

The Coloniality of Higher Education in Africa, the Decolonisation Agenda, and Academic Freedom

Coloniality of higher education in Africa refers to the quality of the continent's higher educational system being or remaining colonial. It is used in this context to refer to long-standing patterns of power ensuing from colonialism and contributing to define knowledge production, culture, labour, and inter-subjective relations. It, therefore, has linkages to the "second colonialism" – colonisation of the mind; and the "third colonialism" – exercise of vestiges of colonial power by the State. The purpose for the establishment of higher education in Africa during the colonial era was to maintain, after colonialism, the politico-economic framework put in place by the colonial enterprise. Therefore, the university inherited from colonialism remained colonised in terms of curriculum and staff and, therefore, needed to be decolonised. Attempts made by post-independence leadership to restructure it, however, were not geared at a decolonisation agenda properly so-called. Rather, the focus was to reset the post-colonial university as a "developmental university".

The development agenda of the African State identified human rights (and by extension, academic freedom) as stumbling blocks to development. Consequently, academic freedom was suppressed as the higher echelons of university management were captured by African governments, thereby introducing another layer of coloniality within the university space. The *de jure* recognition of academic freedom in the post-Cold War constitutions of many African States seemed to indicate a wind of change. However, *de facto*, the situation remains largely unchanged in many African countries as governments have set up proxies in university management circles to do their bidding.

In the peculiar context of South Africa, academic freedom was affected following the decision of the apartheid regime in the 1950s to prescribe admission criteria to the universities on grounds of race and to suppress dissent and opposition, especially when the anti-apartheid struggle gathered momentum. This development led to the enunciation of TB Davie's concept of academic freedom, among others, to challenge the *status quo*. Yet, not much progress was achieved, as exemplified by the #Fallism movement in 2015/16, which emerged to assail the Eurocentric nature of the curriculum and demand free higher education for all. This wind of change that blew from South Africa was not replicated by other African universities, let alone foreign African students then studying in South African universities. The latter could have played a role in galvanising similar movements in their own countries' universities. Several factors account for this disconnection.

Attention will be placed in the lecture on the understanding and application of coloniality in South Africa and the rest of Africa specifically in relation to the concept of academic freedom. In the context of the rest of Africa, "decolonisation" is no more a popular word; it is deemed as passé. Further, most African academics have little or no interest in academic freedom. They are unwilling to challenge governmental authority; and exercise various coloniality practices on students, thereby trampling on the latter's academic freedom. For students, their leadership see student politics as a means to facilitate their future engagement in national politics and therefore are co-opted and pay less attention to student academic freedom issues. On the other hand, students prefer to avoid confrontation with academics for fear of victimisation. The #Fallism movement holds the key to re-igniting the past student activism in other

parts of the African continent and to generate a movement that will help democratise academic freedom and result in making the university relevant to the knowledge economy.