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Wither Kampala Declaration? Academic Freedom, University Autonomy, and Democracy in Zambia, 2011-2021.

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Abstract

This article examines the role of academic freedom as a public good within the framework of the *Kampala Declaration on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility in Africa*. Three decades after the Kampala declaration, many universities on the continent continue to operate in environments characterized by declining levels of academic freedom and institutional autonomy. The declaration emphasizes the responsibility of the academic community to engage with and support the struggles of popular movements for rights and emancipation, including those of their communities. Against this background, this paper examines the state of academic freedom and institutional autonomy in Zambia during the period of shrinking democratic spaces under the Patriotic Front (PF) government from 2011 to 2021. It draws on three recent incidents: (i) the political pressure on the University of Zambia (UNZA) Senate to confer honorary doctorate degrees to President Edgar Lungu and his Zimbabwean counterpart, Emmerson Mnangagwa, (ii) the deregistration of the University of Zambia Lecturers and Researchers Union (UNZALARU), and (iii) the Sishuwa Sishuwa sedition case. By analyzing these incidents, it explores how university lecturers, as public intellectuals, aligned with progressive causes and used their academic authority to defend Zambia's democratic values. It also highlights the backlash faced by the state and ruling party members in response to their efforts. Despite the prevailing hostile political environment, the Zambian intelligentsia exercised agency to influence public opinion on issues such as corruption, political violence, and other undemocratic practices. Overall, this study contributes to the scholarship on the public good role of academic freedom, underscoring the tension between academic freedom in universities and social responsibility in Africa.

Keywords: Academic Freedom, University Autonomy, Democracy, Kampala Declaration, Zambia

Introduction and background

Globally, the state of academic freedom in universities has continued to be under threat across many countries due to repressive governments and increased polarisation. The current proportion of the world's population lacking access to academic freedom is comparable to the situation in 1973, fifty years ago (V-dem 2024). According to the *Academic Freedom Index* report for 2023, there are 22 countries and territories where universities and scholars enjoy significantly less freedom today than 10 years ago (Kinzelbach *et al.* 2023). The report further indicates that out of the 179 countries surveyed, academic freedom has stagnated in 152 countries. In China, for example, Pringle and Woodman have described the state of academic freedom in universities as existing between a rock and a hard place, owing to increasingly repressive policies and constant involvement of the government in the internal affairs of universities (Pringle & Woodman 2022). In India, there has been a decline in freedom of academic and cultural expression in public universities, which has been heightened by Narendra Modi's election as prime minister in 2014 (Kinzelbach *et al.* 2023). This has particularly been the case with universities located in minority Muslim states. In Europe and the USA, the emergence of populist and left-wing political leaders has significantly influenced the state of academic freedom in numerous countries. More recently, the Israeli conflict in Gaza has highlighted the precarious nature of academic freedom within universities in the Global North, where some academics and students have faced punitive repercussions for expressing their opposition to the ongoing atrocities (Giroux 2024).

In Africa, the move towards democracy has unfortunately failed to curtail the threats to academic freedom and institutional autonomy for many universities. As such there have been wider concerns that three decades after the *Kampala Declaration on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility*, many African universities have continued operating in environments characterised by declining academic freedom and institutional autonomy (Shange 2024; Ndasauka 2025). The Kampala declaration entitles academicians with the freedom to exercise their intellectual thoughts as a social responsibility towards popular power struggles, including the advancement of democracy (Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa [CODESRIA] 1990).

Against the above background, this paper uses a Zambian case study to engage with the discussions surrounding the relevance and value of the Kampala Declaration in contemporary times. This is particularly significant in light of recent observations stating that, despite their

three decades of existence, the two documents - Kampala and Dar es Salaam Declarations - remain obscure to many academics (Shangwe 2024:5). The paper examines the state of academic freedom and institutional autonomy in Zambia during the period of shrinking democratic spaces under the Patriotic Front (PF) government from 2011 to 2021. It specifically focuses on this period because Zambia together with Brazil, Turkey, Columbia, Nicaragua, and Hong Kong were identified as the top six countries or territories with Academic Freedom Index (AFi) scores that deteriorated by 0.15 points in 2021¹.

Utilizing primarily secondary data sources such as online newspapers, court cases, and other relevant published materials, this study explores how political actions have directly or indirectly contributed to the subversion of academic freedom. The paper highlights three significant incidents that illustrate the threats to academic freedom and university autonomy in Zambia due to political influence. These incidents are: (i) the political pressure applied to the UNZA Senate to award honorary doctorate degrees to President Edgar Lungu and his Zimbabwean counterpart, Emmerson Mnangagwa in 2019, (ii) the deregistration of the University of Zambia Lecturers and Researchers Union (UNZALARU) in 2020; and (iii) the sedition charges brought against University of Zambia academic Dr. Sishuwa Sishuwa in 2021. These three incidences constitute informative case studies in discussing Zambian intellectuals' engagement with the democratisation project and their quest for academic freedom and institutional autonomy. By delineating these incidents, it explores how university lecturers as public intellectuals were drawn to the progressive causes, lent their academic authority in safeguarding Zambia's democratic values, and the resultant backlash by the state and ruling party members. The paper reinforces that scholars' ability to engage in political discussions in their home countries enhances decision-making competence and improves the quality and resilience of democratic institutions (Kratou & Laakso 2022).

The paper is divided into four parts. It begins by unpacking the concepts of academic and institutional autonomy. This is followed by conceptualizing academic freedom beyond human rights discourses to include public good values of higher education. The third part contextualises debates on academic freedom within continental literature, by highlighting recent threats to academic freedom in different countries. It further provides a historical context to academic freedom and institutional autonomy in African universities during three crucial

¹The Academic Freedom Index (AFI) provides an overview of the state of academic freedom in 179 countries. See., K. Kinzelbach et al., *Free Universities: Putting the Academic Freedom Index into Action* (Berlin, March 2021), https://gppi.net/media/KinzelbachEtAl_2021_Free_Universities_AFi-2020_upd.pdf, accessed 12 June 2023.

periods: colonial, early post-independence, and contemporary eras. The final part focuses on the Zambian case, showing how political actions by the ruling PF under President Edgar Lungu contributed directly and indirectly to the subversion of academic freedom between 2015 and 2021.

Unpacking the concepts of academic freedom and institutional autonomy

The terms academic freedom and institutional autonomy have attracted multifaceted definitions. In their authoritative text on, the *African experience with higher education*, Ajayi and colleagues defined university autonomy as:

[T]he freedom and independence of a university, as an institution, to make its own internal decisions, whatever its decision-making processes are, with regards to academic affairs, faculty and student affairs, business affairs, and external relations. It is the self-governance of a university (Ajayi *et al.* 1996:243).

In a broad sense, academic freedom refers to the liberty of academics and students to engage in collective deliberation on any idea without fear of sanction, censure, or interference from authorities both within and outside universities. Ali Mazrui puts forward three main elements which constitute academic freedom in defining academic freedom from the African context, suggesting that it:

Involves autonomy to shape the curriculum and syllabus, relative freedom to recruit teachers, and some freedom to admit students by criteria chosen by universities. Then there is freedom for scholars to decide research priorities and research methods, to publish their research findings, and to publicise their intellectual positions. Finally, there is general freedom of expression for teachers and students as a necessary intellectual infrastructure for mental development and intellectual creative (Mazrui 1975:393).

Within the Kampala Declaration framework, the definition of academic freedom has been expanded to include the notion of social responsibility, especially for academicians and students. The addition of social responsibility to the definition of academic freedom in Africa distinguishes it from Western-based definitions, as it brings out the socio-cultural context under which African students and academicians work (Zezeza 2003).

Although the various definitions of academic freedom and university autonomy reflect differing environments, contexts, and challenges in various countries, what remains common is their espousal of issues related to institutional autonomy, ideological control, internal

governance, and intellectual authority (Zezeza 2003). Without academic freedom, there is no university autonomy and vice-versa. For this reason, Paul Zezeza submits that ‘university autonomy, academic freedom, and social responsibility are instruments of the same implement and are essential for the production of the critical social knowledge that facilitates material and ethical advancements’(Zezeza 2003:170). These interlinked core principles empower universities to broaden the horizons of knowledge while promoting human development, democracy, and social advancement (Ndasauka 2025).

Conceptualising academic freedom as a public good

Academic freedom has increasingly been seen as a matter of human rights, foregrounding the freedom of expression and freedom of speech among academics and students (Adar 1999). Legally, academic freedom is protected under international human rights law, enshrined in the right to education (ICESCR Article. 13), the right to science (ICESCR Article. 15), and the right to freedom of expression (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, ICCPR Article. 19), among other provisions. While a human rights approach plays a vital role in protecting freedoms of expression and speech, elements essential for the flourishing of academic freedom, it does not encompass a broader perspective on how academic freedom can promote the public good values inherent in higher education. Therefore, framing academic freedom as a public good underscores universities' intrinsic and societal contributions in addressing significant challenges and fostering development within communities. It is with this hindsight that Judith Butler states:

Higher education is not only a public good that every state should provide, but higher education based on principles of academic freedom is necessary for an informed public, a public that can understand and evaluate issues of common concern and form judgements on the basis of a knowledgeable understanding of the world (Butler 2017:854).

From the above perspective, academic freedom can, therefore, be construed as part of the university’s social responsibility and community engagement mandates, which constitute the third mission of the university. The university's third mission has wider benefits for communities, such as steering economic growth, enhancing political participation, safeguarding human rights and advancing democracy, which is crucial to the development of sustainable livelihoods. In advancing the public good role of higher education in Africa, the Kampala Declaration is more specific on the issue of social responsibility of members of the

intellectual community. Indeed, this was further underscored by CODESRIA in its correspondence to the UNZA Vice Chancellor regarding the Sishuwa Incidence:

Academic freedom does not exist to merely enable scholars to carelessly pursue individual passions; rather, its purpose is to enable them to engage in intellectual work in the interests of the greatest public good, and thus to do so in socially responsible ways (CODESRIA 2021).

There is also a burgeoning body of scholarship within the public good role of academic freedom, which argues that academic freedom is an indicator of democracy and therefore central to sustaining democracy (Adebayo 2022; Cole 2017; Kratou & Laakso 2022; Laakso 2020). Adebayo, for instance, notes that ‘the state of academic freedom reflects the state of society itself and of democracy’ (Adebayo 2022:1817). At issue is that the ability of academicians to participate in political discussions in their countries can enhance the quality and resilience of democratic institutions (Kratou & Laakso 2022; Ndasauka 2025). Hence, as universities address and seek solutions to these critical challenges, their role extends beyond education to become instrumental in developing a robust civil society.

In broadening this scholarship, this paper argues that the advancement of academic freedom plays a pivotal role in realising the economic and social mission of the universities and their contribution to communities. In the context of Zambia and many other African countries, where democratic principles and social cohesion are under constant threats, safeguarding academic freedom is not merely an institutional necessity but a societal imperative. This freedom allows universities to engage meaningfully with pressing issues such as governance, human rights, and economic inequality, thereby positioning them as vital contributors to community development. As Philip Altbach reminds us ‘academic freedom is the primary prerequisite for the university to fulfil its mission in the society in which it operates’ (Altbach2001:205). Therefore, ensuring the protection of academic freedom is essential for amplifying the social impact of universities, ultimately leading to a more informed, engaged, and resilient community. Yet, as the next section will show, academic freedom has always been under threat in Africa.

Academic freedom and university autonomy in Africa: Historical realities and challenges

A historical view provides useful evaluative lenses to enable a detailed understanding and appreciation of the context and challenges of sustaining academic freedom in Africa. To this effect, Zavale and Langa have identified three main phases of academic freedom in Africa

(Zavale & Langa 2018). They note that during the first stage, between the late colonial periods to the 1970s, universities on the continent witnessed an academic euphoria. It was envisaged that the universities would supply the newly independent countries with the much-needed human capital, and contribute to nation-building. As such, since universities occupied a central role in national building projects across post-independent countries, universities were granted high autonomy.

Although post-independence has been heralded as a period of thriving academic freedom, this was short-lived. Universities soon became a source of conflict between the political elites and academicians, as politicians pushed their control over the activities in universities. In analysing the state of academic freedom during this period, it is worth noting that ‘in reality, colonial governments did not allow this freedom, nor did post-colonial African governments allow national universities to push an agenda that was different from government thinking’ (Mngomezulu & Maposa 2017:179–180). For instance, Thandeka Mkandawire highlights the conflict between African nationalist leaders and academicians, labelling the tension as a conflict between organic and inorganic intellectuals (Mkandawire 2005).

In describing the influence of the state on the autonomy of African universities, scholars such as Habib, Marrow and Bentley have noted that the state was initially invited as a paying passenger but ended up in the driving seat, thereby making many academics on the continent uneasy (Habib *et al.* 2008:142). The observation by Habib and colleagues resonates well with most African universities in the newly independent states. During this period, it was a common practice for African presidents to take up the roles of university chancellors.

Although, the position of university chancellor is ceremonial in most universities, having heads of state occupying such positions has had its effect on influencing the governance of universities in both subtle and overt ways. This was indeed the case in the late 1970s when government direct interferences in universities led to the deportation of foreign expatriates and arbitrary arrest or exile of local academicians who were critical of the status quo (Ajayi *et al.* 1996; Mkandawire 2005). At the University of Malawi, for example, several expatriate lecturers such as Theodore Pinney, James Stewart, Landey White, and Robbin Graham were deported under the instruction of Kamuzu Banda, for speaking against the political detention and torture of members of the Jehovah’s Witness in Malawi (Kerr & Mapanje 2002). Additionally, other local academicians like Peter Mwanza, the first Malawian Principal of

Chancellor College, John Banda, Thandika Mkandawire and Goodwell Mwanza, among others, all faced political persecution. As a result of these events, it has been recorded that:

By the late 1970s, most of the positions of academic and administrative leadership were either in the hands of [President] Banda's sympathisers or people who were too afraid to protect abuses from academic freedom (Kerr & Mapanje 2002:82).

Describing the above events, Habib and colleagues have narrated that:

Banda's regime epitomised oppression under the cloak of nationalism and, at the University of Malawi, academic and intellectual freedom was obliterated in its name. The Banda dictatorship's immediate and crude expropriation of Malawian nationalism inhibited the elaboration of a more subtle discourse on academic freedom (Habib *et al.* 2008:143)

The state of academic freedom and university autonomy in Africa further deteriorated during the second stage between the 1980s and the early 1990s. This, according to Thandika Mkandawire, was the 'age of delusion', when alienation of African intellectuals deepened, and the quality of universities eroded (Mkandawire 2005). Some of the key factors to this deterioration included the rise of authoritarian rule, one-party dictatorship, meddling in internal university governance, and disillusionment with nationalist agendas and political elites (Ajayi *et al.* 1996; Kerr & Mapanje 2002; Mazrui 1975; Zeleza 2003).

The 1990s marked the return to multiparty democracy in several African countries following the fall of the Soviet Socialist block in Eastern Europe. The return to democracy directly affected educational policies in many countries, including aspects of academic freedom. Since the 1990s, 'the threats to academic freedom have shifted from state-university to market-university relationships' (Zavale & Langa 2018:13). Particularly, the onslaught of neo-liberalism agendas in the wake of increased commercialisation of learning and reduced public spending on universities has had toil on their academic freedom and institutional autonomy (Ogachi 2011; Zeleza 2003), thereby posing a threat to the realisation of common good values. By focusing more on income generation activities, the increased commercialisation and marketisation in public universities has 'sabotaged the capacity of academics to execute their social responsibilities'(Ogachi 2011:31).

The negative impact of the neo-liberalism agendas on academic freedom in Africa is well captured by Munene's article in the Conversation, entitled *The power of the purse threatens academic freedom in Kenya's universities*. Munene (2019) posited that the commercialisation

of universities has shifted the roles of university authorities, to that of fundraisers and managers at the expense of leading and defending academic freedom in their universities. Equally, studies conducted in public higher learning institutions in Zambia have pointed to inadequate funding as one of the key factors hampering the realisation of academic freedom, when it comes to conducting research and disseminating research findings through conference attendance (Lisulo *et al.*, 2021; Zambia National Education Coalition [ZANEC], 2014).

Notwithstanding the adverse impact of the neo-liberal shift on academic freedom and university autonomy, this paper contends that political or state interferences pose even a major threat to academic freedom in most countries on the continent. This is because ‘economic and political relations with the state bring overt dynamics of interference in addition to more covert relations, co-option, or collusion between higher education institutions and national agendas’ (Belluigi 2024:17). Accordingly, the thrust of this paper is to shift debates on the threats to academic freedom from the lenses of ‘market-university’ relations to ‘state-university’ relations. I discuss the in detail in the following section.

Academic freedom, university autonomy and politics in Zambia

Academic freedom in Zambia has a complex history that dates back to the establishment of the University of Zambia (UNZA) in 1966. In the university's early years, it became a battleground for President Kenneth Kaunda’s ideology of humanism, which clashed with opposing views from both academics and students. As the republican president and the chancellor of the university, Kaunda enforced the creation of the Human Relations Chair and facilitated the appointment of his close associate, Lord John Hatch, a British pro-nationalist advocate, to this position. This appointment occurred despite significant opposition from faculty and students (Macmillan 2014). It has been noted that President Kaunda's intervention in appointing John Hatch for an academic position usurped the university’s freedom to hire its own staff (Mboyonga 2024).

Like in many African countries, the initial optimism surrounding the Third Wave of democratisation has not led to a flourishing democratic environment in Zambia. During Frederick Chiluba’s presidency (1991-2001), the presence of state security forces at Copperbelt University and UNZA became commonplace due to frequent student strikes and protests declining funding in universities (Phiri 2017). However, the height of the state threat to academic freedom and university autonomy in Zambia was between 2015 and 2021 under President Edgar Lungu’s tenure. There was increased state intervention in appointing

university management, surveillance of teaching and discourse, self-censorship, and intimidation of academics and students. In the following sections, I focus on three major cases that highlight threats to academic freedom and the university system, while also interrogating how academicians have leveraged their academic authority to safeguard Zambia's democratic values and the subsequent conflicts that arose between lecturers and the government.

Political pressure on UNZA senate to confer honorary doctorate degrees to Presidents Lungu and Mnangagwa

Article 12 of the Kampala Declaration states that the autonomy of higher education institutions shall be exercised by democratic means of self-government, involving active participation of all members of the respective academic community (CODESRIA 1990). UNZA's power to exercise institutional autonomy was tested when the university was bulldozed into conferring honorary degrees to President Edgar Lungu and his Zimbabwean counterpart, Emmerson Mnangagwa. The two presidents are both alumnae of UNZA's faculty of law. Despite popular opposition from key stakeholders such as lecturers and students, the UNZA management went ahead to honor the two presidents on 29 June 2019. This move by the university was widely criticized in Zambia and beyond. Ironically, the two presidents were awarded degrees in good governance and law at a time when Zambia and Zimbabwe, there was increasing suppression of political dissents in both countries. Thus, the lecturers argued that there was no reasonable justification for the university to award the two leaders honorary doctorate degrees, especially in good governance, due to shrinking democratic spaces in both countries.

Zambian academicians bemoaned that such actions by UNZA management potentially undermined the university's credibility and image. For instance, Dr Derrick Ntalasha, The Copperbelt University Academics President cautioned that: 'If you start giving honours to people who do not deserve it, the credibility of the university is questioned. We are really degrading our credibility because academia must be above petty politics' (News Diggers 2019). According to media reports, the move to honor the two presidents was imposed on the university by political efforts and the UNZA senate, which is supposed to be an autonomous decision-making body of the university, was bulldozed (Lusaka 2019). Recalling the events prior to the conferring ceremony, a university senate member shared that:

An emergency Senate meeting was called via email and Senators were told that they will find the agenda as they go for the meeting," [...] As we sat, the agenda was circulated,

and a write-up to support the awarding of the two doctorates was attached (Lusaka Times 2019).

Thus, despite opposition from the lecturers, the university management still went ahead and conferred honorary doctorates upon the two presidents without following the university's own laid-down procedures. We see how the Senate, a supposedly autonomous decision-making body, can be politically captured to 'controversially' legitimize the legacy and image of political elites. Such controversial incidents raise concerns as to whether academic freedom is violated by institutional managers or by government involvement in academic and research institutions (Habib *et al.* 2008). Interesting parallels exist in other African countries. In Zimbabwe, for instance, the University of Zimbabwe awarded a doctorate degree in sociology to the then-first Lady Grace Mugabe, despite spending less than a year on her studies (Nzero *et al.* 2023). These incidences on how political capture of university management points to the weakening of academic freedom and university autonomy in African public universities, contrary to the provisions of the Kampala Declaration. The two incidents discussed in the next sections highlight the downside of such political co-optation on lecturers' academic freedom and tenure security.

Deregistration of UNZALARU

On January 8, 2020, 'PF goes for UNZALARU (Kaumba, 2020)' was the main news headline on the Zambia National Broadcasting (ZNBC), a public media outlet. The PF Deputy Media Director Antonio Mwanza demanded an apology from UNZALARU, for asking the electorate not to vote for the ruling party in the 2021 general election. Mwanza's demands came after UNZALARU Secretary General Dr Kennedy Mambwe was quoted in the media saying, 'If an election was to be called today, there are two categories of people that would vote for them [PF]; either those that are enjoying with them or idiots'(Lusaka Times, 2020a). Dr Mambwe made these remarks during a protest for delayed salaries at the university, where he spoke about the mismanagement at the university, political interference in university administration, the increased cost of living in Zambia, the decline in the rule of rule and other issues related to governance.

What followed was a series of attacks from members of the ruling party, government officials and university management, with a united call to have the academic and researchers' union

deregistered². For instance, on 7 January 2020, the UNZA management gave UNZALARU a 48-hour ultimatum in which to show cause why the Union should not be deregistered following the remarks by its Secretary General. It is worth noting, here that UNZALARU was one of the critical voices that spoke against, issues of corruption, political violence, clamping down on private media, police brutality, and other forms of oppression during Lungu's rule. Thus, the action on the part of UNZA management was not surprising considering earlier calls by PF leaders and some government officials to deregister UNZALARU. In reality, the UNZA management decision was in response to the pressure from these outside forces. This was of course contrary to Article 11 of the Kampala Declaration, which states:

Institutions of higher education shall be autonomous and independent of the State or any other public authority in conducting their affairs, including administration, and setting up their academic, teaching, research and other related programmes (CODESRIA, 1990).

Clearly the maneuvers by the PF through the actions of the Ministry of Labour to deregister UNZALARU threatened the autonomy of the University management in conducting their internal affairs. The political influence leading to the deregistration of UNZALARU shows that, to date, the shift towards democratic governance has not led to total academic freedom and institutional autonomy in public higher learning institutions. Reacting to the actions of their management, some UNZA academicians stated that the statement lacked understanding of human decency and academic freedom (Sishuwa, 2020). As observed by Mngomezulu and Maposa (2017:180) 'while it may be argued that Africa has been moving in the right political direction, with a reduction of cases of overt dictatorship, governments do not generally welcome criticism from academics in their countries'. The continued political harassment of academics in Zambia has led to the conclusion that 'the state of academic freedom in public universities has been facing more challenges under the multi-party dispensation than was the case under the one-party system'(ZANEC 2014:26).

Despite the existence of 'autonomous structures' such as the University Council and the Senate, the government has often exerted unlimited power on the affairs of universities on the premise that public institutions are dependent on public funding. For instance, the Minister of Education still retains the power to appoint members of the university councils in public universities. As a result of such unlimited powers, there have been concerns that the appointment of top

² For an in-depth understanding of the events relating to this, see (Kaumba, 2020; Lusaka Times, 2020a,b; Sishuwa, 2020)

university officials is usually characterised by political patronage, where positions like Vice Chancellors, Deputy Vice Chancellors, Registrars and membership to university councils are awarded on account of loyalty to the ruling party. This practice has contributed to suppressing academic freedom and institutional autonomy in many universities across the continent (Ogachi 2011), leading some scholars to describe academic freedom in Africa as a myth (Mngomezulu & Maposa 2017).

The Sishuwa Sishuwa Incidence

By far, the most potent threat to academic freedom and institutional autonomy in Zambia during the PF's reign was the threats of sedition levelled at University of Zambia (UNZA) historian Dr Sishuwa Sishuwa and the subsequent disavowal of his academic tenure by the university management. Although this incident warrants a full paper to capture all the intricacies, space here does not permit it. In late March 2021, the PF government targeted academic Sishuwa for authoring an opinion piece entitled, "Zambia may burn after the August elections. Here's how to prevent this". The article was published in the *Mail & Guardian* of South Africa on 22nd March 2021. Reacting to the opinion piece, Emmanuel Mwamba, then Zambia's ambassador to Ethiopia and the African Union, alleged that an opposition party paid Sishuwa for his article. In April, Mwamba further accused Sishuwa of sedition and being sponsored by outside forces with the intent to destabilise peace and security in the country. Mwamba, therefore, wrote a letter to the inspector general of police, prompting an investigation into the academic for sedition.

Thus, in light of the Sishuwa incident, Mwamba's state-sponsored action was a direct assault on the aspirations of the Kampala Declaration. Particularly, Article 16 of the Declaration states that:

The State is obliged to ensure that no official or organ under its control produces or puts into circulation disinformation or rumours calculated to intimidate, bring into disrepute or in any way interfere with the legitimate pursuits of the intellectual community (CODESRIA 1990).

According to Zambia National Education Coalition, 'it has become commonplace to label some researchers as 'supporters of the opposition even when research evidence itself is reflective of the reality obtaining on the ground' (ZANEC 2014:22). Being labelled as an opposition has many negatives for those working in public institutions. It means reduced opportunities for promotions, funding and isolation, especially from management, which, in the case of

academicians, has the potential to cause insecurity to one's tenure. Thus, the fear of being labelled as an opposition has forced some academicians and researchers to institute self-censor approaches to their research, which impedes their epistemic capabilities. Some of these measures include not taking part or commenting on any topic or events in communities such as human rights abuses, police brutality and other forms of institutional abuses, which might be rendered politically sensitive. The negative implication of such practices is that 'the critical voice is silenced and creativity, imagination, and the path to discovery are lost' (Cole 2017:866), as lecturers' right to exercise their academic freedoms for the common good is suppressed in the process. A study presented at the *National Symposium on Academic Freedom* revealed that 25 per cent of academic staff across six Zambian public universities were afraid to exercise academic freedom due to fear of political victimisation (Higher Education Authority 2021). Since academic freedom is indispensable for teaching and learning, researching and publishing, restricting any of these elements negatively affects its realisation (Mngomezulu & Maposa 2017), as the Sishuwa incidence shows.

The Sishuwa incidence further gives credence to the earlier findings in the literature that government interference is the major threat to academic freedom at UNZA (Lisulo *et al.* 2021). Specifically, the reaction of UNZA management to this incident reinforces the arguments that university managers have often been at the forefront of suppressing academic freedom in African universities rather than defending it (Ibonvbere 1993; Ogachi 2011; Zeleza 2003). For instance, in reacting to Sishuwa's sedition charges, UNZA management distanced itself and disavowed him, even though he was still a tenured lecturer. Through its then Acting Head - Communication and Marketing, Dr Brenda Bukowa, the university issued a press statement on 27 April 2021 under the headline, 'UNZA Disassociates itself from Dr Sishuwa's seditious article'. The statement read in part:

As a reservoir of intellectuals, the university has guaranteed academic freedom to its students and members of staff to challenge socio-scientific issues with the aim of generating new knowledge and solutions for the benefit of our country. However, Management will not be a party to the abuse of academic freedom to advance personal agendas while using the name of the University to give credence to such abuses (Lusaka Times 2021).

The reaction by the UNZA management serves as an example of how university managers, in acquiescence with governments, suppress academic freedom in their institutions under the guise of social responsibility. CODESRIA noted in this case that, Dr Sishuwa's rights were

threatened he did not abrogate any known social responsibility as an intellectual (CODESRIA, 2021). Additionally, a statement of solidarity for academic freedom issued by UNZALARU stated that:

[T]he press statement in question reveals the growing and alarming trend of weakening the practice of academics at the University of Zambia under the current crop of managers....While we note that public universities are more susceptible to political pressure because they receive funds from the government, UNZALARU believes that the biggest and most feared letdown is in the approach taken by the Management team. The University of Zambia Management is wantonly disregarding and violating the principles of academic excellence, among which, is academic freedom (Phiri & Mambwe 2021).

Although the collective solidarity by academic community members, within and outside Zambia contributed to the abandonment of sedition charges against Sishuwa, the damage had already been done to academic freedom and institutional autonomy at the university. The individual and collective actions by academicians and organisations, within and outside Zambia to rally behind Sishuwa epitomise the fact that collegiality is a mark of academic freedom. This collective agency is in sync with Henning Melber's remarks that 'where there's no fight for it, there's no [academic] freedom' (Melber 2006). Thus, the Zambian case shows that actualising the Kampala Declaration requires collective capabilities, agency and actions within the country and beyond.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the pernicious relationship between the PF's sliding towards autocracy and constraints on academic freedom in Zambia. It has demonstrated that the political intrusion in the operations of the UNZA senate, deregistration of UNZALARU, harassment and the sedition charges against Sishuwa Sishuwa before the 2021 elections epitomised the declining academic freedom and institution autonomy in Zambia. These incidences suggest the changing nature of Zambian progressive liberalism and the precarious state of intellectual freedom and university autonomy. However, despite the prevailing hostile political environment, the Zambian intelligentsia communities exercised agency to drive public opinion regarding incompetence, corruption, political violence, and other undemocratic tendencies. The paper has demonstrated that the politicisation of public universities through state interference increased the regulation and surveillance of academics, thereby threatening their academic freedom and the autonomy of universities and thwarting the aspirations espoused in the Kampala Declaration.

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