A. The Kampala Symposium on Academic Freedom and Social Responsibility

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Summary of Symposium Proceedings

For three days in November 1990, African intellectuals and academics, drawn from all corners of the continent and beyond, assembled in Uganda's capital, Kampala, to debate the dimensions, the intricacies and the contradictions of the phenomenon of 'academic freedom'. As Africa moves towards the twentyfirst century, the debate on such an issue reflects much more than a concern for the plight of academia alone. Rather, as this book demonstrates, participants were concerned as much about their own context as they were apprehensive about the wider social, economic and political milieu in which they exist and operate.

Much of the tone and thrust of the symposium discussion was set in the opening speech by the President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, in which he said that academics should not only be more 'relevant' in their intellectual pursuits, but that they should also be more 'disciplined' in the fashion in which they communicate their ideas and opinions. Whether participants agreed with what the President said, openly or implicitly, or vehemently disagreed with the analysis, perspective and content of his speech, it did ignite discussion of the main themes of the symposium. These were:

a) The state and academic freedom;
b) Civil society and academic freedom;
c) The intelligentsia and academic freedom;
d) Donors and academic freedom;
e) The social responsibility of intellectuals.

The plenaries, the evening keynote speeches and the working groups were all constructed around these five broad themes. The objective of this section is to give some flavour of the major issues that these seemingly disparate, but intricately related themes, brought out in the varied discussions. From 'marginalization' to 'relevance' to the conflict between 'gender-sensitive' research, and a return to the debate on the 'neutrality' of social science discourse, an attempt is made to capture both the broad and the microscopic. The symposium addressed what is undoubtedly the key question of the age for intellectuals – caught as they are between the 'rock' of the shrinking and

increasingly illiberal African state, and the 'hard-place' of donor-conditioned research funding. This section concludes with an account of the deliberations of a roundtable session of various academic staff and student association representatives, who, in many African countries today, represent the vanguard of the movement that is striving to ensure that education once again becomes a priority.

The State and Academic Freedom

A general consensus emerged that one of the predominant, if not the most significant, factor in the consideration of the issue of academic freedom was the role, nature and impact of the post-colonial African state on academia. From a consideration of the historical genesis of the state in colonial Africa, to an examination of its character in the 1990s as ideological and physical barriers seem to collapse, the major issue was: how had the state affected the freedoms of the intelligentsia to write, teach, research and relate to civil society? Not only the present character of the state, but also its essential nature, was the subject of critical scrutiny.

In particular, participants across the board emphasized the question: Can development occur where the production and advancement of knowledge is constrained, often completely stifled, by the action of the state, whether positively – through the active denial of any breathing space to academics by intimidating, persecuting, incarcerating or eliminating them – or negatively – by the failure to provide the prerequisites for intellectual endeavour, including a 'living' wage, research finances, facilities and permissions, physical and material infrastructures or even the basic tools of the academic's trade, such as chalk.

Participants decried the internal political situation that prevails in most African countries, where not only academic freedom, but freedoms of a much broader social, political and economic nature, were the subject of continuous and intensifying violation by the state. In a 'who's who' and 'what's what' of the scene of violations against academics, *Africa Watch* brought to light through a continent-wide perspective, the fact that almost no African state is on good terms with its academics. Many, in fact, have extremely bad relations with academia to the extent, as noted by the CODESRIA Executive Secretary in his opening address, that a number of participants were unable to come to Kampala on account of the theme chosen for discussion. Fresh in the minds of delegates was the recent atrocious massacre of defenceless students at Lumumbashi University in Zaire.

The national context of academic freedom was highlighted through a consideration of the legal and structural links between the state and the university, especially insofar as the issue of the autonomy of tertiary educational institutions was concerned. Political, sexist, personal, ethnic, and even

nepotistic considerations were brought into play in the determination of critical university appointments and dismissals made by the state, and thus in the extent of the freedoms enjoyed by members of such institutions.

Simultaneously, the African state is confronted by a harsh international environment exemplified by increasing dependence, worsening terms of production and trade and the overall crisis of underdevelopment. As the climate has worsened, so measures taken in search of a solution have become more drastic. Thus, the IMF and the World Bank have so invaded the African state that even the sacrosanct question of sovereignty has been thoroughly undermined, followed by the consequent disintegration of academic freedoms. As structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) dictate belt-tightening measures that inordinately focus on higher education as a 'luxury', and emphasize the strengthening of vocational training structures and the 'relevant' as opposed to the 'esoteric' as well as various mechanisms to 'share costs', academic freedom has been transformed into a 'commodity' that has also been deemed of marginal value.

One of the critical observations made by the participants was the evolution of the university in the eyes of the state from an instrument firmly conscripted into the 'developmental' paradigms of the early post-independence epoch, to the fountain-head of 'subversion', unprincipled and indisciplined action of an 'unacademic' character. In many Francophone African states, according to one participant, 'sociology' is a bad word, and PhD studies are discouraged as irrelevant.

At the same time, participants noted and were critical of the role that intellectuals themselves have played in enhancing state action in the deprivation and denial of academic freedom to their colleagues. This phenomenon, variously described as entryism, selling-out or abandoning ship, was of concern less in the fact that some academics will inevitably cross over to the state, and thereby become state functionaries or bureaucrats, but more in the problem of those academics on campus who invite state action in order to resolve problems of a personal or ideological character. While roundly condemned by all participants, no solutions were offered to this problem, in part because it is so often such a difficult matter to either prove, or enforce.

In the same spirit of self-criticism, participants condemned the complacency of academics in the face of encroachment by the state on their academic freedom. Academics had failed to comprehensively organize and protest against the action of the state in the violation of their freedoms. In comparison to other professionals, such as health workers, lawyers, the clergy and general workers, academics were yet to develop organizational mechanisms that came to the aid of their colleagues who 'disappeared', or who were harassed, persecuted or killed by authorities. And this when

intellectuals were proportionately more liable to attack than any other social grouping. Clearly, such complacency had to be replaced by greater militancy in the protection of academic freedoms. Additionally, there was perhaps a need to regionalize and continentalize the frameworks of organizations, so that the effect and impact of individual repressive regimes could be minimized.

Civil Society and Academic Freedom

Delegates grappled with the relationship between the academic community and civil society in a bid to come to grips with what should be the exact form and content of that relationship. How, in other words, could they breach the 'ivory tower' syndrome of which they were so often accused and of which they were, in many instances, guilty? How do academics relate to workers, women, youth movements and the fact that these, more than any other, constitute the most oppressed sectors of society? How, for example, could intellectuals tackle the 'subjectivity of the oppressed' or their open hostility within the objective social situation, while simultaneously legitimizing themselves and their work to the people?

Of particular importance to many delegates was the dilemma that academics faced in the research, teaching and dissemination of ideas in the often-held view that academics were no more and no less than functionaries of the state, were part and parcel of the oppressive state apparatus – (even if they were populist or radical) – and played a critical part in achieving social hegemony and state domination. Today, as movements within civil society in Africa are rising and asserting their rights and freedoms against the state and the status quo, intellectuals and academics are confronted by an identity crisis. On the one hand, for some, vested interests perpetuated by their domination within academia and thus objectively as part of the apparatus of oppression are under threat. For the 'radicals', or those who critically decried that oppression, the call was made for the linkage between such activity and that of the wider movement of groups within civil society.

At the same time, delegates cautioned that 'civil society' was itself not free of contradictions and that these contradictions often impacted negatively on any attempts by the intelligentsia to form links of solidarity. These, for example, were manifest where the religious question was of critical import; where even *prima facie* secular states had employed the mechanism of religion to establish and fortify the mobilization of civil society to its cause, and where religion functioned as the dominant ideology, leading to outright hostility to any links between them and the intelligentsia. Consequently, this has led to the paradox of the existence of a unique kind of academic research that bears the brand of religion, while, at the same time, that which has not been duly approved by state and non-state actors, runs the risk of being

censored. The academics who pursue such research are being harassed, or even dismissed.

Once again, the gender issue in terms of the relationship between civil society and academia became the focus of critical attention. How relevant was the work of intellectuals to the struggle to emancipate women as a specific social group from the effects of oppression? How had the problems of gender-bias affected the operation and emancipation of women in civil society? How far had the male intellectual identified with or correctly articulated the oppression of women? For academics to critically address these issues they had to first and foremost rigorously subject themselves to critical examination.

The Intelligentsia and Academic Freedom

The issue of the intelligentsia and academic freedom permeated discussions right from the beginning of the symposium, gathering momentum as participants seriously questioned their own social basis and their impact on the observation and realization of the academic freedoms of fellow colleagues. It was under this rubric that the issue of the 'marginalization' of intellectuals and academics was posed and the question of implicit and explicit constraints that stand in the way of academic freedom across the board was considered. Of particular concern was the way in which the intelligentsia should begin to practise critical introspection and to find ways and means to link up to wider oppressed groups in society and to the global struggle for their liberation.

Intellectuals were accused of constructing frameworks, that had now become dominant, which tended to naturalize or even deny existing social divisions based on region, gender and class and in this fashion to aid in the perpetration of social inequalities, exploitation and oppression in general. By establishing a hegemony of discourse, analysis and methodology, social science practice had critically limited the possibility of developing new forms of knowledge that could challenge the status quo.

Reality mirrored theory as the response to this argument, particularly to the gender question in social sciences, elicited sharp, often confrontational and at times blatantly sexist responses from discussants. Existing and dominant paradigms, such as the contention of the 'happy' and 'contented' woman under pre-colonial structures, were reasserted in support of the claim that in fact, arguments about the marginalization of certain controversial frameworks, such as those based on gender, were misplaced in the present-day realities of Africa and thus in the study of the social sciences.

A related discussion revolved around the exact role of the social sciences as studied by African intelligentsia in perpetuating methodologies and paradigms that were peculiar to the West European or North American

context and were intrinsically racist and sexist. What happened to Blyden and Hayworth, one participant asked, in reference to the fact that African social scientists of undisputed intellectual accomplishment had been marginalized and ignored by present-day researchers and academics?

At the same time, a note of temperance was injected into the debate as participants observed that intellectuals should not, in attacking the dominant frameworks of analysis for their ethnocentricity, sexism etc., bend over backwards to assert a universalism of the African context, which is both contradictory and non-uniform. Rather, the point should be, through a critical re-examination of the character of pre-colonial structures, to unearth the various forces, the actual content and the impact of such structures. What, for example, was the real social character of matriarchy? How can the exploitation of women be concretely situated within the African context? What is the correct strategy for their emancipation? etc.

Intellectuals, particularly intellectual African men, came under specific criticism for the use of their positions of dominance in academia as a means of perpetrating inequalities, not only in the wider context, but within the framework of the university as an institution. Academic practices as well as the professional processes in place at the university have led to the censorship of individual intellectuals and groups who may voice a dissordant chord within the institution. The hierarchical structures of the university and the absence of participatory methods of governance, manifest in the state and duplicated within the university, had led to a situation where one either toed the line, or was severely censored by colleagues.

The issue of the language of discourse of African academics and its relationship to the issue of how the intellectual relates to the wider context was also the subject of consideration. In contrast to the academic in Asia, the Arab countries or Latin America, the African intellectual was forced to articulate and communicate ideas and opinions in a manifestly alien language, thus raising the issue of how African intellectual discourse can actually be democratic if it is *ipso facto* couched within a framework that fails to reach the hearts and minds of the broader population. Coupled with this was the rigid self-proclaimed definition of the intellectual and the consequent denial to other forms of intellectual endeavour ('informal', primary and secondary) of any role or influence in the determination of social science discourse and practice. Intellectuals were seriously lacking in an essential prerequisite on academic freedom – democracy.

Much of the discussion on intellectuals revolved around the question of their political role and the extent to which the intelligentsia had been primarily egocentric and less concerned about popular struggle than about maintaining the hegemony they enjoyed in the university. Here, the question

of opportunism, the limitations in attempts at organization and the narrow definition of 'struggle' made by the intelligentsia, were the subject of debate.

Donors and Academic Freedom

While only one paper out of the three expected in the plenary session covering this issue was actually read, it generated significant discussion, transcending a host of questions concerning the role, character and impact of the donor community on the functioning of academics and its consequent relation to the question of academic freedom. In sum, the character of donor operations within the context of African universities possessed a manifest duality: on the one hand the financial and material support extended by donors, who were generally considered to be of high moral standing, aided African grantees in universities and other institutions to protect themselves against the repression of the state. On the other hand, such protection comes with substantial power, leading to both intentional and unintentional constraints on research into the social sciences.

Of particular concern to delegates was the often obstrusive and undemocratic methods of work employed by donors, including the rejection of peer appraisal, sitting-in on the deliberations of the scientific committees of African research organizations, and dictating not only the form but the content of research undertaken.

A distinction was made between multilateral institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank whose methodologies of operation were generally regarded to be undemocratic, and funding agencies (such as the Ford Foundation and SAREC) which primarily had a research-focus, and with which most academics were involved. The latter, it was observed, should be the critical focus of attention in the consideration of the relationship between donors *vis-à-vis* academics and academic freedom.

In this regard, a number of additional, mainly ideological, factors were the subject of critique by the delegates. Of note was the 'developmentalist' thrust of donor aid, which grossly restricted room for manoeuvre, especially concerning the critical issue of choice of research project. Without the freedom to choose one's research preferences, if one's hands were already tied *ab initio*, how could one speak of donors actually aiding academic freedom?

The excessive bureaucratization of donor research evaluation methods was considered to be a major obstacle to the freedom of individuals and institutions in the execution of their research goals. This tied in with the issue of time-perspective, which donors invariably insisted upon, and which researchers considered inadequate in light of the various constraints.

Many delegates felt that some donors displayed a high degree of ethnocentricity as well as double-standards. Certain conditionalities and modes

of operation that were never employed in their own countries were widely and strictly applied to African researchers. At the same time, donors also funded projects of a positively negative character, leading to results that not only restricted academic freedom, but more importantly violated the basic human rights and dignity of society at large.

With regard to what African academics had to do in order to counter the negative impact of donor activity, the suggestion that donors put political conditions (so-called 'social-democratic' indicators) on the extension of finances to governments generated significant debate. Delegates felt that the addition of further conditionality of a nature that grantees had no control over, would lead to an exacerbation of the already dire situation. Furthermore, to allow such political conditionality was to cede to donors the initiative in reforming and restructuring our own countries, a job that was essentially national. Finally, there was no mechanism for asserting the fashion in which such conditionality was to be imposed. Rather than ceding such initiative, African academics had to devise means of not only ensuring that they gained autonomy from the operation and funding by donors, but also that the initiative for change not only be internally generated, but also democratically pursued.

The donors present at the symposium threw some light on the current status and operation of the donor community. It was observed that a trend towards a deteriorating capacity for research by African institutions and individuals had set in. This meant, therefore, that donors had to be even more strict in the mechanism used to assist African institutions and individuals. The consequent impact of such stricter controls was thus obvious in terms of the academic freedoms of recipients of donor grants. This was coupled with increasing disillusionment on the part of the public in donor-agency countries, that had led to the lessening of support and more vocal demands for strict accountability for the fashion in which grant monies were utilized.

The plenary session on donors and academic freedom was the most concrete in the articulation of specific recommendations with regard to the search for alternative methods of raising finances. First, African research organizations (such as CODESRIA and OSSREA) should pursue the objective of financial autonomy. Second, individual African academics needed to pursue greater and deeper links of solidarity among themselves and under the framework of autonomous institutions.

Insofar as these were long-term goals, the short-run objective should not be lost sight of. Thus, African academics needed to strive for the evaluation of their research efforts by their own peers, in opposition to the dominant practice of donors who constitute evaluation teams made up of researchers from their own countries. African intellectuals needed to publicize their

research efforts so that the field of donors would be more diverse and more accessible. Ultimately though, there was a need to emphasize to African states that financial and material resources had to be rechannelled to the pursuit of intellectual endeavours.

The Social Responsibility of Intellectuals

From papers as diverse as that which inquired into the genesis and social options of intellectuals, to an evening keynote speech on the social responsibility of women intellectuals, the issue of the social responsibility of intellectuals generated what were perhaps the most lively, engaging and critical debates of the symposium. The debate not only tackled the issue of who was an 'intellectual' and the relevance of his or her location within the social structure, but also, the form and character that 'social responsibility' should assume. Responsibility to whom, and with what objectives in mind? How could such responsibility be either guaranteed or enforced?

Many delegates raised the issue of the cultural divide that existed between the intelligentsia and society at large. Not only were intellectuals often dealing with ideas and concepts that were obscure, in addition they failed to involve society either in their deliberations or in the findings of their researches. Furthermore, there was an additional, artificial and equally insidious divide between intellectuals within academic institutions and those in government; in the so-called 'informal' sector and in educational institutions that were not of the tertiary level. Intellectuals within academia had looked on the latter with disdain, often contemptuously dismissing their work and contribution to the social advancement of knowledge.

Male intellectuals were specifically called to task for their ignorance of disdain for and outright rejection of the struggles of women in general and of women intellectuals in particular.

Concern was expressed about the abandonment by intellectuals of critical issues that affected society, such as the environment, the social division of labour and gender-biased perspectives within the social sciences. The issue of attention to the environment was argued to be one of the most critical issues on the social responsibility agenda. And yet this issue had received only scant attention from delegates. Without addressing the destruction and subsequent degradation of the environment, intellectuals were demonstrating a deep-seated ignorance of the nature of their responsibilities to society. In addition, not only had the environment been ignored, but also women, especially peasant women, were inordinately given the burden of resuscitating the environment and protecting it from more extensive damage.

Delegates expressed the need for solidarity, co-operation and collaboration between institutional intellectuals and those within broader society. In this way, it was urged, an emphasis needed to be placed on how 'social

responsibility' could be socially defined by the various groups in society. With regard to women intellectuals, the need was stressed for delegates to appreciate the sheer complexity of the network of social, cultural, economic and political constraints that complicated their performance in society.

Academic freedom for women intellectuals is even more difficult to attain than it is for their male colleagues, especially in light of these varied constraints. The reality is that the woman intellectual closely resembles her non-intellectual counterpart. In this way, it becomes doubly difficult for the woman intellectual to actively execute her social responsibility. In addition, even where women have participated in and advanced social struggles, their contribution has not been recognized. Again, this is a problem that is heightened by the fact that male intellectuals have increasingly sought to marginalize women intellectuals, and their contribution to social struggles and the struggle to change the status quo, both within academia and without. Second, in the formation of groups and organizations designed to advance the struggle of women, women intellectuals are confronted by hostility. How then can women intellectuals carry out their responsibilities to society, if they are prevented from establishing appropriate frameworks to achieve these ends?

The general discussion of the question of social responsibility elicited several different perspectives, especially concerning the gender question. Of critical import was the contention that by evolving 'separatist' strategies for the achievement of their emancipation, women had failed to forge alliances with other oppressed social groups and in this way shared responsibility for the plight of women. In pointed rebuttal of this outlook, other participants questioned why the issue of linkages with social movements should be specifically the task of women, especially since men too, were also oppressed at different levels and in different forms. This issue transcended the question of female alliances, but had to do with the critical matter of analyzing the nature of the social system and how the negative forces within it could be combated. Without an appreciation of the nature of the obstacles in place, or without any linkages between the various progressive forces, little headway could actually be made in ensuring that academics became and remained socially responsible.

The symposium concluded with the adoption of several recommendations and resolutions with regard to each of the major themes traversed (see the Kampala Declaration in appendix).

The Roundtable of Representatives of Academic Staff and Student Organizations

One of the last events of the symposium was the roundtable discussion that drew together a total of eight representatives of the academic staff and

student associations from diverse countries around the continent. The representatives presented a synopsis of the character of the violations of academic freedom committed by different governments in different countries, and raised issues such as the institutional and organizational structures of tertiary institutions, the obstacles to carrying out research, and the lack of autonomy of their institutions.

Academic associations are now forced into the role of intellectual 'trade unions', whereby they assert the right to be recognized for their intellectual labour and to be afforded the guarantee of the material preconditions necessary for the existence of academic freedom.

Reflections were made on the different reactions by governments in each country to the educational crisis, as well as to the development of organizational structures protecting and promoting the rights and interests of staff, students and other members of the university community. The representatives asserted the need for pan-African co-operation and for the formation of autonomous links with popular movements in civil society. To this end an association was established to promote greater co-operation between African intellectuals and foster the realization of several of the goals and recommendations made by the delegates.