rapidly with globalisation, the managerial revolution, and what Zeleza calls "the six Cs—corporatization of management (the adoption of business models for the organisation and administration of universities), collectivisation of access (growing massification of HE, continuing education or lifelong learning, and accountability to outside stakeholders), commercialisation of learning (expansion of private universities, privatised programmes in public universities, and vocational training), commodification of knowledge (increased production, sponsorship, and dissemination of research by commercial enterprises, applied research, and intellectual property norms); computerization of education (incorporation of new information technologies into the knowledge activities of teaching, research, and publication); and connectivity of institutions (rising emphasis on institutional cooperation and coordination within and across countries)" (Zeleza 2003). This would mean that from changes and innovations that have been occurring mainly on the margins and interstices of the academy, there is a substantial redefinition of the very notion of the university that is going on. Whether such an evolution, in a context where academic traditions and ethics, and scholarly communities are not so strong, is a 'positive' development as far as knowledge production is concerned, is a question for further research.

The second question that then arises is that of the implications of the change in the concept of the University academic freedom and autonomy. As André du Toit argues, "both the external and the internal contexts of academic freedom have radically changed" (Du Toit 2005). Although was referring to South Africa, but the observation is valid for many other countries.

In short, the defence of academic freedom is a defence of the possibilities for maintaining spaces for critical scholarship, in the face of challenges that are becoming more and more global, even as they become more deeply rooted locally, and against perpetrators who are more distant or virtual, and therefore difficult to identify and trace.

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