

Editorial

Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility, 25 Years after the Adoption of the Kampala Declaration

The state of intellectual freedom is, in many ways, both a reflection of the degree of openness and inclusiveness of our societies and of the state of democracy. Academic freedom, in the words of Thandika Mkandawire, is, in truth, about the building of a new civilization. It is a site of struggle for democracy, and one could argue that where intellectual freedom really exists, authoritarianism and fundamentalism will find it more difficult to go unchecked.

When, in November 1990, participants in a CODESRIA conference held in Kampala, Uganda, were adopting the Kampala Declaration on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility, the continent was experiencing profound political changes, with authoritarian regimes collapsing one after the other, or receding as democratic space expanded with the struggles and intense pressures for democratic change coming from civil society and social movements. The state was then still seen as the main perpetrator of academic and intellectual freedom violations, but it certainly was no longer seen as the only institution or actor that was guilty of such restrictions. As can be seen in the conference papers and report¹, most of the phenomena that we are witnessing more clearly today were already quite discernible then: groups based in civil society could harass scholars or public intellectuals for writing or making public statements that were considered to be contrary to religious principles, or to national interests, or to dominant social values, customs and 'traditions'. Donors could also restrict the freedom of research in many different ways.

Within the academia itself, the violations of academic freedom could take forms ranging from sexual harassment, through the trading of grades for different kinds of favours, to student groups threatening academic staff or other students and wreaking havoc on university campuses. The triumph of neoliberalism, and dominant notions of political correctness, and the rise of fundamentalisms of different kinds have led to the shrinking of spaces for critical thinking, not only in society, but also on our campuses. What were emerging phenomena then have now become major problems, with university campuses like Garissa University College in Garissa, Kenya, and the Ahmed Baba library in Timbuktu being raided by armed fundamentalist groups or rebel movements. Disciplines like history are barely surviving. Although it is now recognized that higher education and research have been key to all the successful and sustainable structural transformation and development experiences of the past few decades, most policy makers of our continent tend to be dismissive of the social sciences and humanities. Yet without the social sciences and humanities, no deep understanding of

global and local challenges, and therefore no genuine human and people-centered development and meaningful empowerment of civil society and ordinary citizens are possible.

The good news is, as one of the participants in the conference held in Lilongwe, Malawi, in April this year to celebrate the 25th anniversary conference of the Kampala Declaration, rightly pointed out, there are provisions explicitly protecting academic freedom in the constitutions of fifteen African countries, and in many of these cases, the inspiration came from the Kampala Declaration.

The part of the Kampala Declaration that is rarely mentioned, but which is equally important, is the part dealing with the social responsibility of academics and intellectuals, more generally. The number of professors and lecturers who pay insufficient attention to ethical issues is, unfortunately, very large. This could be anything from the neglect of teaching and the responsibility to supervise theses and dissertations and mentor graduate students and junior colleagues, to a total lack of interest in the issues and challenges facing the communities where the universities are located. Too large a number of academics are prioritizing moonlighting activities instead of their duties at the institutions where they are employed. Yet the defense of academic freedom and the autonomy of the institutions of higher learning are best done if they go with a strict adherence to ethics, accountability, and the fulfillment of the social responsibility of academics.

The development of a vibrant knowledge economy in Africa is something that CODESRIA has always taken keen interest in and researched with relentless vigour over the years through its programmes. At its 14th CODESRIA General Assembly held in June 2015, which focused on the creation of Africa's futures in an era of global transformation, one of the key points over which there was a broad consensus is the need for research and new knowledge, and to critically interrogate the narrative and counter-narratives, not only on Africa's development, but also on innovations and technology as engines of growth and development in Africa. One critical issue today is, precisely, that of the private appropriation, out of power and profit motives, of knowledge produced through scholarship that has been funded with public resources, thus making the availability of that knowledge to African universities or African and southern development extremely difficult.

The future of Africa's knowledge economy is, therefore, a subject that has continued to generate vigorous debate. In one of the articles featured in this issue of CODESRIA Bulletin, titled:

Defining Structural Transformation in Africa, Carlos Lopes calls for a shift away from the present economic models in various African countries. He identifies poor investment in research and development as one of the banes of growth in Africa, in addition to several other political, social, environmental and economic factors.

Henning Melber's article in this issue of the Bulletin: *Development and Environment: The Challenges for Research Collaboration in and with Africa* underscores the importance of new research and new knowledge for development while drawing attention to the gap in knowledge production between the North and the South. He however noted that "relevant insights for local policy makers and communities in the South generated by new research end in peer reviewed journals whose commercial publishing priority remains prohibitive for access by those who might benefit most from it."

The subject of restricted access to scientific knowledge and scholarly communication (which, in effect, is a form of restriction of research and academic freedom), which Melber decried in his article, was the focus of an international conference hosted by CODESRIA in Dakar, 30 March - 1 April 2016, with the theme: "Open Access and the Future of the African Knowledge Economy". The conference which drew participants from 20 countries in Africa and across the globe focussed on the value of open access to scholarly communication in an increasingly globalised knowledge economy. The urgent need for the African scientific community to engage the open access movement as a driver of change and development on the continent was emphasized. A call was also made for a stronger South-South dialogue and cooperation on open access and scholarly communication at the conference which also had a strong participation by UNESCO, the Latin America Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO), the Indian Citation Index, Africa Journals Online (AJOL), the National Research Foundation (NRF) of South Africa, the Academy of Social Sciences of South Africa (ASSAF), and several other partner institutions such as the Human Sciences Research Council, the Nordic Africa Institute, and the African Studies Centre of Leiden. A report from the conference is included in this Bulletin.

Also in this Bulletin, we have featured tributes to two of Africa's great scholars: Thandika Mkandawire and Helmi Sharawy, who are both among the founding fathers of CODESRIA. The tributes are in recognition of their long association with and service to CODESRIA, and the African social science community.

Thandika is one of the leading global scholars of the day, whose devotion to the African cause and contribution to knowledge on the continent is very widely acknowledged. In the words of Jimi Adesina, "Thandika was always driven by giving voice to Africans and elevating African voices. His was not simply being

Africa-focused but facilitating the authentic interlocution for Africa and its peoples". The Kampala Declaration was adopted during his tenure as executive secretary of CODESRIA. The theme chosen for the colloquium held in Malawi to celebrate Thandika the scholar, mentor, pan Africanist, institution-builder, friend, and eternal CODESRIA militant, was *Thinking African: Epistemological Issues*. Indeed, both as a CODESRIA leader and in his own work, Thandika has consistently engaged social science concepts and theories from a critical point of view, interrogating their significance for Africa and the continent's peoples. He has tried to enhance the visibility of African scholarship both within Africa and globally, and promoted scholarship that contributes to the enhancement of the freedom, well-being and dignity of the peoples of the continent.

Helmi Sharawy is also one of the most illustrious leaders of our community who played a pioneering role in the development of CODESRIA, in the promotion of the study of Africa, and in the formation of a number of institutions and associations, such as the African Association of Political Science (AAPS). He was elected and served two terms as a member of CODESRIA's Executive Committee. Helmi has also been a great champion of African liberation. Many great leaders, such as Amilcar Cabral, Agostinho Neto, Eduardo Mondlane and others, who visited Cairo during the years when Gamal Abdel Nasser was the President, were invited to his home and enjoyed the hospitality of his family. On 11 May 2016, CODESRIA and the Arab and African Research Centre in Cairo organized a round table to celebrate Professor Helmi Sharawy. Some of the tributes to Sharawy and Mkandawire are published in this issue of the Bulletin.

The people who have made, and continue to make, great contribution to scholarship in Africa and to the growth and development of CODESRIA are many. More celebrations, taking different forms, will therefore follow. We also invite articles on, or critically engaging the work of, great African intellectuals and their contributions for publication in the CODESRIA Bulletin, or in other CODESRIA journals.

Bonne lecture!

Note

1. See Diouf, M. & Mamdani, M. (eds) 1990, *Academic Freedom in Africa*; Dakar: CODESRIA

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