



# African Diaspora and the Search for Academic Freedom Safe Havens: Outline of a Research Agenda

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## Abstract

This article examines assumptions concerning the extent to which being in exile influences academics' possibilities to exercise academic freedom, particularly when articulating views on African political and social issues that might be inconvenient to the established political authorities. Two main questions are addressed. First, do African academics need to be in diaspora to exercise their academic freedom, including freedom of expression and free speech, particularly beyond the walls of the university and its consecrated freedom of teaching and research? Second, do factors such as disciplinary background, country of origin, reasons for migrating from Africa and period of living in exile influence the propensity of academics in diaspora to publicly express their views on political and social issues in their home countries? The article begins by conceptualising the African diaspora, African academic diaspora, academic freedom and 'extramural' academic freedom.

**Keywords:** African diaspora, academic freedom, extramural academic freedom, safe havens

## Résumé

Cet article examine les hypothèses concernant l'impact de l'exil sur l'exercice de la liberté académique des universitaires, notamment lorsqu'ils expriment des opinions sur les problèmes politiques et sociales africaines qui pourraient déranger les autorités politiques en place. Deux questions principales sont abordées. Premièrement, les universitaires africains doivent-ils être en exil (diaspora) pour exercer leur liberté académique, notamment la liberté

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d'expression et de parole, en dehors de l'enceinte de l'université et de ses libertés garanties d'enseignement et de recherche ? Deuxièmement, est-ce que des facteurs tels que les matières étudiées, le pays d'origine, les raisons de leur migration hors d'Afrique et la durée de leur vie en exil, ont une influence sur la tendance des universitaires de la diaspora à exprimer publiquement leurs opinions sur les problèmes politiques et sociaux de leur pays d'origine ? Cet article procède en premier lieu à la conceptualisation de la diaspora académique africaine, de la liberté académique et de la liberté académique « extra-muros ».

**Mots-clés** : diaspora africaine, liberté académique, liberté académique extra-muros, asiles

## Introduction

In postcolonial Africa, several academics have been forced out of their home countries to live in exile. Some fled political persecution from their governments, others were economic refugees, itself a consequence of bad politics that the academics who fled to exile tried to oppose. The late Kenyan scholar, Ali Mazrui, who first fled to exile from Amin's Uganda once stated that he would have loved to stay in Uganda, but the Idi Amin regime forced him to leave. Alternatively, he would have loved to stay on African soil, in neighbouring Kenya, but the silencing request by Daniel arap Moi's regime to be a 'good boy' prevented him from staying (Mazrui, in Mwakikagile 2006:77; Mazrui 1975, 2003). Another scholar from Makerere University, Mahmood Mamdani, fled Amin's persecutions, first to the UK then to Tanzania and later through South Africa and finally to the US, where he holds professorship positions at Columbia University (Nesbitt 2002). Like Mazrui and Mamdani, scholars like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Thandika Mkandawire, Joseph Ki-Zerbo and Valentin Mudimbe also left their home countries, fleeing political persecution. In postcolonial Africa, there are countless cases of involuntary politically motivated exiles of more or less prominent African-born scholars (Human Rights Watch 1991; Kerr and Mapanje 2002; Mbiba 2012; Turner and Kleist 2013).

But not everyone left Africa only for political reasons. The academic Paul Zeleza, through a vehement critic of Kamuzi Banda was forced into exile in Kenya following threats to his life upon publication of his novel. He eventually settled in Canada and the US, attracted, one might argue, by the better life and working conditions offered in the host lands. Like Zeleza, many highly qualified Africans have left their home countries, attracted by better socioeconomic conditions in Europe, the US and Australia, as well as in wealthier African countries, particularly South Africa. According to the International Organisation for Migration (in Ogachi 2015:30), since 1990

Africa has annually lost one-third of its skilled professionals, mostly doctors, university teachers and engineers. In 2009, there were about 300,000 highly qualified Africans in the diaspora, 30,000 of whom had PhDs (in Ogachi 2015:30). Global statistics published by Marfouk (2006) indicate that, in 2000, about 70 per cent of African immigrants in the US were qualified, about 65 per cent in Australia, 75 per cent in Canada, 19 per cent in the European Union and almost 40 per cent in Britain. These statistics highlight the fact that Africa has sent many highly “qualified” economic and political refugees’ into exile (Ogachi 2015:28), including academics. Zeleza (2013: 4 estimates that in 2008 there were 297 African-born academics employed as full-time faculty in 124 Canadian universities; in the US, estimates were between 20,000 and 25,000. These are partial statistics, since there are no comprehensive, reliable and updated statistics on academics in the diaspora (Ogachi 2015; Zeleza 2004, 2013).

The brain drain of qualified Africans has raised debates concerning the contribution of the diaspora, including academics, to Africa’s development. As Zeleza notes, ‘Africa, the most undeveloped continent in the world, has the highest number, per capita, of its educated population in the world’s most developed countries’ (2004:268). Since the early 1990s, instead of complaints about brain drain, a repositioning of strategies has emerged, aiming at creating mechanisms to engage the academic diaspora in the development of Africa. These early mechanisms have mainly focused on persuading the academic diaspora for a permanent return home to strengthen the academic core and capacity of African universities. Subsequent engagements with the African academic diaspora have entailed deploying the diaspora in traditional academic activities (e.g. teaching, research, students’ supervision, innovation), as well as in leadership and management roles, to cope with the challenges of lack of resources, intellectual gaps and poor governance of African academic institutions (Ogachi 2015; Zeleza 2004, 2013).

An issue that is often neglected in debates concerning the academic diaspora’s role in African development is academics’ engagement, in African political and social affairs. The diaspora may be a safe haven for academics to freely express utterances on African political and social affairs, including criticising African governments. Recall the fierce discussion between Mazrui and former Ghanaian president Jerry Rawlings at a conference in Davos in June 1999. Rawlings accused African professionals and academics migrating to the West of a lack of patriotism and Mazrui blamed politicians (in Nesbitt 2002). Nesbitt summarises this tension between scholars and politicians as follows: ‘the same forces that kept them from achieving their

full potential at home demonise them for leaving instead of contributing to national development' (2002:70). Mazrui perhaps dared to openly criticise the Ghanaian president because of his diasporic condition. This provides a background to examine the possibility that those in the academic diaspora enjoy more freedom to express critical utterances on African political and social affairs.

This article examines preliminary hypotheses concerning the extent to which academics in exile take advantage of the expanded space for academic freedom in the institutions where they work, to raise issues of political and social concerns in Africa. Two main questions are addressed. Firstly, do African academics need to be in diaspora to exercise their academic freedom, particularly the freedom that is beyond the walls of the university, in other words, beyond teaching and research? How do factors of academics' profiles, such as disciplinary background, country of origin, reasons for migrating from Africa and period of living in exile, influence their propensity in diaspora to publicly express their views on political and social issues concerning their home countries? Before discussing preliminary hypotheses, the article conceptualises the African diaspora, African academic diaspora, academic freedom and 'extramural' academic freedom.

### **Conceptualising Diaspora**

A conceptualization of the African academic diaspora on one hand and the spaces available for them to engage in extramural academic work offers an understanding of their engagement and impacts on extramural academic freedom in Africa.

The African academic diaspora is but a small part of the historic experiences of African-born people migrating, willingly or not, to other geographical spaces. Several scholars have provided conceptual insights into the complex nature of the African diaspora (Baubock and Faist 2010; Butler 2000; Dufoix 2008; Faist 2010; Falola 2001; Nesbitt 2002; Turner and Kleist 2013; Zeleza 2004, 2005).

In his overview of the state of scholarly debate on diaspora and transnationalism, Faist (2010) highlights how complex it is to conceptualise diaspora, since it is an extremely elastic, all-purpose and politicised term. Although it generally involves ethnic, religious or national groups being dispersed and crossing national borders, voluntarily or not, to live abroad, usually for long periods, the concept of diaspora encompasses older and newer versions. In its older version, the concept is linked to the idea of return to a real or imagined homeland; of ethnic, religious or national groups dispersed

(often involuntarily) and settled in exile. This notion was originally applied to the diasporic experiences of Jews and Armenians, as well as to recent diasporic experiences (e.g. Palestinians). The older notion of diaspora entails the difficulties (or deliberate unwillingness) experienced by diasporic groups to integrate themselves politically, economically and culturally in their host lands, and thus their predisposition to maintain strong ties with their real or perceived homeland. The more recent notion of diaspora does not view the social integration and cultural assimilation of foreign-born groups as the end of diaspora, but rather sees it as illustrative of diasporic groups' hybrid identity. These groups may maintain lateral ties with both the homeland and the host land, in a circular exchange of continuous mobility, without necessarily envisaging a return (Faist 2010). Butler (2000) succinctly summarises these notions of diaspora. According to him, in any conceptualisation of diaspora, five dimensions should be considered: reasons for and conditions of dispersal; relationship with homeland; relationship with host lands; interrelationship within diasporic groups; and comparative study of different diasporas.

Zeleza (2004, 2005) and Falola (2001) have conceptually examined the African diaspora. Zeleza's contribution to the debate is twofold. Firstly, he recognises, as Faist (2010) does, how complex conceptualising African diaspora is, because it is simultaneously a process, a condition, a space and a discourse: the continuous process by which the diaspora is made, unmade and remade, the changing conditions in which it lives and expresses itself, the places where it is molded and imagined, the contentious ways it is studied and discussed (2004:262). Regarding the African diaspora, Zeleza (2004) emphasises its temporal, spatial and cultural embodiments.

Secondly, Zeleza (2005) distinguishes two major categories of African diasporas: 'historic' diasporas consisting of old diasporas formed before the construction of colonial states – this category encompasses the dispersal of African people during ancient times and the period of Indian Ocean and Atlantic slavery (see Palmer 2000; Zeleza 2004); and 'contemporary' diasporas, formed since the late nineteenth century, consisting mainly of three subcategories: diasporas of colonisation, diasporas of decolonisation and diasporas of the structural adjustment period. The diasporas of colonisation emerged during colonial conquest, and involved Africans travelling mainly to colonial powers (including the US), either to study or to work. The diasporas of decolonisation included the settlement of indigenous Africans in the West, but also of Europeans and Asians (e.g. the expulsion of those of Asian origin after Uganda's independence). The diasporas of structural adjustment were triggered by Africa's political and economic crises in the 1980s, which forced African professionals, academics, political refugees and economically motivated migrants to leave (Falola 2001; Zeleza 2005). As Zeleza (2004,

2005) explains, there are still no comprehensive data and statistics on the demographic and social profiles of different categories of African diaspora. What exists are partial and often outdated data.

The dispersal of African people over time, in prehistoric, modern and contemporary ages, has resulted in the spatial distribution of African descendants across the globe. Although dispersal is historically an ancient phenomenon, it was mainly in the 1950s and 1960s that the African diaspora movement was developed, triggered by greater awareness of the condition of different African diasporas. As Zeleza (2004) points out, the dispersal of groups does not create diaspora. Diaspora implies a 'form of group consciousness constituted historically through expressive culture, politics, thought and tradition' (2004:262). Despite sharing Africanity and/or blackness, the different African diasporas do not necessarily share the same consciousness. Contemporary African diasporas' consciousness is not similar to African diaspora rooted in slavery, be it South American, Afro-American or African European.

The focus of this article is on the contemporary African diaspora, particularly academics of the structural adjustment period. We propose a research programme with a preliminary working hypothesis concerning how the generation of academics who left Africa to live elsewhere – voluntarily, forced by political motivations or attracted by better socioeconomic conditions – exercise 'extramural' academic freedom.

### *African Academic Diaspora*

Conceptualising the African academic diaspora is not as simple as it may seem at first glance. One may define an academic by looking at degrees completed (e.g. college education, PhD) or at institutional affiliation (e.g. affiliation to a research institute or university). However, Sekayi (1997) warns of confusing formally educated people and scholars or academics. While anyone possessing the highest possible degree beyond high school is potentially an intellectual, being a scholar is, above all, defined by a set of attitudes held, or activities performed, after or even without having completed formal (university) education. An intellectual and scholar is someone who 'continues to be engaged in scholarly pursuit, critical thinking and production of new ideas on different issues and situations, after and outside formal schooling' (Sekayi 1997:11–12). Academics and professors affiliated to research institutes and higher education institutions are often thought to be intellectuals and/or scholars, but misconceptions and

variations are possible. As Sekayi (1997:11) states, 'a medical doctor can be smart and expert in his own field, but not be an intellectual or scholar', that is, not be engaged in systematic scholarly endeavour or critical thinking.

Nesbitt (2002) provides an interesting starting point for conceptualising the African academic/intellectual diaspora. He distinguishes three types of contemporary African diaspora intellectuals: comprador intelligentsia, postcolonial critics and progressive exiles. Comprador intelligentsia are those academics or intellectuals who either work full-time for international organisations, particularly financial institutions (World Bank and International Monetary Fund) and United Nations' agencies, or are affiliated to research institutes and universities but provide consultancy to international organisations. Comprador intelligentsia are viewed as enabling the perpetuation of neocolonial policies in Africa by acting as intermediaries between Africa and global capital and by facilitating Africans' uncritical adoption of the global market ideology. Like the compradors, postcolonial diaspora critics use their Africanity and blackness and their Western experience to be conduits of the Western (Euro-American) world vision, for African consumption. They promote African westernisation by arguing for the adoption or adaptation of metanarratives such as liberalism, socialism, modernisation and dependency/world systems theories.

Progressive exiles are intellectuals who use the knowledge acquired abroad to liberate their fellow Africans. Several generations of progressive exiles can be distinguished, from anticolonial activists to critics of anti-authoritarian postcolonial African regimes. Anticolonial intellectuals like Julius Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah, Amílcar Cabral, Eduardo Mondlane, Hastings Banda and Léopold Senghor lived in the West for many years and used the knowledge they acquired during exile to fight for African independence. But once in power, many of these former intellectuals, and then leaders and national heroes, established authoritarian regimes, resulting in another generation of progressive exiles, now fleeing political persecution and trying to enlighten their fellow Africans from abroad (see the introduction of this articles for further examples of postcolonial progressive exiles). As Nesbitt (2002:74) argues, the three types of African migrant intellectuals are not mutually exclusive; 'intellectuals who consider themselves progressives in one context find themselves allied with global capital and neo-colonial forces in another'.

Another way of conceptualising African academics in diaspora, particularly postcolonial academics, is looking back to Africa, to the internal process through which these academics were formed, to different phases of their professional development and to the different contexts underlying their

migration from Africa. In this regard, Mkandawire (1995, 2005) offers valuable insights by distinguishing three generations of postcolonial intellectuals. The first generation was that of early independence until the 1970s. This generation was generally trained in the best Western universities, had high academic standards and strong networking alliances in the international research community. Most academics of this generation returned home after training, attracted by material and moral incentives, better-resourced universities, better living conditions, as well as by the idea of guaranteeing the functioning of universities through indigenising local staff. All these attractions were inserted into the euphoria of the nation-building project of the newly born states. It is not surprising that this generation of African academics maintained good relations with the state and political elites.

The second generation identified by Mkandawire (1995, 2005) is that of the 1980s until the early 1990s. Like the first, the second generation was mostly trained abroad. But, unlike the first generation, many of the second generation's intellectuals stayed abroad, while those that returned did not stay long. Several factors prevented the second generation from returning home permanently, including (i) more competitive and risky professional development prospects (because indigenisation of African universities had almost been completed); (ii) economic crises ravaging African countries, with consequences for academics' salaries and living conditions, and for universities' financial health; and (iii) increasing university–state conflicts and growing political repression of academics in the context of establishing authoritarian political regimes. Mkandawire labels this phase the age of disillusion and disenchantment, provoking the first wave of brain drain.

Statistics cited by Zeleza (1998) indicate that, during the 1980s, an average of 23,000 qualified academics left Africa annually, with an estimated 50,000 leaving in 1995. The second generation's failure to return, coupled with the need to continue running universities and research institutions in Africa, led to the emergence of the third generation of postcolonial intellectuals. Unlike the first and second, the third generation did not, overall, benefit from training abroad and had limited exposure to international academic communities and networks. Difficulties encountered by the third generation include completing their university education in their home countries in very difficult conditions; being subjected, during their youth, to repression of their academic freedom; working in academic environments with limited resources; and being forced to devote themselves to consultancies to increase their salaries, with negative effects on their engagement in original research.



This article's reference to the African academic diaspora refers primarily to African-born academics and intellectuals working in foreign research institutes and higher education institutions. Motivated by political concerns or economic factors, they migrated from Africa and established themselves in host countries, mainly in the US, Europe and Australia but also in Africa, particularly South Africa. The article also considers comprador intelligentsia, those academics working in international or non-governmental organisations, as long as they have devoted themselves to the scholarly pursuit of knowledge. Since our focus is to reflect on how the diasporic condition of these academics affects their extramural academic freedom vis-à-vis African issues, the concept of academic freedom is addressed next.

### **Academic Community and Ideal of Academic Freedom**

Academic freedom is considered essential to academic life. Ideally, it implies that the scientific community should undertake its activities (e.g. teaching and research) without external control (Altbach 2007). Originally, the freedom was two-dimensional and entailed what in German Humboldtian time was known as *Lehrfreiheit* (the privilege of the teacher to teach and of the student to learn freely) and *Lernfreiheit* (the privilege of the researcher and student to inquiry freely) (Ashby and Anderson 1966). In other words, a teacher/researcher should be free to teach/undertake research and a student to learn/inquire, both being bound only by the pursuit of truth; the academic community should undertake its activities without fear of 'hindrance, dismissal, or other reprisal' (Coleman 1977:14). The concept of academic freedom was originally developed to protect activities internal to the academic community – those occurring in classrooms and within the walls of academia. But given the nature of the activities performed by the academic community – production and dissemination of knowledge and its usage by external constituencies – the concept extrapolated academia's walls to include the protection of activities that academics perform outside academia, particularly regarding their civic participation. This third dimension, labelled 'extramural' academic freedom (Coleman 1977; Goldstein 1976), concerns academics' engagement in the political and social affairs of the society they live in. As noted by Goldstein (1976), extramural academic freedom was particularly developed by the American Association of University Professors – as an extension of the original German concepts of academic freedom – to protect academics because, historically, they were more attacked for their extramural conduct than for their intramural activities of teaching and research.

Altbach (2007) posits that the ideal of academic freedom has never been absolute over the history of academia. Even when university autonomy was

granted to academia by competing powers (e.g. state, church, market), the freedom provided to academics could not be taken for granted. For example, Oxford was an autonomous university in the nineteenth century, but it denied academic freedom to its members. There are also cases in which universities are not autonomous, but they protect the academic freedom of their members. For example, during Alexander von Humboldt's time, Prussian universities were heavily dependent on the state, but they granted academic freedom to their members (Ashby and Anderson 1966). Restrictions to academic freedom tend to increase in times of political tensions and to target academics working in politically and ideologically sensitive fields, such as social sciences and humanities (Altbach 2007). Galileo Galilei's death and Martin Luther's restrictions are widely known examples of threats to academic freedom during the Renaissance and the Reformation. Other historical examples are restrictions imposed on academics during Nazi Germany, and in former Soviet countries and authoritarian Latin American countries in the 1960s and 1970s. Today, academic freedom is particularly threatened in countries like North Korea and China, as well as Arabic and African countries. But even in Western countries, threats to academic freedom still exist. Altbach (2007) reports that the rise of managerialism and the corporatisation of academic institutions threaten academic freedom by pressuring academics to be accountable to the market and to satisfy its demands.

At least two fundamental premises back the ideal of academic freedom. The first and perhaps most important is the principle that there is no unchallenged absolute truth, and that the only way to allow the truth to be unveiled is by not setting dogmatic boundaries to its continuous search. John Stuart Mill is among the classical philosophers who originally developed this idea. In his *On Liberty*, he advocates that the freedom to discuss beliefs, including those held (imposed) by authorities, is the only way to discover the truth and to avoid uncritical acceptance of dogmas (Mill, reprinted in Gray 2008). Max Weber brought this debate into the science-politics nexus by distinguishing the role of science and politics in his 'politics as vocation and science as vocation' lectures (Weber, reprinted in Owen and Strong 2004). Weber conceives politics, embodied by the state, as aiming to organise human groups through the legitimate use of coercive power, grounded in different forms of authority (e.g. traditional, charismatic, bureaucratic), whereas the ultimate goal of science is not to exercise power but to pursue truth. Weber further argues for using expert scientific knowledge to allow for the rational exercise of politics. Thus, the ideal of academic freedom is grounded in the need to protect academics' pursuit of truth. Underlying this ideal is the principle, no matter how challenged it might be, that science is a sanctuary of truth and, consequently, academics' utterances, both in their intramural (research and

teaching) and extramural (civic engagement) activities, are bound by the epistemic imperative of 'truth', or by what Altbach (2007) terms disengagement or neutrality: ideally, academics' utterances should not be ideologically bound, but based on the most accurate available scientific knowledge.

This standard view of science – the view, rooted in a positivist–quantitative paradigm and based mainly on natural sciences' methods, that scientific knowledge is true, factual, neutral and objective (Buker, Bal and Hendriks' [2009] demarcation between scientific knowledge and non-scientific knowledge) – has turned science into a potent social force, and academics into undisputed and legitimate authorities. These features of science have aligned it with politics by turning experts into providers of factual evidence to rationally advise political decision-making. Paradoxically, however, while science's characteristics have aligned experts and politicians, particularly in the contemporary knowledge society, tensions have also arisen due to differences in purpose. Science aims at pursuing truth, even if through this process it becomes powerful; politics aims at exercising power, even if for this it may demand truth (Buker et al. 2009; Maasen and Weingart 2005; Weingart 1999). As Maasen and Weingart (2005) emphasise, politics adheres to the operating code of 'power', while science adheres to that of truth. Policy-makers have not only used science, but have also attempted to control experts, particularly when the truth produced is distasteful to the dominant groups' interests and beliefs. Academic freedom thus aims to protect the scientific principle of pursuing, and possibly producing, truth. Truth is, in principle, the code characterising academics' utterances on political affairs.

This epistemic imperative of truth continues to be the backbone of science, despite the changes that have occurred since the 1960s challenging science's pureness. These changes include a greater awareness and demonstration of science's imperfections, and of its increasing democratisation and politicisation (Buker et al. 2009; Maasen and Weingart 2005). Criticisms of scientific metanarratives (e.g. positivism, empiricism) have exposed scientific knowledge's fallibility (Lyotard 1992). The democratisation of society has demystified and democratised scientific knowledge and scientists as well. Other contending social groups, different from experts, have had access to science and have called for more socially and financially accountable science (Maasen and Weingart 2005). Furthermore, universities' and research institutes' exclusiveness in knowledge production has been challenged by other emergent, competitive players, such as corporations (Gibbons et al. 1994). Additionally, academics' involvement in offering political advice has not merely led to the scientification (rationalisation) of politics; it has also led some academics to use their scientific credentials to engage in and support ideological positions.

The public exposure of conflict among academics due to their ideological and partisan membership has contributed to reinforcing science's fallibility and to demystifying its supposedly ideological neutrality. Particularly in the fields of social sciences and humanities, difficulties in rigorously applying the positivist–quantitative paradigm rooted in natural sciences, and the suspicion regarding the objectivity and reliability of alternative qualitative and interpretative paradigms, have negatively affected their scientificity (Buker et al. 2009; Maasen and Weingart 2005). All this has challenged science's principle and possibility of truth. But despite these exposed weaknesses, the scientific endeavour continues to be oriented by the epistemic imperative of 'truth', underlying which is the ideal of academic freedom.

The second fundamental premise backing the ideal of academic freedom is academics' professionalism. Academic freedom is often regarded not as a privilege, but as a fundamental condition or a functional prerequisite for academics to effectively perform their roles of teaching, research and social engagement (Coleman 1977). This premise stems from the idea that academics, like physicians and lawyers, are sanctuaries of valuable skills, knowledge and expertise, and that the best way to allow them to perform their role – of discovering the truth – is through giving them freedom and permitting them discretion in determining what tasks they do and how they do them (Goldstein 1976).

But neither the ideals nor the premises of academic freedom are exempt from critical scrutiny. Goldstein (1976) concedes that extramural academic freedom should be protected as part of the civil liberties that all citizens have, in this case regarding freedom of speech, but he claims that the idea that academic freedom is an academic's special right is not well founded. When academics express civic utterances, it is unclear whether they do so as common citizens or as experts or members of an academic community. As Goldstein (1976:58) asks: '[W]hy should a university chemistry professor enjoy uniquely greater rights to engage in political activities free from restraints imposed by his employer or government than are enjoyed by other citizens and employees?' Obviously, the right of chemistry professors to engage in political activities does not stem from their field of expertise, but from their rights as citizens. Likewise, the ideal of academic freedom does not imply freedom from restraints and obligations in terms of academics' duty to respect the opinions of others, as well as their employers' and professions' public image and interests when making public utterances. These obligations are also applicable to intramural activities: in their teaching and research activities, academics should respect their employers' interests and should be accountable for the money they receive (Goldstein 1976). Nevertheless, using the civil

liberty of freedom of speech to protect academics has often seemed insufficient to safeguard science's sacrosanct principle of the pursuit of truth (despite the inexistence of absolute truth). This has justified the need to protect academic freedom as a special academic right, as exemplified by the tenure system. In extramural engagement, this protection allows academics, particularly those working in politically and ideologically sensitive fields like social sciences and humanities, to express their views on political and social affairs without fear of persecution. Academics' views are, ideally, based on the most accurate available scientific knowledge. In the African context, where knowledge gaps within national academic communities and the persecution of academics working in national institutions continue, the academic diaspora's utterances on political and social affairs may be critical to allow African societies to access less biased knowledge and to protect themselves from powerful ideologies and dogmas.

### *Academic Freedom in Postcolonial Africa*

In post-independence Africa, the degree of academic freedom enjoyed by academics has been shaped by the continent's postcolonial history. Three main phases can be distinguished regarding the possibilities for academic freedom. The first phase, from the late colonial period to the 1970s, was that of academic euphoria. During this period, academics enjoyed a positive image and a greater degree of academic freedom. Besides academics' (and politicians') optimistic engagement with the nationalist project, several factors contributed to the healthy relationship between universities and the new African governments. These factors included university governance models imported from European counterparts; the dominance of the expatriate professoriate, including in management positions, despite the initial Africanisation; the quietism of university graduates due to positive career prospects; and the good material and financial health of African universities (Coleman 1977; Mkandawire 2005). The second phase, from the 1980s to the early 1990s, was that of academic disillusionment and troubled university–government relationships. During this phase, the rise of authoritarian, one-party dictatorships and often military regimes resulted in African academics' disillusionment with the nationalist project and with the political elites, as well as in substantial threats to academic freedom. These threats mainly took two forms: (i) state repression, censorship, intimidation, imprisonment and, in some cases, executions of academics; and (ii) the extreme material and economic deprivation of academic institutions. It is not surprising that many academics went into exile during this phase (Diouf and Mamdani 1994; Mkandawire 2005). The third phase, from the 1990s

onwards, shifted the threats to academic freedom from state–university to market–university relationships, in what Ogachi (2011:36) has termed ‘from authoritarian state to authoritarian market’.

While the state and political elites continued to curtail academic freedom with the emergence of neoliberal policies, the market has gained more prominence, with the activities of universities and academics being shaped to be responsive to market demands (Mamdani 2007; Ogachi 2011). In the early years of independence, Ashby and Anderson (1966) minimised the threats to academic freedom in Africa, if by academic freedom we mean *Lehrfreiheit* and *Lernfreiheit*, that is, freedom to teach, learn, undertake research and publish. As Ashby and Anderson assert:

Little evidence that academic freedom (*Lehrfreiheit*) has been curtailed...at any time in any university in the African commonwealth countries. There have been occasionally complaints and tensions about teaching of some academics but we do doubt whether there are well-authenticated cases of teachers being victimized for opinions they expressed in the classroom. If the definition of academic freedom is broadened to cover the rights of academics to hold political opinions distasteful to the government, then cases have occurred... (1966:344)

The first part of Ashby and Anderson’s assertion, concerning ‘little evidence’ of curtailment of freedom of teaching, was perhaps correct in the early period of independence. But from the 1980s onwards, threats to academic freedom have targeted both intramural (teaching and research) and extramural (expression of views regarding political affairs) activities. These threats began prior to the 1980s, when governments altered the university self-governance pattern inherited from former colonisers by appointing government members to university councils and senates, and by turning presidents of republics into chancellors.

External forces integrated into executive and academic boards have begun to exercise control over universities and academics, including over what and how they teach and research, and what they say publicly. Cases of control and curtailment of academic freedom have been reported throughout Africa (see Coleman 1977; Diouf and Mamdani 1994; Human Rights Watch 1991; Kerr and Mapanje 2002; Mbiba 2012). Kerr and Mapanje (2002) report cases of the persecution of academics in Malawi because of their teaching, research and political and social views; Mbiba (2012) reports similar cases in Zimbabwe; and Bутбуна (2006), Diouf and Mamdani (1994) and Human Rights Watch (1991) highlight such cases from across Africa. Ogachi (2011) and Mamdani (2007) report on how market forces have influenced the selection of programmes, courses and content taught at some African universities.

## **Diaspora as an Academic Freedom Safe Haven for African Academics**

What possibilities does the diaspora space accord African academics to express their views and positions concerning social and political affairs in Africa? Through presenting preliminary hypotheses, our objective is to initiate and frame a scholarly debate on the relationship between the African intellectual diaspora and the possibilities of exercising extramural academic freedom. A number of research questions inform our study: Does going into exile result in more extramural academic freedom? In other words, do African academics need to be in diaspora to exercise academic freedom beyond the walls of the university? Is the diaspora an academic freedom safe haven for African scholars?

Despite the absence of reliable and comprehensive data and statistics concerning African academics living in the diaspora, the literature examined in this article shows that many African academics have migrated from their homelands and established themselves elsewhere. Some went into exile after publicly criticising their governments or expressing views distasteful to the political elites. Others were attracted by the better social, economic and professional conditions offered by the host lands.

In both cases, once in exile many have continued to be emotionally tied to, and professionally engaged with, African affairs, not just through their actions, but also through the views they express publicly on African social and political issues. Needless to say, some of the positions expressed by the African academic diaspora, either through the mass media or through other publications, have been distasteful to the dominant political and economic forces in Africa. However, unlike their counterparts working in the homelands, those in the diaspora seem to face less curtailment of their extramural academic freedom, or to be less afraid of political repression when they comment on African political and social issues. As Teferra states:

It is a common pattern for those in the Diaspora to reflect, comment, or criticize freely without fear of persecution or personal wellbeing. And yet their counterparts at home have to be vigilant and conscious of the consequences of their words and their implications. (2004:6)

The preliminary hypothesis that African intellectuals in the diaspora are less limited or feel less afraid to express their views on political and social affairs in Africa is backed by the diasporic experiences of generations of African intellectuals who participated in the struggle for independence. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's (1996) allegory of the cave perhaps best captures how being in

the diaspora enabled some independent African intellectuals to understand the African situation and to express their views against the colonial order.

After living in exile, African intellectuals like Julius Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah, Hastings Banda, Eduardo Mondlane, Amílcar Cabral and Thabo Mbeki were able to use their status of having been abroad and the knowledge and experience acquired there to reflect and comment on and criticise the colonial system. But once this generation of intellectuals seized political power, some of them established monolithic and authoritarian regimes that provoked a wave of brain drain of African intellectuals and professionals.

Zeleza (2005) reflects on the African academic diaspora's engagement in knowledge production in Africa and how this engagement has minimised the peripheral position of African academia within the global geopolitics of knowledge production. African scholars in the diaspora, particularly those working in politically and ideologically sensitive fields such as social sciences and those that do not necessarily belong to the comprador intelligentsia or fall within the Gramscian concept of organic intellectuals, have frequently criticised powerful political and economic forces in Africa in their publications, without suffering serious persecution or intimidation (see Macamo 2005; Mazrui and Mutunga 2003; Mkandawire 2010). However, it is also true that instances abound where intellectuals working in Africa have courageously criticised governments without reprisals (Diouf and Mamdani 1994).

Kerr and Mapanje (2002) report that this vigilance has led some scholars working at Malawian universities to become experts at playing a double game in order to academically survive Banda's censorship. For example, Alifeyo Chilibumbo and John Kandawire, Malawian sociologists then affiliated to the University of Malawi, produced two versions of the same papers in order to be permitted to participate in international academic conferences. They submitted the version whose content was inoffensive to Banda's regime for government approval, but presented the other version at the conference. It seems, then, that being in the diaspora frees the voices of African intellectuals and accords them the opportunity for political engagement with political issues at home in ways that would not be possible were they at home.

While the preliminary hypothesis that African intellectuals in the diaspora are less limited or feel less afraid to express their views on political and social African affairs sounds reasonable, there are still knowledge gaps concerning how this freedom is shaped by the different profiles of academics in exile. Research is still needed to unveil how aspects such as disciplinary background, country of origin, host country, period of living in exile, institutional affiliation and reasons for migrating from the homeland shape and influence the exercise of extramural academic freedom.



Based on the literature review, we next present some hypotheses regarding how disciplinary background, country of origin and reasons for migrating influence academics in the diaspora to exercise their extramural academic freedom.

### ***Disciplinary Background: The Curse of Social Sciences and Humanities***

The propensity for academics to hold views considered controversial on political and social matters is not unconnected to their disciplinary background. Similarly, the efforts of dominant social forces to exert control and power over academics' positions and views also vary according to academics' disciplinary background. Altbach (2007) hypothesises that restrictions to academic freedom, particularly extramural academic freedom, tend to target those academics working in politically and ideologically sensitive fields, namely the social sciences. To test this hypothesis in the African context, we undertook an exploratory analysis of the disciplinary backgrounds of academics who have suffered from many forms of restrictions on their extramural academic freedom. The results suggest a link: African political elites tend to exert more control over those academics working in social sciences and humanities.

All the prominent African academics in the diaspora mentioned in the introduction of this article have a background in social sciences and humanities: Ali Mazrui and Mahmood Mamdani are political scientists; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o is a linguist and writer; Thandika Mkandawire is a developmental economist; Joseph Ki-Zerbo, a historian; Valentin Mudimbe, a prolific social scientist, specialising in areas ranging from philosophy, anthropology, sociology and linguistics to history and literature. Kerr and Mapanje (2002) report cases of the curtailment of academic freedom in Malawi, targeting mainly social sciences and humanities' academics, such as those affiliated to the Department of English at the University of Malawi, like Jack Mapanje, as well as James Stewart and other intellectuals with backgrounds in economics and sociology, such as former World Bank economist Goodall Gondwe and sociologist Alifeyo Chilibvumbo.

Human Rights Watch (1991) produced a detailed report on how the African academic community suffered restrictions on several forms of extramural academic freedom in fourteen African countries (Cameroon, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Nigeria, South Africa, Somalia, Tanzania, Sudan, Swaziland, Togo, Uganda, Zaire and Zimbabwe) during the 1980s and 1990s. A number of academics and students were arrested, detained, dismissed, tortured or executed because of views they broadcast in the mass media or the political and social positions they defended in academic papers. While some academics with backgrounds in fields

other than social sciences and humanities (e.g. neurosurgeon George Mtafu in Malawi and biologist Kamoji Wachiira in Kenya [Human Rights Watch 1991]) were affected by these restrictions, nearly everyone who suffered from the curtailment of their freedom had a background in social sciences or humanities.

Human Rights Watch (1991) reports many cases of restrictions placed on academics with backgrounds in social sciences and humanities in the fourteen countries. Prominent examples include journalism professors Sam Fonkem and Tatah Mentang in Cameroon; linguistics lecturers Hansel Ndumbe Eyoh and Ambroise Kom, also in Cameroon; Kenyan law lecturers J. Martin and Willy Mutunga; educational psychologist Edward Oyugi in Kenya; political scientist Anyang Nyong'o in Kenya; professor of political science Obaro Ikime in Nigeria; Sudanese lecturers in linguistics, Ushari Ahmed Mahmoud and Khalid al-Kid; professor of geography and history Tanko Diasso, in Togo; Ugandan geography professor Charles Kagenda-Atwooki; and Kempton Makamure, professor and dean of the faculty of law at University of Zimbabwe. Others have also reported similar cases (see Diouf and Mamdani 1994; Mbiba 2012). This suggests that academics in the diaspora with backgrounds in the social sciences and humanities are more likely to be sensitive to issues of academic freedom than those working in other fields. Research, particularly qualitative research, targeting academics in the diaspora from different disciplinary backgrounds is needed to support this preliminary hypothesis.

### **Country of Origin**

Besides disciplinary background, the political and economic situation of the home countries from which these academics depart seems to influence the likelihood of them expressing views about political and social matters in their homelands, as well as efforts by the political elites of these countries to exert control and power over academics' positions and views. A report of the Sixth International Higher Education and Research Conference, held in Malaga in 2007<sup>1</sup>, analysed the state of academic freedom across 170 countries, including in Africa. African countries have been classified into five categories depending on the degree to which they restrict academic freedom. Reports cite hardly any cases of violating academic freedom in countries in the first category, such as Mauritius and Botswana. In the second category, countries like Mozambique, Senegal, Zambia and South Africa formally guarantee academic freedom but there are restrictions at the practical level. The third category is composed of countries like Egypt, Somalia and Zimbabwe, where academic freedom is formally and practically restricted. Countries in the fourth category, like

Côte d'Ivoire, severely restrict academic freedom. Fifth category countries, such as Uganda and Kenya, once restricted academic freedom but have lately undergone significant improvements.

Despite this 2007 classification perhaps being outdated, it highlights the fact that African countries are not homogeneous in the way they formally and practically protect academic freedom. As mentioned by Altbach (2007), restrictions to academic freedom increase where and when there are political tensions. In Africa, the critical phase in terms of curtailment of academic freedom coincided with the rise of authoritarian regimes and the economic crises in the 1980s and early 1990s (Diouf and Mamdani 1994; Mkandawire 2005; Zeleza 2005). Unsurprisingly, this period saw the exodus of African academics reach its apex, especially from countries with the most authoritarian regimes. Since the early 1990s, African countries have witnessed improvements in protecting academic freedom. These improvements have accompanied trends of democratisation in African societies, including of their political systems.

However, African countries continue to display differences in their degree of democratisation, the openness of their political systems and the availability of economic opportunities. Mbiba (2012), for example, reports that political tensions and economic crises in Zimbabwe post agrarian reform led to professionals and academics going into exile, to Britain and elsewhere. This diaspora has participated in political debate in the homeland. Political and economic differences across African countries suggest that they should be classified differently in terms of the way they restrain academic freedom. In sum, apart from disciplinary background, the political and economic situation of the countries from which African academics migrate may shape and influence their exercise of extramural academic freedom. As is the case with disciplinary background, research is needed to unveil how country of origin influences academics in diaspora to exercise this freedom.

### ***Reasons for Emigrating from Homeland***

The reason for migrating and living in diaspora is another variable that seems to be relevant when examining the way African academics in diaspora exercise their extramural academic freedom. The literature highlights two main reasons for migrating. The first is political persecution – those affected include the academics Ali Mazrui, Mahmood Mamdani, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Thandika Mkandawire and Jack Mapanje. The second is economic – those academics and professionals who left their homelands as a result of being attracted by better social and economic conditions elsewhere (Kerr and Mapanje 2002; Mbiba 2012; Zeleza 2013).

Zezeza (2005) notes the lack of comprehensive data on the demographic and social profiles of African academics in diaspora. This lack is even more pertinent regarding reasons why academics flee from their homelands. It is thus difficult to conclusively correlate the reasons for departing and the way African academics in diaspora exercise their academic freedom in relation to issues of African concern. But one clue allows us to make a reasonable hypothesis. Academics who have migrated because of political persecution often do not hesitate to recall or use their personal experience and condition of departure when they address African concerns, particularly years after their departure from the homeland. It is as if they take the problem personally and use the 'weapons' of the academy to express their dissatisfaction.

On at least two occasions, Ali Mazrui publicly recalled his condition of departure from Africa to sustain his scientific arguments. The first was a paper he published in 1975 in *African Affairs*, where he argued that academic freedom in Africa faced a dual tyranny – the internal tyranny of political elites curtailing the normal functioning of educational and research institutions, and the external tyranny represented by the dominance of European culture on and within African academia (Mazrui 1975). To sustain his argument of internal tyranny, Mazrui recalled his own experience of not being able to deliver a lecture at the University of Cape Town because the apartheid regime would not allow him to enter the country with his English wife. The second occasion was in 2003, almost three decades after his departure from Africa, during a lecture he delivered at the University of Nairobi. On that occasion, Mazrui (2003) emphasised that the death of intellectualism in postcolonial Africa was related to what he himself had suffered: political persecution during Uganda's Idi Amin regime and Kenya's Daniel arap Moi regime. Kerr and Mapanje (2002) are further examples of scholars whose academic writing is inspired by personal experience.

Along with other Malawian academics in diaspora, Jack Mapanje's academic freedom was severely restricted during Banda's regime. The title of a journal article he co-authored reveals its content: 'Academic Freedom and the University of Malawi'. Mahmood Mamdani, another academic in diaspora, used his personal experience to back his claims in a lecture on academic freedom he delivered at Rhodes University and at the University of Natal in 1993; at the time, he was a visiting professor at the University of Durban-Westville (Mamdani 1993). Besides working in the field of social sciences and humanities and coming from countries facing political tensions and economic crises, academics who flee their homeland due to political persecution appear to be more likely to address controversial African political and social concerns in their scholarship. Qualitative research is needed to unveil how the reasons for departing from Africa influence academics in diaspora to exercise their extramural academic freedom.

## **Concluding Remarks: Outlining a Research Agenda**

This article laid the groundwork for a research agenda on one issue concerning the role of the African academic diaspora: their engagement in political and social affairs in their home country. The article outlined why academics in the diaspora engage in extramural activities on the continent, using the diaspora as a safe haven from which to express their political views. Furthermore, we argued that, since national African academic communities continue to face knowledge and capacity gaps and to be persecuted for their public utterances, the African academic diaspora's engagement in political and social affairs is critical to allow African societies to access less biased knowledge and to protect themselves from powerful ideologies and dogmas.

Based on a comprehensive literature review, the article presented preliminary hypotheses on the African academic diaspora and extramural academic freedom. The literature supports the assumption that African academics in the diaspora are less limited or feel less constrained in terms of expressing their views on political and social affairs in their respective home countries. However, we hypothesise that the African academic diaspora's propensity to exercise their extramural academic freedom is affected by their disciplinary background, the political and economic situation in their country of origin and the reasons for migrating (whether politically or economically motivated), as well as by other variables such as the duration of exile, the nature of the host country and institutional affiliation.

African academics hosted in more stable democratic countries and educational/research institutions, with a long and steady tradition of protecting individual and civil rights, including academic freedom, may be more inclined or feel less limited or afraid to criticise and comment on issues related to their homelands. We hypothesise that the longer the academics stay in host countries, or the more professional stability they enjoy in these safe academic havens, the more likely they are to exercise their extramural academic freedom. The cases of academics such as Ali Mazrui, Mahmood Mamdani, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Thandika Mkandawire and Jack Mapanje, all of whom moved to countries in the West, particularly the US and Western Europe, support the preliminary hypothesis for a more in-depth study.

These hypotheses open up new avenues for more in-depth research, particularly qualitative research focusing on African academics in diaspora and their experiences. This new research agenda should aim to expand the profile variables that shape the way academics exercise their extramural academic freedom to address pressing issues in their homelands.

## Note

1. See the site: <https://download.ei-ie.org/Docs/IRISDocuments/Education/Higher%20Education%20and%20Research/Higher%20Education%20Policy%20Papers/2008-00037-01-E.pdf>

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