

**IS A LIBERAL CONCEPTION OF UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY  
RELEVANT TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN AFRICA?**

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## **DECLARATION**

By submitting this dissertation electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the owner of the copyright thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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## ABSTRACT

The dissertation investigates whether liberal conceptions of autonomy are relevant to higher education in African. And if they are relevant, the dissertation further examines the extent to which liberal conceptions of autonomy can enhance governance arrangements of the higher education system. The focus of the research is on governance arrangements. It proceeds by exploring selected cases of African universities in order to show that these universities function autonomously along a continuum of less autonomous to more autonomous (or substantively autonomous) systems, and argues that universities with the least autonomy can be said to function as less liberal institutions and those with more autonomy function as liberal universities.

Different philosophical conceptions of autonomy are examined (in Chapter 4) to foreground what may be considered as constitutive meanings or marks of liberal autonomy. The constituent elements include freedom, rationality and objectivity, authenticity and identity, responsibility, critical thinking, and the enhancement of a vibrant critical community. This discussion has considered autonomy from a specific historical context of conceptual theorisation. In view of this, autonomy can be considered as more liberal and / or less liberal depending on the characteristics of the constituent elements. A continuum exists in conceptions of autonomy. This dissertation argues for a liberal communitarian position of autonomy where the “encumbered self” is acknowledged together with its life circumstances (Callan, 1997; Sandel, 1984). The recognition of the situatedness of being further sustains the concept of a deliberative process of engagement and promotes the public good.

The dissertation has also examined the development of higher education in Germany, England and the United States in order to understand how conceptions of autonomy in each of these systems have developed against the background of the particular societies at the different historical moments. For instance, Wittrock’s (1993) account of the universities in Western Europe, England and

America acknowledges that as much as universities are situational; that universities are neither disembodied nor mindless in terms of how they frame their missions, yet again the same universities represent a particular function and identity as reflective spaces in different societies across generations. This discussion has further looked at university autonomy through the symbolisms of the University of Reason, the University of Culture, and the University of Excellence (Readings, 1996).

Chapter Five has argued that neoliberalism and globalisation can make university governance less autonomous. Despite that neoliberalism and globalisation have been ushered in to make the university space the most dynamic in research and technology, such an approach has ushered in a competition-concentrated model of higher education in Europe and America (Scott, 2006: 129-130). While acknowledging that “ economic and technological forces have impacted on the university, undermining some of its modernist assumptions based on the idea of autonomy and underpinned by academic self-governance”, Delanty (2004: 248-249) considers these shifts and forces as multidirectional and not uni-linear in the sense of one replacing another. The dissertation argues that the African higher education system has similarly been affected by globalisation and neo-liberalism. Despite their being founded on notions of freedom, globalisation and neoliberalism undermine the practice and governance of higher education on the African continent. This dissertation argues that the function of universities is not just to focus on its economic extension but also and more importantly its civic role, and proposes that higher education in Africa can fulfil its civic role by the creation of a cosmopolitan citizen. In this way, the African university has a real chance to widen its autonomy. In conclusion, the implications of this envisaged civic role of the university on academic freedom and institutional autonomy are also examined.

## OPSOMMING

Diè tesis ondersoek of liberale kosepsies van outonomie relevant is vir hoër onderwys in Afrika en in gevalle waar dit wel die geval is die mate waartoe diesulke kosepsies beheermaatreëls van die hoër onderwyssisteem bevorder. Die fokus van die ondersoek is gerig op beheermaatreëls. Die ondersoek gaan voort en ondersoek 'n geselekteerde aantal gevalle van Afrika universiteite om aan te toon dat diè universiteite outonoom funksioneer op 'n kontinuum van minder outonome tot meer outonome stelsels en argumenteer dat universiteite met die minste outonomie as minder liberale instellings en die met meer outonomie as liberale instellings beskou kan word.

Verskillende filosofiese kosepsies van outonomie word verken (in hoofstuk 4) om die wesenlike betekenis of kenmerke van liberale outonomie te belig. Die wesenselemente van outonomie wat so aan die lig gekom het sluit in die van vryheid, rasionaliteit en objektiwiteit, outentiekheid en identiteit, verantwoordelikheid, kritiese denke en die bevordering van 'n dinamiese en kritiese gemeenskap terwyl begrip van outonomie voortspruit uit 'n spesifieke historiese konteks van teoretisering van die kosepsies. Outonomie kan in die lig hiervan beskou word as meer liberaal en/of minder liberaal na gelang van die aard van die wesenskenmerke aanwesig; en die wyse waarop die kenmerke gemanifesteer word – 'n kontinuum bestaan dus in die kosepsie van outonomie. In die tesis word geargumenteer vir 'n liberale gemeenskapsposisie van outonomie waar die belemmerde self tesame met sy/haar lewensomstandighede erken word (Callan, 1997; Sandel, 1984). Die erkenning van die gesitueerdheid van bestaan handhaaf verder die konsep van 'n raadplegende proses van interaksie en bevorder openbare welstand.

Die tesis ondersoek verder die ontwikkeling van hoër onderwys in Duitsland, Engeland en die VSA om te verstaan hoe kosepsies van outonomie in elke sisteem ontwikkel het teen die agtergrond van die spesifieke gemeenskap op verskillende historiese momente. Wittrock (1993) se weergawe van die

universiteite in Wes Europa, Engeland en Amerika erken byvoorbeeld dat hoewel universiteite gesitueerd is universiteite nie disembodied of mindless is in terme van hoe hulle hul missies vorm hulle tog spesifieke funksie en identiteit as reflektiewe ruimtes in verskillende gemeenskappe oor generasies heen vreetenwoordig. Die ondersoek het verder na universiteit outonomie ondersoek aan die hand van die simbolisme van die Universiteit van die Rede, die Universiteit van Kultuur en die Universiteit van Uitnemendheid (Readings, 1996)

In Hoofstuk 5 word geargumenteer dat neoliberalisme en globalisasie universiteitsbeheer minder outonoom kan maak. Afgesien daarvan dat neoliberalisme en globalisasie infaseer is om die universiteitsruimte die mees dinamiese in navorsing en tegnologie het sodanige benadering 'n kompetisie-gesentreerde model van hoëronderwys in Europa en Amerika ingelei (Scott, 2006: 129-130). Delanty voer in die verband aan dat alhoewel ekonomiese en tegnologiese magte op universiteite geimpakkeer en sekere van sy modernistiese aannames gebaseer op die idëe van outonomie en onderle deur akademiese selfbeheer beskou hy hierdie verskuiwings en kragte as multirigting en nie uniliniër in die sin dat een die ander vervang. Daar word voorts geargument dat ook die hoëronderwysstelsel in Afrika op dieselfde wyse geaffekteer is deur globalisasie en neo-liberalisme. Ten spyte daarvan dat dit gevestig is op idees van vryheid ondermyn globalisasie en neo-liberalisme die beoefening en beheer van hoër onderwys op die Afrikaanse vasteland. Daar word voorts geargumenteer dat die funksie van universiteite nie net is om te fokus op ekonomiese uitbreiding nie maar ook, en belangriker, op haar burgerlike rol. Ten slotte word geargumenteer dat hoër onderwys haar burgerlike rol kan vervul deur die skepping van 'n kosmopolitiese burger. Op die wyse het die Afrika universiteit 'n ware geleentheid om haar outonomie te verbreed. Ook die implikasies van die gevisualiseerde burgerlike rol van die universiteit op akademiese vryheid en institusionele outonomie word onder die soeklig geplaas .

## **DEDICATION**

To my family, for enduring my continuous pursuit of knowledge.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION: ORIENTATION OF RESEARCH**

This research investigates whether a liberal conception of autonomy is relevant to governance arrangements in the higher education systems on the African continent and the extent to which liberal conceptions of autonomy can enhance governance arrangements of the higher education system. In response to these questions I argue that liberal conceptions of autonomy are relevant because the constituent elements of liberal autonomy can assist in the smooth operations of the university in Africa. In particular, I argue for a liberal communitarian position of autonomy. Liberalism is a philosophy that is founded on the importance of individual rights and freedoms in governance as the best way of promoting the individual person as well as managing public policy. A fuller discussion of liberalism is given later in Section 1.4 and Chapter 4. The position that I argue for in this dissertation is rooted in a liberal acceptance of the principles of liberal equality and pluralism as well as an acceptance of the social imbeddedness of human beings. The debate further locates the broadening of liberal conceptions as the major source for notions of globalisation and neo-liberalism. Despite the fact that these notions are founded on liberal notions of autonomy, I further argue that the influence of globalisations and neo-liberalism on African higher education systems has made these systems less autonomous. In order to make higher education governance more autonomous, I propose the adoption and enhancement of cosmopolitan norms and values within African higher education systems for making universities more autonomous and letting them contribute towards a democratic civic role in societies. In this thesis, “cosmopolitanism” will be used to mean a philosophical position that prioritises the belief that people are essentially connected to each other because they share the same “nature” – humanness. This form of cosmopolitanism also believes that our belonging is secondary to our common nature as people. The cosmopolitan perspective further advocates that as moral agents, people ought to be aware of the consequences of their actions towards each other, and that this requires our conversations to take account of the importance of forgiveness and friendship

(Benhabib, 2006: 19; Waghid, 2005: 331). I will elaborate on these views later in Chapter 6.

This dissertation sets out to answer its main questions by first deconstructing the meanings and relationships between the concepts of governance, power and autonomy in the higher education sector in general. This is done in order to locate the place and function of autonomy in the higher education system. In this dissertation, “governance” will be used to designate decisions that define expectations, grant power or even verify performance. The traditional meaning of steering will be employed to check how the exercise of political power and the use of institutional resources are made use to the general benefit of the public. In other words, the conceptual framework of governance in this dissertation will lean on processes more than statutes or institutional structures. Within the matrices of “governance”, questions of autonomy will arise. While noting the variations that exist in defining “autonomy” within philosophy, this dissertation will argue for a conceptual reposition of autonomy to mean the capacity of rational individuals to make informed, uncoerced decisions without, at the same time and in the same regard, abrogating their obligations and responsibility to other people (including future generations) as well as the particular conditions of society at a given time. I argue that only when the particular conditions of life are taken into systematic controversy within the processes of making informed choices, will such “autonomous” living refer to true self-governance.

A purposive sample of higher education governance systems on the African continent will be looked at in order to uncover underlying conceptions of academic freedom and university autonomy as manifested within the governance systems. The purposive sample on higher education systems in Africa is provided as way of gauging whether liberal autonomy is relevant or not. The notion of “relevance” will be employed in this dissertation to test how pertinent or applicable are the governing structures given the historical, political, economic and socio-cultural position of higher education systems on the African continent. The location of the research question along the lines of relevance assumes that higher education has a particular end towards which it should be striving. Later

in the dissertation I argue for a vision of higher education practice that prepares students to meet the global challenges. Among the global challenges I further argue that the cultivation of cosmopolitan values and norms is best suited for advancing this cause while at the same time mitigating the negative impact of globalisation and neo-liberalism on higher education systems in Africa. Given this orientation, the size of the sample will not be considered as a major issue of focus in this dissertation. What will be of value in the sample are the general characteristics of governance that reveal the forms of autonomy prevailing in these systems or not.

I now put forward an argument as to why forms of governance systems are viable avenues for assessing forms of autonomy in higher education institutions. This discussion will enable me to introduce debates around issues of autonomy and the context of higher education in Africa.

### **1.1 Governance and power in higher education**

My understanding of governance and power in higher education systems will be linked to governance of public institutions since public higher education institutions on the African continent are the primary focus of this study. Governance of higher education systems will be taken to mean the way higher education systems and institutions are managed and organised (Neave, 2006: 4). In many cases, the management and organisation of higher education refers to a multitude of things, including the way the power and/or authority structures are organised. Such arrangements may have to deal with questions about who reports to whom, who does what, and many other things. To many people, this kind of arrangement is usually understood to be constituted within the acts of an institution promulgated by their respective parliaments and constitutions.

As opposed to constitutional meanings of management and organisational arrangements in higher education systems, I argue that ‘management’ and ‘organisation’ need to go beyond the frames of constituted acts to include life-forms and the various ways in which people manage emerging problems in their

lives. In this regard, governance arrangements also include how the different players live out and execute their duties, obligations and responsibilities as well as the perceived state of affairs in the higher education system itself. Hence Neave (2006: 4) also argues that governance in higher education systems refers to the dynamics in the balance of power and the mode of coordination between key players and local university authorities.

The idea that the management and organisation of higher education systems is linked to ‘balance of power’, ‘coordination’ and ‘authority’, as Neave has indicated above, is intriguing for the purposes of this work. In the first place, the idea of balance of power tells a story about the nature of higher education systems and their environments. Since this discourse is mainly concentrated on public higher education, the idea of balance of power will be understood in this context to refer to different levels of the structural organisation of higher education institutions and systems in relation to public interest. For instance, it may refer to the level and extent to which councils exert their influence on other bodies in the institutional structures of the university such as the senate, deans and faculty committees and other college committees and how such influence and acts relate to the interests of the other players and the system as a whole. Balance of power can also relate to how other players in the management of higher education systems perceive their roles in relation to the functions and authority of those in leadership positions in the university. As such, governance will naturally relate to a myriad of issues in higher education systems.

Naturally, the organisational structure of higher education systems *worldwide* is understood to be a vertical ladder of increasing authority and command as one moves up. A properly managed system of higher education is one in which the relations between the different stages of authority are smooth and converse with each other. In other words, a properly managed system is one in which there is coordination between the various authority structures and their subordinates. Ajayi, Goma and Johnson (1996: 176), quoting Saint, state that university governance refers to the “mechanisms whereby an institution incorporates the participation of relevant interest groups in defining the scope and content of its



work – including the capacity to mediate among these interests when they enter into conflict – and the means whereby it demonstrates accountability to those who support it through its mission, mandate and application of its resources in the pursuit of these goals”. In other words, governance in the higher education system refers to the way role players execute their functions. In many cases the governance of universities is legally provided for in their acts and statutes, as Ajayi *et al.* (1996) also agree.

While noting other considerations, like the one above, on what university governance implies, I further argue that the governance of higher education systems means far more than constitutional arrangements in university Acts, funding modalities and other structural arrangements. Although the way in which structures are laid out is foundationally important, university governance includes how such university structures play themselves out in real-time cases, the various roles and the different understandings that people playing the roles have and the nature of the relationship between the higher education system and other systems in the nation. This understanding of higher education governance assumes a people-driven understanding of higher education systems in which the relationships between key players and other agents in the system directly reflect how people acting or involved in the university system want to be understood by others. It is at these moments and many others that I will later make the case for the infusion of cosmopolitan values and norms into the governing systems of higher education on the Africa continent.

For example, higher education systems have historically promoted different social, economic and even political thought patterns that eventually became dominant in societies. In this regard, higher education systems can be equated to opinion setters and leaders. But such a role of higher education also reveals that the promotion of a particular way of approaching social and political issues by its very nature indirectly reveals how the higher education system would want the outside world to understand it. Nevertheless, this particular way of looking at things, or perspective, is done *corporately* by the individual persons, organisations or centres within the system. In other words, the corporate identity

and nature of any university is found in the actions and decisions of its different operating subjects or agents.

Furthermore, I take note that funding modalities in higher education systems say more than the availability of funds to higher education. Funding modalities in many African states are indicators of the social and political dimensions higher education systems operate in. A majority of higher education systems on the African continent happen to be state sponsored. This point is discussed later in this work. Hence, it suffices to mention that the different mechanisms put in place by governments as a condition of their sponsorship and monthly financial monitoring of expenditure before any new funds can be released to the university tend to be perceived as examples of state control in the governance arrangements of the higher education systems. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that in the financial world, such mechanisms are in place for the sake of financial accountability rather than control.

Whether one opts to look at funding, management or selection of students and appointment of lecturers, it is a common phenomenon to conclude that the governance arrangements and management systems of higher education are a source of protracted debates. One may wonder what really is at stake in higher education systems so as to attract such concern about how its systems are arranged. I think that it is clear from this that higher education has traditionally been considered a 'powerhouse'. Various characteristics of the notion of 'power' are manifested within the operations of the higher education system itself. But such power can also be played out in the relationship between the higher education system and the larger society.

I now move on to argue that the concept of power in relation to higher education governance can be understood from two perspectives. On the one hand, the idea that higher education is involved in the production and dissemination of new knowledge creates a sense of power within the institutions because "knowledge is power". The concept of knowledge as power can be understood in relation to the empowerment of individuals who have gone through higher education in any

society. In other words, a person who undergoes higher education and training fundamentally becomes a transformed person in the sense that one's capabilities become enhanced. Secondly and linked to the first idea is the idea that higher education systems in their processes and outcomes have the potential to shift power relations in society. The potential to shift power relations is higher on many students coming from underprivileged families in Africa, once they have managed to go through the higher education system. In other words, through the activities of teaching and research, higher education systems have enabled individuals, qualified through their systems, to assume higher social and economic positions in their societies than they otherwise would have occupied without such an education. In this regard, I argue that there are insignificant cases of individuals who are worse off after finishing their university education, compared to their original status at entering the university, than those individuals who finally emerge in improved or better-off positions. In other words, more people are better off after attaining higher education. In this regard, I further postulate that the worsening of one's position after successfully finishing higher education may be a factor not directly arising from one's higher educational status. These points of strength in individuals that come as a result of higher education consolidate the idea that knowledge is power, hence universities and their management systems become contested power domains. I also acknowledge that the power that one gets after going through higher education may in many ways also be seen as entrenching the existing power relations in many societies.

This explains why there is a general understanding that higher education has within itself the power to deliver certain desirable goods either to the persons who are engaged with it or to society in general. In other words, higher education systems are considered to have an inherent capacity to affect the social, economic and political landscape of a nation. As such, questions regarding how such higher education systems are governed do not only remain knowledge issues but they also acquire a vital economic and political force within and between different societies.

In consideration of all that is at stake in higher education systems, the management and organisation of the system has become a heavily contested terrain. The contestation in the governance of higher education systems can be considered from a multitude of angles or sides. It can be considered from the point of *where* the higher education system obtains its power, *who* exercises control in the system, *for what* purpose and *to whose* benefit. This kind of questioning and the answers it delivers may escape the ordinary terrain of answers. Fundamentally, such questioning goes to the heart of what a higher education system is or is not. The questioning touches upon such things as what the higher education system is free to do or not do, what its players within the system can/should do or not do and the kind of leverage the higher education system has in playing itself out in relation to the other systems and/or goals in the larger society. In view of the nature of these questions, I argue that debates about the governance of higher education systems on the African continent fundamentally reveal the conception people have or want to have of the university in relation to society in general. Such conceptions can touch on the identity of the university, its autonomy and other things.

Ajayi *et al.* (1996: 176–177) continue to argue that what distinguishes the university institution from other institutions is “its relatively fragmented organisational structure, the diffusion of decision-making power among its many semi-autonomous units, and the substantial authority and initiative vested in individual academics, especially the professoriate (and deans)”. If organisational structures, decision-making powers and the agency of individuals are some of the marks of such contestation, one can fairly conclude that the contestation about the management and organisation of higher education systems is in fact a contestation over the autonomy of higher education systems themselves.

If the above concluding statement is valid and true, glimpses into university autonomy reveal that issues of autonomy, although they become elements of constituted acts, cannot be observed outside the governing structures in place and forms of institutional culture. In this regard, I proceed to claim that it is through an analysis of governance structures and power systems that one comes to know

the nature of the autonomy a particular higher education system exercises. In other words, autonomy *per se* is an element that one cannot set out to observe in the operations of a higher education system. What is at stake are concrete arrangements of operations. It is through these governing arrangements and their objectives that one can only derive a sense of the autonomy enshrined or not in the whole system.

## **1.2 Possible avenues for understanding university autonomy in governance structures**

In this subsection I draw on works that have discussed the relationship between government and higher education in order to understand possible positions of autonomy in higher education systems. One caution I need to consider is that such a usage only matters from the point of view of taking considerable interest in public higher education systems. I also note that although governments on the African continent continually want to know the nature of their private higher education systems, such interests are considered only from the point of knowing how such systems assist in developing the citizens, ordinarily vested in the government. In this regard, governments have not shown interest in the intricate operations of private higher education systems except for their contribution to the desired national good. On the other hand, public higher education systems are considered differently because in many ways governments want to see these systems stand as direct agents for serving government interest in meeting its public interest. Similarly, the government, which is the legal custodian of public interest, is inevitably considered as a key partner in the running of the public higher education systems.

The governance of public higher education systems makes certain assumptions about the desirable place of the state in relation to the public higher institution (Neave, 2006; Omar & Figaji, 2000). In general, the position of the state in the governance of the higher education system tends to vary between three ideological positions. These ideological positions can also be considered as models of governance (Omar & Figaji, 2000: 80). According to Omar and Figaji

(2000: 81) the three models are *state control*, *state interference* and *state supervision*. Nevertheless I am not going to provide a detailed analysis of the motives behind each state inclination in relation to higher education except for what each means in terms of higher education governance. In the following paragraphs I explore what each model means.

### **1.2.1 The state control model of university governance**

The *state control model* concentrates on the control of the higher education system by the state and as a consequence considers the efficient management of the same of less importance. In this model, the state determines the activities of the academy with regard to allocation of funds, appointment of professors, student selection models and many more. Such an approach to higher education systems is based on an understanding that the higher education system is created and completely funded by the state and should be controlled/determined by the state. According to this view, the state may achieve this control through either political or bureaucratic means. State control can be manifested through various university processes such as determining the conditions and modes for selection into the university and controlling the actual process of selection, controlling who may hold high posts in the university system and demoting personnel who are perceived to be anti-government and controlling funding mechanisms such as determining the limit of tuition fees universities can charge students, as indicated above.

One can also add that in some instances state control has manifested itself in the university system through monitoring mechanisms to the extent of instilling in individuals the perception that even internal activities are monitored by state agents. In this case the state and its agents assume the role of 'Big Brother'. State control as a model would include all monitoring activities that the state institutes over the university and its personnel going beyond the frames of co-operative action. Such cases of state monitoring of the higher education system can include the monitoring of staff and student political behaviour for the state's own political advantage. In other words, the rationale that states may have for the

control of higher education systems in this model are far from advancing the ends of knowledge in the concerned communities, but more for its own political survival.

### **1.2.2 The supervision model of university governance**

In the *state supervision model*, the state provides a framework within which higher education is expected to perform. The key players within the higher education system are considered to do their jobs with some degrees of autonomy. Even if one case can have state supervision as a general characterisation of the state-university relationship, it is impossible to rule out moments of government intervention. But according to this model, government intervention is considered desirable only when the agreed desired ends and goals are not produced or reached. In other words, government maintains the role of retroactive intervention.

The state supervision model assumes that government and the university system are equal partners that need to agree on what is best for a future citizen. In this case, universities understand themselves as agents of implementation in the best way they see fit and in relation to how universities themselves understand their function in society. Even though government has the right to intervene when the desired goals are not attained, such an intervention is worked out in coordination with the university structures. This conception means that there is a shared understanding between the state and the university on the future of a country and its citizens. In many instances, this desirable working relationship between the university and the state can only be achieved within conditions attuned to deliberative democracy because among other things, “deliberation not only lends legitimacy to decisions about matters of public interest, but also brings epistemic advantages to democratic processes” (Coughlan, Divala, Enslin, Kissack and Mathebula, 2007: 84). In this regard, the supervision model of higher education governance also works to the advantage of promoting a deliberative culture in a nation. I will come to this point later in this work.

### **1.2.3 The state intervention model of university governance**

The last form of relationship between universities and government is *state intervention* (Omar & Figaji, 2000: 80–81). State interference appears in institutions that claim to be autonomous, legislatively or not, but nevertheless also see government intervening in the activities of the universities when government sees that such activities are opposed to its own political agenda. In the state interference model, the most crucial functions of the university become sanctioned by the state, although there may never be any legislation stipulating this. State mechanisms and political agendas become operative in the academy.

Because of the instability of the nature of governing systems and other political systems, especially on the African continent, the state intervention model usually results in unstable governing systems in the higher education sector on the continent. In a few cases, interference takes place at the change of government when this change simultaneously changes the face of high-ranking personnel in the university. Interference can also be seen when government publicly claims to have a democratically arranged relationship with the university but forces the university to toe the line behind the scenes. In Chapter 2 I will show instances of state interference in higher education on the African continent. These cases include the university system in Zimbabwe and the dictation over the quota selection system in Malawi.

The notion of interference ostensibly has the implication of dislocating or disturbing the normal order of operation. In a number of cases, such interference is seen as antithetical to autonomy, whether considered from the point of view of negative freedom (Berlin, 1984) or the point of view of situated autonomy or positive liberty (Berlin, 1984; Callan, 1997). (These conceptions of autonomy are explored in Chapter 4.) But the understanding of interference as antithetical to autonomy is one complication in the idea of interference as a model of governance. There can be a second line of thought in interference as a model of governance. I particularly refer to persistent interference to the extent that such interference acquires a distinctive pattern of governance. This understanding of



interference does not contain in itself a view of interruption of the arrangement of things because in one way or another people expect that state operations are likely to interfere with what they may consider as a normal way of running things while at the same time also holding such state interference as normal and expected.

It is more in the second line of thought that the idea of interference *per se* does not denote lack of autonomy and that imagining interference in this way does not say much about whether a particular situation is free or not free. Hence I propose that much of what can validly be regarded as interference are instances of infringement on the agreed course of running affairs or standard protocol. In other words, the presence of the state in itself is not indicative of less autonomy.

In conclusion to these smaller subsections on the different forms of state-university relationship, it is clear that the models and their characteristics are not water-tight formulas. In other words, I understand the models to exist alongside each other although at times there has been the impression that each of the models exists in isolation. It is theoretically possible for an institution of higher learning (a university) to exhibit different forms of the nature of its relationship with the state, whether at the same time and in different occasions or simply at different periods of its university life. This is largely dependent on particular issues that are under consideration at the different occasions. I acknowledge that this thinking begs the question of whether the models are definite models in the final analysis.

What I have tried to do in this subsection is to highlight that it is in the governance structures where forms of autonomy manifest themselves. If it is the case that there are variations in terms of where power tilts in the higher education systems, it is also the case that the tilting of power in the whole governance arrangement will tend to define the higher education system's understanding and application of academic freedom and institutional autonomy. It can also be indicated that the different forms of state-university relationships such as state control, supervision and interference manifest themselves in forms that issues of

academic freedom and institutional autonomy take within individual universities. The terms *academic freedom* and *institutional autonomy* have often been misunderstood to mean one and the same thing. These two similar terms are different, though, and in the subsequent section, I follow up on this distinction.

### **1.3 Institutional autonomy and academic freedom**

In my introductory remarks, I have introduced the concept of autonomy and I note here that there are different conceptions of autonomy both in theory and practice. The orientation of this dissertation understands autonomy from the point of self-governance, that is, being a law unto oneself. Nevertheless, rational autonomy requires that one be aware of the conditions within which such autonomy arises or is shaped and that autonomy necessarily entails forms of responsibility. Similarly, several different and contested meanings have been offered for institutional autonomy and academic freedom.<sup>1</sup> Terminologically, institutional autonomy is the same thing as university autonomy. A number of scholars treat academic freedom and institutional autonomy synonymously. For instance, Du Toit (2007: 15), quoting the work of Moodie, states that academic freedom involves three distinct elements. These elements are individual academic freedom, academic rule (or self-regulation) within the university and the autonomy of the institution of the university in relation to state and society. This position brings academic freedom and institutional autonomy to an inseparable relationship whereby one cannot be fully understood without the other. Hence, in most discourses, institutional autonomy and academic freedom have been indelibly linked together. In this exposition I will endeavour to look at these two elements as different, although they are closely related to each other.

The idea of institutional autonomy centres on the right of the institution to carry out its affairs with as little interference as possible from external influences (Saunders, 2005: 1). Others consider this right as the right of the university to determine for itself on academic grounds who may teach, what may be taught, how it will be taught and who may be admitted to study (Berkhout Waghid,

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<sup>1</sup> A full discussion of the evolution of the concept of university autonomy, which is the seedbed for any discussion of academic freedom and institutional autonomy, will be given later in Chapter 4.

Taylor, van Wyk & de Klerk, 2005: 1). The determination over what may be taught and how that is taught relates closely to what individual academics may autonomously decide to do central to their work. I therefore concede that such consideration brings a constitutive dependency between academic freedom and institutional autonomy in the sense that the practice of academic freedom gets vested in an autonomous community of lecturers and students dedicated to the service of truth (see also Hall, 2006).

Saunders' (2005) re-conceptualisation of institutional autonomy will be shown to be problematic as I embark on an evaluation of expositions of autonomy later in Chapter 3. The problems inherent in Saunders' (2005) conception involve signalling the idea that being autonomous means not being influenced by any other factors or sources apart from oneself. As will be shown, such a view presupposes an unencumbered self. It presupposes the existence of a self in isolation or in wonderland. I think this conception is problematic because it does not represent the full reality of human existence and how teaching and learning actually occur in and between human beings. Education by its very nature presupposes interaction with the 'other'. This interaction automatically diffuses the sense of an educational institution that would operate without being influenced directly or indirectly by the external other/reality.

On the other hand, I need to note that I understand the conception of institutional autonomy of Berkhout *et al.* (2005) and that of Hall (2006) as implying that an institution determines its course of life in liaison with other factors or agents that the institution may come in contact with. In other words, autonomy is not lived in isolation but in co-ordination. Hence other factors are bound to shape the course of an autonomous life.

Wolpe, Singh and Reddy's (1995: 119) conceptualisation is understood as indicating that institutional autonomy refers to the parameters within which a university as an institution may do or not do certain things or offer certain programmes. According to this conception, university autonomy may be considered to deal with the relationship between the university and other

stakeholders such as the state or the corporate world. Hence, university autonomy refers to the broader framework of operation. Similarly, Ajayi *et al.* (1996: 176) argue that university autonomy protects the corporate rights of self-regulation that the state confers upon the university as an institution in legislation.

The analysis of university governance in Africa, which will be presented in Chapter 2, among other things, indicates that university autonomy is deemed to have been achieved by simply legislating that the university and its operations are independent. This particular conception evokes a specific understanding of the nature of autonomy, which I delve into in Chapter 4. But in a nutshell, it evokes a sense of freedom as merely ‘freedom from’, which Isaiah Berlin (1969) calls a negative conception. It is also very clear that this legislation as a condition of autonomy is compromised internally by conflating state functions in the life of the university, by making a sitting president a chancellor of every university and by giving the chancellor the prerogative to choose the majority of university council members, as will be shown is the case in a number of countries on the African continent. Hence, circumstances within which universities find themselves have led people to think that the extent and definition of university autonomy depends on the nature of the state and how the state relates to the university (Ajayi *et al.*, 1996: 176).

On a different reading, one can postulate that such a working relationship represents a conception of autonomy that is not lived in isolation but one that is negotiated through and by the different key players of society. But then, if autonomy is a matter of social negotiation, such negotiation may work better with a deconstructive approach than other approaches because of the inherent renewal that proponents of deconstruction bring to social practice if applied correctly. In this regard, people’s conceptions of university autonomy need to be negotiated from time to time between the state and the university and it should be realised that no single conception of university autonomy is applicable universally. But also underlying this conception is the belief that any such negotiation crucially or primarily depends on what one understands the person to

be and what may be considered as desirable and worth of achieving by the person given the different patterns of thought that one adopts (see also Biesta, 2006: 119). On a peripheral deterministic note, one can respond by querying how much is actually in control of the person and how much is accountable to other forces such as globalisation and cosmopolitanism. In Chapters 5 and 6, I return to these issues as I examine particular conceptions of autonomy and conceptions of a desirable contemporary university with a view to developing a cosmopolitan person.

Berkhout *et al.* (2005) argue that academic freedom refers to the immunities that the university teacher, as a professional, needs to enjoy in order to function effectively and the right of the academic to study and publish without any hindrance, except where such acts infringe on the rights of others. Hence Berkhout *et al.* (2005: 1) characterise academic freedom as “an unbiased and objective search for truth(s) or an endeavour in which boundaries of knowledge(s) and understandings are continuously and critically tested and expanded”. In this regard academic freedom gets justified because of its functional significance with regard to the advancement of knowledge, which demands that the processes of seeking objective truth should not be corrupted by parochial ideologies and interests (Ajayi *et al.*, 1996: 177). This thinking assumes that advancement of knowledge within the university and society cannot be achieved if university professors and lecturers are hindered from doing their job in the way they know best.

The above idea is similar to that of Wolpe *et al.* (1995: 119) who stress that academic freedom relates to the internal organisation of teaching and learning within an institution. In this regard, academic freedom may refer to how a subject already approved may be taught, from what orientation and with what content, as the individual academic may determine. It is important to note in this case that academic freedom is pursued in a manner that does not violate the constituents of institutional autonomy. But Wolpe *et al.* (1995) are also quick to caution that such freedom is not unlimited in the sense of the academic having a free hand in terms of choice of subjects and research tools. These authors also argue that

infringement on others' rights needs to be avoided in the exercise of such freedom.

In general this exposition proposes that autonomy is never absolute, that its exercise must be accountable to the terms and conditions of the governance structures in practice. As such, this assumption affects the way autonomy is understood. Crucial to this is also the fact that such assumptions will tend to shift the meaning(s) of autonomy in relation to the defining circumstances characterising higher education's relationships with its stakeholders. This will be shown by the different conceptions or understandings of autonomy held by different universities on the African continent.

#### **1.4 The quest for a liberal conception of autonomy: a snapshot**

This dissertation investigates whether a liberal conception of autonomy is relevant to higher education governance on the African continent. The dissertation centres itself on questions of relevance and the extent to which such forms of autonomy can be considered as relevant to higher education systems on the African continent. Such an interrogation invariably asks whether Africa, in particular, requires its own particular conceptions of autonomy in the governance of higher education systems given the environment of governance that is predominantly prevailing on the continent, as will be shown in Chapter 2. The evaluation of governance systems on the African continent will further probe whether there can be any conditions that militate against an exclusively liberal conception of autonomy in higher education. Through this process, I want to argue for situated forms of autonomy as relevant to the African higher education systems. But this kind of argumentation assumes a background regarding what liberal autonomy is and/or is not. Therefore, in the third chapter, I will dwell on various positions/aspects of liberal autonomy. In this chapter my main aim is to find and discuss constitutive meanings of liberal autonomy.

Liberal or not liberal, does it really matter in the way African universities are governed or managed? Does it matter how they go about doing what they

perceive as their mission? I suggest that this complexity be approached by first analysing the common and generative assumptions on freedom or autonomy in order to locate where the whole debate on academic freedom and institutional autonomy lies. This chapter will provide a provisional understanding of the concepts of liberty, liberalism, academic freedom and institutional autonomy as my preamble to what follows in Chapter 4, which goes into detail about what I perceive as competing conceptions of autonomy.

The prominence of philosophical debates over conceptions of freedom/liberty and autonomy came with the Enlightenment period, especially in the works of thinkers such as Kant. The Enlightenment period marks the beginning of a whole movement known as liberalism. What is central in liberalism is its strong belief in liberties, especially those of the individual person.

General discussions on freedom or liberty today tend to be marked by Berlin's (1969) initial characterisations of liberty as positive liberty and negative liberty. In general, the idea of negative liberty involves the absence of external constraint or control on the individual person, whereas positive liberty involves the individual person's capacity for self-determination. This is the capacity to map the course of life and events for one's life. As will be explained in Chapter 4, it is the concept of positive liberty that is the backbone of the ideal of autonomy.

A clarification of the idea of autonomy is crucial for this project because autonomy, understood from this positive sense, implies practical or material independence. In other words, the principle of autonomy in human life aims at the actual realisation of the desired human condition, whether individually or collectively. The structures that one finds in the governance systems of higher education on the African continent are partly a symbol and also a conceptualisation of how each national state or society would want to be or what it would want to become.

The positive conception of liberty can be broadened to include ideas of inner peace, the presence of inner control, an inner experience of choice, spontaneity,

fulfilment and even spirituality, where the individual finds the inner space to express herself or himself. This understanding of freedom is in tune with the operations of the human faculties such as the ability to act according to the dictates of reason and in accordance with one's own true self or values and the recognition of some universal values. In general this sense of freedom implies mastery over one's inner condition. In today's understanding the problem of autonomy has gone further to imply questions of how to organise human collectives with actual individual autonomy, especially if one considers the huge problem of free choice, free expression and free acting in the economy. But it is also possible to conceive autonomy as confined to areas of public dialogue or politics.<sup>2</sup> As such, considerations over the meaning of autonomy have also involved discourses in democratic theory.

The term *liberalism*, from which I coin *whether liberal conceptions of autonomy are relevant for higher education in Africa*, has been universally used to designate any ideology, philosophical view or political tradition that seeks to make liberty its primary political value and virtue. As such, liberalism can be seen as a social ethic that advocates liberty and equality in general. Because of the complexity of debates surrounding concepts of liberty, as will be shown in Chapter 4, debates on freedom and autonomy have tended to range from formal and limited formulations to substantive considerations. In some general characterisation people tend to associate autonomy or freedom with individual rights, freedom of thought for individuals, limitations on governance powers, especially by governments and religious institutions, the rule of law, the free exchange of ideas, a market economy that supports relatively free private enterprise, a transparent system of government in which the rights of all citizens are protected, and many more.

It is also important to note here that liberalism and democracy are essentially connected because of the importance both place on the liberty of individuals. Nevertheless, liberalism and democracy are not equivalent terms. Both would emphasise equal citizen rights by law and an equal opportunity to pursue one's

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<sup>2</sup> Similar conceptions can also be accessed from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom>.



chosen goals and to succeed in life. Liberalism thus makes a preferential option for forms of governance where the governed freely and willingly give their consent to be governed and recent democratic theory adds the conditions on which such a government should operate. Liberalism in this sense essentially opts for democratic processes. Although the preference for democratic processes has been misunderstood to mean representative democracy where a few chosen representatives actually rule, it is still believed to provide the checks and balances needed to protect the rights of citizens in contemporary societies. However, I think that for liberals, democracy is not an end in itself but an essential means to secure the liberty, individuality and diversity of individuals.

Despite the common grounds on which liberalism stands, it is not one homogeneous trend of thought. Just as notions of liberty have received diverse interpretation, liberalism also exists in various strands due to the complexity of the ideals it stands for. For instance, McLaughlin (1992) conceptualises liberalism through citizenship ideals. These ideals stretch liberal citizenship on a continuum between maximal and minimal characterisations. While McLaughlin's (1992: 236) characterisations of liberal and democratic citizenship, that is, identity, virtues, political involvement and social prerequisites, do not intend to address conceptions of liberty, it is the case that they are rooted in liberty itself. Similarly, liberalism can be conceived as a brand of thought that navigates between minimal or formal forms/characterisations and substantive or maximal conceptions.

In order to characterise the minimal and maximal conceptions within liberalism, I introduce some of the debates that Callan (1997) introduces in response to a form of liberalism believed to have been proposed and promoted by Rawls (1971). The formal or minimal conceptions within liberalism designate a concentration on formal, legal or judicial ascriptions (McLaughlin, 1992: 236). From an educational point of view, Callan (1997: 170) considers this form of liberalism as including "no more than the lowest common denominator in a society's understanding of what children need to learn". Callan's discussion assumes the predominance of the very liberal ideals.

Callan's (1997: 5) rejection of the communitarian assumption that virtue and liberalism simply do not mix and the untiring effort to stretch the liberal theory to include unconditional moral commitment, care and moral distress confirm the existence of substantive forms of liberalism. From McLaughlin's (1992) point of view, maximal perspectives of liberalism emphasise a clearer understanding of democratic principles, values and dispositions within the liberal system of thought. As such specific demands are placed upon the subscribers of this liberal thought to create specific dispositions and capacities required for the sustenance of the system. I think that this conception of liberalism yearns for something beyond the basics of a just society in Rawlsian terms.

Callan's (1997) commentary on Rawls' (1971) conception of liberalism acknowledges liberalism as both comprehensive and political. The recognition of comprehensive doctrines within democratic processes and the securing of a workable overlapping consensus can also be read in relation to McLaughlin's (1992) two ends of the continuum. On the one hand, there are variations of political liberalism, depending on how lax or stringent the criteria placed on the demands for reasonableness is (Callan, 1997: 19). On the other hand, variations of comprehensive liberalism are more determined by the level of tolerance and responsiveness to issues of plurality. Of crucial importance in the different characterisations of liberalism in relation to this thesis is the outcome on conceptions of autonomy that are viable for any liberal society or just any society wishing to become liberal.

Callan's (1997) *Creating Citizens* categorically distinguishes the two brands of thought within liberalism but particularly defends the broader version of liberalism. He highlights the fact that the liberal debate on autonomy centres on the different conceptions of an autonomous self. Callan considers that this autonomous self is "an unencumbered self". He argues against a conception, largely promoted by Sandel (1984) and others, that assumes that the self is unencumbered by any ends prior to choice. This view means that people are not obliged to fulfil any ends they have not chosen. As individuals people choose what they want to do and what they want to be and in such an exercise of

choosing they are not influenced by their circumstances except their desire to choose freely. Choice in its simplest forms becomes their sense of autonomy. This conception is close to the thinking that the essence of academic freedom resides in the freedom of the academic from external interference regarding “who shall teach, what they shall teach, how they teach and whom they teach” (Hall, 2006: 371, citing Higgins).

In a sense, the conception of an unencumbered self as quoted by Callan (1997) is parallel to Rawls’s conception of the autonomy needed for the formation of a basic society. In this regard, people agree to operate on the basis of the common elements they agree on and leave out of the agreement for social cooperation all things on which they fundamentally differ (Rawls, 1996: 194). Callan (1997) disputes such a reading of a liberal conception. He argues that such a thesis of liberal autonomy hinges on the bizarre metaphysics of the unencumbered self.

The truth is surely that whatever reflection autonomy requires does not demand that we can detach ourselves from all our ends. The requirement is only that we be capable of asking about the value of any particular end with which we currently identify and able to give a thoughtful answer to what we ask (Callan, 1997: 54).

I labour to give a clear conception of this position of autonomy because, among other things, it recognises the social and political situatedness of persons. In other words, I defend an understanding of autonomy that is lived deep within one’s comprehensive doctrines. This sense of autonomy is lived within the framework of people’s ends and not detached from them. This understanding falls within Callan’s notion of “choice as willing” and not “choice as choosing” (1997: 57). In “choice as choosing” the agent only faces a choice-set or possible alternatives from which to choose from, whereas in “choice as willing”, choice represents a categorical valuation and a decision is made on the basis of its suitability, not merely in consideration of comparison with other alternatives.

“Choice as willing” gives rise to valuation and commitment to choice, and such implications are not available in a process of simply choosing from alternatives on the simple basis of what is preferable at the time, “choice as choosing”. Similarly, the idea of the unencumbered self, an emblem of “choice as choosing”, can have “debilitating effects on legal and political thought” (Callan, 1997: 54). Callan’s conception of an autonomous self as living autonomously through “willing choice” will exert a great deal of influence on what the discourse on autonomy in African higher education should look like. Among other things, the conception choice as willing engages conscience and gives one the idea that “the process of forming one’s own judgement about how to live depends on careful assessment of the reasons available in a given social setting for living one way rather than the other” (Callan, 1997: 66). In other words, living autonomously means making choices willingly within and in full consideration of one’s given circumstances or environment for the good of the self and other. Recognition of this situatedness or imbeddedness brings meaning and life to autonomous living. Hence a good life can hardly be lived in utter disregard of the conditions of responsible choice and action in relation to responsibilities to the rights of others (Callan, 1997: 10–11, 68).

For me, the idea of republican freedom is seriously compromised if a lecturer continues to express him/herself with unhindered freedom, making unsubstantiated claims about some students with the aim of excluding them from class – all in the name of academic freedom (Waghid, 2006: 381).

### **1.5 Methodological considerations – Philosophical analysis**

This dissertation uses philosophical methodologies and philosophical analysis to resolve its questions. The idea of philosophical method can be traced right back from the pre-Socratic period to Socrates, Aristotle, to Descartes, Kant, Wittgenstein and many more. I characterise a philosophical method as that method whereby a person begins to wonder and doubt about accepted beliefs and their meanings. This is done in order to gain more clarity on issues and problems. Hence arguments and justifications become an integral part of the philosophical

methods. I think that my philosophical method will become incomplete without the use of philosophical analysis. I employ “philosophical analysis” to the “breaking down” or “analyzing” of key concepts central to the argument of autonomy I am making in this dissertation. Among some of the central issues are questions regarding what constitutes particularity in the various forms of governance? What would be their resultant effects on how a university lives itself out or makes claims of autonomous governance? What conceptions of autonomy are relevant to higher education on the African continent? What threats or forces further impact on the possibility of autonomous higher education systems? What responsibilities are facing higher education and how does higher education contribute to cultivating capable citizens of managing society? What is globalisation and neo-liberalism and how do they affect the conception of an autonomous university? How can a cosmopolitan perspective understanding help Africa in battling against the negative effects of neo-liberalism and globalisation while at the same time help in recreating the future citizen? The philosophical method that will be employed to resolve these questions is one that finds a common ground between the interpretive framework, as well as a critical perspective with a touch of post-structuralist analysis. I now explain some of the connecting ideas to this framework.

While philosophical analysis is a general term applied to the philosophical methodologies, analytical inquiry is a methodology associated with analytical philosophers such as Bertrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein, W.V.O. Quine and many others. Within this tradition analytical philosophy became famous for clarifying the meanings of language. There are two distinctive issues that one is bound to consider when beginning to bring the analytical framework into focus in a work like this dissertation. The first is the understanding that analytical philosophy largely seeks to clarify meaning, whether taken conceptually or linguistically (Curren, Hager & Robertson, 2003). It is notable that the early periods of analytical philosophy were heavily associated with mathematical logic, among other things.

One can also bring to the fore Kant's (1961) distinction between synthetic judgements and analytical judgements. Simply put, Kant's synthetic judgements come about because of people's assessment of experience whereas analytical judgements are those they make based on their understanding of concepts. Such an orientation of analytical judgements would assume analytical philosophy to use universalistic conceptions of meanings. Similarly, one can also argue that forms of universalism would make certain results easily predetermined and stated as a matter of fact.

Given the discourse on higher education autonomy that is the centre of this work, such analytical inclinations are likely to imply that discourse on higher education should create a universal conception of what academic freedom and institutional autonomy are according to the nature and functions of the higher education sector in general. In other words, according to this pattern of thought valid assessments of institutions and the nature of their governance system would be based on their resemblance to universalistic conceptions of university governance or what universities are supposed to represent. By implication, such universalistic conceptions also mean that universities, irrespective of their circumstances or conditions, need to subscribe to the same conceptions of autonomy.

While I adopt usage of the analytical methodology in this dissertation, there is something different in this usage that needs to be pointed out immediately. I use the analytical method in the sense of "elucidation of concepts, articulation of theories and their reconstruction" (Heslep, 1997: 21). This position takes me to methodological analysis and does not necessarily posit the universalism of the concepts under scrutiny or their universal application. Although the philosophical analysis can evoke sentiments of it promoting the grand narratives, the particular usage employed in this dissertation is one that makes the debate responsive to Africa's problems in managing higher education. At the same time, the discourse aims to reformulate avenues through which African universities can create a cosmopolitan citizen who is at home locally and internationally. In other words, a conceptual work on university autonomy and institutional autonomy requires a

sense of particularity that is essential to conceptions of autonomy within the African experience, while at the same time respecting the norms of reason regarding the general theoretical positions on autonomy. The discourse reflects on the African experience of higher education governance and management as an example of how different forms of governance can influence forms of autonomy.

This attachment to the African experience also dictates the end results of my choice of methodology. As Chapter 2 indicates, higher education in Africa should be considered within the terrain of its circumstances or conditions. This being the case, it is also true that conceptions of autonomy that people running the systems on the continent have will not necessarily fit into the universal mode of autonomy because of the special demands facing the development of the higher education sector on the continent. As a result, my purposive sample of nine systems of higher education systems on the continent gives a glimpse of governance structures across the African continent. These are Egypt, Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa. In all these cases, the state/government is involved in the governance of higher education systems. Nevertheless, there are some variations with regard to the extent to which government is considered to fundamentally affect the running of these systems. This point is further elaborated in section 2.6.3.

What I have tried to establish above is a conception of critical analysis that borrows from the universalistic stances but does not itself remain universalistic because of demands of particularity. In other words, any discourse on higher education governance on the African continent would need to consider the special conditions in which higher education finds itself in on the African continent. Such a special consideration implies a coordination of the interpretive framework and the critical framework. Wittgenstein (1958) proposes that people draw new meanings implicit in the forms of life and that in this sense “philosophy” can be conceived as “what is possible *before* (emphasis original) all new discoveries and intentions” (1958: 50e).

Similarly, Habermas (1978) proposes that considerations on education should prioritise “human interests”. In other words, no meaningful discourse on education can take place if one does not gain understanding or knowledge of one’s place and interest in the process of improving or empowering human lives. In addition, Horkheimer (1982: 244) argues as follows: “Theory is said to be critical to the extent that it seeks human emancipation to liberate human beings from circumstances that enslave them. Its guiding ideal is the emancipation of human beings and it is known as a form of education”. In other words, critical educational theory on conceptions of autonomy in African higher education is a critique of how domination of a pure liberal or pure communitarian position may not emancipate people’s interests given the fusion of social, cultural and political milieu higher education operates in on the African continent.

The particular demands of mixing these theoretical frameworks enable me to propose a conception of autonomy for African universities that has elements of liberalism but is not completely liberal yet at the same time has elements of communitarianism. Using Kymlicka (2002: 337), the methodological position of this dissertation argues for an adoption of autonomy that maintains a healthy balance between individual choice and a communal perspective to the extent that none erodes the other. Callan (1997: 67) makes this connection by asking the following: “If forming my own best judgement about how to live requires me to reflect autonomously on the judgements that others make and on the criticisms they might level against mine, then how can a good life be possible at all if I shirk the requirement?” Inevitably, Callan (1997: 68) further concludes the discussion by pointing out that “a good life could hardly be lived in utter disregard of conditions of responsible action”.

But as much as one can claim specificity in a methodological framework for a work of this nature, one also needs to bear in mind that in educational study no one method works in isolation. The interpretive-critical framework may be considered as inevitable on the understanding that critical theory grows out of interpretive theory. However, critical theory accepts the self-understanding of agents as both the starting point and culmination, but it insists that self-



understanding itself needs to be explained (Fay, 1975: 92). In this regard, I also consider the critical and self-reflective capacity of analytical inquiry in understanding the dynamics of whether a liberal conception of autonomy is relevant to higher education on the African continent through an examination of the governance patterns.

My story and place in using analytical inquiry will not be complete if I do not explain the three dimensions of analytical inquiry, which are personal, public and professional. Waghid (2002a: 2–4, quoting Soltis) explains that a personal dimension comes into play as one invokes “a set of personal beliefs about what can be considered as good, right and worthwhile” in one’s understanding of what university governance and autonomy mean. In this regard, the position of situated autonomy that I defend in this dissertation using some of Callan’s ideas can be considered as my preferential understanding of how academic freedom and institutional autonomy need to be explained given the circumstances of higher education governance on the African continent. Nevertheless, my reflections on higher education on the African continent are not intended to benefit the self but to provide a side of the public discourse on autonomy given African realities and how such discourse may eventually guide educational policy and provide space for debates and critiques (Waghid, 2002a: 3). By adopting this analytical inquiry I also wish to offer a different perspective on understanding autonomy in higher education governance on the continent to academics and other key players in higher education governance. My last stance fulfils the professional dimension of analytical inquiry (see Waghid, 2002a quoting Soltis).

The merits of critical theory will also come to bear as I examine cosmopolitan citizenship later in the dissertation. I should emphasise in this regard that critical theory, which fundamentally rests on the merits and necessity of interpretive categories, will provide space for the creation of a cosmopolitan perspective and a cosmopolitan citizen in higher education endeavours on the continent. Critical educational theory tries to expose the roots and consequences of the agents’ self-understanding of their autonomy, thereby informing social practice.

Given the nature of this study, one cannot rule out a deconstructive touch. Hence I will relate to deconstruction because of its critical potential to present what is other or different (Biesta, 1998: 5). But this position is later clarified by Biesta (2006: 66-69) who argues that rational communities become constituted by themselves and “other” community forms that come in the “interruption of the work and the enterprise of the rational community”. In a way the other exists, recurs and troubles the rational community. He also argues as follows: “The other lives inside the rational community as a constant possibility and comes into presence as soon as one responds to the other, to the otherness of the other, to what is strange in relation to the discourse and logic of the rational community” (Biesta, 2006: 66). In this dissertation, it is evident that the questioning over whether liberal conceptions of autonomy are relevant to higher education governance on the African continent is firmly infused with an awareness of the other. In a specific way in this study, one will have to reckon with the distinctive features of higher education autonomy, what it means to have un-autonomous institutions and governance systems. But again, one’s consideration of higher education governance and its characteristics, however global and cosmopolitan this perspective can become, has to consider that the demands and circumstances for operating higher education on the African continent are different. I consider a post-structuralism methodology as crucial because of the otherness and interruptions of the other that the African scenario is bound to present. The approach will assist in revealing “what we have not thought to think, about what is densely invested in our discourses or practices, about what has been muted, repressed and unheard of in our liberatory efforts”, thereby creating my space or personal dimension for critical analysis from the inside (Waghid, 2002a: 2, 55–56). In this way, one can also manage to explore why certain conceptions seem to be more favoured and favourable for particular circumstances. But the predominance of an analytical frame of mind in the whole process is to be used to provide illumination, understanding and different perspectives of issues involved in this debate (Waghid, 2002b: 4).

### **1.5.1 Some methodological conclusions**

This dissertation falls within the category of philosophical analysis and is centre on providing a critique of major philosophical issues emanating from educational discourse and practice. This methodology will be applied on issues surrounding higher education governance and autonomy in Africa. Through this work, three dominant philosophical frameworks will constantly be used. These are the interpretive theory, critical theory and elements of deconstruction. This choice of method has been influenced by the set of questions that this dissertation sought to investigate. Among the issues are question around governance and autonomy in Africa.

While most analytical forms of inquiry have tended to universalise bodies of knowledge, I do not think one can do the same with education and (African) higher education in particular. One way to understand this is to look at Kant's (1961) distinction between synthetic judgements and analytical judgements. Simply put, Kant's synthetic judgements come about because of people's assessment of experience whereas analytical judgements are those they make based on their understanding of concepts. Such an orientation of analytical judgements would assume analytical philosophy to use universalistic conceptions of meanings. Universalistic conceptions would, by implication, mean that universities, irrespective of their circumstances or conditions need to subscribe to the same conceptions of autonomy. In any case, I have used analytical inquiry differently, in the sense of "elucidation of concepts, articulation of theories and their reconstruction" (Heslep, 1996: 21). This position takes me to methodological analysis and does not necessarily posit the universalism of the concepts under scrutiny or their universal application. In other words, a conceptual work on university autonomy and institutional autonomy requires a sense of particularity that is essential to conceptions of autonomy. The particular attachment to the African experience has also influenced my choice of methodology. As Chapter 2 has indicated, higher education in Africa should be considered within the terrain of its circumstances or conditions. Such a special consideration implies a coordination of the interpretive framework and the

critical framework. Wittgenstein (1958) proposes that people draw new meanings implicit in the forms of life and that in this sense ‘philosophy’ can be conceived as “what is possible *before* (emphasis original) all new discoveries and intentions” (Wittgenstein, 1958: 50e). This is also in line with Habermas (1978) who argues that people’s considerations on education should prioritise “human interests”. My story and place in using analytical inquiry involves three dimensions of analytical inquiry, which are personal, public and professional Waghid (2002a: 2-4, quoting Soltis). By adopting this analytical inquiry I aimed at offering a different perspective on understanding autonomy in higher education governance on the African continent. My last stance fulfils the professional dimension of analytical inquiry (see Waghid, 2002a quoting Soltis).

## **1.6 The structure of the dissertation**

In this chapter I have tried to locate the problem of tracking down and analysing the issues of higher education autonomy within higher education governance structures. Among other things, I have discussed how issues of governance and power emerge in higher education discourse and their importance in understanding autonomy. I have also considered the initial relationship between institutional autonomy and academic freedom by considering different perspectives from a number of scholars in the area. Further on in this chapter, I have provided a quick analysis of what is basically considered as central in the liberal conception of autonomy and tried to make a preferential option for a form of autonomy that is essentially situated before clarifying on my methodological framework.

This background work is meant to lay the foundations for the scheme of my argument. In this argument, I consider autonomy to be central to any liberal tradition. As my argument develops I will recognise different positions in understanding autonomy. I will then argue that understanding such difference in relation to the discourse of higher education governance on the African continent causes a fundamental shift in the way people ordinarily conceive autonomy in higher education.

My analysis of governance forms in the running of higher education on the African continent, which follows in Chapter 2, is aimed at revealing two things. First, this analysis is meant to provide an understanding of how key players and analysts dealing with higher education governance understand this system on the continent. Hopefully this will bring out the professional dimension of this analytical inquiry. This understanding will particularly focus on the management and structural arrangements of public universities in the randomly selected countries on the continent. Second, I wish to understand what forms of autonomy may be relevant to higher education governance on the African continent in relation to the university's mandate of producing citizens. Chapter 3 examines at least three different higher education systems with the purpose of understanding first how conceptions of academic freedom and institutional autonomy developed in these systems. I go further in this analysis to discuss current positions of autonomy that may characterise the systems in question. In Chapter 4, I examine different philosophical conceptions of autonomy. In this chapter I also attempt to outline and discuss constitutive meanings or marks of liberal autonomy. This discussion will later act as a foundation on which my further analysis will be based. As a matter of clarification on the constitutive meanings and marks of liberal autonomy,

The challenges facing higher education on the African continent cannot be considered as complete if one does not at the same time consider how the mandate of the public university to create future citizens can be carried out efficiently given that the contemporary world no more operates in segmented units in so far as the knowledge economy is concerned. Chapter 5 will therefore consider the impact of globalisation and neo-liberalism on higher education discourse, particularly in Africa. In this regard and among other things I will discuss Africa's trajectory in a globalised economy and the challenges that globalisation and neo-liberalism present to the governance of higher education systems. In this regard, I will also highlight how educational marketisation and localisation play themselves out in shaping and reshaping the characteristics of university autonomy through the governance systems on the continent. In this chapter I will argue that globalisation and neo-liberalism make higher education

systems on the African continent less autonomous. My conclusions therefore are in sharp contrast to the main assumptions about globalisation and neo-liberalism that they usher into peoples' spheres of freedom.

Given my conclusions in the preceding chapters, Chapter 6 seeks to understand the extent to which cosmopolitan norms can at least address concerns over autonomy in African higher education systems. In this chapter, I argue that cosmopolitan norms can assist in reshaping higher education autonomy discourse on the continent. In view of this, I also examine Nussbaum's (1997, 2002) conception of a world citizen where, among other things, she suggests that "our task as citizens of the world, and as educators who prepare people to be citizens of the world, will be to *draw the circles somehow toward the centre* (emphasis original), making all human beings like our fellow city-dwellers" (Nussbaum, 1997: 60). Nussbaum (1997: 61) further explains that the implications of this conception are such that people give up their special affections and identifications in an effort to make all human beings part of their community of dialogue, respect and concern. Using such a cosmopolitan mindset, I will proceed to examine the extent to which such an emancipatory project can be realised given the conditions of African higher education. Some of these conditions, as will be explained in the chapter 2, include the state's assumed prerogative to regulate the higher education system as national asset over and above essentialized notions of the nature and function of the university.

Through answering most of the issues I have raised in this structural view, I hope to definitively come to understand whether liberal conceptions of autonomy are relevant to higher education governance on the African continent and the extent to which one holds this view. In the following chapter (two) I evaluate governance arrangements in some African universities. As already mentioned, this snap evaluation is intended to create a background on whether a liberal conception of autonomy is viable for African universities, but more so to check the prevalent forms or conceptions of university autonomy and academic freedom in place.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS IN AFRICA'S HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEMS**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

In this sub-section I examine a number of higher education governance structures on the African continent in an attempt to reveal the possible forms of autonomy that higher education systems in Africa have. The selection of the cases has been done through purposive sampling in order to give a picture of what the situation is in different parts of the African continent, where that information has become available. The countries under focus include Egypt, Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa. South Africa is treated separately in this work because of its unique features. Among other things, the raging debates on how higher education governance needs to be managed have become so complex that treating South Africa as just another African case runs the risk of not paying attention to how debates on South African higher education system indirectly shape how other African countries try to manage their own systems. My approach recognises the important ramifications that the debates on South African higher education have for the continent despite South Africa's being historically, socially and politically different.

The focus of the selection can rightfully be regarded as an analysis of higher education in Africa in the post-colonial period. This analysis, despite its focus, recognises that higher education on the African continent was introduced long before the colonisation of Africa by different European states. In the following subsection, I discuss this historical picture of higher education in Africa, paying much attention to the nature or character of higher education, as a prelude to any discussion of note one can have of higher education on the continent.

## 2.2 The story of higher education in Africa: the pre-colonial beginnings

Several scholars have documented the beginnings of higher education on the African continent. In most cases, there has been a tendency to think that it is colonisation that brought higher education onto the continent. Nevertheless, the works of Ajayi *et al.* (1996) and Assie-Lumumba (2006) trace the origins of university life on the continent back to the ancient centres of civilisation on the African continent, such as Egypt and the African traditional societies in general. This subsection revisits these origins in an argument to show that some of the directions and redirections of higher education on the continent today are directly related to the ancient forms of higher education on the continent. Assie-Lumumba (2006: 25), quoting Ajayi *et al.* (1996: 5), states that “indigenous higher education produced and transmitted new knowledge necessary for understanding the world, the nature of man (sic), society, God and various divinities, the promotion of Agriculture and health, literature and philosophy”. The descriptions of higher education from Ajayi *et al.* (1996) that Assie-Lumumba draws on were initially drawn from elements of African sagacity. Despite the lack of technological advancement, African societies developed forms of knowledge that superseded what an ordinary person needed to know in order to be and survive as a member of a particular society. Such knowledge did not only rely on repetition of traditional norms but went further to give rational explications of such bodies of knowledge and their justifications and refutations (Odera Oruka, 1990).<sup>3</sup>

Ajayi *et al.* (1996: 3–5) use some of Odera Oruka’s (1990) findings on African sagacity to argue for the existence of philosophers or original thinkers in African indigenous cultures who created and nurtured forms of informal higher education. The system of higher education remained “predominantly oral, eclectic and even esoteric” (Ajayi *et al.*, 1996: 4), while the forms of knowledge could range from metaphysical to epistemological to social. Ajayi *et al.* (1996: 5)

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<sup>3</sup> This subsection will not provide details of this debate because it is not its focus, but an elaborate discussion of African philosophic sagacity can be accessed from Odera Oruka’s (1990) book.



also argue that such higher forms of knowledge by specific individuals were recognised and promoted by the society by rewarding such individuals with different gifts and even pieces of land. Today, acquisition of higher education is rewarded with degrees and certificates, which are further used by individuals to acquire lucrative jobs.

What is really distinctive in African sagacity or forms of higher education, as explained by Odera Oruka (1990) and used by Ajayi *et al.* (1996) and Assie-Lumumba (2006), is that philosophic sagacity, although it naturally operated outside the confines of the communal pool of knowledge, was highly treasured by the community and considered as part of the community. In other words, Odera Oruka's (1990) descriptions of philosophic sages give the idea that such individuals managed to give explanations of things or events beyond the ordinary pool of explanation available in the community. But due to the nature of African traditional societies, that is their communal nature, such explanations were not considered as totally oppositional to the framework of the community although in most cases they would be critical of community traditions.

The other element that is unique in traditional forms of higher knowledge is that these forms were valued in the community for what they offered. Higher forms of knowledge provided an exceptional source of solutions for problems facing societies and for the advancement of these societies. Despite the fact that at times philosophic sagacity is considered as esoteric, these forms of knowledge are valued not just for their own sake but for the development of the community as a whole. The developmental character that was attached to sophisticated traditional forms of knowledge resonates with ideals of a 'developmental university' in today's formal higher education and training.

### **2.2.1 The pre-colonial formal higher education systems in Africa**

A number of universities were established on the African continent before Africa became colonised by western countries. These centres of higher education were mostly influenced by religious structures, such as Islam, Christianity and African

traditions. The Egyptian civilisation stands out as the root of the idea of a university “as a community of scholars with an international outlook but also with responsibilities within particular cultures” (Ajayi *et al.*, 1996: 5). Alexandria served as a connecting point between the Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. The rulers of Alexandria established a museum that assembled different forms of knowledge from the transecting cultures through the copying of manuscripts, thereby attracting leading scholars. The people who were appointed to manage the collection were also given the responsibility of guiding young scholars in a collegiate system. Quoting Riad, Ajayi *et al.* (1996: 6) state the following:

Scientists and men of letters lived in the institution. They were housed and fed and were able to give themselves up entirely to their research and students, with no menial duties to perform. Its organisation was similar to that of modern universities, except that the resident scholars were not required to give lectures.

The works collected in this library included those on cosmography, astronomy, literature, history and mathematics while others directly influenced the formation of modern scientific botany, human anatomy and physiology. The works collected in the Museum of Alexandria also contributed to the formation of the monastic system in which models of communal living were favoured and the search for knowledge became a joint enterprise (Ajayi *et al.*, 1996: 7).

Despite the fact that one finds mixes of Western influence in secular higher education, the origins of Ethiopian higher education have mixes of both Christian and Islamic influences, countries on the western coast such as Sierra Leone and Liberia were influenced by Islam, Christianity as well as the secular Western worldview because they started in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Freetown Debate that Ajayi *et al.* (1996: 16–20) describe is characterised by indignation at the low level of education that Christian missionary initiatives implied on the one hand and an inspiration to create space for a “secular African-controlled university” (Ajayi *et al.*, 1996: 17) on the other hand. This indignation

is echoed despite the growing influence of Western education in Africa during this period.

Ajayi *et al.* (1996: 8) also note that higher education within the Islamic tradition initially started with the need to teach children the “rudiments of Arabic and the Koran”, which was mainly done informally and in homes. As the children became more sophisticated in the knowledge of Arabic and the Koran, there was a need to move on to higher levels of knowledge with more advanced pupils. This impetus created *madrasas* (or colleges) and “some of the madrasas attracted enough reputable teachers and the courses of instruction were organised more formally like universities, ... and curricula built around one or more of the schools of Islamic law, Advanced Philology, Hadith, History, and Geography” (Ajayi *et al.*, 1996: 8). The growth of scholarship in the Muslim tradition rested on “the need of rulers to use scholars in their administration” and “the need of pious Muslims seeking contemplation” (Ajayi *et al.*, 1996: 8–9). Some of the first and influential universities established in this line were the Karawiyyin University of Fez (also known as al-Karawiyyin of Fez) in Morocco, Al-Azhar of Cairo in Egypt and the University of Timbuktu. The last-mentioned became famous, though not with much posterity, because of its quest for autonomy, piety and learning (Ajayi *et al.*, 1996: 10).

What I recognise as notable characteristics of the life of the university in Africa during the pre-colonial period can be summarised as the quest for knowledge, autonomy and piety. These elements emerge from an analysis of higher education from Islamic and Christian influences. Such education also tended to develop from informal education to formalised ways of conducting the search for knowledge. African traditional systems also reveal the independence of thought of the philosophic sages and a deeper quest for knowledge and explanation of puzzles confronting the human race as at the centre of developing higher forms of knowledge in traditional societies. In my view, it is the traditional perspective of sagacity that provides leads to the role higher education was assumed to be introduced for.

### **2.3 The connection between higher education and national development in the first African independent states**

As the development of knowledge moved from lower forms to sophisticated forms in both traditional societies and religious communities, there was also the need for knowledge to change from informal transmission to formal transmission. At this stage higher education clearly became a symbiosis of two functions. On the one hand was the need to use higher education for national development and administration. On the other hand, the quest for contemplation also took root, though largely associated with monastic forms of life. The need for higher education to assist in national development is echoed in a number of sectors including a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) conference on higher education in Africa that was held in Tananarive from 3 to 12 September 1962 (UNESCO, 1962: 17–19). In this space (that is, UNESCO 1962), the role of higher education in the post-independence era is phrased as the need to forge unity by promoting the African character of the independent states, which is commensurate with world civilisation. Among other things the university was expected to “encourage and support elucidation of and appreciation of African culture and heritage, thereby liberating the African mind socially and culturally” with a holistic approach to the development of the human person (UNESCO, 1962: 18).

As discussed in Section 2.2.1, the real need that gave rise to the origin of the African university was an indigenous aspiration towards independence. This was the need to establish institutions that would not just train African people to work as interpreters of the colonisers and evangelists of the different religious institutions that were being established but would also create “an African elite who could work side by side” with the Europeans (Ajayi *et al.*, 1996: 30). Of course such an initiative was started by those Africans who had already been trained to see the benefits of proceeding with Western education. The connection that was perceived to be there between university education and national development gained momentum alongside the growth of nationalist movements in different African states such as Ghana, Ethiopia, South Africa and many

others. In a way, access to higher education and the attainment of a higher educational qualification was seen as one of the ways of bringing the African person on a par with the Western person. This is why Ajayi *et al.* (1996: 49) note that “by the 1930s, perceptive observers began to see that future constitutional development in Africa depended more on the educated elite than on traditional leaders”.

## **2.4 The African university in the post-independence period**

In the above section, I have highlighted two central motifs for the development of the African university. These include the fact that the African university was seen as a means of steering national development through human personnel training. But it is also clear that the university was one way of creating an elite group in Africa that could stand up to the authority of the Western coloniser. It is also important to note here that although African ancient civilisation has been noted as the core of the university, many universities on the continent were only created after 1960. Since then, the “assumed role of the postcolonial university in Africa as an institution with a social mission in economic development and national building” has not been an easy road. I argue that this has been the case because of the way higher education was popularised and patronised in the post-independence period.

The creation of higher education systems in the colonies was accompanied by a fear that educating the African would endanger the settler’s privileged position (Assie-Lumumba, 2006: 32–33). Even if this was the case, African higher education in the post-independence period is a mirror of the partition of Africa, or a mirror of the countries that colonised Africa. For instance, the British believed in social Darwinism<sup>4</sup> and were the first colonisers to authorise establishment of higher education institutions with affiliation to the British universities. On the other hand, French colonisers developed what Ajayi *et al.* (1996) refer to as a “hidden and open policy” of education. This system aimed to educate not the masses but only a few elites who would be loyal to the French

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<sup>4</sup> Social Darwinism believes that culture is hereditary and even education by a particular system would not change one into a member of the educator’s species or nature (see Assie-Lumumba, 2006: 33).

culture and promote it. In general, the French believed that such elites would require further training in France. But in other instances, such as Tunisia, the French developed open education systems (Assie-Lumumba, 2006: 35). The higher education system that was developed in Ethiopia was different from the patterns one can notice in the other colonies. Again, such a system is a reflection of Ethiopia's historical picture. Ethiopia became independent in 1804 by defeating Italy. As such Ethiopia has been regarded as a symbol of hope for many struggling African nations because Ethiopia symbolised self-determination in the early stages of African consciousness (Assie-Lumumba, 2006: 41)

This section cannot exhaust all the cases that mark the beginnings of higher education in Africa in the aftermath of colonisation and independence. However, But it suffices to safe that my comments on the few cases I have picked manage to give some picture of the landscape of higher education and the different motives behind the establishment of higher education. In the next subsection I will endeavour to develop a contemporary picture of higher education in Africa in selected cases. The selection has been motivated basically by availability of research on higher education in the countries. In some cases, not much is written about higher education so that making these cases a sample in this work would prove problematic.

## **2.5 Higher education governance systems in nine African countries: a contemporary picture**

In this subsection, I will consider governance arrangements in randomly selected countries. Much of what one reads on higher education in Africa tends to be descriptive and as such there is a great deal of quantitative information on higher education systems on the African continent compared to a few analytical works on the same. In my argument I will fall back on a work edited by Altbach and Teferra (2003). This work, though, is not the only conceptual analysis of the state of higher education on the African continent. For instance, Olukoshi and Zeleza (2004) have edited another work dealing with issues of liberalism and internationalisation in African universities. On the other hand, Altbach and

Teferra's (2003) work is one of the latest publications on the state of higher education governance in Africa. Altbach and Teferra's collection is authoritative for this purpose because of its inclusiveness. This collection is comprised of chapters by authoritative educational researchers within each country in Africa.

### **2.5.1 Higher education governance in Egypt**

My first purposive random choice of Egypt acknowledges the Egyptian higher education system as unique within the African context because the geographical location of the country offers it unique cultural mixes as the country can be considered as one of the meeting points of early civilisation. In Section 2.2.1 I have discussed the origins of higher education in Africa as dating back to the Egyptian civilisation. Egypt is home to one of the oldest universities in the world, the Al-Azhar University. This university was established much later, that is 970 A.D. (Assie-Lumumba, 2006: 36), than the Alexandria Museum and Library (Ajayi *et al.*, 1996: 6), which laid the foundations for university life. The account of university beginnings in Egypt by Ajayi *et al.* (1996: 5) reflects the role and function of the university as a centre for free pursuit of knowledge combined with necessary responsibilities within particular cultures. It is recorded that "the spirit of resistance and local patriotism symbolised by Alexandria bred the monastic system" (Ajayi *et al.*, 1996: 7). This can be seen as an exercise of autonomy in resistance to political authority. In addition, this period led to the favouring of monastic or communal life whereby the search for knowledge was held as a joint venture of the members of the community.

Today, Egypt continues to act as a meeting point of African, Asian and European values and ways of life. According to Said (2003: 385–300), public higher education in Egypt today is considered to be free but mainly in relation to the Egyptian legislative framework. This view can evoke the nature of higher education in the early centuries as experienced by the people of Alexandria. Although such is the case, one also notes that in many cases today's university personnel and management conduct the business/affairs of the university system in much the same way that government business is done. In other words, Said

(2003) argues that there is little distinction between the civil service and the university system, in so far as the governing system and structure are concerned.

The Egyptian higher education sector is by legislation divided into two categories similarly controlled by separate legislations. There is the university sector that, in principle, is headed by a Supreme Council of Universities. This council is chaired by the Minister of Higher Education. It is argued that it is only in theory that this council is independent of the ministry itself (Said, 2003: 292). Said's observation can be taken to mean that the Ministry of Higher Education, which is an arm of government – the political institution, practically controls the affairs of the higher education sector.

On the other hand, there is a non-university sector that incorporates higher technical institutions. This sector has the same structures as the one controlled by the Supreme Council of Universities, only “it is far less autonomous” (Said, 2003: 292), even in terms of how its legislative framework works. This can be explained by the fact that the Ministry of Higher Education, through the Supreme Council of Universities, makes “all major decisions concerning admission levels and standards, definition of programmes and curricula, creation of new academic posts ... establishment of academic standards and their assessment”, as Said (2003: 292) notes. This implies that by legislation, technical institutions in Egypt, by their nature, are supposed to be controlled by government although the technical institutions have structures similar to those in the universities.

Given some of the elements the researcher has highlighted above, one can conclude that the Egyptian public higher education system is a good example of a higher education system that is created for government and run by government. For instance, Said (2003: 292) indicates that the Ministry of Planning and the Ministry of Finance discuss with individual universities their budget needs and allocations. In this process the Supreme Council of Universities and the Ministry of Higher Education are not involved. As a result, Said (2003: 292–293) also states, “institutions have very limited authority over internal reallocations of resources among budget categories”. So the lack of distinction between the state



and the university systems, which I have pointed out above, is not only on account of their similarity but because the state controls the university.

Based on the research that Said (2003) reports on, one can fairly conclude that the higher education governance system in Egypt today is in the hands of government and/or state bureaucracy. This means that the university system in Egypt does set the agenda for most of its activities. The government of Egypt is the main agent that sets the agenda of higher education and ensures that its projects are carried out. Such conditions in governance systems and structures are indicative of state control, as outlined above. But as much as one can argue that the state controls the higher education sector in Egypt in general, there is also some evidence indicating that the state at times interferes with the same mechanisms that it puts in place to regulate higher education. For example, the state and some of its agents, like the Minister of Finance, are at liberty to overlook the Supreme Council and the Ministry of Education in relation to funding needs and requirements. While the main condition of the relationship between the state and the university is that of state control, instances of state interference can also be observed where the state can be regarded as interfering with its own set protocols. It is in this regard that I think that the Egyptian higher education system in Egypt exhibits forms of less autonomy because of being state controlled.

In conclusion, it is important to note that an examination of the higher education system reveals that Egypt was the first place to show traces of higher education dating back to a few centuries B.C. On top of this, Egypt has the oldest surviving university system, the Al-Azhar University, which was established in 970 A.D. (Assie-Lumumba, 2006: 36). Nevertheless, the origins of higher education in Egypt were the Alexandria Museum and Library (Ajayi *et al.*, 1996: 6). I have pointed out above that the origin of higher education in Egypt reveals a picture of the university as a centre for the free pursuit of knowledge that is combined with the necessary responsibilities within particular cultures (Ajayi *et al.*, 1996: 5). In my view the origin of higher education in Egypt shows that university life was endowed with greater autonomy than is the case currently. The “spirit of

resistance and local patriotism that symbolised Alexandria” and gave birth to the monastic system “favouring the search for knowledge as a joint venture” (Ajayi *et al.*, 1996: 7) exemplifies a state of human agency and autonomy where people could not compromise their autonomy in the face of any authoritarian system or intruding authority. In this period, though, the picture of political forces that could direct the search for knowledge to their advantage does not come up. Despite such a prestigious beginning for higher education, today’s Egyptian higher education governance shows many signs of being under state control and being directed more by politics than by the mere search for knowledge as a joint venture whose terms could only be dictated by the co-operating members.

### **2.5.2 Higher education in Nigeria**

The origins of higher education in Nigeria can be understood in the context of the broader West African region. Okafor (1971: 21–23) reports that although at the outset there was a need for the creation of a university that would cater for the African character, suggestions for the university favoured Sierra Leone’s Freetown as the place where the university needed to be established. As such, Fourah Bay College was created in 1876 with affiliation to the University of Durham (Ajayi *et al.*, 1996: 23). This university faintly represented the need for a university for West Africa that would take into account the need for an African environment of education where the character of the Africa person is nurtured. “Fourah Bay College remained the only university institution in West Africa until 1948” (Ajayi *et al.*, 1996: 24).

The need for the establishment of a university in Nigeria was commensurate with the need for a West African university, to some extent. Benjamin Nnamdi Azikiwe was the first Nigerian to call for the establishment of a university in Nigeria (Okafor, 1971: 41). This call was part of a broader call for ‘a new’ or ‘renascent’ Africa whose philosophy centred on five principles, namely spiritual balance, social regeneration, economic determination, mental emancipation and national resurgence (Okafor, 1971: 42). The establishment of an African university based on these values and principles was regarded as a vital tool for

emancipating the mind of the new African person while at the same time helping in the reconstruction of a New Africa. Ajayi *et al.* (1996: 27) conclude that the African university as envisaged by Azikiwe would be defined “not merely by its historical continuity with the African past, but even more by its commitment to the renaissance of Africa”.

Although not very successful, Yaba Higher College, established in 1930 (Okafor, 1971: 72), was the first establishment of higher education in Nigeria. Among other things, the college was criticised for duplicating the efforts of other institutions and for being just another institution meant to cater only for the supplying of government with young recruits who could work with it and not necessarily for empowering the citizenry because its standard was low. This college closed in 1947, giving way to the establishment of the University of Ibadan, which was affiliated to the University of London (Okafor, 1971: 80, 88, & 91).

Yaba Higher College and the University College of Ibadan were not started as direct results of colonial imperatives. These institutions were started as a result of pro-nationalist thinking that considered the establishment of centres of higher education as critical to the independence of West African peoples. It is also clear that although the colonial governments ensured the origins of these institutions through the various commissioned reports, education was left in the hands of the missionaries. The creation of the University of Ibadan, with affiliation to the University of London, and its claims to university autonomy came under attack because of the thinking that a university within a state could not be absolutely autonomous and that such claims have to be in tandem with the social mission of the university – “to reflect national aspirations of the people” it was meant to serve (Okafor, 1971: 96).

Today, the higher education system in Nigeria is marked by the type of its political system. Nigeria has a federal government in which several states

‘claim’<sup>5</sup> to have semi-autonomous forms of governance. Consequently, there are “federal universities” and “state universities” (Jibril, 2003: 493). Jibril further states that the higher education system was created by government as a way of producing midlevel workers to meet the needs of the colonial civil service. To an extent, the Nigerian system of higher education can be considered as part of the government system, in so far as its scope is framed and operates according to what government desires.

Nonetheless, the above thinking assumes that government cannot put in place structures for the development of its people. The problem here lies in whether such structures are really put in place for the development of citizens or whether they only serve government’s utilitarian purposes. Okafor (1971), Ajayi *et al.* (1996) and many others duly recognise that the genesis of higher education in Nigeria was linked with nationalist liberation motives as well as the need to make the university a centre for creating personnel for national development.

Jibril (2003) also recognises that in Nigeria, all higher education institutions came to be considered as full, ‘autonomous’ colleges and universities after independence in 1960. Despite this statement, Jibril (2003) does not shed enough light regarding the nature and parameters of this autonomy, if any. Such lack of clarity moves one to speculate that the autonomy of these institutions resides in their legislative framework. But whether this autonomy is in a lived form or exercised in the business of higher education is another matter. Nevertheless, what is clear is that the university system, which came into effect after the 1960’s, was part of the broader agenda for national development.

To date, higher education institutions in Nigeria are still heavily subsidised by the state. The governance structures between the universities, polytechnics and colleges of education are the same irrespective of whether the institution is a state or a federal institution. Each institution is governed by a council, comprising both internal members and members external to the institution. These members are directly chosen by a respective government. While each institution

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<sup>5</sup> My indication of the concept ‘claim’ is not meant and used in a pejorative sense as it may appear in this case.

has its normal administrative ladder from principal down to clerks, it is senates (in the case of universities) and academic boards (in the case of the other higher education institutions that are not universities) that decide over academic issues such as curricula, admission requirements, examinations and accreditation. Jibril does not clearly separate the councils from the senates and academic boards. One can only assume that these are different bodies that enable the institutions to operate efficiently.

Jibril (2003: 493) also notes that the federal government keeps an eye on each of the institutions through the appointment of a government agency for each type of institution. The agencies oversee quality assurance and control and funding in accordance with government directives. Not much light is shed on how these government agencies operate in relation to the functions of the councils, senates and academic boards. Trade unions such as the Academic Staff Union of Universities and other similar arrangements for students operate nationwide to bring to the attention of government the needs/grievances of their members. Again, not much elaboration is made on these processes. But one can equally intimate that this relationship reflects a 'master-servant' relationship.

The nature and functions of the relevant governing bodies for universities in Nigeria raise questions as to whether the Nigerian higher education system is really as autonomous as Jibril (2003: 493) claims it to be. This questioning is necessary because what one is provided with is a picture of a post-independence government that has overarching control and influence over the institutions of the university and its structures. In this relationship, the government is portrayed as the 'master' or the 'initiator' of most university activities, and there is no clear sign that such a role by the government could possibly be carried out in line with democratic values and principles. The assumption that this role of dominance is normal for a government in Africa is also problematic.

To sum up, one can state that higher education life in Nigeria shows two dominant faces. On the one hand, the life of the university colleges before independence came along with the introduction of colonialism, although it is

stated that the governments did not actively involve themselves with the university. The setting up of the university was left in the hands of missionaries. Despite the missionary influence in establishing higher education in Nigeria, it is also evident that the system that was planted allowed more room for liberal values, hence the call to Africanise the nature and functions of the university by a number of people such as Azikiwe (Okafor, 1971: 41–44). In the post-independence period, higher education adopted a nationalist agenda of providing a workforce for the development of the country. This period shows elements of a system that is less liberal because of the perception that the university was established to fulfil national goals of development. But what makes it less liberal is the control of government over the determination of how the university will function and who will control it. The predominance of a government agenda, the government control of budgets and other crucial positions in the governance of the university, although fulfilling to an extent the need for a place of learning attuned to African needs and the urge for West African nationalism, do not fare well on the map of liberalism.

### **2.5.3 Higher education in Ghana**

The demand for higher education in Ghana can be considered as rooted in the traditions of the Ghanaian society. Budu, Gariba and Munah (2007: 31) argue that the pre-colonial Ghanaian societies valued knowledge and those who were well versed in the traditions of a community and who could apply this knowledge to solve local problems, irrespective of their status in society. In this case, it appears that the value of knowledge lay not in possessing knowledge for its own sake but in its high potential for resolving problems confronting humankind.

Although Ghana became an independent republic in 1960, its university life stretches back to the colonial period with the University College of the Gold Coast being established in 1948 as an affiliate college of the University of London (Budu *et al.*, 2007: 34). The university was created to offer programmes in the humanities, arts, sciences and agriculture. In the post-independence period, accelerated growth and social transformation prompted the need for varied and

specialised human resources and institutions, which shifted the focus of higher education to the development of science and technology (Budu *et al.*, 2007: 1). This explains the reasons for the establishment of the University College of Gold Coast, whose core function was to provide specialised training for teachers of science and mathematics in secondary schools and technical schools (Budu *et al.*, 2007: 36).

Quoting Sawyerr, Budu *et al.* (2007: 36) also argue that university development in Ghana was accompanied by a great deal of public interest that saw the development of higher education as a critical component for and of national development. In Ghana several universities have been established with campuses in all the regions of the country (Budu *et al.*, 2007: 35).

Sawyerr's (1994: 22–53) own analysis of the higher education system in Ghana identifies three development stages of the system. He argues that from 1957 to 1966, the relationship between the university and the state could be described as that of state control. The government invested a great deal of resources in the sector with the hope of making the sector play a critical role in national self-discovery, culture and sovereignty. The state of events that led to state control were university elitism, conservatism and bureaucracy on the one hand and the state's impatience with university conduct on the other hand, which further developed into the state claiming greater control of the university (Budu *et al.*, 2007: 39).

Sawyerr (1994) and Budu *et al.* (2007) seem to agree that from 1966 to 1981 the university system in Ghana underwent a period of relative autonomy. While this period historically reflects mixes of military rule and civilian rule, there were no major attempts to control the universities (Budu *et al.*, 2007: 40). The universities maintained their freedom to determine their modes of operation in terms of teaching, research, expansion of faculties and internal administration. This period also represents the economic downturn of the Ghanaian economy after independence, but although the government had reduced funding to universities, the universities retained their power to allocate funds to different

programmes. Budu *et al.* (2007: 41) point out that this state of relative autonomy may have been contributed to by a number of critical factors. First, the fragmented organisational structure of the university along with the traditions of academic freedom and the decentralised decision-making power among principal officers, the senior professoriate and the committee systems managed to shield the university from external pressure. A second factor was the strong leadership and diplomatic skills that the university had. The university also enjoyed a privileged status, which political authority understood well (Budu *et al.*, 2007: 41).

The third stage of development is regarded as a stage of confrontation and directed change. This stage has mixes of supervision and control, which gives one the impression that this was a stage of state interference. This was a time when Ghana was ruled by the military regime of Jerry Rawlings (*ibid.*).

I would agree with Effah (2003: 345) that the general picture of higher education in Ghana today is that of “a two-tier, or bicameral system of governance”. This system of governance assumes that university councils would be independent and have sufficient “autonomy to determine the content of academic programmes, subject to appropriate oversight for the maintenance of standards” (Budu *et al.*, 2007: 36). Similar to Nigeria, the first university was modelled after the British system with the intention of training people to take over the roles in government from the British colonial bosses. Until today, the “public tertiary institutions are perceived as a vital part of the national project of self-development and self-realization” (Sawyerr, in Neave & Van Vught, 1994: 25).

In this bicameral system there are councils that take care of overall finance, development, appointments and discipline, as well as senates/academic boards that are responsible for all academic matters. The university council consists of members from government, the university, students’ representative councils and workers’ associations, as well as alumni (Effah, 2003: 345). Effah also notes that the “minister of education has ministerial oversight over all levels of education”. Government funds up to 40% of the higher education system’s budget. The



White Paper on Education in Ghana introduced the idea of cost sharing between government, students and the private sector (Effah, 2003: 343–344).

Although history shows government intrusions into the running of the universities, such as the appointment of ‘special professors’ directly responsible to the president as well as the demands to conform to government regulation and rules, Effah (2003: 346) maintains that “the institutional structure, the legal framework provided for in the acts and statutes, and the substantial amount of authority vested in the elaborate system of committees and boards insulate the academic community from outside forces and interference”.

In other words, Effah’s account amounts to an argument for formal institutional autonomy as structured in the statutes of the university. But that conception falls short of any indication for the substantive conditions of autonomy. Although substantive conditions of autonomy are not thoroughly examined in Effah’s account, he nevertheless indicates that “absolute autonomy is not possible as long as the government continues to fund higher education” (Effah, 2003: 346). Sawyerr’s views concur with this thinking in his observation that in post-colonial Ghana there has been a tendency to treat “universities as objects of policy and means for achieving given ends and not as subjects with a definite character and ethos ...” (Sawyerr, in Neave & Van Vught, 1994: 24). In most cases the ends are defined by the government in power. Sawyerr’s view consolidates the view that African governments treat higher education systems as a means to their ends.

The university system in Ghana has also come under the influence of globalisation and neo-liberalism. This is evidenced by the drift towards a market-oriented model of the university. Although the initial stages were introduced in Ghana through the private higher educator sector, the public higher education sector, through the University for Development Studies, has also adopted market models of higher education. Budu *et al.* (2007: 54) argue that this university was established with the purpose of adopting alternative perspectives for teaching, research and community outreach. This approach to the university combines the merits of technological approaches and community integration in the

development of curriculum. Hence, in the case of Ghana, one can talk of market-oriented courses as well as people-centred courses where the development of the larger society is assigned a pivotal role in curriculum innovation (Budu *et al.*, 2007: 54–59).

#### **2.5.4 A comparison between the Kenyan higher education system and higher education in Zimbabwe**

Kenya's public higher education system, which is comprised of six universities, is headed by its state president, who serves as chancellor. This system is similar to Zimbabwe's system where the state president is the sole chancellor of all seven state-sponsored universities (Maunde, 2003: 644). In both cases, the president is also considered to wield enormous power and influence over the affairs of the university.

Among other things, the president in Kenya appoints the vice-chancellors and principals of the universities' constituent colleges. These appointees owe their positions to their loyalty to the head of state. The president also nominates most members of the university council (Ngome, 2003: 362). "The various statutes that regulate public universities in Kenya allow government to have direct control over university institutions" (Ngome, 2003: 367). As a result, political patronage, rather than competence and merit, characterise most of the appointments and promotions and all decision-making processes.

The concentration of power in one person's hands manifests itself in Kenya's higher education system at different levels of governance. Ngome (2003: 367) argues that the vice-chancellors and the principals exercise enormous power and authority to the extent of single-handedly controlling appointments and promotions. Formally, councils are mandated with such matters. In addition to these governance structures, management boards were also created to assist vice-chancellors in the running of universities. The case presented by Ngome (2003: 363, 367) indicates a system of higher education in which confusion and ambiguity surround the nature and functions of the appointed boards. This

conclusion is based on the observation that in some cases, the management boards are constitutionally sanctioned while in others, they are not. These boards are also heavily used to ratify the personal decisions of vice-chancellors, while in other cases the boards assume senate powers in university management (Ngome, 2003: 362, 367).

In the governance of public higher education in Kenya, the management of financial resources has moved from free universities to fee-paying universities subsidised by government. Also in place are student loan schemes and bursaries from government. Due to dwindling funding from government, parallel and external degree programmes were introduced to boost the revenues. Nevertheless, Ngome (2003: 363) worries that it is mostly students from affluent families who may benefit from these schemes because “all students were eligible for the loan regardless of their economic status”. From such intimations one can further conclude that equity principles are missing in terms of access to public higher education in Kenya. This is the case considering that the cost of higher education means much more than the basic tuition. The demand by university students that government financial schemes cover every individual student equally irrespective of need or distress, as it is recorded by Ngome (2003: 363), is a scenario that one can find in a number of African universities, including the University of Malawi and in universities in Zimbabwe, for example.

Ironically, Ngome (2003: 362) wants to make one believe that it is the “management by committee system that tends to slow down decision-making processes” in the university governance system irrespective of the catalogued political and administrative interference that the university is made to live with. In itself, this thinking may imply that Ngome in his perspective does not endorse democratic representative systems of governance and the merits that accrue from such processes directly to the people participating in the processes. He would rather see an efficient governance system that operates by directives from a certain authoritative position than a deliberative democratic process that inevitably takes time to resolve issues.

While the president in Zimbabwe is the chancellor of all state-sponsored universities, he is also the head of the government agency funding universities (Maunde, 2003: 644). Maunde's analysis of higher education in Zimbabwe avoids tackling the governance of higher education. Instead, the author has opted to consider the historical and descriptive aspects of higher education in Zimbabwe. But towards the end of the chapter the author slightly hints that government has overarching control over higher education (Maunde, 2003: 647). The public higher education system in Zimbabwe can be considered one where there are no checks and balances in the way power is exercised. "The use of university budget allocations was left to the arbitrary whims of the Ministry of Higher Education and the university authorities" (Maunde, 2003: 647). I concede that my reading can be considered as "reading between the lines", but the point I want to make is that it is quite evident at the end of this chapter that the government in Zimbabwe uses the university to resist change. Although not much information is given on how the system itself is governed, conclusions of state control of higher education are to a large extent justifiable.

### **2.5.5 Higher education in Uganda**

In Uganda, the higher education system was started, developed and managed in order to contribute to national and regional development. Although university life was established as far back as 1949 (Musisi & Muwanga, 2003: 7) the University Act was only created in 1970. Musisi and Muwanga (2003) locate the origins of the university in Uganda to the initiatives of the British colonial administration, which established Makerere Technical School in 1922, after the First World War "to assure the world that it was also concerned with the welfare of colonial peoples" (2003: 7). The school was created to develop a middle cadre of civil servants beyond clerks, messengers and interpreters, and to improve on the educational policies prevailing at the time. This technical school developed into Makerere Higher College for East Africa in 1937. In 1963, Makerere University amalgamated with universities in Kenya and Tanzania to form the University of East Africa (ibid). It is during this period that Makerere became renowned as a world-class university for the training of professionals.

Makerere University's strength lay in its reputation, its location in a vibrant and growing city, and its well-established infrastructure. The quality of its staff, the highly selective quality of its student body, sound and innovative management and external linkages and support were sources of great pride. (Musisi & Muwanga, 2003: 8)

Makerere University can be considered as central to understanding the life of the university in Uganda. The flourishing beginnings of university life in Makerere took a dramatic turn at the beginning of the 1970s. Musisi and Muwanga (2003: 9) argue that inflation and world economic monetary mechanisms remain at the root of this dramatic turn of events. On the one hand, high inflation in the 1970s ate into university budgets, particularly salaries and other services. On the other hand, the World Bank and other international monetary organisations encouraged the new African governments to cut down on public spending by, among other things, reducing funding of non-essential services. The university was also perceived as non-essential compared to the government mandate to provide education at primary and secondary levels. It is conceded that such forces and the policy shift came at a time when the population was growing and demand for higher education was increasing (Musisi & Muwanga, 2003: 10). The Ugandan higher education system was further disturbed by several years of civil unrest. The effects of these conditions were observed in lowering of the morale of university lecturers as they tried to make ends meet, the dwindling of teaching and learning resources and student unrest. In general, one can argue that what seemed to be a flourishing African university life suddenly came to an end. These conditions made the governance of the higher education system in Uganda problematic.

The University Act, which was promulgated in 1970, gave government political power/control over university administration. Policies were generated and issues resolved according to government directives. One can easily conclude that such legislation, although meant for the higher education system, fundamentally tilted the balance of power in higher education towards government.

The public higher education system in Uganda has three evident key players. These are the National Resistance Movement, which controls government, the universities and the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE). The NCHE acts as “an intermediary body between higher education institutions and the government” (Musisi, 2003: 614). The NCHE is also mandated to promote the objectives of university education; address government’s development, coordination, planning, administration and financial management of national universities; coordinate students’ admission and accreditation of national universities; and serve as a data bank on higher education institutions for government and other key players (Musisi, 2003: 618).

Musisi argues that Uganda allows candidates to apply for studies directly to any of the available tertiary education institutions. It appears as if before this was the case, students were applying and being allocated space in the university depending on the demand in the public service (2003: 618). This could mean that government directly allocated places for students and determined what they were to study in the university. The current access conditions also mean that the system has moved from a fully government-funded system to a cost-sharing system. But due to increases in enrolment in a bid to increase revenue, the quality of teaching and learning dropped. Musisi (2003: 619) argues that the drop in quality forced government to create a department of higher education. It is important to note in this regard that the University and Other Tertiary Institutions Act was only promulgated in 2001 to take care of the governance system and issues of student access (Musisi, 2003: 619).

Musisi (2003: 619) argues that the new act contains two main objectives, which are to regulate and guide the establishment and management of higher education institutions and to act as a qualifications framework watchdog. The act also creates and puts into operation the NCHE. The act removes the president as chancellor and increases the powers of senate representatives and councils. According to this act, the NCHE is empowered to register, monitor, evaluate, coordinate and certify institutions and their activities (Musisi, 2003: 619).

### **2.5.6 The university system in Malawi**

Until recently Malawi had one national university, the University of Malawi, with five constituent colleges and one central administration centre named the University Office. It was only in 1997 that an act of Parliament established the second national and public university called Mzuzu University. Its first students were admitted in January 1999. Three private universities were opened after 2000.

Similar to other African countries, the public higher education system in Malawi was introduced to meet the economic and cultural demands of the country after independence in 1964 (Chimombo, 2003: 414). Chimombo (2003: 415) further indicates that at its establishment, the University of Malawi was intended to create local personnel that would assist government and the private sector; it would also initiate educational and industrial research that would benefit the whole education system and the wider public sector. Nevertheless, issues of access and financing have, over the years, been under the strict control of government.

The system of higher education in Malawi has five constituent colleges under the University of Malawi. The five colleges are Chancellor College, the Malawi Polytechnic, Malawi College of Medicine, Bunda College of Agriculture and Malawi College of Nursing. These are run by the central offices of the University of Malawi. The University Office coordinates selection, funding and all other major activities for the constituent colleges. In other words, governance at the University of Malawi uses a federal system with parallel administrative structures in each of the five colleges, that is, from principals to librarians and support-staff structures. This means that the structures of governance that are manifested at the level of individual colleges are replicas of administrative structures at the University (Central) Office. In this case, each stage of the administrative structure, each assistant registrar of a college, owes allegiance to similar structures in the central offices by carrying out instructions from such offices as well as responding to local structures of authority in each individual

college. Chimombo (2003: 416) argues that this dual system of allegiance creates confusion and duplication in the governance system of higher education in Malawi.<sup>6</sup>

The financing of higher education in Malawi has since its inception been dependent on government. Hence, there has been a heavy government involvement in the choice of what programmes are to be run and to what extent. For instance, in different political circumstances of the nation, access to the university has been shifting between access based on academic merit and access based on a district quota system. These shifts have largely been dictated by the government in power. In addition to this, entrance to the university, that is, to each college, still depends on the available bed-space in each college. Due to limited space, only a few candidates have traditionally been selected every year to start their first year. One can consider this limited provisioning of college bed-spaces as an unintended consequence brought about by inadequate government infrastructure since all the colleges in this regard are owned by government.

Furthermore, Chimombo (2003: 419–420), citing Dzimadzi, states that until 1985, university education in terms of fees, board and lodging, and medical expenses was free. Students were also given an allowance for incidental expenses. Afterwards a co-sharing mechanism was hesitantly put in place at the instruction of the World Bank. The co-sharing positioning of higher education in Malawi has resulted in a deepening financial crisis in the sector. This crisis is easily noticed in the increasing dilapidation of university infrastructure and declining relevance and quality of education and research, which eventually led to the inability of the university to implement some of its programs, such as adequate training of lecturers, production of up-to-date research and provision of books. Chimombo (2003: 419) also notes that this situation has been seen as the foremost reason for a number of conflicts between staff, students, management and government, leading to numerous strikes in the sector. The frequent closures of the university due to political and economic unrest resulted in the university

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<sup>6</sup> Similar observations are also contained in the Malawi Institute of Management Report (MIM) (1997) on the state of the University of Malawi, available at <http://www.unima.mw/downloads/mimreport.pdf>, p.43.



abandoning its term system to adopt a semester system because, among other things, the university curriculum could not cope with the routine term calendar for each year due to these constraints.

The higher education system in Malawi shows signs of collapsing standards in output and lack of morale at all levels of the system because of unstable and dwindling government financial support. Chimombo (2003: 421) argues that the governance system in the University of Malawi is in a crisis. The crisis concerns issues of direction, internal organisation and relevance. The Malawi Institute of Management Report (MIM, 1997: 48) to the Malawi Government, in general, proposes a more market-orientated type of university offering in terms of stepping up university output in order to meet the increasing demands of the market economy. The market-oriented university is proposed as one way of effectively using the dwindling resources.

Towards the end of the 1990s the University of Malawi introduced higher tuition fees, from 2 500 Malawian Kwacha to 25 000 for residential students. Ironically, almost all students, who are selected on a residential basis, are given loans by government, covering tuition, board, medical expenses and book allowances. In theory, the loans are repayable after graduation. It is not clear to the public how these loans are being recovered. Chimombo (2003: 420) argues that this policy tends to favour certain groups of people in society, especially those coming from wealthy families. Chimombo (2003: 420) also maintains that “the student loan scheme was undertaken without wider consultation and debate or consideration of more equitable ways” to fund public higher education in Malawi.

### **2.5.7 Higher education in Namibia**

Otaala (2003: 478) claims that the university system in Namibia inherited the British idea of a university with its concepts of autonomy and academic freedom. Nevertheless, there is no elaboration as to what autonomy and academic freedom may mean in the Namibian case of higher education. But further on, Otaala (2003: 480) describes the University of Namibia as having taken its place in

assisting government to achieve its goals of national development. This promotion of national development is encapsulated in what is seemingly a managerialist and neo-liberal agenda. The governance philosophy at the University of Namibia is coined as the “promotion of management efficiency” (Otaala, 2003: 480).

I argue that Otaala’s (2003) views may cause ambivalence in one’s understanding of higher education in Namibia. This is in relation to a reading of how governance of the university is handled as enacted in Section 6 of the University of Namibia Act, no. 18 of 1992 (Republic of Namibia, 1992). This section states that the chancellor, who is the titular head of the university, shall be elected and be in office for a period of six years, after which he/she may be re-elected. This formulation initially opens up the chancellor’s position to any other persons who may be capable of and interested in holding the position. This basically means the position is open to competition from any members of the public who feel that they qualify for the post.

Later in the act things turn around as the act virtually makes the head of state chancellor of the higher education system. Section 26 (1) states, “Notwithstanding the provisions of Section 6, the first Chancellor of the University shall be the incumbent of the office of President of the Republic of Namibia on the date of commencement of this Act, who shall be deemed to have been elected as Chancellor of the University in terms of that section”. In other words, by virtue of making the state president the titular head of the higher education system, the chancellorship of the University of Namibia falls under state control just as in many other cases that I have evaluated above. The mixing of this idea with the concept of a free market of ideas and economic productivity only adds confusion to the understanding of governance in the university for governments are not the best proponents of a free market and economic competition on the African continent.

In addition, the university is expected to submit a programme of activities for each preceding year to the Minister of Education, who in turn presents it to

Parliament. In this regard one needs to note that according to forms of public governance, parliament is one of the institutions of government. In addition to this, parliaments on the African continent are also reflective of ruling parties in the different countries, in many respects. This observation implies that the University of Namibia, given other African cases I have analysed above, may not be independent of government. Funding for the university comes from government upon consultation between the Minister of Education and the Minister of Finance.

### **2.5.8 Major trends in higher education governance arrangements in South Africa**

My last country of analysis is South Africa and I outline a few major trends that characterise higher education governance in South Africa. My concentration goes on governance patterns after the abolition of the apartheid system. Nevertheless, such a focus cannot take place in exclusion of an understanding of the basic characteristics of life that necessitated educational change in South Africa. As such, the apartheid system of higher education governance will be mentioned in order to shed light on the motivations for some of the changes that have occurred in higher education governance in South Africa since then. In this regard, I want to acknowledge that the recently introduced transformation of the higher education sector in South Africa has gone through tremendous change and through different paradigms. Lange (2003: 2) asserts that “the transformation of governance of higher education institutions in South Africa took a historical form that responded to particular political and ideological circumstances”.

The historical picture of higher education governance in South Africa can be considered by analysing the apartheid period as different from the post-apartheid period. My contention is that the options for higher education governance in South Africa since the end of apartheid have always reflected an option against its previous imbalances and segregatory educational policies. In other words, the apartheid system of education acts as a background for the creation of a new and antithetical higher education order.

Higher education governance in South Africa is affected by and reflects its history under apartheid. Nash (2006: 4) argues that the apartheid system created an “ongoing crisis of legitimacy for all South African universities” by reinforcing racial barriers, among other things. The apartheid system, instead of creating a unified higher education system, created three deformed systems. The Bantu Education Act, which was promulgated in 1953, motivated and determined most patterns of higher education governance in apartheid South Africa. Within this framework, tertiary institutions fell into three categories: the English-medium universities, the Afrikaans-medium universities and the homeland universities. The main thrust of building a system based on racial segregation rested partly on the assumption that each ethnic group needed to enjoy its own homeland education system, where the culture, language and heritage of each group would be preserved and promoted (Nash, 2006: 5).

This categorisation and framing assumed that higher education institutions would have a great deal of leverage in so far as matters of self-governance were concerned within their locations of operation. But such a categorisation and its characteristic management of higher education systems also assumed ideals of segregation and separate development, thereby creating imbalances in forms of pedagogy and educational governance (with particular reference to separate schools, see Hartshorne, 1992: 36–37). For instance, the homeland universities were deprived of the state-of-the-art facilities for efficient higher education development whereas the white universities, in this case both the English-medium and Afrikaans-medium universities, had many resources at their disposal.

Hall and Symes (2003: 6) argue that the divisions in the apartheid higher education system were characterised by language, ethnicity, location and resources and that the governance of the institutions during this period did not reflect one model of state-university relationship. In other words, while the state exerted much influence on the governance of the homeland universities, such as the University of Venda, the University of the North and the University of Zululand, in order to protect its own political interests of seclusion, the so-called

liberal universities, such as the University of Natal (now called the University of Zululand), the University of Cape Town and the Witwatersrand University, were subjected to little state interference, given the nature of state repression at the time. The Afrikaner universities, such as the Rand Afrikaans University, the University of Pretoria, Stellenbosch University and the University of Port Elizabeth, were regarded as promoters of the seclusion ideology and hence also regarded as part of the state.

The differential treatment of universities by the state created imbalances between the universities. In general, the governance of the higher education system during the apartheid system is characterised by lack of homogeneity and coordination. This background created a need for a single, co-ordinated system of higher education that would effectively remove the discrepancies, discrimination and injustices that resulted from the apartheid system (Department of Education, 1997; Hall & Symes, 2003; Nash, 2006).

The inception of a new system of higher education governance in South Africa is informed by a number of values. These values are meant to enable the nation to rid the system of the discrepancies and injustices while at the same time creating enabling conditions for a democratic South Africa. The Education White Paper 3 (Department of Education, 1996: 7–8) outlines the pillars upon which higher education governance in South Africa is supposed to rest. Some of the major pillars for higher education governance include equity and redress, democratisation and development. Higher education was also expected to maintain values of quality assurance, effectiveness and efficiency, academic freedom, institutional autonomy and public accountability.

In general, there is a strong intimation in White Paper 3 that higher education in South Africa should create conditions that would enable the education system to contribute to the common good of society. Equally high on the higher education governance agenda is that the system should be “assigned a greater role to national development through global competitiveness” (Waghid & Le Grange, 2004: 34). The expectation that higher education should play a greater role

through global competitiveness demands that the governance of the higher education system in South Africa should adopt the philosophy of neo-liberalism – the current major sign of global competitiveness. To a large extent, this implies that economic efficiency becomes more imperative than issues of redress or equity.

In general, I concede to the fact that the broader agenda of making higher education respond positively to issues of redress and global economic competitiveness can take place with any of the possible alternatives regarding the relationship between the state and the higher education sector. But the state supervision model can better achieve results in global economic competitiveness whereas state control is better suited to achieving equity goals as set by the national governments. Ideally, I eliminate state interference because of its very nature of being an ad hoc procedure in managing institutions. I think the main clue lies in the points of pressure used by any of the partners in making their agenda felt and implemented. Specifically, I take note that the two broad ways of looking at the benefits and/or outcomes in higher education transformation in South African higher education, economic global competitiveness and equity, contain inherent conflict between each other. Nevertheless, the general working relationship stipulates a model of ‘co-operative governance’. This framework demands a fair consideration of the interests of all key stakeholders or partners without undermining any one of them.

Omar and Figaji (2000: 82) argue that co-operative governance “entails autonomous constituencies of civil society working co-operatively with an assertive government”. In this regard, the different key players or interest groups are considered to work together towards a common goal or purpose, while at the same time recognising their individual interests in higher education practice and enterprise (Omar & Figaji, 2000: 84). Hall and Symes (2003: 7) further argue that co-operative governance as a model is equivalent to state supervision, a model that is discussed above.

According to Omar and Figaji (2000), co-operative governance is also a system of active role playing by different stakeholders. With regard to higher education in South Africa, the stress is on the tripartite co-operation and interaction between the Department of Education, higher education institutions and other interest groups and a higher education council. In this case, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) serves to bring about an effective system of co-operative governance.

The system of cooperative governance is envisaged to operate in such a way that the ministry would provide expert knowledge on educational policy, management, analysis and formulation, among other things. The higher education institutions and other interest groups are representatives of particular interests and act to advise the minister (Omar & Figaji, 2000: 82). In this framework, the advisory body on higher education acts as a buffer zone between the state and the institutions, ensuring that “there is no loss of autonomy” (Omar & Figaji, 2000: 82). In other words, co-operative governance implies stakeholder partnership. While these are the intended purposes of co-operative governance, whether these goals are pursued in the same way as meant when first formulated has also generated a great deal of debate within higher education discourse today.

Hall and Symes (2005: 8) argue that White Paper 3 (Department of Education, 1997) conceives co-operative governance as outlined above to be “a system of delineated powers and constraints that remain hierarchical, while incorporating checks and balances designed to preserve the degree of institutional autonomy necessary for academic freedom in teaching and research”. As such, in co-operative governance, not all the participants have equal authority and responsibility. The idea that this White Paper vision endorses, namely that government should have the upper hand since it is the custodian of public interest, cannot be considered as too wide of the mark. This is further supported by sections 3.6 to 3.7 of White Paper 3 that expect government to exercise a “proactive, guiding and constructive role while expecting institutional autonomy to be exercised in tandem with public accountability”. Such a mandate partially

removes the inevitable situation of government overriding institutional decisions. I take this line of thought because of the counselling role government is left with.

The ideals of co-operative governance in South Africa's higher education system are an important source for assessing academic freedom within higher education. The main reason is that co-operative governance has implications for relations between the state and higher institutions (Kraak, 2001). According to Kraak, through co-operative governance the apparent opposition between state intervention and institutional autonomy is mediated while the state remains in the role of steering and co-ordinating. In this case, when an institution exercises its autonomy, it does so within the limits of accountability in order to maintain co-operation. Hence, co-operative governance in the South African higher education system necessarily assumes equality of partners operating with a commonly agreed agenda in order to arrive at a common good, where autonomy, transparency and accountability also become crucial. But the extent to which such a vision for higher education can be thoroughly implemented given South Africa's apartheid history is another matter.

Nevertheless, the application of co-operative governance in the practice of higher education governance in South Africa has come with a number of problems, complications and dilemmas. For instance, tensions can arise from the way the Ministry of Education wants the higher education sector to operate and from the way the Ministry of Labour conceives its mandate for the provision of skilled labour to meet the demands of the market economy. The universities' perceived mission of developing people according to their individual intellectual capacities can also come into conflict with the state's agenda of redress and social justice in a system riddled by inequality. Furthermore, the universities' wish to genuinely engage in knowledge production and dissemination may not match the market demands of producing graduates who will fit into the market economy. These are just some of the issues that can bring tension into the conceptualisation and practice of co-operative governance in higher education in South Africa. In effect these tensions have ramifications for the understanding and practice of autonomy within the higher education sector.



Two dominant motifs determine how key players in South Africa's higher education system manage the higher education system. On the one hand, there is enough evidence to think that higher education is there primarily for the promotion of the common/public good. In other words, higher education is supposed to be beneficial to the communities that it serves. On the other hand, there is a notion that as much as issues of justice, redress, equity and transformation are necessary for the governance of the higher education system and the achievement of the common good, such efforts need to be in keeping with global trends and the economic imperatives, which should have an influence upon higher education today. The researcher will discuss the implications of globalisation and neo-liberalism later in this dissertation.

From the point of view of promoting the common good, White Paper 3 (Department of Education, 1997) states that higher education should engage in social transformation that will enhance the individual's capacity to live a full life in society (Section 1.3). In addition, higher education should enable the nation with its programme of redress through an equitable distribution of opportunities. Hence Singh (2001: 8) in trying to put forward the nature of universities along the spirit of White Paper 3 further suggests that the "applied use of knowledge for social development (community service) is amongst the core elements of a university".

Other social functions of higher education that are part of the promotion of the common good in the South African higher education system include the "facilitation of social justice through enhanced access to higher education for the disadvantaged and excluded constituencies" (Singh, 2001: 11). In addition, higher education is also expected to contribute to critical human development in all disciplines. It is also expected to develop critical citizens who would drive the democratisation process forward. These expectations become part and parcel of the higher education governance system.

Co-operative governance in South African higher education also implies that higher education should be accountable to the demands of the liberal market

economy, as indicated above. Among other things, this means that higher education is faced with the demands for creating human resources and high-level skills and the production, acquisition and application of new knowledge. In this regard, co-operative governance is meant to assist the higher education system in responding to an increasingly technologically oriented economy (Department of Education, 1997: 1.12–1.13). Within the logic of co-operative governance, the demands for the promotion of the public/common good militate against the neo-liberal demands of marketisation in higher education (Singh, 2001: 13).

South Africa's model of higher education governance, after 1994, tilts toward the supervision model. The system recognises the equality of key players such as the university, the Ministry of Education and the Council for Higher Education (CHE) (Department of Education, 1997). In this development, it is assumed that the state, although it remains the dominant financier for many South African universities, does not control the university sector as just one of its departments. In this regard, university institutions are expected to experience substantial autonomy in how they conduct their affairs. One good example is the adoption of different languages in the different institutions.

Nevertheless, some fear that at moments the state intrudes on the affairs of the universities and imposes itself on the universities in several dealings with them (Berkhout *et al.*, 2005: 1). Such remarks come in the wake of the state's applying specific benchmarks in relation to transformation issues, such as the stress on the employment of black academics and other top university personnel, the monitoring and evaluation of different universities using the same yardstick, without consideration of circumstantial differences, and the insistence that universities tackle the dilemmas in fast-tracking. Similarly, a report from the University of Pretoria to the CHE on the same issues suggests that the interventions made into the higher education system by government after the initial 1997 Higher Education Act tilt the balance of power from a supervision model of co-operation to a strong interventionist system (University of Pretoria, 2005: 21). The report further notes that there has been a move from institutional autonomy as one of the pillars for the governance of higher education to

conditional autonomy. The report regrets that not much clarity is provided for this important shift. The University of Pretoria is of the view that institutional autonomy in the governance arrangements of the higher education in South Africa is held at ransom by government, which sets the conditions for autonomy, thereby eroding the very foundations of co-operative governance.

Furthermore, irrespective of instituting co-operative governance, Jansen (2006: 12–14) maps nine distinctive pathways through which the state has made significant incursions into institutional autonomy in South Africa. Jansen’s list claims that the South African Government now decides what can be taught, which institutions will offer what programs, who can be taught and how, funding models and credibility of degrees, among many others (Jansen, 2006: 13–14). While declaring that his argument does not amount to accusing the state of unnecessary changes, Jansen (2006: 14) affirms that such interventions have changed the face of institutional practice. To him, the interventions have “changed the discourses, understandings, and behaviours of institutions in ways that make *any* (emphasis original) state interventions more legitimate than before, thereby also altering how universities understand themselves, their missions and their degrees (sic) of freedom” (Jansen, 2006: 15).

## **2.6 General characteristics of higher education governance patterns on the African continent**

The higher education system on the African continent and in relation to the cases I have analysed leans more towards state control. In each of these cases, the state has an authoritative voice in the running of the public institutions. This view is supported by a number of factors, such as the role of the chancellors, how legislation is done and who holds power in the system’s framework, the management of resources and the general funding of the higher education sector. The goals of most higher education systems are also determined and set by the different nation-states.

Higher education on the African continent shows similar characteristics across the different nations. One common feature that one is bound to notice in the process of analysing the different governance structures in the selected countries is that the birth of the higher education systems in the different countries is linked with specific social, historical and political factors, which in turn characterise the different nation-states. As I explain below, the legacy of colonialism, global economic forces together with financing modalities and the persistent yearning of governments to make the higher education system ‘a child’ of the state are some of the major factors affecting governance structures of higher education on the continent. My assumption is that much as the South African higher education system is unique in terms of history, innovation and other things, the dominant characteristics that tend to influence how the governing structures of a higher education institution are going to be arranged and their rationale may not be very different across the continent.

In the subsection below, I evaluate general factors that cut across and characterise the governance of higher education systems in Africa. These include factors such as the legacy of colonialism, the global market economy and government/state control.

### **2.6.1 The legacy of colonialism**

Altbach and Teferra (2003: 4) argue that “the impact of the colonial past and the continuing influence by the former colonial powers remain crucial in any analysis of higher education in Africa”. Most patterns of governance and legislation in higher education have not shifted much from those inherited from the colonial masters. Altbach and Teferra (2003: 4) also indicate that some of the indicators towards this trend include the fact that higher education in most African countries still maintains values of limited access. For instance, the University of Malawi still continues to enrol less than 1 000 first years every year due to the limited capacity of the different colleges under it. In most cases, widespread access to higher education in Africa is considered a luxury. There has also been a decrease in the funding of higher education institutions, both by

international donors and local governments. Among other things, this could be a sign of government's growing disengagement from higher education.

Most higher education governance systems on the continent were modelled after the colonialist (mostly European) approaches to higher education. Nevertheless, this does not mean that there were no higher education institutions before colonialism. Other institutions existed but almost with no resemblance to and continuity with colonial systems (Lulat, 2003: 19). In the colonial period, the governance systems of most higher education institutions in Africa, especially British colonised Africa, were replicas of governance systems in Britain. This was so because curricula and examinations were determined by a specific board or university overseas. The degrees were also granted by the mother institutions (Lulat, 2003: 19).

In the post-colonial era national universities were created for nationalistic reasons. Political unification of the new nations determined more the path of governance in the newly established universities than the goals universities set for themselves. Overseas higher education institutions helped in the development of higher education in Africa through overseas training of students, controlling the examination system and the granting of degrees (Lulat, 2003: 25). In general the development of the higher education sector in Africa has mostly depended on ties with overseas governments, multilateral agencies and others. It is in this regard that Lulat (2003: 26) argues that external governments and donor agencies "have had a virtual monopoly on shaping policy on higher education throughout the post-independence period" (Lulat, 2003: 26). I argue that this virtual monopoly over policy in higher education in Africa is largely responsible for the governance patterns that one observes in most higher education institutions on the continent.

### **2.6.2 The influence of a globalised market economy**

Mittelman (1994: 144–149) claims that the governance of higher education in Africa is fundamentally driven by three forces, which he refers to as pressure

points. These are globalisation, the state and the universities themselves. Of these three Mittelman concedes that global forces play a bigger part in controlling how higher education systems are governed on the continent. The global imperatives play themselves out in the three dimensions of global finance, development assistance and philanthropic activities (1994: 144). As such, one can validly argue that central to the global imperatives are the operations of a globalised market economy.

Mittelman points out that Africa's economies are structurally weak and as such, they are subject to declining terms of trade and fluctuations in primary commodity prices. In turn, this weakness forces the African nations to fall back on cushions provided by the international financial organisations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (Mittelman, 1994: 145). The involvement of international funders in higher education systems, for instance, brings with it conditions to be fulfilled by the higher education system just as is the case with the huge amount of debt that has accumulated in most third world countries. In the higher education sector, donor funding has dictated the type of education that is to be offered, where and how it is to be offered and the maximum level/standard of education on offer. In practise, every fund affects how governance structures are arranged in an institution. Most of all, the international funders influence the governing of higher education in the sense that in many cases the funds allocated to the higher education sector are reduced in preference to primary education and the training of primary school teachers as opposed to a preferential treatment for higher education. To an extent, one can also argue that this pattern reflects a positivist mentality in looking at educational outcomes. In this case, the outcomes also happen to be tangible and measurable in reference to the extent to which upliftment of the lives of local people is affected. I argue that having the above as the working framework for funding of higher education institutions on the African continent means that higher education has erroneously been considered not to directly affect the lives of ordinary citizens in third world countries, Africa in particular.

Global welfare or development assistance relates to foreign programmes set up in African universities in a bid to strengthen the capacity or output of the universities. If such funding prospects come to materialise, it is rare to find this development assistance spreading across all areas in the higher education sector. Usually, the language of prioritisation cuts in and this funding usually goes in the direction of improving the sciences and not so much the humanities. Today, the catchphrase “development-related training programme(s)” has become famous as a determining factor of whether a higher education institution programme will be funded or not. In other words, the very selective nature of development assistance directly determines how the governance of higher education systems will operate. I argue that this trend fundamentally affects what the higher education institution will offer, how it offers it, to whom and also to what level. This is much in recognition of the fact that most African universities and their research centres depend on foreign assistance because of economic indebtedness.

Mittelman adds that attachment to philanthropic institutions has also determined the nature of governance in higher education, although to a smaller extent compared to the other economic forces. Philanthropic institutions have particular values and live for and promote those values for what they are. For instance, a National Arts Foundation of a wealthy country would develop collaboration with a Department of Arts in Africa specifically for the promotion of the arts simply for the love of the discourse. In other words, philanthropic institutions are selective in their nature and any economic dependency on them determines the scope of operations for the concerned higher education institution. In a nutshell, globalisation<sup>7</sup> together with its implied financial arrangements and conditionalities on the African continent affects the way higher education systems are managed. The availability of financial resources affects the nature of personnel recruitment and retention, and the nature of material resources available for teaching and learning.

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<sup>7</sup> I will consider how globalisation affects the governance of higher education on the African continent later in Chapter 4.

Teferra and Altbach (2003: 5) further indicate that governance in higher education has been under heavy pressure from local governments in the last decade concerning finances. Universities are specifically pressured to find alternative sources of funding. This imperative affects the orientation of the nature of the business of the university; that is, it affects the governance of higher education institutions in terms of the scope of operations. Universities have been forced by diminishing financial resources to expand and extend their services for a fee. For example, Malawi introduced a non-subsidised category in university entrance, which implies that students going on such programmes pay the full fees, different from state-sponsored students who pay relatively low fees.

While the trend to let universities on the continent look for sources of funding other than state funds, for example full fees for some students, has generally increased access to higher education for most students, this move also tends to compromise the quality of higher education, and it has caused the redirection of higher education institutions in terms of governance models and possible avenues for understanding and exercising institutional autonomy. Contrary to these unintended though foreseeable consequences, Sawyerr (2004: 5–6) argues that a variety of structural adjustment programmes that swept through the higher education sector in the 1980s and 1990 were geared towards averting a crisis in the higher education sector. The structural adjustment programmes were intended to “to give a freer rein to market forces by removing rigidities in the production, pricing, marketing and exchange rates regimes” (2004: 5). Leaving universities to the operations of market forces ideally meant opening up universities to competition with the hope of improving the way universities are run.

In Sawyerr’s (2004: 6) thinking, globalisation seems to be the major factor driving the particular ways in which higher education lives itself out today. He repositions higher education in relation to the economic forces that make higher education respond in particular ways. In other words, economic conditions and factors are at the heart of determining what higher education ought to be today. Nevertheless, what Sawyerr (2004) does not indicate directly is the way these economic forces keep on influencing university governance so that even the



university's own sense of autonomy becomes affected. I intend to dwell on this point later in Chapter 3. Sawyerr acknowledges, however, that higher education can still be a vehicle for the derivation of maximum social good by promoting the restoration of its own "public good" (Sawyerr, 2004: 7). Hence the interest of the state in higher education issues has to a large extent been defended on the grounds that the public good is at stake. I follow up on this point in the next subsection.

### **2.6.3 Governance of higher education systems and the state**

My purposive sample of nine systems of higher education systems on the continent gives a glimpse of governance structures across the African continent. These are Egypt, Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa. In all these cases, the state/government is involved in the governance of higher education systems. Nevertheless, there are some variations with regard to the extent to which government is considered to fundamentally affect the running of these systems. For instance, a closer look at Ghana, Uganda and South Africa reveals that there are independent structures responsible for the running of higher education systems although government may still maintain an oversight role. Ghana's bi-cameral system is one such example although the appointment of special professors by government tends to jeopardise the independence of the system from government structures. South Africa's co-operative governance system has a high potential for independent higher education governance although observations of actual government-university co-operation indicate a tilting towards state intervention (Jansen, 2006).

Some of these countries have forms of governance that range from moderate to high state control and interference. For instance, there tends to be no distinction between government and state in Egypt. While in all of these the head of state is the chancellor or titular head of the higher education systems, in some cases, such as Kenya and Zimbabwe, the presidents are not just symbolic heads. The heads of state wield enormous power in the governing structures. They nominate

councils and in some cases there are special statutes that allow government direct control over the affairs of the academy.

It may be argued that higher education governance in Africa also shows enough signs of using a federal system of governance. Malawi and Lesotho are clear cases in point. Such systems are highly centralised with a number of satellite colleges or institutions receiving structural and governance orders from central offices, which are themselves under the control of the state.

The analysis of a few cases on the African continent in terms of higher education governance confirms the idea that ‘the governability’ of a higher education system also reflects the level of its obedience to state dictates. Teferra and Altbach (2003: 11) think that “most African governments are intolerant of dissent, criticism, nonconformity and free expression of controversial, new, or unconventional ideas”, hence the need to keep higher education systems under state control in order to avoid havoc in a nation. While this tendency cannot be explained by the legacy of colonialism, it is the case that the tendency weakens the university’s exercise of autonomous action.

The state involvement in the governance of higher education can be accounted for in a number of ways. Mwiria (2003: 33) argues that apart from the historical origins justifying the high presence of government in higher education systems, it is also the case that universities have been perceived as centres for national development by the state. Hence “African (national) leaders find universities too visible and prestigious as national monuments to be given complete autonomy”. This being the case, government exerts influence in most important stages or sections of the higher education system. It influences the selection of most officials and controls the agenda that these officials would be promoting in the university. There are strong links between the university and the chancellor (who in most cases happens to be the president) and the Ministry of Education. Because most high offices are filled by nomination, there is a good chance of the chancellor “sending directives to council through their key nominees, such as the

minister of education or the vice-chancellor” (Mwiria, 2003: 34), thereby compromising the autonomy of these institutions.

The nature of government influence in the governing structures of a higher education system affects the degree of institutional autonomy and academic freedom that a system may live out. In the case that governments appoint or directly influence the appointment of top management within the university systems, the appointees tend to be more accountable to government (the paymasters) than to the goals and ideals of a university. Mwiria (2003: 36) recounts that due to the centralisation of power and the nature of that power, “in many African universities, senates, faculty boards and heads of departments often rubber stamp the wishes of the university chief executives”. Such decisions are often in line with the wishes of the government of the day but which may have little to do with the life of the university and its sustenance.

Therefore, in effect the nature of the state-university relationship heavily affects how the university does what it does, where it does it, with whom and for how long. The strong relations between governments and universities have resulted in universities being run as state institutions financially. The better the relationship between government and the university, the more assistance the university receives, thereby having more leverage to do what it wants to do. Government on the African continent has a patronising influence on higher education systems.

In relation to these dilemmas, some suggest that it is a question of discovering equilibrium between public interest and the higher education’s private interest (Bok, 1982: 52) so that government and higher education can work in harmony and enable higher education to contribute to the social good. Such ideals assume an underlying conception of operation between the partners, for instance that the activities of government always contribute towards the common good. This position is difficult to prove when one looks at how deplorably many governments on the continent conduct themselves and the misery they directly inflict on citizens at times. But the researcher needs to note here that possibilities of underlying terms of co-operation between the state and the university assume

that such co-operation heavily depends on the cooperating partners' full awareness of the terms, conditions and implications of their cooperation.

Part of this awareness includes a recognition of and respect for what universities are mandated to do and under what circumstances they best achieve their goals. Such an investigation goes to the centre of defining what academic freedom and university autonomy are all about. Again, this questioning is in view of the idea that the structures of governance reveal the nature and understanding of academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

## **2.7 Predominant patterns in African higher education governance systems: concluding reflections**

Many of the cases, I have analysed above indicate a heavy stress on state control rather than state supervision. On such grounds, I proceed to argue that the governance of higher education as shown has more non-liberal tendencies. This is the case because the state/government controls most higher education governance structures on the African continent. For instance, the case of Egypt leaves no distinction between the civil service and the university system. The university is structured according to the structures of the state. These cases also show that the executive arm of government largely oversees crucial decision-making processes of the university through the roles performed by the ministers who chair university councils. The state president holds the position of chancellor in most of the cases. Through such forms of control, one can easily argue that government exerts enormous power over the higher education system, as seen in a number of African universities.

It is also noteworthy that in a few cases claims to a bi-cameral system and co-operative governance are made. These forms of governance are discussed in relation to higher education systems in Ghana and South Africa. In such cases, government is considered to maintain an overseeing role in the governance of the higher education system. In South Africa, for instance, particular emphasis is placed on the government as an equal partner or stakeholder in the governance of

the higher education system. Nevertheless several scholars indicate that the way government handles issues relating to the higher education sector goes beyond equal partnership and stakeholderhood to government control. This form of control is viewed as the main source of the erosion of the basis for university autonomy and academic freedom. Hence, Jansen (2004: 4) argues that both academic freedom and university autonomy face an uncertain future in South Africa. He argues that this is so because the changes taking place both in the legislative concept and the practice of higher education constitute a “gradual but systematic erosion of historical standards of autonomy that were ingrained within the institutional fabric of universities” (Jansen, 2004: 5). Through these changes the state is regarded as continuously acquiring new forms of power that eventually erode the concept of cooperative governance, as enshrined in its own terms of operation with the universities. This can only mean that even in the cases I have reviewed as following co-operative forms of governance, persistent moves are being made to tilt the higher education mindset toward toeing the government line, other than what the universities themselves perceive as their mandates in the nature of their work.

According to the random cases reviewed, it is evident that African governments also determine the operations of the higher education institutions through the imperative to see the higher education sector as a major agent for labour training and the improvement of socio-economic conditions in a country. In this regard, higher education is pressurised to be relevant in terms of delivering according to the expectation of the state. This pressure can be considered to impact negatively on the freedom of the universities to teach what they want to teach to whom they want to teach, if I may be allowed at this stage to evoke only a basic understanding of autonomy and leave out the complexities that theories of autonomy have brought to the fore. I will analyse the different complexities involved in the theories of autonomy in Chapter 4.

Similarly, it is with this understanding that I assert that claims that have been made on the autonomy of higher education mainly refer to the institutional legal status of the higher institution as a distinct and separate entity dedicated to higher

education. But little is mentioned of the required level of autonomy for controlling officers of the higher education system. Effah's (2003: 346) concession that there is never absolute autonomy for higher education to a large extent resonates with the circumstances I have just described.

Higher education systems on the African continent are also heavily subsidised by national governments. While the provision for training of people at tertiary level is considered as a social good and hence the prerogative of every government universally, funding of higher education in Africa by government has meant government taking control of what is done in the university. Some common examples of this include government's control of levels of access and reduction of state funding for institutions failing to meet targets set by government, as is the case in South Africa. These targets include institutional transformation, enrolment rates for designated groups and universities' through-put rates, among others.

The control of government in universities has been rationalised on various grounds, including the need for accountability for public funds and responsiveness to the demands of the nation. On the other hand, universities, while requiring government funding for their operations, demand from government that the university be left free to decide what it does for it is in the best position to judge what is good for the university. In such circumstances, one of the problems facing this project is the question of whether government funding of higher education should mean government controlling the universities or whether such funding should be regarded as government's fulfilment of its mandate to the public and realising that it is the universities themselves that can control themselves.

So far I have shown that governance of higher education in Africa is a mixed bag that heavily tilts towards government control of the sector. This control is also seen to compromise what universities are ordinarily mandated to do by their nature, that is, free research and dissemination of knowledge. It can also be fairly concluded that issues such as the need for creating a national workforce, serving

the common good and economic and social accountability are all idioms used by governments to have control over higher education systems. It is only in a few cases that one observes models of a bi-cameral system of governance and cooperative governance. The theoretical grounds on which the models of bi-cameral system and co-operative governance are based have liberal characteristics. But the growing power of the state within such governance arrangements and the shifting of the poles of engagement through changing legislation by the state represent a corrosion of any possibility to develop such liberal underpinning.

Similarly the belief that governance of the higher education sector on the African continent is far from being liberal is justified by the tendency to operate the higher education sector as part of the state machinery. Consequently, major appointments and control of higher offices are done by the government through the ministries of education and offices of the state presidents. In so far as the voice of the state carries more weight than the voices of other stakeholders in the governance structures, such arrangements can be regarded as non-liberal and merely tools of political engineering. The fact that appointments are made on political and not professional grounds, as has been reported to be the case in Egypt and Zimbabwe, and the fact that tertiary education is still considered as part of a national project of self-development and self-realisation, as Sawyerr (1994: 25) points out ,show that states do not want to let the higher education sector determine its own course (to be autonomous), despite the states' claims that their higher education systems are autonomous merely by virtue of their legislative frameworks. Such a condition can only indicate smaller levels of autonomy rather than full-blown autonomous practices.

A majority of the cases I have analysed indicate that universities operate like state apparatuses in the sense that government controls most of the things that happen in the university. It is difficult to conceive of the same universities as centres of independent thought and criticism. My own experience of working in the University of Malawi, for example, tells me that criticising government on any issue makes the university become unfavourable and subsequently worsens

the university's financial problems since government is the sole funder of the higher education system in Malawi. In similar cases on the African continent, one can at best only say that universities have very little leeway for independent criticism since governments control the hiring and firing of university management teams through their education ministries.

What becomes of the university when it is made to toe the government line? Inevitably independent and critical voices are thwarted. In many ways, universities become more preoccupied with managing to survive, but how they manage to survive and the forms of their silently negotiated identities become less important. Whether one considers this mandate of the university from this latter utilitarian sense, for instance the idea that universities serve their societies in different ways, or from the more sober aims of achieving the highest development of human reason and imagination, questions of institutional autonomy and academic freedom are indispensable for such projects. Readings (1996: 5) hints at the idea of the self-realisation of humanity as the core function of the university at the dawn of the Enlightenment. In cases where universities operate under state control, this core function of the actualisation of human potential also becomes difficult to achieve because most of the political pressures universities are made to live with are in many ways parochial and at best short-sighted.

In the next chapter I trace the development and usage of the concept of autonomy in systems of higher education outside Africa. This examination will be done in order to understand the forms and conceptions of autonomy that may have influenced the African higher education system.



## CHAPTER 3

### THE EVOLUTION OF THE CONCEPT OF UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY

#### 3.1 Introductory remarks

In this chapter I proceed in the discourse by taking a look at how the concept of university autonomy has evolved in history by, among other things, examining underlying assumptions and declarations of autonomy and university practices and systems according to some traditions of higher education systems. This discussion assumes that the connection between autonomy and education is proven. Although I may allude to this matter later in the chapter, the chapter is not meant to give a detailed discussion of this connection.

#### 3.2 The philosophical-historical development of the concepts of academic freedom and institutional autonomy in universities

In this section, I trace the historical developments of the conception of academic freedom as it has evolved within university traditions. I first locate the conception within historical and social conceptions. In this way, I will also attempt to understand whether the concept of autonomy has something unique and essential in itself, something that makes university autonomy what it is.

Is university autonomy a natural right of the universities, as Kirk (1955: 8) argues, or it is a socially constructed right? This question echoes most of the challenging questions that confront one in understanding the nature of university autonomy. Kirk (1955) first distinguishes between intellectual freedom as the inner aspiration in people to acquire knowledge and academic freedom, which appears more as a construct of the society of practice. The researcher thinks that Kirk's perspective on intellectual freedom, which is close to academic freedom, assumes an acceptance of a specific naturalist understanding of the nature of academic freedom. He argues as follows:

In the middle ages, as in the classical times, the academy possessed freedom unknown to other bodies and persons because the philosopher, the scholar, and

the student were looked upon as men consecrated to the service of truth; and that truth was not simply a purposeless groping after miscellaneous information, but a wisdom to be obtained from a teleological search (Kirk, 1955: 17).

In the first place, this view implies that there must be something out there called 'truth' to which all academic endeavours should aspire. Such an argument is mainly proposed by a number of rationalist philosophers, who may also hold that the human mind has an inherent capacity to reason and that given an option to reason or not to reason, the human being will choose the path of reason. In the Rationalist tradition, the objective end towards which the argument for the need for academic freedom is made is truth and the idea that this truth is sought for its own sake. Furthermore, Kirk (1955) is of the view that people enter into a professional enquiry to discover the truth only when such truth is sought for its own sake and that the rules for the enquiry are set as the objective end itself. This view apparently presents a notion of truth that has an independent metaphysical characterisation, in the sense that truth becomes an objective entity that exists independently of other realities, be they social or political. In other words, it is a notion of truth that is independent of the different historical and social circumstances within which knowledge is constructed, as most educationists would argue.

When applied to university life and practice, the notion of objective truth makes one think that the autonomy of the university should reside in the search for 'objective truths'. Such an understanding removes the role of knowledge communities in the construction of different forms of knowledge. The understanding also creates the impression that the university is a place where reason finds its proper place only in the sense that the university takes on the function of developing private reason and imagination and improving the mind by apprehension of truth only (Kirk, 1955: 27). Such a free development of private reason, nevertheless, has nothing to do with the service to the knowledge society.

On the other hand, Russell (1993) takes the historical route by unpacking the concept of academic freedom and university autonomy from a perspective of how the concepts developed in the Middle Ages. He argues that the tension between the church and the state in the Middle Ages, with the state wanting to rule over church matters, meant that the church had to take an affirmative step to defend itself, its role and function in society. As the church was developing its sense of autonomy to do the things it had to do within society, universities also gained similar levels of autonomy by virtue of their being entities that were founded by the church and also under the church's control. In this period, the church claimed autonomy from the control of the civil state. Russell (1993: 2) argues that academics, because their privileges were originally ecclesiastical and guaranteed by the Pope, tended to enjoy intellectual power and prestige, which made others, like the civil state, feel uneasy.

The right to have one's own sense of autonomy has also been defended on the grounds that it is within this atmosphere that universities can meaningfully do what they are meant to do, that is "to protect the world from forces of irrationality" (Russell, 1993: 3). The sense of university autonomy that Russell defends has intrinsic characteristics of the good. This is why in some of his later arguments Russell (1993) dismisses the idea that at times an understanding of university autonomy and academic freedom can be influenced by financial factors and other monetary gains. Such thinking is controlled more by the understanding that university autonomy and academic freedom are dictated by the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, regardless of the fear of reprisal and dismissal. Russell did not pay much attention to the cosmopolitan or globalisation influences on higher education governance, which have had a heavy impact on university governance today. This can be attributed to the particular historical moment from which he was writing. Nevertheless, the idea that conceptions of university autonomy and academic freedom should be dictated by the search for knowledge for its own sake stands at odds with the present globalised and neo-liberalised world. I return to this discussion in the next chapter.

In a number of cases the defence for the autonomy of the university has been proposed on the grounds that academics have “freedom within the law to question and test received wisdom, and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions without placing themselves in jeopardy” (Russell, 1993: 18). The intrinsic notions of university autonomy and academic freedom evoke the Socratic ideal of the quest for knowledge. This understanding of university autonomy and academic freedom implies that a university is vested with the power to do research and teach without undue influence either from the state or society or even industry, for that matter. Russell (1993: 19) also holds that academic research that is meant to be used for propaganda and is not meant for seeking the truth for what it is deprives the university of its entitlement to be free. In many ways, the early notions of university autonomy depict that the university “possesses freedom unknown to other bodies and persons because the philosopher, the scholar, and the student are looked upon as men consecrated to the service of truth; and that truth was not simply a purposeless groping after miscellaneous information, but a wisdom to be obtained, however imperfectly, from a teleological search” (Kirk, 1955: 16–17). While medieval times may have accorded the university its freedom simply for the love of truth, Kirk (1955: 26–27) further argues that in modern societies, people require centres of independent thought and criticism if society is to survive and progress, given today’s unique challenges.

Similar to defences of academic freedom in the form of the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake and the idea that this autonomy needs to be exercised without any fear of reprisal or dismissal by persons engaged in it, many scholars in the African higher education system, especially in relation to South African higher education, have defended different versions of an apparent negative conception of liberty within academic freedom (for instance, see Hall, 2006; Higgins, 2000b; The Academic Freedom Committees of the University of Cape Town and the University of the Witwatersrand, 1974). For instance, Higgins (2000b: 101) argues for a conception of academic freedom that is “vested in an autonomous community of teachers and students dedicated to the search for, or service of, truth”. Despite the apparent affiliation to community inherent in this notion, the

conception carries most of the elements of the traditional understanding of the university, as indicated above. The different historical patterns under which the concept of university autonomy developed and grew indicate that variations in such conceptions are wide. According to these earlier conceptions, the university is constitutionally vested with the power to do research and teach without undue influence either from the state or society or even industry, for that matter. It can be concluded that according to this understanding the university has a natural right to autonomy.

Russell's thinking, which I have elaborated on at length, confirms the idea that questions on whether the university can operate with or without being autonomous can better be answered using a naturalistic path. But the ideals of the concept of academic freedom have in many cases been reasserted and reaffirmed in varied forms, depending on the social, political and economic forces influencing it. Hence, the issues that are ordinarily considered to affect university autonomy and its parameters keep on shifting their boundaries along different historical moments.

### **3.3 Transformations of the modern university and its influence on conceptions of autonomy: a focus on German, British and American higher education systems**

In this section, I will trace the transformation of the modern university through the presumption that what autonomy means in the university has been settled. This understanding accommodates autonomy as meaning 'self-determination' in the dual sense of freedom from interference as well as the development of a capacity to structure and direct one's future. Nevertheless, I have maintained in the preceding chapter that a correct understanding of autonomy does not have to operate in a vacuum when it comes to understanding how autonomy features in different social circumstances. I have thus argued for a situated form of autonomy. Similarly, my understanding of the transformations is informed by a sense of autonomy that takes into consideration the various ways through which people begin to define their lives and activities, without shunning their

responsibilities. In this sense, any considerations of the debates that have informed the conceptions of autonomy on the African continent have also to be considered within the context of substantial and complex international lineage. In a particular way, this lineage points to the historical evolution of a relationship between university education and society in an English society and the general European context, from which ideals of liberal autonomy are largely to be rooted. In acknowledging that the concept of autonomy has emerged from this dynamic and variable relationship, I will argue that people's understanding of the nature and prospects of autonomy can be substantial if they recognise the complex historical dimensions of such relationships. This overview also intends to show that the discourse on university autonomy and academic freedom in relation to the African experience is shaped by how the university continues to be perceived worldwide and why the discourse on autonomy is an indispensable aspect of the universities' identity to many.

Wittrock (1993) reviews the evolution of the university in England, America and Western Europe over the last 200 years in the article titled "The modern university: the three transformations". Despite the fact that that this title gives a broad overview, my account does not intend to generalise the place and function of the university as confined to the social and economic spaces of the societies within which it is situated. Similarly, the picture that is presented does not make individual universities to be the embodiment of some universal 'idea' of the university by virtue of being subspecies of the university in general. The discourse recognises that individual university institutions and ideas "are always situational and are neither disembodied nor mindless" (Wittrock, 1993: 309). In this way Wittrock's account articulates the trajectory of university development in a number of countries over the last two centuries, while respecting the particular historical circumstances within which these institutions have evolved.

Wittrock's (1993: 312) account begins with the idea of change in universities and how as ages pass universities remain the same even though they may pass through historical moments that negatively affect the nature and function of universities. In one particular case, Wittrock reflects on the impact of the defeat

of Prussia by the armies of Napoleon in 1806. This event is considered from the point of view of its influence on Prussia's traditional rulers and its intellectual elite. In this regard, he argues that the defeat exposed the weakness of the Prussian state, while at the same time precipitating a crisis of cultural identity and character for Prussia's leadership. The accounts of the University of Culture that Humboldt introduced to the discourse on universities targeted this exposure of the Prussian impotence (see also Readings, 1996). Humboldt's ideas through the concept of the ideal of culture and the university aimed at reclaiming the identity of the state and society through the repositioning of the cultural identity of the university. It was hoped that the identity of the state and society would be enhanced through a determined relinquishment of the kind of traditional university education that had characterised Prussian society for centuries (Coughlan, Divala, Enslin, Kissack & Mathebula, 2004).

This system had perpetuated the privileges enjoyed by the faculties of theology, law and medicine, for which studies in the arts and sciences were merely a preparation. Hence, Wittrock (1993: 311) argues that the forms of knowledge that this age possessed were not fundamentally different from those of the preceding generations. For reformers like Humboldt, one of the main problems with this traditional system was a certain intellectual stagnation and ossification, which resisted any really vigorous and critical scrutiny of the established fields of knowledge. The educational privileges of a social minority induced an intellectual indolence that could only impede the development of the Prussian character. In order to break this impasse, reformers like Humboldt advocated the establishment of parity between the faculties and stressed the importance of a critical attitude to inherited bodies of knowledge and the promotion of a scholarly orientation that would, in fact, elevate philosophy to a supreme position within the quest for knowledge.

The Humboldtian university, inspired by holistic thinking in broad historical cultural categories and informed by a type of philosophy which rejected narrow-minded specialization, turned out to become the ideal and archetypical home for scientific activities ... The assumption behind modern

scientific thinking and that the historicity of idealist philosophy is at best an impossible dream, and that the distinction between the natural and cultural sciences, a distinction fundamentally alien to late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century science and philosophy, is necessary and valid. (Wittrock, 1993: 315)

The new epistemic regime together with the concurrent processes of industrialisation, scientification and bureaucratisation led to the development of organisationally different patterns for institutions of higher education and scientific activities (Wittrock, 1993: 316). The implementation of these ideas was initiated by the new University of Berlin. Further, Wittrock (1993: 317) contends that the crystallisation of this approach produced a refined formulation of the idea of *Bildung*, which provided a particular rationale for the benefits of a university education, albeit one that was characterised by a sustained and probably inherently irresolvable tension. The term privileges the notion of individual development and character formation and in this sense contributes towards a particular understanding of the notion of a liberal education, with its emphasis on cognitive breadth, but also on the adoption of a critical rather than a respectfully assimilative attitude towards the received understandings of the past. However, the term *Bildung* also encompasses the idea that there is a national culture that must be revered and promoted, implying that the reflective activities of university teachers and students should contribute towards a definition and appreciation of this cultural inheritance.

At the centre of Humboldt's vision of the modern university was a dislike for tendencies that incline towards petty academic controversies. The University of Culture needed to maintain a "delicate balance of power which is intended to secure the intellectual freedom to teaching and learning by safeguarding against political incursions and violations" while at the same guarding the university "from the narrow guild-like interests within academia itself" (Wittrock, 1993: 318). Hence the notion of *Bildung* established a close link between the university and society. The university was mandated with the creation of a new societal culture. The concept also came to represent key components of academic culture



and ideology and a sense of self-understanding in continental Europe. The university became considered as a force that would “regain for the state in the realm of intellectual activities what it had lost in the physical real” (Wittrock, 1993: 317, quoting Fredrick Wilhelm III).

Many reformers in Humboldt’s time argued that the role of the university lay in providing an appreciation for a cultural inheritance because such an activity was viewed to have the capacity to provide the Prussian state with a renewed sense of dignity and strength and offer it the prospect of restored pride and purpose in the aftermath of its humiliation by the French. It was only in later periods that the reformers discovered that the notion of critical individualism, articulated by some interpreters of *Bildung*, coexisted in a tense and antagonistic relationship with the concept of national unity and cultural cohesion. In a way, the University of Berlin had contributed towards a definition of Prussian, and subsequently German, national identity, vindicating some of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century reformers' vision that universities should contribute towards an articulation of the notion of *Bildung*.

If the Prussian university reforms of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, epitomised by the establishment of the University of Berlin, represented the first phase in the transformation of the modern university, for Wittrock the German universities also pioneered the inauguration of the second phase in a series of initiatives and emphases that were not necessarily compatible with the notion of *Bildung* that had characterised the first phase. For if the notion of *Bildung* had stressed the importance of an individual’s comprehensive and broad understanding of inherited fields of knowledge, developments within the epistemic domain were beginning to impugn this kind of aspiration.

The major long-term impact of the Humboldtian reforms was not the preservation of a particular conception of appropriate scientific specialization but the resurrection, or rather better, the creation of an autonomous institutional setting for intellectual activities which later came

to be co-terminous with the modern research-oriented university (Wittrock, 1993: 320).

Wittrock (1993) stresses that during the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the dichotomy between the natural sciences and the humanities became more pronounced, resulting in the promotion of epistemic specialisation, which ruptured the ideal of the comprehensively educated individual and introduced a prevalent culture of research into the universities. The departure in university conception from a holistic conception of human development does not successfully manage to explain the continued influence of the university in the rebuilding of the nation-state. Nevertheless, the University of Berlin became an accomplished model of research to which other universities aspired.

A closer critical scrutiny of what the advancement of knowledge requires also generated controversies about the methods appropriate to the acquisition of knowledge. The experimental and empirical methods upon which the extraordinary accomplishments of the 17<sup>th</sup> century scientific revolution were based provided a procedural template with which all research was expected to comply. Such expectations engendered the fields of enquiry that subsequently became the social sciences, which were characterised by the application of natural scientific methods of inquiry to the study of human beings. These methodological injunctions were, in turn, challenged by the burgeoning discipline of hermeneutics, whose focus on the complex relationship between culture, language and interpretation contested the view that the methods of the natural sciences were appropriate for the study of human beings.

Such debates and disputes constituted the intellectual vigour and dynamism of the research culture in Germany, creating the distinctively modern impression that the pursuit of knowledge is a combination of controversy and systematic (primarily empirical) investigation. The German model of research not only reinforced the distinction between the natural sciences and the humanities but it also rendered the difference between pure and applied research more conspicuous. The former refers to the research stimulated by curiosity about

phenomena that present themselves to people. It also involves an attempt to formulate accurate descriptions of the phenomena and to provide convincing explanations for the way they appear and behave as they do. The latter acknowledges that most advances in people's understanding of their natural and human environments will have consequences for the ways in which they react to and modify both – their knowledge will always have an impact on their contexts (implying that, although distinguishable, pure and applied research are usually inseparable). This would, in turn, mean that imagining operations in university governance without the particular contexts and how these contexts reformulate inherent self-understanding and exercise of autonomy may not advance the aims and ends of higher education in this context.

The pioneering and innovative work of the German universities challenged some of the epistemic assumptions of the earlier proponents of *Bildung* regarding the notion of the comprehensively educated individual (although their emphasis on critical individualism was consistent with the basic tenets of a research ethos and aspects of university enquiry, particularly in the field of the humanities, contributed towards a consolidated understanding and promotion of conceptions of national culture). Consequently, this made a major contribution towards a definition of people's understanding of modernity, even though the emphasis on specialisation ruptured the desired sense of epistemic unity associated with the perspective of *Bildung*. Simultaneously, these German universities presented both a challenge to and a model for universities in other countries, whose values, orientations and practices seemed anachronistic in comparison with the German example.

In a later commentary on the role of Wilhelm von Humboldt and the revival of the university in Germany, Wittrock (2006: 111–112) emphasises that Humboldt's proposal for Germany's new university sought for a “delicate balance of power between different interests within and without the university, between different governing principles but with an ultimate aim to secure the intellectual freedom of teaching and learning”. The conception of a university that Humboldt envisaged was one where the creation of new knowledge and the

transmission of that knowledge, in given contexts, are linked. Wittrock (2006: 112) emphasises that the university is an embodiment of the unity of research and teaching and also the unity of students and professors.

The major points of emphasis in reclaiming the vision of the university as seen by Humboldt envisage an autonomous university in a very unique way. The university needs to constitute the unity of knowledge both in the production of new forms of knowledge and in the dissemination of that knowledge. While the university necessarily needs to be free from incursions, these influences are recognised by Humboldt as matters that can arise from within the university and its structures as well as from external forces. In the university, narrow-mindedness and preoccupation with petty debates that would not advance the ends of society are considered as negative elements to the freedom of the university. Hence, the conception of freedom or autonomy that Humboldt proposed for the German university is one that produces a balanced institution that is neither controlled by the state nor by petty academic interests, as also indicated earlier on. To him, this kind of university would ably advance the interests of society without compromising the nature of a university or the nature of the political state. Within this framework of a university, Humboldt understood *Bildung*, which I have elaborated on earlier in this chapter, to refer to a “process whereby a person is allowed and encouraged to be raised and to grow to maturity in accordance, not with an external imposed mechanical standard, but with those inner needs that constitute what is the most fundamental essence of being human” (Wittrock, 2006: 112).

The progressive and successful German example stimulated the reform of England's most prestigious universities, Oxford and Cambridge. Influenced by the dedicated expertise of German research specialists, as well as by their practical and secular orientation, England's parliament introduced the University Reform Bill for Oxford in 1854 and the Reform Bill for Cambridge in 1856 (Green, 1969: 68–69). The passage of the bills, and the universities' compliance with them, fostered the emergence of a new kind of ‘don’ at these universities, a scholar who was more interested in systematic research than in the reproduction

of an inherited knowledge, which was traditionally concerned primarily with theological issues and the cultivation of a refined aristocratic sensibility.

The university reform acts began a process that fundamentally restructured the conceptions of knowledge and research at these esteemed institutions, consistent with German emphases. These reforms were slow and they precipitated a controversy between those who emphasised excellence in research and those who prioritised sound teaching. Sound teaching was understood to be “education for life” in the public school understanding. This understanding contains Platonic influences on conceptions of the good life (Green, 1969: 71).

In terms of management and control, the British higher education system has one common feature that distinguishes it from higher education in European countries. Today, the University Grants Committee (UGC) is the main force that is associated with the co-ordination between higher education systems and government. Since the government is the main financier of higher education in the United Kingdom, there has been no broad distinction between private and public higher education systems. The UGC was created to mediate between the higher education sector and government so that the dependence of the universities on the state in terms of how they manage their affairs could be minimised. The first grant of the government to the universities through the UGC was made in 1889 (Allen, 1988: 38). The UGC is composed of members from government, civil society, the business community and academia, and most of the latter are professors representing different fields of university life although they do not participate in the UGC as particular representatives of their individual universities or faculties (Wolfenden, 1972: 144–145). The UGC acts as a buffer zone between government and the universities (Wolfenden, 1972: 149). This is so because it is the UGC that deliberates with government officials on the details supplied by individual universities on the nature of their funding requirements. Wolfenden (1972: 147) argues that such deliberations are made so that government acquires a thorough view of the financial requirements and the reasons for their justification in respect of recurrent budgets and other historical developments in institutions. Once funds are acquired, the UGC distributes the

funds to individual institutions with a fair understanding of the circumstances within which each institution is working, although this funding from government comes without any prescriptions as to how the individual universities may dispose off such funds.

Wolfenden (1972: 148) argues that the autonomy of individual institutions rests on the fact that although these institutions provide elaborate detail of their functions and projects, the grant from government through the UGC comes in a block grant without prescriptions of how it may be used. Wolfenden further deduces that such a practice gives the universities a sense of autonomy and a confirmation that the UGC and government do not run the universities but rather give the universities the necessary resources to run their own affairs. He later sums up this working relationship as one that depends on reciprocal confidence between the three partners, which also acts as a pillar for the British higher education system (Wolfenden, 1972: 149–150). Allen (1988: 38), quoting Dainton, adds that apart from securing funding from government, the UGC was also mandated

To collect, examine and make available information on matters relating to university education throughout the United Kingdom; and to assist, in consultation with the universities and other bodies concerned, the preparation and execution of such plans for the development of the universities as may from time to time be required in order that they are fully adequate to national needs.

Despite the broad framework of the UGC, as reflected by the above quotation, it is acknowledged that the UGC's role was mainly confined to financial matters between government and the universities (Allen, 1988: 39).

In relation to the higher education sector in the United Kingdom it is important to note the major role that is played by special commissions that are instituted, mostly by government, to investigate a particular practice or how certain things within the higher education sector can change. In general, I tend to concede that a

number of the major changes that have taken place in the British higher education system are due to these special reports. For example, although very little have been implemented from the recommendation of the Robin's Report that was presented to Parliament in 1963, it caused a shift from an elitist system of higher education to the introduction of some form of mass higher education. In this regard, Allen (1988: 43) states that the "Robin's Principle" recommended that "courses of higher education should be available for all those who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them and who wish to do so", thereby rejecting the idea that access to higher education may be determined by the skills required in a nation.

The above case represents only one report amongst many and there have been major contestations over the nature and purposes of higher education in the United Kingdom. What is crucial in determining the dynamics of university autonomy in such instances is that in almost all the cases, the reports are presented to an arm of government: parliament. Thereafter the recommendations are adopted or not. In other words, this shows a particular working relationship between the universities and government and the confines within which the universities may or may not do certain things.

The British higher education governance system shows elements of autonomy as well as elements of centralised management. This is the case because both the universities and government are equally involved in determining the goals of any higher education institution, how the institutions may achieve these goals and the nature and amount of resources that will be needed for the system to achieve its goals (Allen, 1988: 137). The funding process that I have elaborated on earlier also indicates that government is interested in the self-assessments that institutions make of their own performance within the range of resources that were previously allocated to them. Allen's (1988) argument also shows that on the whole, the British higher education system is managed in a hierarchical fashion with a pyramid structure that has the government and the Department of Science at the top and the institutions in the lower bigger section, mediated by the University Grants Committee and the National Advisory Board in between.

The hierarchical fashion of arranging the management of higher education in the United Kingdom carries elements that are clearly associated with a centralised system of governance. Allen (1988: 137, 138) notes that the government only decides in broad terms or in loosely defined terms what it wants the universities to achieve and how much money (in total) they are to be given to carry out their tasks. Nevertheless, it is still the universities' prerogative to make their own internal and autonomous decisions on the activities they will engage in or not with the given state funding. In view of these elements, it can be concluded that the British higher education system as discussed here contains elements of state control as well as an autonomous governing system.

On the other hand, the American higher education system is unique in form and tradition. Martin Trow's (1996) chapter firmly characterises the issues that one would look for in American higher education system. Trow (1996: 26) first traces the origins of the American higher education system back to the Oxford and Cambridge traditions. Although it is acknowledged that the American higher education system had its defining moment in the 1890s regarding the full development of all aspects of higher education, Trow (1996: 26) argues that by then, the American colleges and universities "already had a lay board of trustees, a strong president and his administrative staff, and a well-defined structure of faculty ranks". The institutional characteristics that are considered to have been established more than 100 years ago include, among others, a scholarly and scientific reputation linked to publication and the readiness to develop one's career in any institution; a general education mixed with a follow-up specialised education; and an elective system with modular courses and credit accumulation based on the transcript of grades. What marked the American system of higher education from the very beginning is a "spirit of competition, institutional diversity, responsiveness to markets (especially the markets for students), and institutional autonomy marked by strong leadership and a diversity of sources of support" (Trow, 1996: 26). Despite the widening access to higher education with its commensurate increases in enrolments, Trow argues that in approximately 100 years, the higher education system in America has fundamentally remained



the same in terms of prevailing basic structures, diversity, mission, governance and finance (1996: 27).

Trow further attributes the particularity of the American higher education system to the European origins of the system despite the fact that the system was locally managed through a strong college presidential style of management. The particular political history of the time, marked weak state control, also meant that the state could “neither provide adequate higher education nor constrain other private groups and organisations from doing so” (Trow, 1996: 28) thereby deregularising the system from inception. This factor marks a fundamental shift in running or managing higher education as explored in the case of African higher education systems or the European higher education system. Trow (1996: 28) states, “In the United States, almost anyone could start a college that awarded degrees, and almost anyone did, without governmental approval (or support) or their setting of academic standards”, although in some cases, the American higher education systems had “their mission defined for them by the state law” (Allen, 1988: 65, quoting Norris). But such mandates are also acknowledged to have been part of a broader appeal to attract funding from state agencies.

The above conditions that mark the beginning of the American higher education system carry a number of implications that consequently condition the character of governance and the levels and nature of higher education autonomy when such is evoked. One common mark of the American higher education system is that colleges and universities managed to operate without much government control, thereby leaving themselves open to the control of market forces. This positioning of the American higher education necessarily meant that universities had to operate with an entrepreneurial mindset if they were to survive in this environment. The idea of leaving the operations of higher education entirely to the free market operation mechanism has been viewed by many as taking chances with regard to higher education. This view considers that higher education is such an important public sector that it requires that central governments keep a close watch regarding its management, financing and other operations.

On the contrary, the initial inception of higher education in America carries a belief that higher education systems in America survive on the basis that individual people or groups find their offerings necessary for society and hence ensure their financial survival through contributions, tuition fees and other grants, state or otherwise. By implication this translates into the creation within higher education itself of programmes that appeal to the public and are relevant to the labour market demands. This position virtually removes the idea of universities as serving some undefined common good or good that is mostly politically and culturally defined. A university system that operates according to labour market demands ensures that its programmes are relevant to the growth and sustenance of the labour market while at the same time appealing to this labour market for supporting and maintaining the universities in an innovative way.

The above operations of higher education systems in America leave the education systems with two alternatives or choices. The systems are impelled, according to the rationale of labour market forces, to adapt to the deterministic environment of the labour market or risk extinction through financial bankruptcy. Trow's (1996) argument reveals that the market forces push the universities towards innovation drives in a bid to attract more funding through donations and increased student enrolments. While many institutions come and go in just moments, the growth in size of those that adapt and the establishment of new institutions indicate that the higher education system has survived into a mass higher education system because many institutions find ways to survive economically and many new ones originate, leading to the cumulative effect of a mass higher education system based on pure competition for resources and an avoidance of being complacent and lax in the management of higher education institutions.

The above characterisation of the higher education system in America shows that the higher education system has a unique history and pattern. Trow (1996: 28–30) characterises the American higher education system as driven by a belief in the unpredictable future. This belief spurs competition in a social life

organisation as well as in the management of the education system, the higher education system in particular. This belief further claims that central governments cannot successfully manage the organisation of these facets of life without opening up a window of myriads of opportunities to realise their potential. This basic vision for an unpredictable life, while creating opportunities for everyone in society, cannot be fulfilled if the tenets of an autonomous life are not held central in the organisation of the social and economic life in the state. An addendum to these factors that spur growth in the higher education system in America is the belief that “education is intrinsically good, and that everyone should get as much of it as they can be persuaded to enrol for” (Trow, 1996: 29). While many American institutions may set basic limits regarding entry conditions and qualification, the system inherently believes that the sky is the limit and that any student can achieve as much as his or her potential and energy allow him or her to.

Trow (1996) mainly contrasts the American higher education system with the European system in arguing that the American system has wide access and very few stopgaps, whereas the European system of higher education has tended to promote elitism over centuries because of its approach to recruitment, training and through-put rates. Nevertheless, it is important to note that while Trow (1996) would like to argue that the American higher education system has assumed several elements of the ‘University of Excellence’ from inception, such as the ideals of an equal higher education for all or the ‘sky is the limit’ approach for everyone, Keohane (1999) argues that the primary origins of American higher education are also elitist. The college system was established in order to train leaders for the colonies. What is similar between these scholars is the way in which they capture the American zeal for higher education as a “civilizing force and as a prerequisite for republican government” (Keohane, 1999: 51–52).

### **3.3.1 Understanding the changing nature of the identity of the (Western) university through Bill Readings' symbolism.**

Transformations of the Western university as discussed through the development of the university in German, Britain and the United States are summed in the three symbols of the university as discussed by Readings (1996). In a way, the three ways of conceiving the university can also be considered as particular patterns through which the university idea has gone. Nevertheless, such an alignment does not necessarily imply a sequential development of the symbols as a progression from one to another, as the American case shows otherwise. Each of these symbols gives a specific trait of the university and characterises the university towards those functions. Readings (1996) argues that the university has taken up three different symbols through history. In general the symbols signify the extent to which one can envisage a university working with or without autonomy. The symbols can also be considered as different spectacles or forms through which universities have tended to understand themselves. Readings' assessment of the nature and identity the university brings to the fore three dominant forms that universities, even in the African case, can take. These forms are the University of Reason, the University of Culture and the University of Excellence. While the three symbols have much to do with the nature of the university, I argue that the different forms directly function as three different conceptions of university autonomy as much as they are historically located conceptions of the functions of the university.

Regarding the first conception of the university, Readings (1996: 54–61) discusses the idea of the University of Reason. This idea arises from an understanding of the way knowledge is considered to be organised in the university. The conception relates to medieval thought as well as to the modern period of philosophical development. Readings (1996) starts off from the understanding that the academic disciplines of the university in medieval times were centred on the explanation/exposition of a specific understanding of God (theodicy). University life and activity at this stage of human civilisation tended to be explained by a reason that was itself not clearly manifested in the

university. This reason transcended the normal spectrum of explanation in human life. According to this reason, divinity and reference to the divine became the frame of reference against which knowledge was constructed, measured and transmitted within the university.

Readings (1996: 56) further contends that after the medieval period, it was reason that provided the rationale or distinction between the different disciplines operational in the university. The modern period of thinking is influenced by the works of Immanuel Kant, among others. Quoting Kant, Readings argues that reason became primary and authoritative.

According to this understanding, reason became authoritative because it had its own source as much as it was also its own arbitrator. In other words, reason became an end as well as being the source of its own authoring. The conception of the primacy of reason has traditionally been associated with the practice of philosophy. According to Readings (1996), the other traditional three faculties that also exist in the university, that is the faculty of medicine, law and theology, are believed to be heterogeneously sanctioned. They find their reason outside their frame of existence. Hence the idea of the University of Reason is one that perpetually champions the use, development and protection of free reason because of its very identity of being better positioned to promote rational inquiry and being the end itself. The concept of the University of Reason particularly brings to the fore the understanding that reason provided the identity of the university. From both the medieval and the modern periods, it is clear that the autonomy of the university was and is considered as an important aspect of the life of the university and that the university needed and still needs to be autonomous in order to carry out its pursuits.

Readings' understanding of the autonomous nature of the university also relates to the role of the state. He is of the opinion that the state must protect the university so that the use of reason prevails in public life. But on the other hand, philosophy, the lower of the faculties but one within which reason is enshrined for its own sake, must protect the university from state interference (Readings,

1996: 58). This position raises a dilemma on whether reason *per se* can be institutionalised and can still remain autonomous reason. In the Kantian understanding, from whom Readings derives most of his ideas on this concept, this dilemma is resolved by circumventing the subject or the individual person. The individual person is considered as a rational person in terms of handling reason, but when it comes to public/state matters, the individual is expected to be republican. This means that the university functions by affirming the principle of the autonomy of the rational subject while expecting the state to protect this same status (Readings, 1996: 59).

The idea of the University of Reason only depicts the nature and functions of the university as determined by reason. Thus, it can also be argued that the nature of the autonomy of the university resides in the extent to which the university itself makes reason its own operative factor and force. An autonomous higher education system would be that which is not overly determined by external circumstances in its core nature of developing and using reason in the teaching, research and dissemination of its knowledge systems. There is a need for an autonomous institution using the ideal of the University of Reason to have its reason justified from within the university itself. The conception builds the understanding of an autonomous higher education system from the idea that reason is supposed to operate independently and find its justification from itself and not from another authority.

No one tradition of higher education governance can claim monopoly to the ideals of the University of Reason. For instance, some African higher education systems have claimed to be in pursuit of the ideal of reason and that they exist simply for the purposes of promoting the same. The governance of higher education in Europe, particularly in Germany, can also lay claim to reason as infusing the quest for a rejuvenated cultural university, as much as the British higher education system can argue that outside the confines of the government, the UGC and the National Advisory Board, universities stand to promote the ends of reason within the society.

Readings' (1996) conception of the University of Reason has not managed to ward off an understanding that promotion of reason has tended to present the ideals of reason as disembodied and abstract. Drawing on the ideals of the University of Reason, one can easily infer that Readings' conception promotes conceptions of academic freedom and institutional autonomy that maintain that a university is only autonomous when it is free from interference in staff and student recruitments, modes of teaching and the general determination of the culture of the university. Based on my discussion of different conceptions of autonomy and their application to higher education, it would be accurate to argue that such a disembodied conception of autonomy is a misnomer to academic freedom and the institutional autonomy of higher education systems.

The second model that Readings (1996) presents is the idea of the University of Culture. The idea of the University of Culture is described as arising from the German idealists who were seeking to clarify the autonomy of knowledge in the university. In this regard, Readings (1996: 68) argues that "for knowledge to become an autonomous object that can be thought organically, it must be possible for teaching to be both a process of production and of reproduction at the same time". The act of production and reproduction simultaneously brings about an idea of the university where the past, present and future are fused together, thereby generating a *unifying culture* for the university. Readings sees Humboldt's version of the university as more authoritative than the versions proposed by other thinkers such as Fichte and Schleiermacher in so far as the relation of the state to the university is concerned.

Readings (1996: 68) also states that Humboldt proposes looser state control over the university whilst ensuring that the university retains its sense of power and diversity to fulfil its own mission and its own mandated freedom of action within its culture. Humboldt's proposal assumes that universities have within limits the power to run their own affairs freely. But this position also assumes that given such freedom, universities will promote their culture. It is possible at this stage to translate the idea of culture as loosely meaning the university's culture of teaching and research, but Humboldt's proposal goes deeper than this. It is

important to note that according to this concept, the fusion of the past and present in order to determine the future life of any university depends on a thorough awareness and understanding of the university as a major agent of cultural identity and change. This understanding implies that the state should maintain a minimalist role that will only ensure that the university's mission is fulfilled, without effectively aligning the mission of the university with that of the state. The concession by Readings (1996: 69) that there needs to be some regulatory state power over the university can be an acceptance that other models of the same idea of the University of Culture exist.

Humboldt's ideal of the University of Berlin, which Readings disputes, appears to be authoritative because it merges the ideal and the practical. The position considers the social mission of the university together with the Kantian conception of the idea of reason for its own sake. The university's conception in this ideal becomes the embodiment of both thought and action as an ultimate end. In this regard, Readings (1996: 69) concludes the following:

The university seeks to embody thought as action towards an ideal; the state must seek to realize action as thought, the idea of the nation. The state protects the action of the University; the University safeguards the thought of the state. And each strives to realize the idea of national culture.

The concept of the university as realising the idea of culture summed up above implies that the university does not only fulfil a social function or mission but that it is also given the space to promote reason for its own sake. In other words, the university becomes a place for both contemplation and action. The role of reason and the social function to the state become the centre of Humboldt's authoritative proposal. In this conception of the university, a free university is one where reason and the social function of the university dialogue with each other. In this way, its sense of freedom is partly founded on the social understanding of what a university should and can do. The concept of the University of Culture harbours no clear indications regarding the autonomy of the university or on whether higher education can do without being autonomous.



Nevertheless, although there are no clear intimations to forms of autonomy, one can without doubt link the University of Culture to the concept of co-operative governance of the university, which I have discussed earlier on in relation to the cases of South Africa and Ghana or the case of higher education governance, which I have briefly stated in the preceding section. If notions of co-operative university governance were to be sufficiently infused with deliberative democratic culture, it would not be difficult for the state to protect “the action of the university” and for the university to “safeguard the thought of the state” (Readings, 1996: 69). In the samples I have given in Chapter 2 on forms of governance prevalent in the African higher education system, most cases of state interference or control represent the nonexistence of a national culture that would adequately support the university system as well as promote the ends of the state.

The last conception that Readings (1996) examines is the University of Excellence. Readings indicates that this idea of the University of Excellence has been the most recent conception in development and remains very controversial, although the idea of ‘recent’ is itself debatable. Some accounts of American higher education also lay claim to elements of excellence from inception (see Trow, 1996). The idea of recent mainly fits with regard to the argument that many university reforms to date have tended to demonstrate much of the corporate model.

The concept of the University of Excellence promotes the idea that the ideals of excellence are at the centre of and determine how universities operate. The concept finds its roots in the value of excellence that is associated with the corporate world. It may be argued that when the idea of excellence is applied to the governance of the university it introduces mechanical practices such as quality control and monitoring mechanisms for university performance, such as performance indicators. On these grounds, I argue that the idea of the University of Excellence is closely associated with neo-liberal trends of governance. The symbolism associated with the University of Excellence brings into the understanding and running of higher education managerial practices and ideals that mostly belong to the corporate world.

Most of the changes that have taken place in the higher education sector in the last two decades have occurred in the name of repositioning higher education. Consequently, the higher education sector is expected to respond to such issues as customer satisfaction, value for money and responsiveness to social and economic demands. In other words, the university is perceived as fulfilling its mandated mission if it remains an economically viable system (Readings, 1996: 21ff). To a large extent, Readings (1996: 8) acknowledges that the idea of a University of Excellence leans heavily on administrative overtones.

The relationships that exist between the different conceptions of the university have inevitable conceptual consequences on the nature of the university and how the universities understand their own sense of autonomy. In a general perspective, there is a strong indication that such a conceptual relationship brings about ideals of marketisation and economic viability as the particular marks of success and excellence in the university. This conception determines what the university is free to do or not free to do. It also raises questions as to whether the university can be autonomous as such. In this regard, I also pose the question, Are universities autonomous with or without pursuing ideals of excellence? Ideals of excellence are also closely connected with globalisation, and this question will be answered to a great extent in the next chapter that examines globalisation and higher education.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that despite the different overtones that are associated with the conception of the University of Excellence, the conception of the University of Excellence is very problematic. When the ideal is introduced in education, it easily brings elements of mismatch into the understanding of education. The ideals of excellence relate more to corporate management and marketisation than to the higher education sector *per se* and the nature and operations of this education system. Readings' (1996) exposition of the notion of excellence further indicates that the ideal at its best remains nonreferential. In other words, there is no tangible or conceptual content to which one can point as the focus of excellence. The ideal of excellence can be used as a relational idea with varying overtones in each particular reference. When this ideal is used in

higher education discourse, it may simply refer to desirable goals that need to be achieved in the different areas under consideration. Hence it is also possible to have different ideals of excellence in reference to student performance, graduation rates and fiscal management of the university, let alone the conception and exercise of university autonomy.

My understanding of the meaning and application of the University of Excellence leads to questions of whether the ideal can be put at the same level with the other conceptions that Readings (1996) brings to the fore. The ideal of excellence in its framework remains a very fluid concept by the fact that it is nonreferential. It has no content other than being a pointer to some condition of existence. In this case, what represents a condition of excellence in one country, for example, may not be regarded as excellent in another country because of varying economic and even managerial structures.

Given the inconsistency of valuation regarding excellence, it is possible that the marks of excellence for a university in a liberal state may not be necessarily the marks of excellence in an authoritarian state. Readings (1996: 32–33) confirms this understanding by stating that “it is not that no one knows what excellence is but that everyone has his or her own idea of what it is”. In a more concrete way, the conception of higher education autonomy in restrictive states and liberal states will, by far, not be the same. This variation alone becomes problematic when it comes to conceptualising autonomy in higher education in general and the extent to which autonomy is desirable. In other words, although the concept of the University of Excellence is the most current conception of understanding of the university and its operations, it is also possibly the most divisive model for constructing the idea of a university and its relationship with educational autonomy.

The analysis of the ideal of excellence creates the impression that the university can exist autonomously of other factors in society by constructing and living up to its own ideals of excellence. In this regard, one can even think that higher education, by paying attention to this ideal of excellence within its own fields of

teaching and research, is an equivalent of living an autonomous life. But one does not need to go further in order to see that even notions of excellence as they have come down to application are not autonomous in themselves. The researcher has just shown using Readings' (1996) analysis that many models of excellence lean on practices that are prevalent in the corporate world. It can also be argued that the dynamics of the corporate world have a colossal effect on the life of the university, if this understanding is anything to go by. This simply affirms one of the major shortfalls in the idea of excellence that as much as it has no referent, the ideal also has no content. In other words, it is neither true nor false (Readings, 1996: 13). The ideal of the University of Excellence is only used as a buzzword to reflect the economic and managerial viability of higher education but has nothing in itself that can direct how reflection and practice on higher education autonomy is done, for instance. I will examine the impact of economic and managerial practices on university governance in my consideration of neo-liberalism and globalisation in chapter 5.

#### **3.4 Reconsidering university autonomy through traditions of reason**

Conceptions of university autonomy cannot be discussed outside the frame of the connection between education and autonomy, which has a long philosophical tradition. For instance, the works of Aristotle and Plato tie up the conception of education with notions of autonomy or freedom. Plato's ideal free person is one who is in control of his or her emotions, one whose reason controls the activity of the whole person. Similarly, education is also conceived as an activity for enabling the rational side of the person to take control.

On the other hand, Aristotle's philosophical works indicate a different link between freedom and education. A closer look at this philosophy indicates that virtue is the desired frame of human existence. As such, education would be considered worthwhile if it promotes a life of virtue where one learns to maintain the balance in one's life. This is so because virtue, in Aristotelian terms, is the balance between lack and excess of any character condition.

Nevertheless, one lives in freedom when one is capable of choosing this balance as a matter of rational habituation. Hence in both of these classical theorists the connection between education, morality and freedom is a common issue. In other words, no education can be considered as meeting the condition of education if it excludes morality and freedom.

In relation to different educational setups, Glenn (2000: 11–12) argues that educational autonomy can refer to a continuum of issues from the making of significant decisions about employment, admission of students, curriculum and the budget to making autonomous individual choices in life. It is also observed that a lack of proper public funding or its presence alone, as some would assume, does not indicate the degree of autonomy for an educational institution. In other words, the mere fact that higher education institutions are undergoing institutional regulation through modes of funding and other technocratic means is far too complex to be an indicator of autonomy than ordinarily perceived because autonomy itself touches on many facets of life.

In general, Glenn (2000: 14) can be understood as characterising autonomous educational institutions as those institutions that are a “law unto themselves” in the sense that there is mutual agreement among key players in terms of their mission and spirit within which business is conducted. From this Kantian understanding of autonomy as self-legislation, the autonomous institutions are expected to be responsive to those they serve and the communities in which they operate. The autonomy of educational institutions would also imply that the educational institutions are free to express different educational cultures and seek to form their students in different ways available to different societies (Glenn, 2000: 15).

### **3.4.1 Can higher education exist without being autonomous?**

In this section, I want to argue that debates and controversies surrounding autonomy are relational, that such debates arise in human life for what it is and that they are always in relation to specific forms of human life being considered.

In South Africa, for instance, debates on whether higher education can exist without being autonomous are always read in the context of the country's apartheid history where education was heavily used as a tool for implementing segregatory practices and policies by the apartheid government.

My analysis of governance patterns in the South African higher education system shows that many developments have taken place in order to move away from the apartheid system, which is considered as not having the qualities for promoting autonomy in higher education. Universities have undergone restructuring in order to reflect the new democratic society in South Africa. Nevertheless, current research (Jansen, 2006) indicates that there are more manoeuvres by the state to control the life of the universities (see Coughlan *et al.*, 2007; Jansen, 2006). In other examples on the African continent, debate is rife as to whether higher education systems are autonomous or whether they simply exist as parts of state machinery. Only a few cases that I have analysed in the second chapter reveal forms of co-operative governance towards a more democratic mode of governance. In many of the cases, state control and interference are common.

The summative perspective of higher education developments in other regions such as Europe and America, which I have given in this chapter, is intended to put this discourse into perspective. To what extent is a liberal conception of autonomy relevant to higher education in Africa? Is it necessary to set limits to conceptions and practices of academic freedom and institutional autonomy so that, in turn, universities are seen to serve their communities (whether socially, economically, or politically)?

The historical situation of universities globally and on the African continent specifically still begs the following questions: Can higher education operate without being autonomous? Is higher education necessarily an autonomous institution? What forms of autonomy are relevant to higher education? Such questioning brings to the fore the nature of the university while at the same time it tries to make sense of education as it is. My examination of this issue does not in itself imply that people have to arrive at some definitive unitary point, except

for the sake of clarity. Making this discourse definitive would mean putting finality into the discourse, thereby thwarting the very conditions under which the concepts of education and autonomy are meant to operate in. Most post-structuralist thinkers would also buy into this position. The current trends in philosophical analysis demand that any attempt to define such heavy-loaded but apparently simple concepts, such as autonomy in the academy, be mainly precursory and tentative. One reason for this is that “academic freedom, like freedom itself, defies absolute definition” (Academic Freedom Committees of the University of Cape Town and the University of the Witwatersrand, 1974: 2).

### **3.4.2 A postmodernist perspective on the relationship between autonomy and education and its influence on academic freedom in Africa**

Menand contends that most of the perspectives that one finds on the concept of autonomy in higher education assume an understanding of autonomy as something that is unproblematic itself (Menand, 1996: 5). In other words, the idea of autonomy when applied to higher education first gives one the picture that it is already a done deal and that everyone knows what autonomy refers to. Sometimes this further implies that the conditions of autonomy in higher education practices are a given and accepted fact. Alongside such assumptions is the idea that the freedom that one finds within the higher education context is in itself coherent and acts as a basis upon which certain other issues relating to higher education life and governance can be settled. This position nonetheless posits autonomy in higher education as a condition upon which desirable circumstances could be created. According to Menand (1996), assumptions like these in understanding autonomy are also highly problematic.

In the first place, I am inclined to think that the concept of autonomy or forms of freedom is based on and exist within specific social contexts (see Chapter 4). No freedom can exist without there being a social context or a primary domain as its point of existential reference. As such, any intimation of the idea of the position

and the meaning of the relationship between autonomy and higher education as a completed and resolved mathematical puzzle remains idealistic.

Rorty (1996) is one of the scholars who has criticised the underpinnings of rationalism from which most liberal thinking has emanated. Reacting to conceptions of autonomy that are caught up in abstract rationalism or conceptions that do not recognise the lived circumstances of people and their changing environment, Rorty argues that the assumption that autonomy and the discourse of academic freedom will have to be understood from the foundationalist assumptions of Western rationalistic thinking is very difficult to sustain. Rorty's argument arises from his comments on the nature of academic freedom but connects with the dispute on truth and validity between traditional Western rationalistic philosophy and the post-structuralists (Rorty, 1996: 29–31). Among other things, Rorty consolidates his criticism by raising questions about reality. Of particular interest here is the question of whether reality exists independent of what people think or whether reality comprises what they think or decide to think, and hence is dependent on their beliefs and choices. In his conclusions, it becomes clear that the position from which people understand reality determines how they begin to understand the university and the consequent nature of its autonomy.

At issue between the two views, Western rationalistic tradition – the basis of liberal conceptions of autonomy – and post-structuralism as represented in Rorty's views, is the dilemma of whether universities need to pursue knowledge for its own sake or whether the pursuance of knowledge should be for improvement of the human condition and service to society. This dilemma has serious implications for the way universities understand the relationship between education and autonomy.

Rorty's own position is a conviction grounded in postmodernist thinking that is constantly looking for newer grounds for understanding. He argues that it is an error to think that “the idea of truth” corresponds to an accurate representation of “the intrinsic nature of reality”, which would be objective in itself (Rorty, 1996:



35). According to him, reality and its meaning are not objectively defined but are rather a result of an inter-subjectivity relation, something that we discover in “our living”. What is significant in this shift is the fact that meanings are not out there in some objective reality waiting to be apprehended by the human mind but that human beings through their social collaboration construct meaning and eventually determine what reality will be.

Rorty’s (1996) thinking, as presented in the form above, can have many implications for the discourse on higher education autonomy. These ideas can introduce the notion that the nature of the university and its characterisation of autonomy/freedom can be understood from the way agents within the system negotiate meanings. In this case, a negotiation of meanings inevitably implies that people regard the traditional conceptions of autonomy with suspicion. Furthermore, any meaning with universal implications would be equally approached with suspicion. Similarly, Dworkin (1996: 359) argues that one’s understanding of freedom depends on the nature of the problems and questions that confront one at the time that one is trying to understand that freedom. Dworkin uses hypothetical consent in order to reconsider freedom as a person’s capacity to form, revise and rationally pursue what he or she sees as good (1996: 361–362).

Furthermore, Scott (1996: 65) argues that meanings and relations are constructed according to power relations and different histories. In this regard, the position of the relationship between autonomy and education can never be regarded as definitive and settled. The reference point for understanding such a relationship continually becomes contestable. Nevertheless, the ethical space between an ideal of the autonomous pursuit of understanding and its specific historical, institutional and political realities should limit how people conceive of this relationship.

Taking seriously a postmodernist perspective on autonomy together with forms of situated autonomy will mean that some versions of the concept of academic freedom in higher education that would be understood as giving the African

universities the right to decide whom to appoint, what to teach and how to teach and many more without due consideration of the social position and role of the university in society need to be seriously examined for them to be relevant. The different examples of university governance on the African continent, which I have provided in Chapter 2, consolidate a particular conception of the role of the university and its relationship to the state. Similarly, to consider that universities are autonomous when they are legislated to be autonomous but are not necessarily autonomous in reflection of their place and role in society is to put the operations and future of the university in danger. Nevertheless, the idea that a situated autonomy that is constantly reflected upon and reconstructed in view of the prevailing life circumstances is the more substantive form of autonomy and the one being advocated here does not sanction the fact that governments on the African continent have a legitimate mandate to monitor and control the affairs of the academy.

### **3.5 Concluding remarks**

In this chapter, I have opted to consider the evolution of the concept of university autonomy through the lived examples of university life and reform in Europe, particularly in Germany, in England and also in the United States. At the onset of this discussion, two perspectives come into focus. On the one hand is the view that university autonomy is a natural right in the sense that this autonomy should be guaranteed by the very existence of the university. On the other hand there is a functional and social construct conception of the university that considers university autonomy as a necessary prerequisite if universities are to fulfil their mission in societies and also for universities to carry out their work without undue interference. I have not bought as much into the idea of university autonomy as a natural right as others would want to argue. On the other hand I consider university autonomy to be recognised and negotiated within its lived circumstances but in full view of the universities maintaining their identity. But in general the analysis shows that universities globally, have gone through a process of mediating their autonomy between state control and state supervision. Not many instances of state interference are cited mainly because of the mutual

understanding of the nature and function of the university that both the state and the university had.

Nevertheless, conceptions of autonomy in each of these systems need to be understood against the background of the ideals that were driving the particular societies at different historical moments. For instance, Wittrock's (1993) account of these universities (in Western Europe, England and America) acknowledges that universities are situational, and that they are neither disembodied nor mindless in their missions. According to this understanding, universities represent a particular function and identity as reflective spaces in different societies across generations. This understanding led the Humboldtian University to reject an orientation towards narrow-mindedness in preference for the development of broad critical thinking capacity in individuals.

I have also attempted to bring to the fore how different conceptions of the university interact with higher educational autonomy. For instance, the University of Reason and the University of Culture display in different ways how the life of the university can be organised. Through these different paradigms, the conception of university autonomy manifests itself differently. The University of Reason is mainly understood from the traditional background of reason. In this conception universities are seen as centres where reason is supposed to be concentrated and the ones who have to promote reason. On the other hand, the Humboldtian conception of the University of Culture slightly shifts this identity to making the university a centre where the thought and action of a people are embraced. I have associated the University of Culture with forms of co-operative governance that one finds in the United Kingdom, South African and Ghanaian higher education systems.

The last conception that Readings (1996) analyses is closely connected with ideas of neo-liberalism and globalisation. Using this model, it is possible to argue that globalisation has irretrievably pushed the identity of the university into a corporate identity (Considine & Marginson, 2000: 41). The shifts in the understanding of a university do not suggest that every successive stage in

conceptualisation represents a better and refined conception. I think that the shifts can be understood without implying any such qualitative progression despite the fact that the shifts are tied to a time progression. In this regard, one can consider the American claims to elements of the corporate identity of the university to be better understood without any implications of qualitative progression.

It is of interest to note that the ideal of excellence as presented in Readings' (1996) book connects one with issues of neo-liberalism and globalisation in higher education. Considine and Marginson (2000: 41) interpret Readings' conception of the University of Excellence as an indication that "the modern government-funded university is changing irretrievably under the pressure of globalisation". In other words, corporatisation is a major force for change in the governance of higher education in general. Considine and Marginson (2000: 42) partly acknowledge Readings' (1996) notion that the corporate identity of the university fundamentally undermines ideas of the nation-state and the cultural function of the university and that instead of making the university a centre of reason and a place where the culture of the nation-state would be embraced and nurtured, globalisation turns universities into "trans-national bureaucratic corporations whose logic is corporate rather than cultural". But Considine and Marginson (2000) also think that Readings' perspective is over-theoretical in the sense that it does not engage with actual universities. They argue that the relationship between globalisation and higher education or the universities is criss-crossed with countertrends and that it is not as simplistic as Readings states it. In the following sections I track this argument and assess whether Readings' conception of the University of Excellence unnecessarily globalises the higher education sector and the extent to which neo-liberalism and globalisation affect how the business of higher education is done, especially in Africa.

In the last part of this discussion, I have tried to show that irrespective of the cultural and historical features that particular higher education systems find themselves in, issues of how such systems live out their autonomy have become indelibly linked. Through the discussion, I have also showed that a liberal

conception of autonomy has the tendency to drive higher education systems to live without properly acknowledging the social and historical circumstances of the institutions.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCEPTIONS OF AUTONOMY

#### 4.1 Introductory remarks

In the previous chapter I have provided a picture of governance forms in higher education on the African continent. In all these cases, there are claims to autonomy made by each system. Nonetheless, the claims to autonomy are so diverse that no single picture of autonomy can be constructed and the claims are far from meaning the same thing. This means that the claims to autonomy in practice are essentially varied. This has been shown through the purposive analysis of some higher education systems on the African continent as well as a brief view of some of the world's great traditions in higher education such as Germany, England and the United States.

The analysis of the current conceptions and practices of freedom/autonomy in higher education on the African continent raises further questions about the meanings of autonomy and their different forms. Similarly, one can also question whether autonomy is relevant to the discourse of higher education in Africa or whether there are any forms of autonomy that speak more to the African experience of higher education. This dissertation particularly asks about the extent to which liberal forms of autonomy are relevant to higher education governance in Africa.

In order to answer some of the questions above, this chapter will analyse different theoretical dimensions of the idea of autonomy and/or freedom. This task will begin with a historical mapping of the concept of autonomy. I take a closer look at the idea of autonomy and how it has developed in order to have a clearer understanding of the implications that arise from different conceptions and subsequent practices of autonomy in higher education.

By starting with a historical mapping of the concept, I intend to highlight how the concept developed but also to focus on the different connotations the idea of

autonomy has acquired through the different historical stages with the hope of bringing clarity to the understanding and practising of autonomy on the African continent. This historical mapping can be done through analysis of three different stages.

I will consider the first stage as the period before freedom became the main subject in social and political discourses. This is the period before the birth of liberalism as a dominant social and political ethic (Skinner, 1998). Skinner generally refers to evocations of forms of freedom in this period as the liberty or freedom of the ancients. This distinction and naming of the liberty of the ancients becomes justifiable against the background of a modern philosophical tradition. The modern philosophical tradition, which gives rise to the second stage of autonomy in my conception, is considered to be the founding stage for the dominant philosophical concepts of freedom and autonomy.

Towards the last half of this chapter, I will examine what I refer to as the third stage in the development of the concept of autonomy in the contemporary period. This stage has more elements of the fundamentals of the modern conception of autonomy, and what makes it different is the fact that autonomy becomes more defined and refined and conceptions of autonomy become heavily contested areas as they also mark the different brands of liberalism that people have come to know. Although one is tempted to argue that such a consideration after the modern conception necessarily becomes a post-modern conception, I do not think that the various conceptions of autonomy that continually challenge each other today can easily be labelled post-modern, because this categorisation does not speak for all forms of freedom after the modern period. Nevertheless, the theoretical mindset that brings this contestation uses a post-structuralist methodology.

## **4.2 The liberty of the ancients**

The idea of the liberty of the ancients is not familiar terminology in the contemporary discourse on liberty. Nevertheless I refer to this concept to

distinguish and differentiate concepts of freedom/liberty that influence discourse on autonomy today. Berlin (2005: 517) uses the concept of the liberty of the ancients to refer to how the ancient world understood liberty, particularly among the Greek city-states. An equivalent characterisation is also found in Skinner's (1998: 1–58) conceptualisation of the neo-Roman theory of *free states*.

In the ancient world referred to above, to be free meant “to be able to participate in the government of one's city” (Berlin, 2005: 517). Berlin indicates that during this period of human history, there was no distinction between the person as a private individual and society as a collective group. In fact, no significance was attached to individuality. Essentially, this meant that what the community understood as freedom was its own collective freedom from tyrannical leadership or foreign forces or occupying forces. Hence, freedom came to designate that condition whereby people made laws for their own government and ran the affairs of their government, without any subjection to kingdoms or chieftaincies. This being the case, it was also understood that the freedom of the state penetrated every aspect of life, whether public or private. But the distinction of the individual was then immaterial.

Lovett (2006: 1880) argues that prior to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, political liberty was not an especially controversial notion. The idea of liberty had an uncontested meaning. This was largely due to the fact that political freedom during this period was not considered an important political value compared to the freedom of the nation-state from a foreign power or the arbitrary will of another ruler. Lovett (2006) continues to argue that because of its particular historical setup, the ancient conception of liberty was also understood mainly as a kind of independence from slavery. This understanding conveys the idea that freedom was thought of and defended only when it was in danger of being destroyed by a tyrant or an autocratic king or leader. A full characterisation of the freedom of the ancients has been provided by Skinner (1998) and I now look at some of the elements of this conception.



In Skinner's (1998) *Liberty before Liberalism*, the ancient idea of liberty is understood in two ways. On the one hand is the neo-Roman understanding of civil liberty and on the other is the Anglophone classical conception of liberal autonomy. Skinner's main purpose in this exposition is to challenge the assumption that "the freedom of citizens is only possible within free states" (1998: 98), a conception that is dominant in the classical understanding of freedom. Skinner's explanation of the neo-Roman understanding of civil liberty is an example of the classical conception of liberty.

Skinner (1998: 5) notes that the 17<sup>th</sup> century discourse on liberty came up with regard to the power that the state had in relation to the power held by the subjects. In this regard, an individual's freedom was only a factor of the freedom of the collective or group. The individual was considered free if he or she was a member of a free civil association. It was only within the framework of free association that one was unimpeded from exercising one's capacities in pursuit of one's desired ends. According to this understanding of liberty, the duty of the state is considered to be one of preventing others from violating the right to action of fellow-citizens by imposing coercive force of law on everyone. "Where the law ends, liberty begins" (Skinner, 1998: 5). Although this conception touches on the role of the state in affecting individual liberty, the prime focus of the conception is not on the preservation of individual rights as such. Government's coercive laws to deter others from injuring fellow citizens are considered as a means of preserving the natural condition of individual liberty within a community.

What is remarkable in the neo-Roman conception of liberty is that civil liberty was always thought of in the relationship between the freedom of the subjects and the powers of the state. Hence, conceptions of liberty have always carried political implications. The conditions under which individual citizens were thought to possess or lose their liberty were tied to and dependent on the free association of the whole group (Skinner, 1998: 23). Today, this conception is close to the communitarian conception where the primacy of the association or the state is held against that of individuality. It was assumed that by virtue of

living in a free state, citizens were also free. Similarly, living in a state that was autocratic meant that the individual was not free, according to this understanding. The idea of common freedom, also referred to as the liberty of the commonwealth, became the basis for the discourse of liberty.

On the other hand, a free government, according to the neo-Roman theory of liberty, was one where the actions of the whole group, otherwise also referred to as the body politic (1998: 26), were determined by the will of the members as a whole. In other words, free states were keepers of their own liberty and unfree states were those that were subjected to the will of another who was not oneself, the body politic. In this case, monarchies did not fall under free states irrespective of the particular licences the monarch would allow his/her subjects. A free state was defined only by its capacity for (popular) self-government where the prerogative to make rules lay with the general public. A state that received its laws from elsewhere/outside, instead of from its members, was similarly considered to be unfree. Although in these classical societies one would find executive councils, senates and houses of representatives, the state was still considered as ruling itself because the power to elect members of society into these executive bodies also lay within the general group (Skinner 1998: 34–35).

Berlin (2005: 517) argues that in the ancient world a person was not free, nor did he or she claim freedom, because this world assumed that life is one and that the laws and governments covered the whole of it. This conception shows that as much as the private arena of life was not given much consideration, there was no point protecting it except when it was felt to be in danger (Lovett, 2006: 1880). What made this conception predominant is the fact that during this period one was feared to have lost one's freedom if captured in war, according to the Greeks. Lovett (2006: 1881) further argues that it is the ancient concept of liberty that influences the conception of liberty in the early English political writers of the modern period.

The neo-Roman conception of autonomy/liberty had a number of implications for governance systems. At a general level, the system implied that the idea of

‘veto’, as is commonly known in forums or group decision-making processes, did not apply to a free society. If all people made decisions, no one had the mandate, even constitutionally, to make or abrogate decisions on behalf of the group, except when this mandate to decide on behalf of the group was duly given to the individual person by the group itself.

The neo-Roman theory also assumes that certain benefits accompany the ideal of a free state over and above that of a free individual. Similarly, the existence of a free state was considered as a precondition for the liberty of the individuals. It was not common thinking to imagine that individual rights and freedoms could exist independently of the state or that one could exercise one’s liberties under a tyrannical rule. Secondly, Skinner (1998: 61–62) notes, “The benefit of living in a *civitas libera* (free state) is that such communities are especially well-adapted to attaining glory and greatness”. This is so because under a free system of government everyone strives for glory without the least fear of appearing to be a threat, as would be the case in an autocratic system of government. In other words, the neo-Roman theory of liberty provided the conditions for the advancement of every member of society as part of the advancement of the whole group. In this conception the members of the group serve their own group interests, thereby indirectly promoting themselves. This is in contrast to a monarchical rule where the subjects serve the king and the royal family.

The idea of the ancient free state also accommodated the understanding that liberty comprised the idea that everyone was free to own property without reprisals from any higher authority and that the system of society itself gave every member a fair chance to advance in life without imposing certain privileges on any group of society. The liberty of the free state enabled individuals to develop their virtue towards self-fulfilment in life. The dominant idea running through Skinner’s (1998: 30) understanding of the neo-Roman concept of liberty is that the rights of every person are respected when every person takes part in the making of the laws of society. Skinner (1998: 74) notes that participation is a necessary condition of maintaining one’s liberty.

In this section, the neo-Roman theory of liberty as an example of different concepts of liberty has been considered. What is of particular interest in this position is that liberty was understood as the liberty of the group rather than the liberty of the individual members of society. Individuals in society were considered free if the collective group made its own rules and ruled itself and was not subjected to the will of some dictator.

### **4.3 The idea of liberty in the modern period**

Berlin (2005: 517) argues that the clearest formulation of the concept of liberty in the modern period can be traced to Benjamin Constant. The concept of liberty became prominent as part of an agenda to have a clear distinction between private life and public life. This distinction is absent in the concept of the liberty of the ancients, as shown above. In the modern period, it is believed that human life should have a certain space where the public cannot encroach. This is the space where one would be left to one's own devices to do as one pleases, provided one's actions do not injure similar rights and claims of other members of society.

Berlin (2005) provides a socio-historical origin of this conception of liberty. In his explanation, he says that the development of the protection of liberty and the consequent distinction between the private and public realms of life can be attributed to two factors. On the one hand, the often tense relationship between the secular state and the church could have contributed to the split between private life and public life. The struggle that existed between these two forces of society led to the creation of a space within which the individual was allowed to do as she or he pleased. But Berlin (2005: 517) also adds that the growth of private enterprise, industry and commerce led to the desire to protect individual ownership against state interference. Freedman (2006) identifies this shift with the birth of the ideal of maximum pleasure, or utilitarianism<sup>8</sup>, as the goal of life.

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<sup>8</sup> Glover (1990: 1ff) introduces utilitarianism as an ethical theory/principle that replaces arbitrary-seeming rules of morality. It argues that human acts should be judged by their consequences. It further argues that happiness is the only thing good in itself and that a good action is one that creates the highest level of happiness for the largest number of people possible. The major proponents of the theory include Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, among others.

Freedden's argument is made on the basis of a shift of power from the few who owned property to the idea of the creation of the happiness of as many people as possible as a ground for assessing the good in public matters.

The result of this shift in thinking was that the realms of individual liberty and personal possession of property became the pillars of social and political thinking. In other words, the idea of freedom is conceived as part of the broader agenda of self-ownership, so that the "scope and nature of the freedom we ought to enjoy becomes a function of our self-ownership" (Kymlicka, 2002: 138). This conception is refined and developed further in the contemporary debate on liberty, which I return to later in this chapter.

The efforts to distinguish public life from private life can also be seen through the works of Immanuel Kant. His ideas have an enormous influence on the concepts of liberty in the modern period. In Kant's thinking, the distinction between nature in general and human nature is crucial for the understanding of freedom. On the one hand, Kant entertained the idea that all things in nature are connected by the law of necessity. This idea promotes the thinking that determination is real and that everything is always influenced by something from outside, and as such things are in a perpetual flux or state of change. In this regard, human life, given the connection of forces in nature, is determined and influenced like that of any other existent being. But Kant further distinguishes human consciousness as something that makes a human being different from nature in general. Consequently Kant also believes that it is because of human consciousness and human rationality that human beings have the capacity to lay down the law for their own actions, that is, the moral law (Caird, 1889; Ross, 1954: 38). It is in the capacity for the moral law that Kant believes that the idea of human freedom is central.

With regard to the idea of the moral law, Kant maintains that human beings lay down a law for their actions without reference to circumstances they find themselves in, except their ideals (Ross, 1954: 39). The extraction of the moral law through human consciousness enables human beings to transcend their

natural ties. The moral law is a law that is bound up with the consciousness of the self as subject, in such a way that obedience to it is equivalent to making the self as subject one's end (Caird, 1889: 247). Hence, in the idea of the autonomous self, Kant draws a distinction between the self as self-legislating for its moral law and the self as determined by others in legislating for its actions. But since the idea of the will is connected with the notion of the moral law according to Kant, the moral law is necessarily the law of freedom. This idea arises from the fact that the will freely legislates for its actions by its own determined set standards, which comprise its moral obligation (Ross, 1954: 67–69).

It is possible to consider the Kantian formula of freedom as having an aspect of negative liberty. This applies only in the case where one considers the self-legislating will as not interfered with by passions or “sensuous motives” (Caird, 1889: 255). Using the “neumenal-phenomenal” distinction, Caird argues that in Kant's understanding “phenomena cannot explain super sensuous objects such as free will”. In other words, freedom cannot be explained by something outside the person, per se. Freedom is considered as the inner legislation of reason, a faculty or a power. According to this position, the conscious subject should determine itself in view of its own universal nature alone and should not be determined by its particular passions.

Apart from the innovation in his ideas, it is the circumstances under which Kant was writing that made his position unique. Rorty (2004) argues that before the Enlightenment, the moral experts were religious leaders, priests in particular. Against this background, Kant's attempt was aimed at overturning the conception of a moral law that arises from outside because it does not evoke one's sense of duty. Instead, Kant proposed that every person has the inner resources necessary to make sound moral decisions. Accordingly, these resources consist of the recognition of one's possession of an unconditional principle, the categorical imperative, that would enable one to decide how to resolve moral dilemmas. Hence Rorty concludes that Kant's imperative is the product of a special faculty, the faculty of pure practical reason.

Kant also recognises that consciousness or self-determination in an individual is consciousness of oneself as the author of one's acts. Kant's notion of moral autonomy means having one's moral decisions regulated and made by reason rather than sensual experience. In other words, the self can truly be itself when its will transcends its natural or bodily limitations. Hence, an understanding of the empirical as distinct from the non-empirical is crucial in understanding Kant's conception of liberty. Such a distinction is also very similar to Plato's distinction between form and substance, material and immaterial, human and divine.

Considered from a different dimension, the distinctions that Kant brought into the concept of autonomy have largely been understood as if Kant is proposing an individualistic ethic that generates an abstract conception of autonomy that is detached from one's living circumstances. O'Neill (2004: 182) notes that Kant's conception of autonomy has been taken to promote self-centredness, possessiveness and individualism. The individualistic forms of autonomy attributed to Kant are perceived to devalue the necessary dependence that is part and parcel of human life today. The conception of an individualistic ethic is also considered to be inimical to issues of human solidarity, community and affection because of its inherent sense of self-centredness and individualism.

Based on the views expressed above, contemporary defenders of the Kantian formula of autonomy insist that Kant has been misunderstood. For instance, O'Neill's (2004) restatement of Kant's position, which is itself a comment on Schneewind, defends a conception of autonomy or liberty as self-government (2004: 181). This conception acknowledges the ancient concept of the liberty of the republic but does not agree with it. Instead, O'Neill (2004: 182) argues that the idea of liberty as primarily a factor of the group does not respect the entitlement of individuals to autonomy. An autonomous person is one who is capable of legislating for the self, thereby instituting self-government. The concept of human self-legislation departs from considerations of external moral legislation, whether by God or any external sovereign.

The idea of self-legislation of individuals highlights the point that in autonomy “individuals shape and govern their own lives” (O’Neill, 2004: 182). O’Neill contends that self-legislation is a specific understanding of the idea of self-governance in the sense that to avoid conflict in society, one would need to select principles that any, hence all, can also select and adopt as a basis for regulating their lives. The Kantian conception of autonomy is meant to be understood as one that does not conform to or derive its sense from antecedent-given standards of reason (2004: 186). But it provides the supreme principle of practical reason itself. O’Neill (2004: 186) states the following:

The principle of autonomy as a principle of our willing means that there are no external standards of reason but people invent or construct standards for reasoned thinking and acting, standards that have the sort of generally recognised authority that we would look for in anything that could count as a requirement of reason.

In other words, the idea of self-legislation implies that there must be a “minimal structure that must be imposed on thought and action if any plurality of free agents is to be able to follow one another’s thinking and acting” (O’Neill, 2004: 187). Therefore autonomy in thinking is an attempt to conduct thinking on principles on which all others whom one addresses could also conduct their thinking and action. Therefore reason means striving for autonomy in thought and action, and conversely autonomy means conducting oneself with reason that others can understand or follow.

In this understanding, reason must be disciplined and flawless, otherwise it would not be followed by others. In other words, reason cannot be lawless, neither can its law come from anything outside, other than reason itself. It is in this sense that defenders of the Kantian conception of autonomy argue that reason must be internally disciplined. In other words, reason becomes autonomous if it adopts some principle of its own that others would easily understand. Hence the idea of self-legislation is a characteristic of thinking that free individuals achieve by imposing the discipline of ‘law-likeness’ and by



making their thoughts or proposals for action capable of being followed by or accessible to others (O'Neill, 2004: 189).

It is also worth noting that although a free will is one that is determined by pure reason, it may be affected by impulses since they are part of human life; however, the impulses do not determine the will (Kant, 1965: 13). As such freedom attains its peak when the will is independent from determination by sensible impulses. Furthermore, Kant's conception of autonomy has innate foundations. If freedom is one's moral capacity as a person to legislate for oneself and if this capacity is from within and not from outside, the idea of freedom becomes an innate right (Kant, 1965: 43–44). Within the society of human beings this innate right implies equality and independence from others. In this regard one is not expected to do more than one can also reciprocally bind others to do. Human beings through their act of willing become masters of their own life.

Using this Kantian perspective, it can therefore be concluded that liberty or autonomy should be conducted in thought and action. Autonomous reason is a process of freely imposed self-discipline on the use of one's capacities. This use of reason is public because it is meant to be followed by everyone and not just a specific group of people. Reason that is capable of being followed by everyone can manifest itself in speaking, writing and other forms of communication. This defence of autonomy as public reason has many implications for the consideration of university autonomy and academic freedom.

#### **4.4 Liberalism and the competing conceptions of liberty**

The modern conception of liberty is largely ushered in by liberalism. Liberalism is difficult to define. What the defenders of the liberal ideal propose to be the defining marks of liberalism have always varied to the extent that defining the term ends up in patronising certain concepts over others, a thing that is contrary to the liberal spirit itself. This is why some liberal thinkers, such as Ryan (1998), believe that it is easier to produce a list of liberals than to characterise what they

have in common. In many ways, liberalism is known for its points of convergence that are not even unanimous but generally surround issues concerning autonomy and the good. As such no single definition can stand for liberalism without defeating the very assumptions on which it is built.

Nevertheless, the different positions in liberalism can also be distinguished along the lines of positive and negative liberty, concepts that were popularised by Sir Isaiah Berlin in 1969. In the section subsection, I consider elements of these two concepts of liberty.

#### **4.4.1 Positive and negative concepts of liberty**

Much as one can trace the origins of liberal forms of autonomy to classical periods, the origins of negative and positive conceptions of liberty were mainly introduced by Benjamin Constant and popularised by Sir Isaiah Berlin in 1969. The concepts of negative and positive freedom act as pivot on which contemporary debates of liberal autonomy are based.

Negative freedom refers to the state in which the individual person is or should be left to do or be what he or she is able to do or be without interference from other persons. Lack of interference, coercion or hindrances forms the hub of the conception of negative freedom. Negative liberty does not arise because of natural impairment. Berlin (1984: 17) believes that “there ought to exist a certain minimum area of personal freedom which must on no account be violated; for if it is overstepped, the individual will find himself in an area too narrow for even that minimum development of his natural faculties, which alone makes it possible for one to pursue, and even to conceive, the various ends which one holds good or right or sacred”. This position can better be understood against a tradition that held that the group or social association was prior to and determined the conditions of individual existence and exercise of choice. The repositioning of the role of the individual in the concept of freedom by Berlin can also be read as a reformulation of Kant’s understanding of autonomy which I have explained above. Skinner (1998: 29) further argues that the negative notion

of liberty implies that the truer and more humane ideal of liberty finds expression when the individual is not prevented by others from doing what she or he wants. In this sense, the strength of freedom is measured by the strength of the barriers to ward off the imposition of the will of an external body.

Berlin's notion of positive freedom can be described as an individual wish for self-determination or to be one's own master. Berlin (1984: 23) states: "I wish to be conscious of myself as a thinking, willing, active being, bearing responsibility for my choices and able to explain them by reference to my own ideas and purposes". In my view, positive liberty is the main source of the concept of an autonomous self. The individual self envisaged in this conception is identified with reason, and reason is also considered to represent one's higher nature. Hence this idea of autonomy includes the capacity to have and experience one's inner space and peace, the presence of inner control through the choices people make as they shape their lives. Autonomy brings about self-determination and self-realisation in people's lives.

There seems to be a growing consensus that the negative conception of liberty is the truer form of liberty, as attested to by Berlin himself. Nevertheless, the negative concept of freedom has received more critique than the positive concept, especially from communitarian theorists. The critiques are directed at the apparent dissociation of the negative concept of liberty from social factors that are at play when individuals act. But some of these critics are not necessarily in defence of the communitarian conception of liberty, as such. For instance, Taylor (1979: 192-3) argues that the classical formulation of negative liberty as "absence of external interference" is impoverished and has debilitating effects on the individual person. Taylor (1979) states that most often the debate on negative liberty tends to entail two extreme ends.

On the one hand, negative liberty is presented as the opposite of a caricatured conception of positive liberty, which is leftist. This caricatured view poses positive liberty as exclusively residing in the "exercise of collective control over one's destiny", in some form of a classless society" (Taylor, 1979: 175). As such,

negative liberty simply tends to be understood as the opposite of this position, the absence of any determining collective will or standards. To an extent, the caricatured conception of positive liberty does not only misrecognise that freedom can exist in societies but it also holds that one can be forced to be free in the name of one's good, as Raz and others would argue. Nevertheless, Taylor (1979: 177) makes concessions to the idea that positive liberty involves exercise of control over one's life. I return to this idea later in the discussion.

The caricatured view of negative liberty holds that freedom is simply the absence of external physical or legal constraints (Taylor, 1979: 176). For freedom to exist, it is not important that other obstacles to freedom such as one's lack of awareness, false consciousness and other internally determined conditions or dispositions are considered. Freedom is merely individual independence from other people or influencing conditions. It is the absence of obstacles. Taylor argues that such a conception of liberty simply adopts "an opportunity concept" (1979: 177) but it is an idea close to what Callan (1997: 56–65) describes as choice as mere choosing. Taylor argues that the opportunity concept on its own is untenable without self-realisation. But again, self-realisation is not possible if one is unaware of one's potential and/or if one is influenced by internal fear. In this regard, Taylor, and later Raz, promote a similar conception of autonomy.

It is important to recognise the distinction between 'potential' and 'exercise' in the autonomous self-realisation of individuals. In this distinction, the concept of "being capable to do something without interference" is distinguished from "the ability to actually exercise the capability to freedom". Taylor argues that "being able to do what one wants can no longer be accepted as a condition for freedom" (Taylor, 1979: 180). He suggests that other factors such as internal motivation, accurate knowledge, clear consciousness as opposed to false consciousness and basic purpose play a crucial role in determining the nature of autonomy. These factors cannot be accounted for by simple notions of positive and negative liberty. In this sense, "freedom is no longer just the absence of external obstacle, but also the absence of external obstacle to a person's capacity to undertake significant action, one that is important to the person" (Taylor, 1979: 182).

Taylor (1979) proposes a communitarian liberal agenda of autonomy and I will discuss this in greater detail in the next subsection. In this view, the idea of what is significant in one's life is considered from communitarian ends. Taylor argues that even the internal motivations that people have as claims for freedom to do certain things cannot be put on a linear scale. In other words, just as people have significant purposes and less significant purposes in life so will their motivations be. This position opens up the area of individual liberty to external arbitration and some judgment over the worthiness of these motivations, close to Raz's (1986) condition of autonomy. Taylor (1979: 187) later refines the idea to retain the concept that freedom is the absence of internal as well as external obstacles to what a person truly or authentically wants.

Our attributions of freedom make sense against a background sense of more or less significant purposes, for the question of freedom/unfreedom is bound up with frustration, fulfilment of our purposes. Our significant purposes can be frustrated by our own desires, and where these are sufficiently based on misappreciation, we consider them as not ours, and experience them as fetters (Taylor, 1979: 191).

Taylor's position includes the idea of strong evaluation within one's given social conditions as an aspect of human freedom.

#### **4.4.2 Varieties of liberalism and their implications for educational autonomy**

There are as many varieties of liberalism as there are proponents. In general Ryan (1998: 293) identifies classical liberalism and modern liberalism as the dominant trends in liberal thought. On the one hand, John Locke is seen as one of the proponents of classical liberalism, which emphasises "limited government, the maintenance of law, the avoidance of arbitrary and discretionary power, the sanctity of private property and freely made contracts, and the responsibility of individuals for their own fates" (Ryan, 1998: 293). The classical formulations of liberalism were made against a tradition of monarchical and authoritative forms

of government. It was believed that limiting the powers authorities held over their subjects would enhance the liberties of these subjects.

On the other hand, modern liberalism is exemplified by the works of John Stuart Mill, who upholds the capacity of individuals to reason and rationally decide for themselves the forms of life that will enhance each individual's capacity. Modern liberals emphasise individual freedom and the idea that personal fulfilment should be the goal of each person's exercise of individual freedom (Ryan, 1998: 295). Today, liberalism is best known for the prominent emphasis it places on individual liberty in general.

Liberalism can be said to designate any ideology, philosophical view or political tradition that seeks to make liberty its primary political value and virtue. It can be seen as a social ethic that advocates liberty and equality in general (Seidentop, 1979: 153). From the consideration of being a social ethic, the tendency has been to break down liberalism into its constituent elements, which may include rights, freedom of thought, limitations on power, especially of government and religion, the rule of law, the free exchange of ideas, a market economy that supports relatively free private enterprise and a transparent system of government in which the rights of all citizens are protected. But again there is no unanimity over the particular character of the values regarded as unique to liberalism.

Bellamy (1992: 219) further divides the contemporary liberal tradition into two groups: neutral liberalism and communitarian liberalism. Neutral liberalism is characterised by an equal concern and respect for individuals, groups and communities so that a particular conception of the good is not imposed and so that competing values are allowed to exist side by side. Although neutral liberalism springs from the foundations of right that Kant introduced, the doctrine has different emphasis points across its adherents (Bellamy, 1992).

On the one hand, there is the narrow sense of neutralism that holds that the state should not take any action to assist its members to achieve their conception of the good. This view also implies that no substantive conception of the good will be

proposed except that which helps the formation and sustenance of a basic society of equals. The second conception holds that the government should assist all its members so that they are equally able to pursue and achieve any conception of the good that they choose. The third position of neutralism is a combination of the first two positions. It tries to strike a middle ground between a minimalist state, as Nozick (1974) would call it, and a comprehensive approach to the social good.

In general neutral liberalism promotes the equal rights of individuals to form a conception of the good and a good society and the equal entitlement to devise means to achieve this. The state's role is that of protecting the conditions within which these equal individuals will operate without preferring any one and particular conception of what is good in life. The implication of this position is the presumption of free individuals as people who are capable of discerning and choosing alternatives in their lives.

But if it is desirable within liberalism to allow individuals to see different alternatives in life and eventually choose between them, it becomes difficult for neutral liberalists to maintain the position of not prescribing any particular conception of the good. The presupposition that individuals are capable of choosing rationally what is good for each one of them prescribes an expected outcome of the process of choice in life. Hence Bellamy (1992: 240) argues that there is only a thin line of separation between neutral liberalists and communitarian liberalists. This argument is made on the ground that the principle of autonomy on which neutral liberalism seems to base its important position is itself substantive.

On the other hand, communitarian liberalists emphasise the role of settled traditions and established identities in the formation and exercise of individual liberties. Communitarian liberalism draws from the liberal acceptance of the principles and values of liberal equality and pluralism on the one hand and the social embeddedness of human beings on the other. In the first place, liberal communitarianism argues that if people are equal and equally capable of forming

and pursuing various conceptions of the good life, it is also admissible for groups of people to form and pursue their common interests if they happen to agree on similar principles governing their conduct. In other words, if people accept and respect the idea that there are bound to be different conceptions of the good life, it follows that different communities will tend to surround themselves with their own sense of what is good in life, thereby entitling them to pursue this vision of the good as legitimate goal in life. But Walzer (1983), one of the liberal communitarians, believes that people can only criticise certain standpoints from their privileged standpoint, that the social beliefs they already have act as a background for assessing the good in life. Walzer's main concern though is justice. I position a preferable conception of autonomy within the circles of communitarian liberalism.

Furthermore, Raz (1986) concentrates on conceptions of autonomy as he disparages moral individualism and the idea that morality is rights-based. Raz identifies two conceptions of liberty. On the one hand, there is a view that liberty has meaningful value because it serves other interests. In other words, the value of freedom will be affirmed in so far as the other variables outside freedom are also affirmed. In this regard, Raz (1986: 17) argues that freedom would collapse once the other variables lose their value. Hence, the idea of liberty or freedom has to be founded on a self-explanatory principle where freedom is intrinsically valuable as an independent value.

In general, Raz (1986: 17–18) believes that the ideal of liberty is important because it is the centre around which political morality revolves. The idea of liberty connects liberalism and democracy. But it needs to be noted that although liberalism can provide foundations for democracy, it is possible to come to democracy through other ways that are not necessarily liberal. On the other hand, individualism is a moral doctrine that simply associates with liberalism. But Raz's point is that just as liberals may support undemocratic institutions in some cases, it is possible that liberal conclusions can be based on nonindividualistic conclusions. Raz (1986) uses this position to build a conception of autonomy that is not individualistic but communitarian in character.



The liberal communitarian position shifts away from a vision of liberalism as theory of limited government where liberty is about what governments may not do in order to promote individual liberty. While conceding that governments can be a source of restraint on individual liberty, Raz's formulation of liberal communitarianism proposes that governments can also create conditions under which citizens would enjoy greater liberty than without it. This view shifts to a conception of government not as threat to individual liberty but as an enabling condition or an enhancement in individual liberty. Such a conception of nonindividualistic liberty is essentially connected with forms of government, because governments are required to create conditions under which political liberties would be created and promoted.

Raz (1986: 35–37) connects the issue of liberty and political authority and ultimately sets conditions under which political authority can be legitimate in promoting liberty. He distinguishes mere command as authority from authority as a giving of reasons that would be recognised as necessary for action. He also makes a distinction between an individualistic morality of rights and a nonindividualistic one in the sense that an individualistic morality of liberty, though humanitarian, “will not recognise any intrinsic value in any collective good” (Raz, 1986: 198). In other words, the collective goods are held in so far as they are supportive of the moral rights but are not considered to be valuable in themselves. This point gives one a distinct line between autonomy and rights.

Autonomy, understood from a liberal communitarian stance, can be equated to achievement (Raz, 1986: 204). In this regard, an autonomous life is characterised not only from what it is but as a synergy of what it might have been (a consideration over failed options) and what it actually became. For instance, a person cannot be considered to have lived an autonomous life if he or she simply drifts through life or if there are no significant choices that he or she has to make. In other words, the status of autonomy is one that one consciously achieves through one's circumstances in life.

The above consideration can apply to autonomy at two levels. At the first level is the initial capacity to be autonomous, to become the author of one's life. Raz (1986: 204) refers to this as the "primary sense of autonomy". The second component of an autonomous life comes to the fore when the conditions of one's assumed autonomous life are such that they make an autonomous life possible in real-life circumstances. In this regard the conditions of one's autonomy would include such things as the state of the individual, the level of knowledge of surrounding circumstances and the circumstances of one's life, and whether through all these one can be considered to have achieved a considerable or "sufficient range of significant options" available (Raz, 1986: 204).

The above conception of autonomy fundamentally separates the two conceptions of autonomy. On the one side is a rights view of autonomy that promotes the idea of a right to autonomy as a capacity for autonomy within individual persons. On the other hand, life is considered as autonomous if its conditions/circumstances have come about through achievement and not merely as the result of a capacity for autonomy. This brings the judgement on life as autonomous to be made on the grounds of the choices the person has made and lived through as a distinct mark of his or her life.

One can proceed to argue that given this understanding, "the ideal of personal autonomy requires not merely the presence of options but the presence of acceptable options" (Raz, 1986: 205). Such a conception specifically translates into the idea that if autonomy is to be achieved, one's options will depend on certain social conditions for them to be realised. Some of the conditions include whether the environment one is in allows for the exercise of those rights or not. In the end, social conditions equally become important. It can therefore be concluded that the realisation of autonomy depends in part on collective goods that cannot be held conditional on some other goods or values and that to an extent the collective goods need to be intrinsically valuable, otherwise they perpetuate an infinite chain of causes in search of an inherent value.

To sum up these views, one can say that the desire to be autonomous implies the desire to have options that are socially acceptable as options and to live within circumstances where one's desires would be fulfilled. Considered from such a position, the idea of autonomy as absence of coercion becomes narrow and autonomy as situated in life communities becomes meaningful. No wonder that several individual freedoms would only be possible if an appropriate common culture is also possible and available to support them (Raz, 1986: 247). This is a conception of autonomous life that is judged by how it came to be, that is, "by what it might have been and by why it is not other than what it is" (Raz, 1986: 371). The idea directs us to the important factor of autonomy as the ability to choose one's options and one's power to bring about what one has chosen within one's given social circumstances. Again this position assumes that one has the power to do what one chooses, otherwise the action would not be considered as contributing to one's autonomy or not. Nevertheless the conditions of autonomy as necessitating circumstances are just part of what it means to have autonomy itself. These circumstances include appropriate mental abilities, an adequate range of options and independence.

This point brings me to a distinction between autonomy and self-realisation. While one can achieve self-realisation in a nonautonomous way, autonomy helps in the project of self-realisation. The means for self-realisation do not lose their quality if they are dominated by the requirement to survive, for instance. On the other hand, when the reason for one's action is the need for survival, it is difficult to talk of autonomy.

To be autonomous, and to have an autonomous life, a person must have options which enable him to sustain throughout his life activities which, taken together, exercise all the capacities human beings have an innate drive to exercise, as well as to decline to develop any of them (Raz, 1986: 375).

If choice dominated by the need for survival cannot count as a meaningful option, it is also the case that a choice between good and evil is not enough. Autonomy requires that many morally acceptable options be available. The idea

of personal autonomy transcends what every person may have a right to. To be autonomous one must identify with one's choices and must be loyal to them (Raz, 1986: 379–382). Hence to be autonomous also involves to a large extent having integrity. There is value in integrity; that is why an autonomous life can also be considered as a life of value. Conditions of autonomy concern the central aspect of the whole system of values in society. Raz's autonomy-based conception of freedom is a combination of individual capacity as well as the availability of adequate options, the necessary mechanisms by the state that prohibit denial of freedom and to an extent the right to infringe on the perceived autonomy of others, based on their good (Raz, 1986: 394).

In this subsection, I have argued that liberalism can be understood from various standpoints or ideals, such as neutral liberalism, communitarian liberalism and classical and modern conceptions. I have drawn extensively on Raz (1986) because his conception of autonomy accommodates the idea that to be autonomous requires a full account of one's living conditions and how options within those living conditions manifested themselves, were chosen and were lived out. I also concede that although much is said in this regard, not everything can be said about liberalism and the various trends within it. In the following subsection, I consider the positive and negative conceptions of liberty and their influences on liberalism and higher education autonomy discourse.

#### **4.4.3 Political and comprehensive liberalism**

The popularised concepts of negative and positive freedom have influenced contemporary debates on liberalism. The two concepts are also at the heart of the distinction between political liberalism and comprehensive liberalism (Callan, 1997; Rawls, 1971). The distinction between political and comprehensive liberalism is centred on a particular conception of autonomy, which to a large extent cannot be equated with the negative and positive concepts of liberty although these two concepts have influenced that thinking. In order to clarify this distinction I employ McLaughlin's (1992) maximal and minimal forms of citizenship for they reveal different dimensions of the contemporary liberal

tradition. It needs to be noted that although the framework I am employing deals with democratic citizenship, this discussion does not discuss citizenship issues. Implications for citizenship issues are discussed in Chapter 6.

McLaughlin (1992: 236) analyses liberal democratic citizenship from questions of identity, virtues, political involvement and social prerequisites that stretch between maximal and minimal features. While these characterisations do not directly address conceptions of liberty, their basis is rooted in liberty itself. For instance, Rawls' (1971) proposal for a political conception of justice that is preoccupied with finding a general consensus would be considered as fulfilling the conditions of minimal liberalism, just as Rawls was more concerned with arriving at constitutional essentials. One can also equate such forms of liberalism with Bellamy's (1992) neutral liberalism. From different angles, neutral liberalism is associated with the theories of Nozick (1974), which defend the minimalist state. Callan (1997: 170) characterises the same as a liberalism that is satisfied with the lowest common denominator as the basis for teaching children what they need to know in society.

The minimalist conception of liberalism, which is close to Rawls' conception of political liberalism, uses a negative conception of liberty by virtue of its emphasis on the promotion of equal rights for all. The basic framework of this conception sets a limit beyond which an individual's entitlement cannot be disturbed or infringed with. It is with such understanding that I argue that this conception is a resemblance of Skinner's (1998: 29) position that states that "the freedom of a society, or a class or group of people is measured by the strength of the barriers to ward off the imposition of the will of an external body onto it, and the number and importance of the paths which they keep open for their members". In many ways, liberalism has become famous yet controversial because of its preference over a negative conception of liberty, which is in fact a minimalist conception of liberalism.

Macedo (1991) provides one of the clear perspectives on minimal liberalism, which is particular in its conception of rights, government and social life. He

argues that liberalism is believed to centre on values of individuality, social pluralism, liberty, legality, rights, limited government and public reasonableness (Macedo, 1991: 12). Similarly and in line with the ideals of a basic society (Rawls, 1971), liberalism holds that government ought only to provide for equal freedom, order, security and a few other widely acceptable public goods (Macedo, 1991: 3). According to this understanding liberalism believes in the provision of the basic framework for the proper operation of members' activities in society. Beyond this framework, any other efforts are considered as tampering with individual liberty.

From the framework of liberalism outlined thus far, one would expect liberal systems and societies to place a marked emphasis and value on individual freedoms. In many cases it is believed within liberalism that such values are better protected in a society that puts into place mechanisms for the rule of law and the separation of powers. The rule of law works primarily to protect individual rights by making sure that appropriate legal instruments are in place. These instruments include the availability of courts and personnel to manage the courts as well as clear formulations of the rights of citizens through either a bill of rights and/or a constitution. Minimalist liberalism carries overtones of constitutionalism.

Liberal societies, because of the emphasis on equal rights for all, have also been known as fertile grounds for the cultivation of democratic values such as freedom, respect, tolerance, reciprocity and public reason (Kymlicka, 1989; Rawls, 1971). I return to the connection between liberal autonomy and democracy later in this chapter as I clarify on the constituent elements of autonomy. By promoting diversity, toleration and respect, liberal systems emphasise the value and importance of individuality. Individuality is considered to be integral to the promotion of personal liberty through the imposition of procedural and substantive limits on the ways that persons or governments can interfere in the lives of others. In so doing, liberals believe that other values such as tolerance and respect for the rights of those from whom one differs are also going to be respected and promoted.

The ideals of respect, toleration and the right to disagree are mainly based on the principles for the minimum requirement of public reason. In other words, it is not possible for individuals to engage with each other on public matters if there is no effort to engage each other's reasons for particular positions on issues affecting people. Similarly, the idea of respect would be nullified if people understand respect to mean avoidance or lack of interest in the views that others who are different from one are proposing (Waghid, 2001: 128–130). Hence Macedo's (1991: 7–9) idea that liberal rights are not based on disagreement or self-interest but on moral principles justifying the equal right to freedom should be understood against this background of the liberal spirit. The framework of public reason is the background against which liberal ideas are promoted or understood. I also note that what liberalism hopes to offer in these liberties is a system of justice where the reasons for doing things are made public and are open to public scrutiny. I will explain further the liberal implications for justice as I consider the implications of these ideals for higher education.

Liberalism's structure of power is horizontal and reciprocal and not vertical and managerial (Macedo, 1991: 40). This structure of power within the liberal understanding implies that all players in society are equal before the law. It also means that the procedures for managing society apply equally to all members of society. But this condition can only be sustained in the liberal commitment to public justification of reason (Benhabib, 1996). Hence a liberal social order is one that should "in principle be capable of explaining itself at the tribunal of each person's understanding" (Macedo, 1991: 41). The aim of liberalism is to create reasonable agreement but for this to be achieved, Macedo argues that liberalism should seek for justifications that are widely acceptable to reasonable people with a broad range of moral and philosophical commitments and interests, not only specialists. This position necessarily moves such strains of liberalism to communitarian considerations.

## 4.5 Constitutive features of liberal autonomy

The idea of autonomy has a number of features that distinguish it from other conceptions while at the same time giving a unique character to different claims of autonomy. I consider autonomy not just as a mark of the condition of human activity but also as an indication of the level at which individuals in an institution realise their projects as part of the whole. Bonnett and Cuypers's (2003) article gives a distinctive mark to the discourse on autonomy by considering autonomy in line with its constituent elements. The elements that are central to the understanding of autonomy are freedom or free will, critical thinking, rationality or objectivity and consciousness, responsibility, authenticity or identity, and community. What this discourse also assumes is that the more one has of these elements in the operations of particular institutions, the more one can claim to live a liberal autonomous life and that the less one has of these features in an institution, the more one can talk of that particular institution as having less autonomy. In many ways the constituent elements of autonomy operate together in synergy in the projects of an autonomous person or institution.

### 4.5.1 Rationality and objectivity

Rationality is a quality that is inherent in human beings but that needs proper cultivation. A better understanding of what rationality means draws me back to two key figures in the history of philosophy: Rene Descartes (who lived from 1596 to 1650) and Immanuel Kant (who lived from 1724 to 1804). Descartes (Stumpf, 1988: 236–243) was disturbed by the many doubts and imperfections that he had despite having been trained one of the astute academic environments. He turned to mathematics in search for the human “mind’s ability to apprehend directly and clearly certain basic truths” (Stumpf, 1988: 239). Through the use of methodic doubt, Descartes came to the conclusion that there was one certain truth whose foundations could not be shaken; that he was *thinking*. This thinking was the most secure foundation for his existence as a person. It is framed as “I *think*, therefore I am [*cogito ergo sum*]” (Stumpf, 1988: 243, emphasis original).



On the other hand, Kant was stunned by two things: “*the starry heavens above and the moral law within*” (Stumpf, 1988: 300, emphasis original). Kant’s notion of rationality centres on the capacity of the human mind to construct experiences according to its own patterns and not on the fact that experience structures the human mind in specific ways as Hume and others before him had argued (Stumpf, 1988: 307). In other words, the mind imposes its way of knowing upon its objects through the process of rational judgement, which is a priori. The idea that human beings can deduce meaning by simply analysing logical connections between concepts and not by their causal connection gives rationality its foundation. Similarly, Kant regards people as morally autonomous “if in their actions they bound themselves by laws legislated by their own reason as opposed to being governed by their inclinations” (Bonnett & Cuypers, 2003: 327). In this sense, the condition of “making *rationally informed* choices” causes human beings to be autonomous (Bonnett & Cuypers, 2003: 327, emphasis original).

But rational thinking can lose its integrity if it is not objective. Bonnett and Cuypers (2003: 338) consider *objectivity* as the opposite of self-centredness. They argue that “rational thinking relates us to the world and achieves its rigour by the application of public rule-governed procedures to experience in terms of which it is thus organized and validated”. In this case objectivity becomes a function of rules to which all people agree as conditions for something to be declared ‘true’.

#### **4.5.2 Freedom and/or free will**

The theme of freedom or free will runs concurrently with elements of rationality. The rationality of human beings becomes operative when people exercise their freedom to hold different opinions and have the reason to defend them. For existentialist thinkers “we are always free” (Bonnett & Cuypers, 2003: 328) in the sense that people are always positioned to make choices in the ways that they respond to different circumstances. The human will can be considered as having a nature of its own, although the Frankfurt School (Bonnett & Cuypers, 2003: 329) argues that the will is “constituted by a person *caring about* or *loving*

*something* (emphasis original)”. This understanding of the will is called volitional necessity and at first sight appears to contradict the very nature of free will.

The idea of volitional necessity means that a genuine free will is always construed within specific conditions and becomes free in relation to those conditions. For instance, freedom of expression or of opinion would lose its significance if the human condition did not have any histories or conditions that impeded the free expression of ideas and opinions. Despite being constructed in the negative format of liberty, it is this negative freedom that creates the first condition for freedom before people begin to realise their freedoms in various ways through civic participation, for instance. Given this understanding, it can be argued that autonomy primarily depends on the condition of the individual not being under constraint and finally depends on this individual acting according to the character of her or his will (Bonnett & Cuypers, 2003: 330).

#### **4.5.3 Critical thinking**

Critical thinking is thinking that “facilitates judgement because it relies on criteria, is self-correcting, and is sensitive to context” (Bailin & Siegel, 2003: 181–182). In this regard, critical thinking requires both the ability to think and the disposition necessary for this thinking to take place. In many ways, critical thinking is considered as an overriding ideal for education; that is, education aims at developing in individuals the capacity and ability to think. It does this in ways such as marking the conditions under which reasons can be evaluated and setting the criteria for judgement in so far as the probative reasons are concerned. While the capacity to think can be considered as inherent in human beings, oftentimes people have preferred not to think about specific aspects of their problems because they do not have the skills to do so or simply because they do not want to think about the matter in question. As such, the development of critical thinking as the disposition to thinking is very much a condition that each individual person opts for.

Critical thinking becomes a constitutive element of freedom beyond its consideration as a disposition in individuals to choose the path of looking for reasons, weighing them and choosing from alternatives based on the probative strength of these reasons. In one way, critical thinking is the basis for creative thinking in human beings. Possible alternatives to an issue are not possible if people do not assess the reasons that back different perspectives or options. In addition to this, Bailin and Siegel (2003: 188–189) argue that critical thinking develops the respect for persons in students and prepares them for adult roles, where self-direction are prominent. Apart from the idea that educational activities are built on a critical thinking basis, Bailin and Siegel also argue that the democratic life to which most educational systems have attuned themselves requires careful analysis and reasoned deliberations. In this regard, one can consider critical thinking as the basis on which any independent thinking would have to be based in developing personal autonomy and judgement.

One of the crucial capacities in the development of an autonomous self is the capacity to critically assess and even actively shape one's actions, one's character as well as the source of one's actions (Macedo, 1991: 214). These capacities assume that an individual is capable of making strong evaluations regarding the circumstances of his or her life and that the individual is also capable of scrutinising and shaping his or her values and goals in life. Hence, the ideal of strong evaluation requires that an individual be aware of his or her situation, and as such situationless autonomy becomes out of place, as will be shown later. This ideal moves away from the Kantian conception of autonomy that is centred on pure reason into a conception that is fully situated within a specific social context. This will turn out to be an ideal of autonomy that is informed by different concrete standards while at the same time maintaining a reflective distance from the desires and emotions.

#### **4.5.4 Authenticity/identity**

The concepts of rationality, freedom and critical thinking that I have analysed above pave the way for authenticity or identity. Bonnett and Cuypers (2003: 327)

argue that human rationality, which gives birth to critical thinking, provides the basis for authenticity, which is better fulfilled in conditions of freedom. In this regard, claims that something is truly one's own imply that one has considered all conditions in perspective and has come to a point of declaring the thing as one's own. If one were to develop something merely by following a prescribed method, one would not be in a position to make a wholesale claim of that thing as one's own. In other words, while acknowledging the existence of standards in ordinary practice or discourse, such as teaching and learning, one would not claim that the things one has developed are authentic if one does not assign personal meaning to the activity. The idea of creating personal meaning removes the possibility of blind adherence to norms and standards while at the same time attaching "a personal identity" to the created thing (Bonnett & Cuypers, 2003: 327, 330).

Quoting Frankfurt, Bonnett and Cuypers (2003: 330) state that "a person acts autonomously [authentically] only when his (or her) volitions derive from the essential character of his (or her) will". This understanding of an autonomous life largely evokes Kant's conception of the will as a self-legislating will, as one of the major conditions for human autonomy to exist. Nevertheless, the conception that is central here does not sanction an escape from public rationality that moulds a person's understanding within a shared social environment but at best advocates that even in the face of public rationality, one should not adhere to norms of public rationality uncritically.

#### **4.5.5 Responsibility**

The above-mentioned characteristics of authenticity/identity may have several implications for one's life. While it may well be possible to argue that some elements of authenticity/identity carry possibilities for a self-centred life, Bonnett and Cuypers (2003: 337) argue that authenticity requires a decentred relationship with the world, in which one begins to acknowledge the consequences of one's thoughts and actions and that one has a clear perception of their human significance. In this case, one can further infer that responsible action demands

conditions of life similar to those proposed by a number of deliberative democracy theorists. On a general note, the idea of responsibility only makes sense in those places where there is due regard for the equal dignity and worth of people other than oneself, irrespective of their social, economic or educational status. Bonnett and Cuypers (2003: 337) evoke the idea that there needs to be a reorientation of the subject-object relationship. Hence the democratic framework stands as a background against which such responsibility can favourably be developed.

The concept of responsibility can be developed into several other ideas such as its relationship to the development of friendship. Waghid (2008: 199), commenting on Sherman's account of friendship, argues that teaching and learning, within the democratic framework, takes place when both teachers and students avoid being dismissive of one another and listen to each other with interest and appreciation. He goes further to argue that when these conditions are in place, people learn from one another in an atmosphere of trust, where "goodwill and mutual benefit are enhanced" (Waghid, 2008: 200, quoting Sherman). Creating a space where friendship prevails assumes that a foundation of autonomous acting and thinking has been established. The absence of autonomy makes friendship impossible and thwarts independent thinking, thereby breeding fear of being unfairly dismissed in public discourse.

#### **4.5.6 Community: unencumbered freedom versus situated autonomy – in defence of comprehensive liberal autonomy and/or liberal communitarian autonomy**

The concept of community is one other element that influences the character of autonomy, and hence I consider it as a constitutive element in the debate on autonomy. Debates on conceptions of autonomy are connected with and reveal notions of the autonomous self and/or the autonomous community and have become connected with the realm of human actions and how human beings conceive themselves. Callan (1997) argues that the concept of an "unencumbered autonomous self" or "unencumbered autonomous institutions" is debilitating.

The concept of the unencumbered autonomous self is basically proposed through the works of Rawls (1971) and Sandel (1984). The concept of an unencumbered autonomous self promotes the idea that the self is not controlled nor influenced by any other ends prior to choice other than itself. In reference to individual life, the conception holds that as individuals people choose what they want to be and do without being influenced by their circumstances except for their free desire to choose freely. Choice in its simplistic form becomes their sense of autonomy, according to this thinking. I argue that the tenets of this position largely rely on a negative conception of liberty, as explained earlier on.

The position and condition of autonomy that Rawls (1993) proposes argues that a concentration on deep-seated beliefs and convictions cannot manage to bring about agreement and be a basis for public reason in the public life compared to a preference for an overlapping consensus. If this understanding is to be applied to the context of higher education governance, one would argue that the framework of liberal university autonomy and academic freedom that can follow is likely to uphold the *categorical* right of the university to conduct its affairs without any interference from outside, be it government or society at large. It is a position that insulates the university from the outside. The insulation from all outside influences is what makes Callan (1997: 54) think that “Sandel’s thesis of liberal autonomy hinges on the bizarre metaphysics of the unencumbered self”, that existence as being with others is not considered as an essential part of existence. Conversely, Callan (1997: 68) proposes a conception of autonomy that does not demand that people detach themselves from all their ends: “that a good life can hardly be lived in utter disregard of the conditions for responsible action”. Callan’s proposal carries the conditions within which respect and toleration of differences can be enhanced without a blatant ignorance of people’s own identities and differences. This proposal is in contrast to the idea of the *veil of ignorance* that Rawls employs in deciding the good and the just end of a society, which is presupposed to exist with minimal social difference.

Through the proposed view, Callan (1997) argues for a conception of autonomy that recognises the social and political situatedness of persons. He argues that the

requirement of this conception is only that people are capable of asking about the value of any particular end with which they currently identify and that they are able to give a thoughtful answer to what they ask. In other words, it is an understanding of autonomy that is lived deep within one's comprehensive doctrines, within the framework of one's ends and not detached from them. The distinction between choice as choosing and choice as willing becomes handy in clarifying this position. In the idea of choice as choosing a person is confronted with a choice set or possible alternatives. The ranking and consequent choices are based on mere preference and no serious valuation is required of the choice-sets. In choice as willing there is a categorical valuation and a decision is made on the basis of the suitability of an option and not merely in consideration of comparison with other alternatives (Callan, 1997: 57). The idea of choice as willing is similar to the concept of positive liberty since it also evokes commitment. It is in this light that Macedo (1991: 45) argues that any liberal public justification cannot avoid controversy. Hence, the idea of autonomy considered from the position of situated autonomy necessarily becomes partisan. It also implies the recognition of the practical impossibility of a perfect convergence on common principles of justice and that the fabric of difference should also be acknowledged.

The idea of willing choice bears a great deal of influence on the discourse between an unencumbered autonomous self and an encumbered autonomous self. These have further implications for higher education autonomy in Africa, especially when one goes into the discourse fully aware of the circumstances that make higher education governance different on the African continent. Similarly, the concept of willing choice synchronises conceptions of autonomy to involve choice and willing together. This conception is absent when choice is considered as merely choosing. The idea of willing choice has a bearing on conscience since "the process of forming one's own judgement about how to live depends on careful assessment of the reasons available in a given social setting for living one way rather than the other" (Callan, 1997: 66). In other words, the conception of a situated self makes a person or an institution autonomous when the process of making choices happens willingly and within or in full consideration of one's

given circumstances or environment. Recognition of this situatedness brings meaning to autonomous living. Hence autonomy can be considered as reasoned free participation in collective self-rule with responsibilities for “a good life could hardly be lived in utter disregard of the conditions of responsible choice” (Callan, 1997: 68).

In proceeding with this argument, Macedo (1991) positions the autonomous situated self as an opposite of negative liberty. The situated self is characterised by self-mastery and one is conscious of oneself “as a thinking, willing, active being, bearing responsibility for one’s choices and able to explain them by reference to my own ideas and purposes” (Macedo, 1991: 213). This conception of autonomy is more relevant to higher education governance on the African continent than the general idea of freedom or unencumbered autonomy. In this sense, the idea of autonomy gives room to the development of reflective capacities in individuals, thereby enabling these individuals to develop appropriate characters for leading a better life in their institutions.

Among other things, living a situated autonomy means that one engages the inherited values and personal commitments into critical and reflexive thinking. This understanding of situated autonomy goes along with the social responsibilities that reflexive action encompasses (Waghid, 2002b: 470–471). It does not mean detachment from one’s commitments and aspirations, nor from social understandings and ideals. In a way, there is no choice in abstract. Hence autonomy engages people’s deeper sense of morality and personal identity as their projects, plans and commitments are played out in the requirement for strong evaluation.

Our freedom and the autonomy we strive for are not the consequences of an ability to extricate ourselves from this networking of public meanings. We are objects and not only agents of critical interpretation, and it is natural for us to care about other people’s interpretations of us and our actions (Macedo, 1991: 225).



This consideration of others in the lived forms of one's life situates one's ideals of autonomy. I find the conception of situated autonomy more appealing to the issue of higher education autonomy than other forms of autonomy that I have discussed in this chapter, particularly in view of the circumstances of governance on the African continent, as evaluated in Chapter 2.

Callan (1997) and Macedo (1991) have introduced a few milestones that need emphasis in any conception of autonomy. In the first place, it is inappropriate to imagine that the idea of freedom only speaks to one's inner life and identity away from the social constructions with which individuals are meant to live. In other words, any effort to make freedom unique requires that this freedom converses with the circumstances of life. And if freedom/autonomy is required to speak to the circumstances of individuals, it can further be argued that freedom evokes commitment, otherwise the forms of life would not be necessary. To an extent, liberal autonomy in its extended form as situated autonomy means that it has a connection with liberal politics and democracy. This connection is made by the prominence of ideals of a character that is "actively reflective, self-critical, tolerant, reason giving and reason demanding, open to change, and respectful of the autonomy of others, a character disposed to enjoy and participate in the vast spectacle of progress and diversity" (Macedo, 1991: 251). In the following subsection I explore the relationship between democracy and autonomy.

#### **4.5.7 Liberal autonomy and the good**

John Rawls' theory of justice has been taken as one of the major pillars for a liberal agenda. But at the heart of Rawls' (1971) theory of justice is what Rawls refers to as people's basic intuition to lead a good life. In many ways the desire for the good life is believed to be brought about by an examined and autonomous life. According to Rawls and this human intuition, human beings want something that is good and/or desirable in their endeavours. This desire results in the effort to make sure that arrangements for attaining this good are fair to everyone. According to this liberal understanding, the equal basic liberties are the primary goods of any social arrangement (Rawls, 1971: 54). Hence a liberal society and

liberal values and virtues have much to do with the idea and realisation of the good. Miller (2000: 102) (using liberal communitarianism) argues that one mark of the liberal tradition is that it concerns itself with the “irreducible plurality of individual values or conceptions of the good; that there are many valuable ways of life which people may choose to pursue”. These choices are always informed by what people perceive to be their good in the process of the activities chosen.

Similarly, Macedo (1991: 39) believes that constitutionalism in liberalism is desirable because it offers the conditions for the distribution of basic human goods and the conditions under which people can enjoy these goods. He argues that the basic human goods are security, prosperity and freedom. Nevertheless, the idea of autonomy becomes central because the framework for the achievement of the good and the consequent social security and prosperity can only be guaranteed where the basic freedoms of individuals are maintained.

On the other hand, Kymlicka (1989: 12–13; 2002: 64) sums up the traditional liberal concern for civil and personal liberties as centred on the interest in leading a good life and the commitment to do so. He argues that the good life can be lived from the inside, that is, in accordance with one’s beliefs about what is of value in life. Furthermore, living the good life also entails the ability and freedom to question the very beliefs that inform one’s choices in life in the light of any other relevant information. According to this understanding, the pursuit of the good life can only be achieved if government’s role is confined to that of treating people equally, with equal concern and respect, by providing for each the liberties and resources needed. Similarly, it would not work for government to try and impose values from the outside in order to promote the good. In other words, the good life can be lived through the exercise of autonomous choice.

Kymlicka (1989) further argues that liberty and the good are intertwined within the liberal tradition. He explains that “liberty is important not because we already know our good prior to social interaction, or because we cannot know about our good, but precisely so that we can come to know our good, so that we track our best-ness” (Kymlicka, 1989: 18). Similar to the views proposed by other liberals,

Kymlicka (1989: 19) thinks that the freedom to examine one's ends is worthless if one cannot pursue one's ends from the inside. Kymlicka (2002: 217) further argues that "our interests would be harmed by attempts to enforce a particular view of the good life on people, so the state should remain neutral concerning the good life".

Kymlicka's view of liberty as living the good life from inside out has far-reaching implications for people's understanding of autonomy and how autonomy is conceived within the university. For instance, the literal implication of this view would mean that if people's essential interest in living a good life requires that they revise their ends and freely pursue those revised ends, autonomy would be in jeopardy when penalties and measures of discipline are instituted from outside or even when an external measure of success is instituted other than that which is from inside. The higher education transformation agenda in South Africa runs the risk of instituting measures from the outside in so far as there are insufficient deliberative processes before the changes take place. Similarly, most cases of higher education governance on the African continent that show a heavy state influence in the running of higher education are emblems of external control.

Secondly, Kymlicka also entertains Rawls's idea that the distribution of basic or primary goods and nothing other than that enables people to act and examine their beliefs about value. This distribution of the primary goods enables people to live out their essential interest, which is also equated to their good. By implication, one can argue that subsidising activities that do not fall within the primary goods category would be tantamount to treating people unequally according to this thinking. In the case of higher education, and probably on the surface of it, and assuming higher education is not amongst the basic primary goods, government subsidy of the system is equivalent to treating people unequally. This thinking is informed by the reasoning that if it is the case that people are responsible for the formation of their aims and ambitions and capable of adjusting their aims, within a broader liberal framework, subsidising expensive tastes becomes unfair.

The link between liberal autonomy and the good, important as it may be, has long-standing effects on how university autonomy and public universities are conceived. I note that some discourses on the nature of the public higher education system have suggested the idea that it should promote the good (Singh, 2001). But it has also been noted in Chapter 2 through the analysis of higher education systems on the African continent that public higher education in Africa is largely subsidised by the state. Although the level of subsidy varies between the different national economies, it is clear from the analysis given in Chapter 2 that governments do not just fund public higher education purely from a disinterested standpoint. Public funding of the higher education system on the continent is heavily associated with state interest both in the running and products of higher education.

To conclude, one can argue that the good life is not one unanimously agreed and homogenous path of life. There are various conceptions of the good life, as shown above. Some conceptions lean toward a more liberal side when this good is conceived within the frames of individual life. On the other hand, a less liberal position on the good can be anything from drawing the good as dictated by societal values to the belief that the common good is the ultimate source of individual good.

#### **4.5.8 Reframing higher education autonomy within a democratic deliberative discourse**

In the above subsections, I have tried to highlight some of the ideals of liberty or autonomy. Contemporary discourses on autonomy have drawn a connection between autonomy and democracy. Such discourses have also considered respect, toleration and public reason as central to the liberal tradition. Although I have noted that the concept of liberty is known in a number of variants, such variants can be considered as depending on the extent to which the basic constituent elements of autonomy take precedence. My conception of autonomy gravitates towards substantive notions of autonomy.

It is in view of the above that I also argue that ideas of democracy and autonomy are interconnected with each other. The concept of freedom or autonomy plays a crucial role in democratic theory, and democratic practice is generally considered to enhance the exercise of individual liberties. In the first place, freedom as understood from the formal and minimalist conceptions has often led to notions of freedom as only centred on the legal protection of individual rights: state or societal noninterference in individual projects. Specifically, it is the discourse on representative democracy that is known for these characterisations of freedom. On the other hand, I argue that it is the discourse on deliberative democracy that pushes the concept and practice of freedom further to capture central aspects of freedom as autonomy. Autonomy is a major factor underpinning active democratic deliberation. In the following paragraphs I look closely at the dimensions of the relationship between freedom and democracy.

From a general standpoint, the idea of freedom in democratic discourse is understood as synonymous with the imperatives of representative democracy. One reason is that democracy secures the freedoms necessary for meaningful self-rule. Understood from this position, notions of freedom acquire forms of constitutionality, in the sense of different individual rights and freedoms that have to be provided for the citizens to govern themselves. Consequently, a general democratic discourse understands freedom in its negative conception as the absence of interference. Given my analysis in relation to the negative concept of liberty, as indicated earlier, this understanding of freedom is wanting on several accounts. For instance, Gould (1998: 35) argues that emphasising the absence of constraint misses out bringing into consideration the enabling conditions necessary for realising one's choices. In other words, it assumes that democratic freedom can be lived in a vacuum in so far as the circumstances are concerned. In addition to this, the understanding "focuses on an individual as an isolated being and leaves out consideration of the development over time of the person through actions and long-term plans" (Gould, 1998: 35). Gould prefers the positive concept of liberty to the negative concept because the positive concept is more attuned to developing democracy since it accommodates

*freedom as self-development*. I use the same concept to defend a conception of situated autonomy as I make my case for the African higher education system.

In the first place, the concept of freedom as self-development designates the freedom that individuals have to develop themselves through the process of realising their projects. In this process, each individual develops her or his character and capacity (Gould, 1998: 40). In this regard, the idea of freedom embraces the whole of a person's life and how this life is lived. This position fundamentally means that the consideration of democratic freedom should also include objective conditions under which an individual person can fulfil her or his freedom, such as social, material and economic conditions. Similarly, people are understood to live within cooperative forms of social interaction or reciprocal recognition of each other's free agency. And as such, the access that people have to possible training, information, education and the available social institutions (Gould, 1998: 41) comprises the conditions of their freedom and consequent self-development.

Gould's (1998) discussion of the conditions of freedom may sound essentialist, to some extent. This is mainly the case when she draws the concept of positive freedom along the lines of what a person is capable of doing in accordance with her or his nature. Taking this line of thought, Gould (1998: 43–44) argues that at the end of the day there must be a certain threshold that counts as a measurement ideal for a specific issue in its own class. Considered in the context of this discourse, it can be said that one's consideration of the discourse of freedom is only meaningful within the context of agents who are capable of being free, otherwise the discourse itself would not make sense.

Although essentialist thinking causes problems with regard to the notion of freedom itself, 'naming' or 'identity' is inevitable in any discourse. The capacity to name and identify something has an influence on the discourse that people may have about it. Similarly, Carol Gould's thinking that there must be a certain threshold of identity against which one can measure the ideal of freedom can still stand as an initial stage for the discourse in question. This understanding would

mean that a consideration of universities must be accompanied by some conception of what a university is or the function of the university, otherwise one would not manage to generate any sensible and recognised discourse about it. Furthermore, one can infer the full meaning of university autonomy in the context of self-development rather than in the context of negative liberty alone. I make this claim because contexts of negative liberty are not completely excluded from the realms of a university life.

If the concept of identity cannot be overruled, self-development as linked to autonomy can only be so if it expresses the agent's own purposes and not purposes imposed by others. It is also the case that such purposeful activity is in accordance with the goals of the agent for these are central in identifying the agent as autonomous. In this case, the idea of freedom as self-development necessarily implies democracy. If people are free in the sense of having capabilities to realise their options, it means that there are enabling social conditions within which these projects can be realised. But the broader perspective also implies that within these social circumstances, people can recognise and respect each other's goals and ends, otherwise the social condition would collapse. This idea further implies the recognition of equality of membership and claims made on each other (see also Benhabib, 1996). If self-development requires appropriate conditions for it to be realised, the equality principle also means that no single person can lay more claim on others than they can on him or her. The claims made on each member of society require reciprocity. This idea connects freedom as autonomy with democracy in general.

In the recent debates on democracy, the simple and constitutional requirements of democracy are heavily contested as hardly enough for sustaining democracy itself. Due to this contestation, the democratic discourse has largely shifted and today is dominated by deliberative models. The concept of deliberation emanates from the idea of free choice among equal and free individuals and binds these individuals to one another with reciprocal obligations. The deliberative model promises to remedy the weaknesses abound in social choice because of the inadequacies of the aggregative model (Miller, 2000: 22–23). Enslin, Pendlebury

and Tjiattas (2001: 129) argue that “deliberative democracy helps to advance the debate about whether toleration or autonomy is more crucial to democratic education”. These scholars make a case for toleration motivated by reasonability, without ruling out autonomy, as a crucial enabling factor for recognising the burdens of judgement and providing for the capacity for “enlarged thought”.

The problem with aggregation as a method for social choice is that it does not consider the content of the preferences in general whereas deliberative democracy promises a fair consideration of the content of deliberation by allowing this content to emerge during the process of deliberation itself, thereby enlarging one’s perspective. While the aggregative model is moved by the drive to give weight to each individual’s preference by aggregation within the conflicting/plural political community, the deliberative model works on a different premise in an attempt to resolve conflict in social preferences.

The deliberative model believes that such conflict is inevitable given the plurality and diversity of views in society. It proposes that conflict regarding social choice can be resolved by holding open and uncoerced public discussions concerning public issues in order to arrive at an agreed judgement. Through the process of discussion, it is expected that initial positions or preferences of individuals will be transformed because of the interaction of perspectives from other discussants. The main purpose of this process is to enable members to bring out their reasons for particular choices and have them tested in a public forum. But the general rule is that one is expected to put forward reasons that others would equally find acceptable. In this sense the deliberative process relies on “a person’s capacity to be swayed by rational arguments and to lay aside particular interests and opinions in deference to overall fairness and the common interests of the collectivity” (Miller, 2000: 10).

But if an autonomous life is considered to involve choosing patterns of life after reflection on alternatives, such choice is by its nature connected with the values that one adheres to in pursuit of those alternatives or the derivative goods that one can achieve. Hence the availability and exercise of choice are fundamental to



autonomous life in the deliberative process, making the democratic deliberative process another important element in considering what constitutes autonomy. In one of the liberal communitarian traditions that Miller is associated with and towards which I am sympathetic, Miller (2000: 102) isolates two central concerns. These are the concern with conceptions of the good and the concern with how autonomy is understood. While the relationship between the concept of autonomy and the good is already discussed in section 3.5.7, the point is important in this discussion because of its implications for democracy as desirable for the promotion of autonomy.

Gutmann and Thompson (2004: 3–7) further characterise the deliberative process as marked by the need for people to give reasons for their views in the pursuit of common decisions. These reasons need to be accessible to all people concerned with the issues. These reasons must satisfy the reasonable judgement of others, hence they are also public. But deliberative democracy is critical in such a way that it is aimed at arriving at a decision that can be sustainable for a reasonable time. Holding each other accountable for public reasons means that deliberation is dynamic for it consistently requires that decisions be continuously revised, depending on issues and circumstances. More deliberation has the advantage of increasing stakeholder participation and decreasing government regulation (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004: 34), thereby advancing the aims of deliberative democracy. This understanding mainly applies to public institutions, such as public universities.

Considered from the perspectives of Miller (2000: 142), Gutmann and Thompson (2004) and Enslin *et al.* (2001), a deliberative democratic system strives to create a community or an atmosphere where decisions are arrived at through a process of open discussion in which each participant is free to suggest the agenda and the ways of deliberation and to contribute freely and in doing so disposing him- or herself to be open and willing to consider the views of others. The deliberative process promises to resolve disputes in social choice because its decisions are not made prior to the deliberation itself and it allows a wide range of relevant views and arguments to enter the debate, provided they reflect the genuine concerns,

interests and convictions of the discussants. Given the number of strengths of the deliberative ideal of democracy, it can be affirmed that this model can achieve more in terms of promoting autonomy than other models of democracy promise to offer.

Before concluding this part, it is important that I evaluate some challenges posed to the deliberative model. The main challenge that deliberative processes pose concerns the idea that deliberative democracy is in many respects provisional and, that it refuses to permanently settle on conclusions reached through deliberation, thereby rendering the system unstable. Gutmann and Thompson (2004: 112–115) acknowledge that the deliberative process subjects democracy to its own principles and other moral principles for critical scrutiny over time. Nevertheless, this subjection to openness and revision is far from giving up the right to critique and the idea that binding moral and political decisions must be justified by reasons. The deliberative theory and practice need to be open to change and fresher challenges in a dialectical process. This dynamism of the dialectics within the deliberative theory provides the mechanism for its own revision and sustainability rather than its annihilation. The deliberative framework is partly provisional because of giving room to revision continuously. It is self-correcting as it respects the ideal of reciprocity. This being the case, deliberative decisions stand on a structure that recognises and provides for regular considerations of the same decisions based on new insights, new evidence and new interpretation. Similarly, a university governance system that promotes autonomy requires that democratic deliberation be central to its norms.

Gutmann and Thompson (2004) suggest that the schooling system is one of the central places in any democracy where the preparation for future free and equal citizens can appropriately be done. But this ideal cannot be meaningfully achieved if university systems are complacent towards their duties as creators of the schooling system itself. Gutmann and Thomson (2004: 35) argue that public schools (in which I include public higher education systems) constitute one of the important sites for the promotion of deliberation. In this regard, it is also argued

that if there is no deliberation in public schools, it is less likely that deliberation will exist in other institutions of society.

I argue that the above argument places all types of schooling, whether primary, secondary or tertiary, as centres for the promotion of deliberative democracy. I also note that deliberative processes cannot be developed outside the understanding of autonomy and autonomous human life, for these are the seedbeds of viable deliberations. Dunne and Pendlebury (2003: 208) argue that education needs to play the role of cultivating special dimensions of character and special virtues that are necessary for the sustainability of any democratic regime. In order to bring this form of democracy to maturity, Waghid (2001: 34–35) argues that universities can only manage to deliver on their democratic mandate if reflexive critical pedagogy becomes a central part of teaching and learning in higher education. In this regard, the governance of higher education institutions can be considered to operate effectively if and only if such governance is conducted within a reflexive, deliberative and democratic atmosphere. The deliberative framework is capable of successfully meeting the challenges of contemporary society in its diversity. One way to make this work is to allow the principles of deliberative democracy to operate alongside university autonomy discourse (see also Coughlan *et al.*, 2007: 79–81). I elaborate on this point below.

Deliberative theory and practice are believed to have inherent dynamism and are open to change and fresher challenges. Coughlan *et al.* (2007: 80) claim that “the internal dynamics of today’s university, which encompass the dual emphasis on teaching and research, are best promoted by fostering a climate of deliberation” within the university and between the university and other partners. The dynamism within the deliberative theory provides the mechanism for its own revision. Hence, the deliberative framework is partly provisional because it gives room to continuous revision. It is self-correcting. The commitment to revision also respects the ideal of reciprocity. The idea of reciprocity while acknowledging the equality and symmetry of all human beings (Rawls, 1996) further asserts that all concerned members are entitled to introduce items for

public deliberation and set the rules in which such deliberation can be conducted (Benhabib, 1996). This being the case, deliberative structure should recognise and provide for regular considerations of decisions because actual deliberation (giving reasons to each other) promotes reciprocity (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004: 101). The process of deliberation has epistemic value in the sense that deliberation combines factual and evaluative matters in the giving of reasons to each other. It can therefore be argued that the deliberative framework is better suited as model for the management of higher education institutions.

The deliberative discourse is morally and politically provisional. Among other things, this means that the framework is capable of duly providing room for autonomous thinking and revision of policies. Deliberative democracy subjects its own principles and other moral principles to critical scrutiny over time. As such, deliberation can invite critique to its own principles but refuses to give up the right to critique and the idea that binding moral and political decisions must be justified by reasons. Gutmann and Thompson (2004: 115) emphasise that “deliberative democrats are committed to mutually justifiable ways of judging the distribution of power”.

The ideals that one finds in deliberative democracy, such as open-forum deliberation, provision and justification of reasons to each other on issues that are publicly important and regarding each other as having equal right to initiate debate and lay down the rules that govern this debate, make deliberation a close ally of the higher education system. If higher education is about letting people find meaning in the lives they choose to live, the challenges that face deliberative processes make it more important that deliberative democracy should find a home in the governance and autonomy of the higher education system. Similarly, higher education helps in living an autonomous life through self-knowledge. And since autonomy is made operative through the choice of preferences that are long lasting and not simply impressions, knowledge of one’s deep-seated preferences is important in the education for autonomy (Gingell & Winch, 2004: 99–100).

A society that has as its central features democratic government, a strong emphasis on individual rights and the defence of value pluralism and market economics can hardly avoid promoting autonomy and deliberative democracy as some of its central educational goals. In a society in which these central features have an intrinsic value, autonomy must itself have intrinsic value, since it is essential for living a worthwhile life in that kind of society that one has the capacity for autonomy (Gingell & Winch, 2004: 105–106).

My main contention in this subsection has been to argue that universities today, whether in Africa or elsewhere, cannot afford not to promote autonomy and deliberation. While it is possible to consider this as an in-house matter where the culture of the university promotes autonomy and deliberation amongst its students, Coughlan *et al.* (2007: 83) extend the deliberative mandate of the university to its relationship with all its stakeholders, such as the state and the corporate world.

#### **4.6 Concluding remarks**

In this chapter, I have considered debates that surround the concepts of liberty, autonomy, liberalism and democracy, with a particular focus on drawing out what constitutes autonomy. I have opted to begin to understand freedom from a specific historical context of the theorisation of the conceptions. At this point, it is clear that the mapping I have tried to provide is far from being exhaustive, much as the idea of freedom itself does not in any way have to be understood in one way. Nevertheless, autonomy can be considered as more liberal and/or less liberal, depending on the type of constituent characteristics available and how these characteristics manifest themselves. On any continuum of conceptions of autonomy, one is bound to find that characteristics pull between two basic ends in liberal thinking. At the one end is the liberal communitarian position, towards which I am sympathetic. At the other end, one finds a concentration of elements associated with liberal individualism. In this regard, a liberal higher education governance system would have more elements of freedom, rationality and objectivity, authenticity and identity, responsibility, and critical thinking and the

enhancement of a vibrant critical community. The less one finds of these elements in an institution, the more one can actually conclude that such a system is, in fact, less liberal. One tricky aspect, though, comes up when one begins to think of forms of governance as a representation of embedded or encumbered forms of autonomy, as opposed to those who believe that autonomy is an aspect that primarily belongs to the individual and that such autonomy should be unencumbered or unsituated. The latter will believe in the freedom of the university to teach whomever it wants to teach, unbridled methods of recruitment, research and teaching, and many more, without recourse to community responsibility.

The dominant picture I have provided over the issue of autonomy indicates that autonomy or liberty, as may be the case in some instances, can be understood either as a factor of the group or of the individual. As a factor of the group, notions of liberty exist indistinct from the communities of practice. Once a society is considered free, individuals living within it are also considered free and it is thought that their freedom is not more important than that of the community but only a factor of the community. This view is has been challenged by a number of scholars because of its inherent lack of recognition of individuality and the creating of meaning that individuals attach to life. But I have also explored the view that liberty primarily belongs to individuals. In this respect, it is possible to consider liberty as merely the absence of constraint on individual choice and action without much thought about what the individual will actually do given that there is no outside restraining force or circumstance.

In the course of this exposition, I have tended to prefer the second option, which upholds individual liberty in the sense of a living autonomous self that is unencumbered in its life circumstances. Despite the lack of homogenous position in this line of thought, I maintain that when autonomy is considered as part of the whole life of a person or corporate body, the conception is better positioned to promote the good for which the person or body exists. It is on this point of recognising the situatedness of being that the concept of a deliberative process of engagement can also be sustained. Towards the end of this discussion, I have

concentrated on establishing a link between democracy and autonomy, largely because the public education system (of which higher education on the African continent is an aspect) in any democracy is appropriately placed to prepare future free and equal citizens (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004: 35). By implication, this thinking would mean that the educational discourse finds its proper place within the frames of autonomy, where public discourse can be enhanced. But Gutmann and Thompson (2004) also argue that if there is no deliberation in public schools, it is less likely that this would exist in other institutions.

The current atmosphere of university governance in Africa and in the world today is also being influenced by a few economic ramifications of the principles of democracy. I understand principles of democracy in this instance as those principles that advocate popular sovereignty as opposed to either dictatorship or monarchy. Far much more than introducing principles of government, democratic thought has ushered in a strong culture in people's rights and freedoms. On an economic front, democratic culture today is also seen to be the foundation on which neoliberalism and globalisation thrive. The connection between democracy and neo-liberalism and globalisation, hence becomes the individual person with one's rights, be it social or economic. Given the foundations on which principles of globalisation and neo-liberalism are built, one would expect that these two generally operate to advance the cause of higher education systems. In the next chapter, I explore some of the meanings of globalisation and neoliberalism and impact of these processes on higher education in Africa.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **GLOBALISATION, NEO-LIBERALISM AND HIGHER EDUCATION**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

In concluding Chapter 3, I have indicated that Readings' (1996) conception of the University of Excellence relates to the corporate world. I have also indicated through Chapter 4 that the American higher education system contains elements that relate to this conception because of the nature of integration between the universities and the corporate world. The corporatisation of higher education, which has made the American system what it is, has had similar effects to the European higher education in recent years. The previous chapter has also discussed different conceptions of autonomy – the relationship between democracy and autonomy, among other things. At the centre of this debate is the characterisation of what constitutes liberal autonomy in terms of the different elements that need to be present for a system to be labelled autonomous according to the liberal tradition of thought. I have also argued that the connection between democracy and autonomy exists irrespective of the different conceptions of both democracy and autonomy that one finds in current discourses. In this Chapter, I argue that higher education governance systems on the African continent are negatively affected by the processes of globalisation and neoliberalism.

Scott (2006: 129–130) argues that the European universities today are more concerned with making Europe the most dynamic region of the world in research and technology and that this approach has ushered in a competition-concentrated model of higher education within the region. The African higher education system has similarly been affected by globalisation and neo-liberalism. In this chapter, I argue that globalisation and neo-liberalism, despite their being founded on notions of freedom, undermine the practice and governance of higher education on the African continent.



Much as one can argue that certain conceptions of the university are laden with elements of the corporate world, it is important to note that notions of neo-liberalism and globalisation characterising the corporate world as people know it today have only become dominant in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In many ways, neo-liberalism and globalisation have external origins to Africa. Nevertheless, they interlace in important ways. Neo-liberalism can be seen as global just as globalisation can be seen as neo-liberal. Underlying both of these ideologies is a conception of liberty that promotes the individual and activities linked to the promotion of the individual. Neo-liberalism is a progressive form of liberalism.

Bourdieu (1998) tries to provide a definitive statement on the essence of neo-liberalism. Bourdieu (1998: 1) considers neo-liberalism as a form of rationality that is primarily rooted in “individual rationality, and disassociated from social conditions of rational orientation”. In other words, neo-liberalism is a particular mindset that “calls into question any and all collective structures that could serve as an obstacle to the logic of the pure market” (1998: 2). Bourdieu and many others have tried to capture the progression of the motifs for liberalism in neo-liberalism, such as the value for individual liberty. As such, neo-liberalism extends the application and assumptions of individual liberty to include a person’s economic activity and its values of productivity and the quest for economic advancement as simultaneous to human advancement. This is confirmed by another belief that today movement of capital and human labour across national borders has become easier than before. Hence what scholars have mostly classified as neo-liberalism is not any different from globalisation. For instance, Marginson (1999: 19–20) argues that “globalisation refers to more than the internationalisation of goods and services, money, people and ideas. Globalisation is about world systems which have a life of their own that is distinct from local and national life, even while these world systems tend to determine the local and national”.

Elements of globalisation and neo-liberalism are in stark contrast to a number of characteristics of most African systems, which are argued and perceived to be permeated with a communal sense of being in which individual existence is

secondary to communal belonging on which most forms of identity are based. Current phrases such as “I am an African” and the concept of *Ubuntu*, as can be observed from political rhetoric and indigenous approaches to bodies of knowledge confronting the African continent, are an expression of the uniqueness of African systems as more communal than individualistic (See Gyekye, 2002; Van Wyk, 2005). In other words, when neo-liberalism and globalisation are considered from the way they influence discourse and governance approaches in African higher education systems, the African universities have to negotiate – or struggle – with both in their reconfigurations as well as transformation towards ‘localised’ relevance and ‘globalised’ recognition and competence.

Zeleza-Manda (2004: 42), elaborating on the nature of globalisation, presents globalisation as a project and process of neo-liberalism. He argues that in Africa, this process has been “articulated primarily through structural adjustment programmes, and that globalisation through its projects has accelerated the corporatisation of university management, commercialisation of learning and commoditisation of knowledge”. Due to globalisation, the nature of university governance and the identity of scholarly discourse have also changed. Zeleza-Manda (2004: 51) traces the impact of globalisation on higher education on the African continent through what he calls the six Cs. The six Cs are the following:

Corporatisation of management (the adoption of business models for the organisation and administration of universities; collectivisation of access (growing massification of higher education, continuing education or lifelong learning, and accountability to outside stakeholders); commercialisation of learning (expansion of private universities, privatised programmes in public universities and vocational training); commoditisation of knowledge (increased production, sponsorship, and dissemination of research by commercial enterprises, applied research, and intellectual property norms); computerisation of education (incorporation of new information technologies into the knowledge activities of teaching, research, and publication); and connectivity of institutions (rising emphasis on

institutional cooperation and coordination within and across countries) (Zezeza-Manda, 2004: 52).

This quotation from Zezeza-Manda (2004) introduces into this debate much of what one can expect of the interaction between higher education governance on the African continent and globalisation and neo-liberalism. From the listed items, it will be further argued that globalisation causes universities to adopt a neo-liberal discipline in the way they conduct their affairs. This understanding affects most of the operations in the university, from recruitment of teaching staff to student enrolment and graduation rate imperatives, tuning higher education into an economic investment rather than a common good.

## **5.2 Conceptualising globalisation and neo-liberalism and how they may affect higher education operations**

The coming of market reforms in the higher education sector is heavily associated with the notion and influences of globalisation. The idea of educational marketisation relates to the impact of market forces on education and how these affect the running and autonomy of the higher education sector. But the idea of marketisation cannot be dealt with in isolation of the other elements around it, such as the question of globalisation and its relationship to educational trends. Sentiments on globalisation in higher education are often in conflict with notions of localisation. Put simply, the idea to govern the higher education sector based on internal trends sometimes comes into conflict with efforts to govern this sector based on local needs and aspirations. In this case, the idea of whether higher education institutions will allow local or global influences to determine their course of life becomes one of the central issues that one has to grapple with when it comes to dealing with the autonomy of the higher education sector.

Elements of globalisation can be traced from the onset of civilisation and colonialism. In this stage of development, civilisation and commercialism went hand in hand. Participating in commerce at a broader level than only one's local environment was regarded as a positive and good thing (Hoogvelt, 1997: 20).

Hoogvelt argues that within this framework of thought, the imperialists saw it as their duty or mission to disseminate law, order, justice, education, peace and prosperity in the native land. Within Africa, this gave rise to a conception that being similar to others, which in many ways referred to developed world, is good and a desirable pursuit in one's life. The good and desirable forms of life were conceived in terms of economic development. In part, this impetus can be considered as the beginning of the propagation for a global mindset.

Hoogvelt (1997: 114) goes further to associate globalisation particularly with the beginning of the 1980s, which saw the intensification of networks of human interaction across different nation-states in many areas of human enterprise. From this particular perspective, globalisation began to mark the increasing irrelevance of the local and national and the increasing relevance of the international or the global. Considered from this perspective, globalisation can also be considered as the antithesis to processes of localisation.

Today, the concept of globalisation has become trendy to the extent that some think that it has become inevitable. But despite this common acceptance and occurrence and the frequent usage of *globalisation* in discourse today, it is less obvious what globalisation really means. Kirkbride (2001: 4) notes that "while much heat has been generated in discussions and debates around the topic (globalisation), there is often not quite so much light". He further observes that the cloud surrounding the concept of globalisation can mainly be ascribed to its generalist character. This sentiment refers to the observation that the idea of globalisation has tended to be used in almost all fields so much so that, on the fringes, one can consider it as term that simply introduces the new millennium, the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The term has been used to represent different forms of novelty.

Writing from an economics and business management position, Kirkbride, Pinnington and Ward (2001: 14–15) suggest that the concept of globalisation implies the doing of business beyond one's local confinement, like one's country or continent. In other words, the concept designates a particular way of doing things that considers one's actions and effects as stretching to or being influenced

by others around the world, even those outside one's continent. In this case, instead of considering individual localities, the whole world is considered as the ultimate and unitary space within which people are bound to interact. Globalisation, in a sense, blurs the national and continental boundaries and their consequent identities. The concept of globalisation, therefore, 'relativises' the local.

Kirkbride *et al.* (2001: 16, quoting Hirst and Thompson), argue that globalisation raises the locally based and defined parameters to newer levels where "the international economic system becomes autonomized and socially disembedded, as markets and production truly become global. As systemic independence grows, the national is permeated by and transformed by the international". In this regard, judging how extensive the networks of relations and connections are, the intensity of their activities and its impact on local communities and the extent to which such networks and relationships are regularised and institutionalised in the social fabric of life can be a way of assessing globalisation as a process.

Kirkbride *et al.* (2001: 18–35) also evaluate the phenomenon of globalisation from four different reactionary positions in the way people understand and use the concept. In the first position, the idea of globalisation creates a feeling that globalisation is here to stay. Such thinking further postulates that the power of national governments has become eroded in the face of the global forces and that modern capitalism and new technology have become the benchmarks of innovation. Having this dominant feeling forces institutions to respond in line with the demands and directions of the global village, thereby making the world borderless. Through this process, the nation-state becomes weakened in its influence (Kirkbride *et al.*, 2001: 27–28).

The second position that institutions, organisations and individuals are likely to take is the belief that the world is not yet global and that it is not any different from what it was in some earlier periods. This view makes an exception for the increased strength and coverage of networks, which have grown beyond reasonable doubt. This position rather acknowledges regionalisation and regional

configuration or realignment and that mere ‘internationalisation’ has become the in-thing in what is called globalisation. I think that this position would settle for a perspective of the world as a fragmented world where some units operate in isolation. In other words, this second position argues that the world today is not yet at a level of being called a global village. To an extent, this position amounts to a form of denial of the current state of the world.

Kirkbride *et al.* (2001: 30–32) use the works of Held *et al.* (1999) and Hoogvelt (1997) to present a third perspective, referred to as the transformational thesis on globalisation. The position is characterised by an acknowledgment that the world has reached levels of interconnectedness that have never been experienced before. This means that the powers of national governments and institutions are becoming reconstituted within modernity. The outcome of this redefinition process is the ushering in of change in the direction of a new world order. But such world order also brings about integration as much as some things become disintegrated. For instance, some economies can become consolidated while others collapse by the very same influences of globalisation.

The fourth perspective on globalisation is the sentiment that recognises the impact of globalisation on communities and peoples’ lives. This perspective argues that globalisation has ushered in negative effects on lives and communities and the environment (Kirkbride *et al.*, 2001: 32). The ‘anti-globalists’, as Kirkbride *et al.* (2001: 34–35) coin them, argue that globalisation is an emblem of new forms of colonial exploitation driven by free-market capitalism, liberalisation and third world debt. This thinking envisages that people are in fact controlled by “global economic elites whose interests transcend national boundaries, and creates a marginalized and subjugated world proletariat” (Kirkbride *et al.*, 2001: 36). In other words, when higher education change is considered in the light of this position, the global factors influencing the change are considered to have transformed the higher education landscape negatively.

In a related development, Hoogvelt (1997: 138) argues that the IMF uses arguments of neo-liberalism to impose privatisation. What is really at stake is

that the world of free markets is believed to promote values such as individual freedom and equality through market competition. Similarly, the relational powers of supply and demand are further assumed to give people opportunities to live a life they can freely choose, given their level of resources. Commenting on similar sentiments on globalisation Stiglitz (2003: 55) argues that “the IMF simply assumed that markets arise quickly to meet every need, when in fact, many government activities arise because the markets have failed to provide essential services”. Stiglitz’s view cannot be taken to mean that the effects of the global market meet people’s hopes about their life and resources.

Badat, Cloete and Muller (2001: vii-x) further highlight imminent tensions in dealing with globalisation and how these forces effect change in contemporary society. On the one hand is the option to adopt a communal approach to managing society and change in society. This stand represents the localisation motif that I pointed out earlier on. The authors indicate that when a state takes this option, it becomes less effective in promoting the globalisation agenda. On the other hand, when a state becomes a co-agent of a global system of shared power, it becomes less effective in addressing the local needs of its people. In this case the nation-state focuses on issues such as regional integration and its own place within the community of countries. Badat *et al.* (2001) are also of the view that there is persistent tension between these two poles in as far as managing state legitimacy and interests are concerned. A globalised idea of constituency therefore can be regarded as a constituency that has diminished local power. On the other hand, a localised agenda acquires more power as it directly speaks to its immediate constituency. Such tensions are not particular of state management alone; they also exist in the governance of higher education.

Castells (2001: 2–21) asserts that the idea of globalisation has its roots in the conceptualisation of the new global economy. But any talk about globalisation in general begs the question, Globalisation of what? In order to resolve this problem, Castells (2001) locates globalisation as a debate linked to other aspects such as the economy, finance, politics, the environment and many more. But central to all is the economic conceptualisation of globalisation. In this regard,

the researcher wants to emphasise that it is the idea of a global economy that has seen the concept gain prevalence in many discourses. But what is this global economy and how different is it from other conceptions of the economy?

Different from the previous scholars I have considered, Castells (2001: 2–3) characterises the new global economy in three interrelated forms or networks, while noting that labour activities are at the centre of this economy. The new global economy refers to “all kinds of business or dealings, or activities whose organizational source, value and competition are based on information technologies” (2001: 2). In this economy, productivity and competitiveness are based on knowledge and information. While the global economy operates in distinct units, the capacity of these units to operate as one unit in real time makes it global. Castells argues that from telecommunications and information technologies, the networks of the units manage to operate and remain active globally in terms of the supplies they receive and the markets they look for (Castells, 2001: 3). As a consequence of the networks of operation and their characteristics, globalisation assumes that the environment and the rules that operate it are *deregularised* and *liberalised* by the different nation-states in which they operate. Given that globalisation assumes a weakening of the state’s grip on institutions, it can be concluded that globalisation essentially expects a free flow of activities and that such activities depend on the competitiveness of global forces or factors. While globalisation tends to acquire an economic face in most cases, Castells (2001: 3) cautions that globalisation is not only economic because it also includes the media, information systems, the internationalisation of institutions and the networks that states establish for their mutual benefit, such as NEPAD, the EU and others.

The interdependence in financial markets that is brought about by their integration through globalisation also affects the higher education sector. For instance, noticeable in the higher education sector today is the fact that many universities on the continent have had to raise their student fees in order to meet the costs of running higher education institutions. These costs are heavily influenced by what is happening on the global market interface and its prevailing



trends. As a result, this phenomenon has also given rise to the idea of ‘value for money’ as an important consideration in evaluating the contribution of any higher education system to the people it serves. Coupled with these developments is the fact that universities in a number of African states, such as Uganda, Kenya, South Africa, and Egypt, have looked beyond their borders as particular catchment areas for prospective students. This is evidenced by the creation of a special department dealing with international students, as is the case in most South African universities. Nonetheless not many countries on the continent are successful in this respect.

In a number of ways, the current trends in higher education governance on the African continent fit in well with Castells’ (2001) conceptualisation of globalisation. Higher education systems are increasingly adopting motifs of liberalisation in terms of diversifying their resource base and what they conceive to be their catchment areas. Secondly, higher education systems are more and more fitting into the ‘Castellian’ conceptualisation when it comes to adapting their practice in line with the advancement of technological infrastructure. The connectivity of individuals with different universities and the capacity to seek new forms of information beyond one’s university is one of the aspects of globalisation. But within universities today, the growing need for an intranet and use of it proves that the global means of communication is carrying more weight as more people begin to find this mode reliable and fast. In any case, this kind of networking can only be considered as basic in view of all that globalisation entails. Similarly, the new mindset also introduces an instrumental mentality into learning as more emphasis is placed on the technical and professional fields at the expense of the humanities and basic sciences (Zezeza-Manda, 2004: 53).

What is also fascinating in Castells’ (2001: 5) conception in relation to the higher education sector is the idea that global financial markets adopt certain global ways of evaluating the volatility and stability of financial markets. This generates characteristics such as poor and rich in relation to specific grids. The higher education system, whether by design or default, finds itself in a situation where ranking and benchmarking have become inevitable. In this particular case,

universities become ranked on national, continental and global levels. As a result, institutional reputation and student flows and preferences have also existed to the advantage of the highly ranked universities at the expense of the lowly ranked universities. I am aware that this ranking has in many ways depended on empirical figures such as graduation rates, publication rates and fiscal standing of particular institutions. But the point he is making is that such inclinations towards a globalised world perspective also change the discourse of higher education, thereby affecting the way a system understands and practices its sense of autonomy and the limits that such autonomy may be considered to have.

Another perception that has moved higher education systems to incorporating globalised forms of governance is a perception that regards 'being global' as a desirable position for any higher education institution on the grounds that doing so is regarded as having stable market fluency on the global plane. Consequently, not playing by the rules set by international (lending) organisations such as the IMF or the International Association of Universities may be labelled as not being stable (see also Castells, 2001: 6). Such labelling compels developing nations and their educational institutions to ascribe to the international standards set by the watchdogs even if such measures are deemed harmful to national economies and local governing environments. When this becomes the case, globalisation works to undermine the seedbed of university autonomy as understood from situated forms of autonomy rather than its promotion, which is assumed to be the general case.

My main argument here is that when developing nations dance to the tune of international lending organisations in terms of how they organise their monetary flows and their organisational policies and options, it becomes inevitable that these nations will impose similar regulation on their higher education systems. Of late, the higher education system in South Africa has ascribed to and adopted 'quality assurance measures' through the establishment of the Higher Education Quality Commission (HEQC). While quality assurance measures can be regarded as part and parcel of what it means to run higher education systems, one cannot disassociate the quality assurance mechanisms from notions of economic

performativity in the management of higher education institutions, which may not be directly in the service of the nation's common good in achieving required levels of equality among its citizenry.

The globalisation of science and technology is another critical component of a globalising agenda. Globalisation operates through the network of information and technology. Within this framework, it is noticeable that individual organisations and agents begin to realise and consolidate the view that developing networks of relationships or partnerships with others has become the order of the day, and universities in Africa or elsewhere are no exception. On the financial markets, the network of organisation and resourcing is considered to be a better way of growing by making sure that one has at one's disposal the best resources and personnel this world can offer. But what this means is that the networks in the financial markets usually work to the advantage of those who have access to resources and trade as opposed to those who do not have any access to these means.

The university setup in Africa can similarly be considered to be heavily influenced by the global flows of human capital. The dwindling levels of highly skilled personnel that one observes in many countries that are poorly resourced on the continent can partly be attributed to globalisation. Mechanisms of the global market and labour economy enable people to move their own human labour and other personnel from one country to another. Sometimes this is done in search of better working conditions for the recruited and catching the best for the recruiter. In many cases, such movements occur with very little notice of the burden laid on poorly resourced and economically weak nation-states. One example of this case is the abundant evidence that many trained personnel that could have been currently working in universities in countries such as Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi and many other similarly positioned institutions are not presently working within these countries. African higher education systems in particular have lost out on a number of eminent scholars to the developed world because the poorer nations cannot compete in terms of availability of resources for teaching and research, academics' work conditions, incentives for

research and publication, and many more. Hence, the shortage of personnel looming in a number of African universities is a direct effect of the influence of the global economic market.

Castells (2001: 12–20) discusses how the labour market operates as a self-programmable entity that keeps on replenishing itself through its “in-built capacity to generate value through innovation and information” (Castells, 2001: 13). This propensity causes the globalised labour market to be in a position of always looking for highly skilled labour and talent in order to keep its own system working. Such a process, while making the system creative and productive, creates extraordinary exclusion through what is most referred to as the process of networking and segmentation. Networking and segmentation mean that any process of globalisation will favour factors that work to the advantage of the (global) system in terms of sustaining it and moving it further. As such, any elements that are not in its own favour become inimical to the process of globalisation. In real terms, it can be argued that globalisation as a market-related process will only work to the advantage of elements that enhance the labour market and develop it. All other things that apparently do not promote the cause of a globalised economy are relegated. In this way, the process of globalisation leads to four inevitable conditions in human existence. These are inequality, poverty, polarisation and social exclusion (Castells, 2001: 16).

Similarly, a globalised agenda of higher education governance potentially creates inequalities, poverty, social polarisation and exclusion despite the fact that notions of globalisation and neo-liberalism are built on liberal beliefs in the freedom and equality of human beings. A higher education system with a globalised or neo-liberal agenda would want to maintain high levels of productivity that would ensure the sustainability of the system, among other things. This productivity may be judged in terms of student graduation rates, research outputs by academic personnel and, of course, securing a high regard for its status in the society where the higher education institution is situated. These goals and expectations cannot be fulfilled without excluding people from its circles on the basis of inadequate financial support for aspiring students and

academic staff's inadequate capabilities to work in the university and compete with staff from other universities on output or productivity. Those who cannot cope with the demands of the system and the conditions within which its policies are formulated and implemented will eventually leave the system and join less demanding institutions. This contributes to polarisation, leading to exclusion in society.

The process of globalisation tends to concentrate on the labour capital that sustains it and as such it purges any elements that are not supportive of the core. Castells (2001: 17) argues that "the networking and flexibility of the system make it possible to connect the valuable and discard the devalued people, firms, territories, leading to a notion of a dynamic system which does not need all these other elements of our species". This process by its very nature creates inequalities between the different groups of people, and those capable of making it in the capital-intensive world become richer while the poor become poorer. In this way, globalisation as a process polarises the world since what really matters is the development of a creative, innovative and productive economy in relation to how the global economy works.

The higher education system, as an aspect of the broader education system, cannot avoid operating with and through the framework of a globalised world. In this age, in so far as technological literacy, research and development are concerned, the education system is the pivot and source of production, much as it creates the enabling conditions for benefiting from the new order. More and more curricula today pay much attention to the development of science and technology. Research in science and technology receives more financial funding than other sectors of higher education. This attention, which is differentiated from that paid to other branches of learning such as the humanities, simply confirms the usurpation of the education system by the globalised world.

The intricate relationship between globalisation/neo-liberalism and the higher education system has also been discussed by Marginson (1997) as emanating from how the state understands these processes. In this work, it is argued that the

idea of a liberal market draws attention to the process of free enterprise and the establishment of a competitive order. Much as the origin of this conceptualisation is within market and labour issues, the understanding of globalisation as related to the labour market refers to far greater things than simply the economic aspects of human transaction. This may refer to a borderless worldview where states tend to lose their controlling power over their populations to external (mostly monetary) control mechanisms. As a result governments no more have the same influence over labour issues as before. Most importantly, governments are no more considered to offer total commitment to full employment and its concurrent extensive social programmes. Marginson (1997: 53) argues that this shift can be understood as the overturning of the Keynesian techniques of government economic intervention and management. Within the new-found ideological mindset (of a globalised and neo-liberal economy), it was understood that a competitive market society could only be realised once the governments took their hands off the market environment in terms of setting control mechanism. Quoting Hayek, Marginson (1997: 54) asserts that within this new global order, what is required “is not an ordered competition restricting markets, but a competitive order where the state creates conditions favourable to the markets”. According to this understanding, the state’s watchdog role over society is transformed into one of simply creating enabling conditions for free enterprise to flourish in society.

The concept of co-operative governance as discussed in relation to South African higher education systems after apartheid and the universities in Ghana and Uganda brings out this working relationship between governments and universities in globalised fashion better. But in many ways, the other cases of higher education governance on the African continent represent high forms of Keynesian techniques of government economic intervention and management of public institutions such as universities. For instance, many African governments control funding and access to higher education institutions.

At the heart of a neo-liberal market understanding of society is also the assumption that what makes the world what it is to people is this “timeless,

borderless always-ready market” (Marginson, 1997: 55–56) that saturates their understanding of social relations as grounded in competitive individualism. According to this understanding, market liberalism or neo-liberalism provides the tools with which one can begin to criticise processes and reconstruct one’s preferred world order, as much as it provides the rules for assessing such a practice. In other words, Marginson (1997) emphasises that market reforms come in because the new world order is regarded as normative and universal and the slightest margin of difference is similarly considered as a condition necessitating public reform. He therefore describes one of the reformists as positing a situation where the conceived new world order becomes understood as similar to a natural order. To this extent, a neo-liberal mindset or a globalised world view acquires more elements that are hegemonic, contrary to the plurality of values and views that the mention of a globalised and a neo-liberal framework evokes.

For instance, the reforms that are most often proposed by the West along with the international monetary organisations, such as the World Bank, on how Africa should address its economic system and the kind of services a government can render to its citizens are underpinned by the assumption of the new world order as a natural order. In this natural order, it is further expected that governments simply have to adapt or otherwise they perish financially. The 1980s and 1990s have witnessed a heightening of pressure on governments to outsource some of their services to the general public to private enterprises. Such a mandate or requirement is fulfilled with the same understanding that governments should leave their hands off public services. Again, the assumption is that such a hands-off approach by governments will improve market efficiency through economic competition, thereby stabilising the institutions, like the higher education sector. The restructuring of the public higher education sector is similarly influenced by the same understanding. This thinking has led to the emphasis on less government expenditure and more stakeholder involvement in managing higher education finances.

What makes globalisation function as new world order is the fact that it embraces all dimensions of life that affect the public sphere of life. It is economic, much as

it is political and also cultural. Many scholars, including Marginson (1997), think that its impact came in with the booming of multinational companies and increasing global financial markets that are more complex and dynamic than any country's system. In the same way, labour becomes more mobile than before, and education and research attain an internationalisation agenda. It is to this extent that some people view globalisation as the demise of the nation-state and the national political sphere in the sense that national political decisions become subordinated to the forces of international economic competition. In real terms, though, it does not mean that national governments and national economies stop to exist but that in their operations and principles they directly or indirectly attune themselves to the global flow of events. This also implies that states or national governments have a reduced capacity to enforce cultural identity and less control of the economic, social and cultural developments within their own countries (Marginson, 1997: 59). As such, governments still control national politics and other national programmes, but they are more controlled by globalisation in their own ideologies. This state of affairs makes governments more agents of globalisation in their agenda. Similarly, universities become complex and begin to run as multinational companies, with profitability as the benchmark of performance indicators.

Nevertheless, scholars are divided over whether globalisation means that governments maintain a minimalist state or not. Marginson (1997: 68, quoting Friedman) argues that this state of affairs does not reduce the powers of the state or turn the state into a minimalist state. In any case, Marginson (1997) does not provide much evidence for this argument. The fact that the state still controls areas such as its judicial system and the monetary controls and that it intervenes in the financial and economic life of the players falls short of a government positively determining the course of events, which is purported to be the case here.

On the other hand, it can be argued that what governments manage to do within the influence of globalisation is to maintain forms of negative liberty (see also Berlin, 1984). In this case, the researcher particularly refers to the limits that a



state can put in place in order to sustain the best possible environment in which business can be conducted, a road map for individual noninterference. Globalisation ensures that governments protect the citizens' free enterprise through maintenance of the principle of noninterference. This approach fails to ensure that there are favourable conditions within which citizens can meaningfully develop without endangering the weaker members of society.

A global perspective that is heavily biased towards negative forms of liberty leads to a scenario whereby the state and business are set apart. In this regard, market liberalism operates through and provides its own reason and framework while at the same time limiting the powers that a state can have over it. In the end, it is market liberalism that informs and critiques state policy, and economic management becomes the core of modern government management. But when areas central to public service and management are run like corporations, without much attention to the public good, working spaces create ambiguities. Universities become vulnerable to these ambiguities. Most patterns of governance in higher education governance today are the direct effects of a globalised and neo-liberal mindset.

### **5.3 The relationship between information systems and globalisation**

I have mentioned (above) that although globalisation has become multi-dimensional, the concept is better understood and analysed from its economic dimension (Castells, 1999: 4). It is in this regard that the idea of globalisation has also been synonymous with the phrase "the new (global) economy" (Castells, 1996: 66) as distinct from a world economy (1996: 92). The new global economy is distinct because it is characterised as being *informational* as much as possessing the other global elements. In the first place, the character of the new economy as informational indicates that its capacity for productivity and competitiveness hinges on its capacity "to generate, process, and apply efficient-based information" (Castells, 1996: 66). On the other hand, its global dimension comes in because the "core activities of production, consumption and circulation are organised on a global scale" (Castells, 1996: 66). The new economy is what it

is because its modes of production, consumption and circulation are competitively done through a global network of interactions.

The productivity of the new global economy becomes distinct from other forms of productivity because it possesses information and does not simply focus on the accumulation of capital and labour. It is a knowledge-based form of productivity. This knowledge base also acts as the cutting edge of new technological discoveries that enable the economy to grow and become global. While technology plays a crucial role in improving economic growth, knowledge-based productivity is not only specific to informational economy. The idea of productivity reproduces itself into various other avenues of human life and enterprise such as (higher) education. Castells (1996: 79) observes that productivity increases, from information technology to other miscellaneous services to the extent that organisational change takes place. He also notes that “profitability and competitiveness are the actual determinants of technological innovation and productivity growth” (Castells, 1996: 81). In this regard, institutional dynamics, which have an emphasis on profitability and competitiveness, are not exclusive to the economic sector. Various notions of profitability and competitiveness are also present in educational discourse. In many ways, notions of profitability and competitiveness are likely to be understood and used differently between different sectors and different institutions.

For instance, the idea of technological capacity can imply “the appropriate articulation of science, technology, management, and production in a system of complementaries, each level being provided, by the educational system, with the necessary human resources in skills and quantity” (Castells, 1996: 103). On a preliminary note, Castells’ notion can refer to the fact that different areas of life can operate with and through a globalised economic conception. In this regard, the higher education sector remains a source for the provision of required skills and personnel. Secondly, higher education as a system in itself is not exempt from the influences of globalisation through information technologies, the basis for competitiveness. Thirdly, competitiveness also tends to be influenced by the

mode and level of access to influential markets or ideas and resources that individual players have within the new global economy. Higher education systems are equally interested in influential markets and resources. But despite the fact that all may be influenced by globalisation, the extent to which each of the global players is affected by constitutive elements of competitiveness tends to mark the level at which each is globalised.

#### **5.4 Africa's trajectory in the new global economy**

When the economy becomes globalised, processes of inclusion and exclusion also take place. Inclusion takes place on the grounds that a country, a system or a body operates in synergy with the rules of global competition and productivity and is thus essentially assimilated into this system. On the other hand, by the same rules, exclusion can also take place. In this case, when a country, a system or corporate body fails to integrate itself into the global flow of the economy, it relapses or becomes relegated and the system fails to cope in the dynamics of the new global economy. Castells (1996: 133) consolidates the idea of economic revolution in a globalised economy by emphasising that the new global economy "affects the whole planet either by inclusion or seclusion in the processes of production, circulation, and consumption that have become at the same time globalised and informationalized".

Most African states, including many in the sub-Saharan region where a number of the researcher's cases are concentrated, have experienced deteriorating trade terms and development rates compared to the early 1970s. Of course this study excludes the years after some of the countries had their debts cancelled, that is, after 2005. In the cases where the African governments could not sufficiently cope with the increasing demands of a globalised economy, they resorted to heavy borrowing from other governments and international lending organisations. The bulk of the lenders happened to be concentrated in the northern hemisphere. The researcher has in mind countries like Kuwait, Britain, the United States of America, Japan and many more whose aid has trickled down to Africa. Castells (1996: 133) explains that it is because of the new globalised

economic flows that poorer nations, such as those in sub-Saharan Africa, are drawn to borrowing in order to keep up with the kind of development that is expected of a technological age. He also notes that “the conditions of competitiveness in the new informational, global economy were too far away from what could be accomplished in the short term by rather primitive economies” (1996: 133), which were to a large extent still dependent on the economies of their former colonial masters.

While the economic prospects of many African countries were not that good before international borrowing, Castells (1996: 134) argues that the state of Africa’s economy further worsened after the international organisations had come in. He attributes this scenario to a number of factors. On the one hand, one has international lending organisations that fix the rules of the game towards more liberalisation of African economies. On the other hand, there are changing climatic conditions that weaken Africa’s economy that is mainly agro-based. As if this is not enough, many African states have experienced unstable political conditions and at times civil wars, which further weakens their new economies. Some examples of these include Mozambique, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zimbabwe and countries in the Great Lakes region of Africa.

Given Africa’s realities, such as unstable economic and political conditions, it can be concluded that much of Africa does not really benefit from the new-found global economic dynamism. For instance, Castells (1996: 135) also argues that much of Africa does not benefit from market liberalisation and globalisation because “most primary commodities are useless or lowly priced on the international and global market, markets are too narrow, investment too risky, labour not skilled enough, communication and telecommunication infrastructure clearly inadequate, politics too unpredictable, and many government bureaucracies inefficiently corrupt”. In a nutshell, these conditions make it difficult for many African institutions, including African higher education systems, to have a level playing field in global economics.

Bloom, Steven and Weston (2007) point out that the African continent is in a precarious position when it comes to liberalisation and globalisation. This position is informed by several factors that militate against Africa's integration into the global economy. The factors include globalisation's insensitivity to the reality of Africa when it comes to its structural adjustment programmes, for instance. This is compounded by the global decline in primary commodity prices and the rich world's protection of its agricultural and textile markets. The HIV/AIDS pandemic has also dealt a heavy blow to Africa's growing economy (Bloom, Steven & Weston, 2007: 193). Poor geographical conditions, the inability of African governments to combat chronic diseases, corruption and unstable governments are among the many factors that have limited Africa's capacity to integrate into the new global economy (Bloom *et al.*, 2007: 204ff).

### **5.5 The impact of neo-liberalism and globalisation on higher education in Africa**

In the preceding subsection, I have mainly been preoccupied with understanding globalisation and neo-liberalism. I have wildly taken globalisation and neo-liberalism as two issues that belong in one basket. I have conceded that globalisation may refer to the extension of networks that people build so that the limitations of space or its authority will have little influence on the course of events. Later, I have aligned globalisation with some of its basic characteristics such as the advancement of technology, which has, in turn, broken the national and regional boundaries of connectivity that would otherwise have limited the process of development. I have also argued that the free market and the promotion of its values are central to a globalised perspective. What happens to education when government adopts a globalised and a neo-liberal agenda? What shifts are evident in the higher education sector? These questions direct one to a number of aspects that come into play when the model of a higher education institution enters the globalised agenda.

The theoretical base on which globalisation and neo-liberalism are founded is essentially rationalistic and liberal. The processes of globalisation and neo-

liberalism believe in their own system's inherent power to create conditions of freedom and development in human lives and societies by restricting the powers of the state and allowing private enterprise to flourish. It is believed that private enterprise, which operates in many ways through the market dynamics of supply and demand, has the capacity to improve the human condition by allowing people to source from wherever in order to manage their life and business. It is also believed that this process in turn creates opportunities for all. Despite the glamorous vision of life inherent in a globalised and neo-liberalised pattern of life, it is interesting to note that developments on these processes have caused many African states to fail to cope with their external debt levels triggered by structural adjustment programmes and other conditions of the labour market. The main rationale of structural adjustment programmes has been to shift the focus of national governments in public resources allocation and management. In general, under structural adjustment programmes, governments are forced to cut public spending in a bid to reduce and eliminate their own debt levels. This process in many ways has resulted in the lowering of funding to higher education sectors as governments tend to concentrate on providing primary education. Changes such as these are the direct result of the process of globalisation and neo-liberal policies in public management. Hence I argue that neo-liberalism and globalisation, although having the conditions for the improvement of human autonomy, undermine the same when it comes to the developing world and its higher education institutions.

Globalisation, as emanating from the economic perspective, brings into higher education issues such as institutional rating, classification and competition, all of which serve economic ends. Market reforms in higher education produce competitive behaviours that may result in the examination, grading and ranking of the student populations as well as their institutions in terms of economic indicators. While this appears to be inevitable in any educational process, the effects of globalisation make such competition not only an aspect of educational merit but also a system of reproducing the professions and preserving social advantage (Marginson, 1997: 134). In such cases, co-operation between higher education institutions only appears as a tentative measure towards achieving

one's individualised ends. This brings about competitive behaviour between higher education institutions or systems and a specific standard of performance ratings. In this regard the idea of performativity evokes high notions of Readings's (1996) University of Excellence.

The ideal of performativity also brings out other related issues. On the one hand, higher education performativity and its methods assume that there is a certain general standard or rule against which the performance of individual higher education institutions will be judged or ranked. The idea of a similar standard in a way requires a sense of equality, real or assumed, that comes as a prerequisite for that judgement and ranking to take place. In educational terms, it implies that all students or higher education institutions be regarded as similarly positioned, otherwise the ranking would not work and no ideal of performativity would make sense. Among other things, such conditions force higher education institutions into policy and practice borrowing without making sense of the autonomy and aspirations of the people it serves. Sometimes this borrowing takes place at the expense of specific identities that the higher education institutions have acquired through history and the particular conditions within which these institutions exist. On the other hand, the concept of performativity brings in differences between the different higher education institutions involved. Educational competition assumes that higher education institutions have different capabilities and that these further depend on individual players and their individual situations. In turn, this becomes a condition on which higher education institutions are judged to be capable of excelling and meeting their performance indicators.

Performativity in higher education heavily influences ideas of desert or merit. The processes associated with performativity create conditions for unequal social outcomes, although these outcomes are regarded to be educationally justified in the sense that every individual gets what she or he deserves or that each reaps the fruits of his or her labour and effort in pursuing certain educational goals. While performativity *per se* assists in lifting up individual human capability, its heavy reliance on patterns reminiscent of neo-liberalism and globalisation can have

negative effects on higher education practices and the relationship between higher education and the promotion of justice and the common good. I do a follow-up of this argument in the next chapter.

The idea of competition in higher educational institutions spins off another effect of accreditation and ‘credentialism’. I use credentialism as a state or condition in which higher education institutions find themselves in because different governments and bodies have rated their practices against some specific grid of performance indicators. Such forms of accreditation, as can be observed from the accreditation of South African higher education institutions by the HEQC, can also become the benchmark for students’ choices of preferred institutions and courses as well as the background against which prospective donors, whether government or non-governmental, contract out services, etc. In the first place, most forms of accreditation for higher education place an economic value on institutional offerings or courses relative to other global players in the field. But in addition to this, the credentials that individuals acquire through the institutions carry along with them some economic value relative to the market value of the institutions.

Marginson (1997: 207–209) argues that as educational institutions aspire to offer more and more qualifications relative to the market economy, the pressure for more and better credentials also rises and spins off the need for further education in many people. On an economic level, the preference for better credentials in skills also becomes another determinant in the spiral. In general higher educational qualifications become stratified according to their attached economic goods as determined by labour market values. Through this whole process little is done in advancing and accounting for universities’ contribution towards developing the functional and critical human being who would competently operate in a multifaceted environment.

Having considered the above aspects of market values that are brought into higher education discourse, an extension can be made to argue that the market values also bring in commoditisation into higher education. The idea of



commoditisation of higher education has a number of dimensions. At a primary level, the commoditisation of higher education takes place when educational goods are evaluated and valued as economic goods. For instance, the fact that certain degrees are assigned higher tuition fees and that the more marketable graduates are in fields like engineering and business management means that more tuition is required of an individual for enrolment in such a course. At another level, commoditisation changes the nature of the university to a place where all knowledge converges toward minute specialisations that leave out human development in the process. The changes in higher education in Africa have entailed an emphasis on monetary value, which may be detrimental to the autonomous running of these institutions because most of the economic pressure African institutions bear is heightened by external global factors in the market. Such pressures have brought in reductions in student–teacher ratios and the adoption of more efficient means of running institutions amidst dwindling of quality education both in the higher education systems and in their states. The idea of value for money has therefore made things different in the way universities run their affairs (Amonoo-Neizer, 1998: 306).

At a secondary level, the valuing of educational goods as economic goods triggers another effect whereby students become clients in the sense that they are mainly considered as customers to particular educational institutions and courses while the institutions offer educational services to the students in the same way that the transfer of economic goods takes place. This takes place through educational subjects that are modulated in quantifiable units and valued and charged in similar economic values. Neo-liberalism has resulted in the transfer of academic credits across the globe between different institutions. Summer schools in a number of universities are a mark of the globalisation of higher education.

Commenting on the unseen influence of globalisation on people's lives, Burns, Dell'Anno, Khan and Poppleton (2001: 291) concede that one of the influences of globalisation in this world is its emphasis on the rights and privileges of the individual over the rights of the group. In this case the rights and values of the broader community are subjugated to those of individuals. Some conceptions of

institutional autonomy and academic freedom prevalent in some quarters on the African continent bear these marks of universities in a globalised world, without many social obligations.

Bolsmann and Uys (2001) note that globalisation has brought in the marginalisation of national boundaries in terms of trade, finance, the labour market and the knowledge economy itself, thereby affecting the higher education sector. In globalisation, knowledge creates competition, which contributes to and affects the knowledge factory. Higher education systems are at the centre of this knowledge production. In South Africa, for instance, globalisation has seen the development of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution Policy (GEAR) (Bolsmann & Uys, 2001: 173). GEAR is in itself a neo-liberal agenda. Neo-liberalism believes that governments have to cut spending on the public sector so that in turn growth is accelerated in other sectors of national development. In turn, universities, especially in Africa, are made to look for private sources of support while at the same time deregulation takes place, which eventually turns the running of universities into corporate and managerial systems (Bolsmann & Uys, 2001: 173). Governments pressurise universities to make a contribution to increased international competitiveness and commercial purposes. In some ways this implies that universities take on short-term goals, for instance carrying out research for commercial purposes.

Despite the noted effects of globalisation and neo-liberalism on higher education governance, at times universities are caught between bargaining liberalisation and the consolidation of democracy (Bolsmann & Uys, 2001: 174). In my introduction for this chapter, I have indicated that the needs for neo-liberalism and globalisation exist hand in hand with the need for localisation. In this regard, universities on the African continent succumb to the growing need of remaining relevant in the ever-changing world and addressing needs that go beyond national interests through founding new international collaborations. But in many ways, these universities also have to fulfil the national needs of developing skilled personnel suitable for particular countries. In view of these expectations universities always bear a responsibility of balancing between the global

imperatives and the local needs. But globalisation and neo-liberalism push the universities to a position where they are more relevant to global demands than local needs.

In addition, Cobbing and Southall (2006: 34) note that in cases where universities are faced with the challenge of declining funding, globalisation compels them to shift from collegial forms of governance to corporate models of management. The corporate models of governing higher education systems are considered among other things as cost-effective and efficient. Nevertheless, the authors also recognise that higher education teaching personnel are entitled to maintaining academic freedom in the way they do their business. This position shows that there will always be tension between the core duties of academics in the higher education system and the external demands that shape the course of such institutions, such as the need to be global in the new financial management models. In this regard, Pendlebury and Van der Walt (2006: 79) argue that the efforts of universities, such as Wits University, to align themselves in relation to the demands of neo-liberalism have had negative effects on working students and support service workers. They think this is the case partly because the conception of a market university inherently contains serious contradictions and antagonisms that the managerial model cannot solve (Pendlebury & Van der Walt, 2006: 91). These problems further raise questions on how suitable neo-liberal and globalised patterns of higher education are to African higher education systems.

## **5.6 Concluding reflections**

This chapter has looked at globalisation and its impact on higher education systems, with specific reference to African higher education and has highlighted the extent to which processes of globalisation and neoliberalism undermine the autonomous governance of higher education systems on the African continent. One feature that is dominant in the discourse is the idea that globalisation and neo-liberalism have economic roots on the one hand and individualistic traits on the other. Based on their foundations, neo-liberalism and globalisation are assumed to promote individual liberties and conditions for the enhancement of

these liberties. I have argued that the ideals of neo-liberalism and globalisation primarily belong to the corporate world. As such, their usage in higher education discourses represents a corporatisation that has occurred in the higher education sector. I also noted that because of a differential development pace between Africa, generally regarded as the third world, and many countries of the northern hemisphere, generally regarded as the first world, neo-liberalism and globalisation, when applied to higher education governance on the African continent, force a compromise between internationalisation and localisation. In their efforts to develop societies and their own institutions, higher education systems on the African continent bargain between the need for international recognition and relevance on the one hand and the need to remain relevant to the local environments in which universities find themselves, on the other hand. But most of all, one can validly argue that part of this compromise that higher education systems have to live through concerns the manner and nature of autonomy that universities can have in their own affairs. Through the different ways of exposing how globalisation and neo-liberalism manifest through the life of higher education systems the researcher argues that these processes make higher education governance on the African continent less autonomous.

It is crucial at this point to note that the urgency to find a balance between localisation and internationalisation sometimes reflects the conflict of interest and focus in which higher education systems on the African continent find themselves in. From one perspective, this conflict can be considered as an emblem of the conflict between different ideals of the university, that is, the University Reason and the University of Culture as against the University of Excellence. In other words, the apparent conflict can be considered, from Readings' (1996) perspective, as lying between the understanding of the university as a centre for the emancipation of reason and the promotion of culture on the one hand and as a centre for achieving excellence on the other. But I should acknowledge here that even such conceptions do not answer all the questions regarding the complex situation in which African universities find themselves in. That is why some university missions will tend to reflect elements from each one of the three perspectives that Readings (1996) provides. But

considering the operations of the higher education sector in Africa merely from the three conceptions would be simplistic.

Delanty (2004) prefers to look at the different conceptions of the university as relational. His view takes one to a communicative consideration of these relationships with an understanding that neo-liberalism and globalisation do not represent the end of the University of Reason and the University of Culture but rather show a progression in the understanding of the university within the framework of global challenges. Delanty's (2004: 244–245) position entails a fundamental critique of what constitutes modernity and the role of the university as a key institution in modernity. He understands modernity not as an end to reason and culture but rather as a progressive extension of different forms of communication into all spheres of society. He reconsiders modernity and its impact on the university as resulting in four different epistemic shifts that are largely characterised as “cultural, social, political with the fourth shift as essentially economic and technological” (Delanty, 2004: 248).

While acknowledging that “economic and technological forces have impacted on the university, undermining some of its modernist assumptions based on the idea of autonomy and underpinned by academic self-governance”, Delanty (2004: 248–249) considers these shifts and forces as multidirectional and not unilinear in the sense of one replacing another. In other words, he does not think that the corporate identity of the university replaces other former identities of reason and culture. In view of Delanty's (2004) position, I argue that academic freedom can exist alongside market freedom as the university negotiates its course of life and that traces of neo-liberal practices do not necessarily mean the end of the University of Reason and the University of Culture. It is in this perspective that globalisation and neo-liberalism can be harnessed into a positive force transforming higher education in Africa rather than militating against it, as the patterns I have dealt with seem to indicate.

The identity of the university is thus determined neither by technocratic-managerial strategies nor by purely academic pursuits. In the knowledge society

knowledge cannot be reduced to its uses or to itself because it is embedded in the deeper cognitive complexes of society, in conceptual structures and in the epistemic structures of power and interests (Delanty, 2004: 252). This understanding squarely places the identity of any university within the lived experiences and practices of the communities the university operates in. Similarly, conceptions and practices of institutional autonomy and academic freedom can only make sense within a liberal communitarian perspective rather than purely liberal conceptions. Purely liberal conceptions of autonomy only act as a seedbed for the further development of required autonomous dispositions.

Delanty's (2004) refusal to reduce the role of the university to the function of reason alone and the reflection of the power and prestige of the nation-state is intended to shift the understanding of the university to one of providing structure within which expert and lay cultures intersect with more specialised knowledge domains. The university's assumption of neo-liberal and globalised stances can be understood as the university's repositioning as it tries to accommodate the rising demands of the new global economy.

In an attempt to put to the test Delanty's (2004) conception of the cultural, social, political, economic and technological repositioning of the higher education system in a multidimensional format, the following chapter will look at the intersections of cosmopolitanism and higher education as I try to look for ways though which African higher education systems can continue to serve the world while at the same time remaining true to the challenges facing Africa today..

## CHAPTER 6

### COSMOPOLITAN CITIZENSHIP AND THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN AFRICA

#### 6.1        **Introductory remarks: understanding cosmopolitan norms**

In the previous chapter I have focused much on exposing the dangers of globalisation and neo-liberalism in the operations of higher education in Africa. Despite this take, one thing that has been implicitly acknowledged is the fact that higher education discourse and governance today has become part of the neo-liberal and globalised agenda, consciously or not. This realisation places enormous demands on the operations of the university in Africa as the universities try to negotiate the universal demands with the local expectations and burdens. In this chapter, I argue that the function of universities on the African continent is to focus not just on their economic expansion but also, and more importantly, on their civic role. In this way, the African university has a real chance to strengthen its autonomy.

I propose that higher education in Africa can fulfil its civic role by taking up an important role in the creation of a cosmopolitan citizen. I also see that the values of a cosmopolitan citizen are better attuned to the promotion of justice and a better education for all. When social justice and the good of society are promoted as collateral aims for higher education, even alongside some neo-liberalist elements such as efficiency, accountability and productivity in response to the local demands, higher education will reclaim its capacity for autonomy.

In pursuance of this argument, I explore the foundations of cosmopolitan norms and how such norms can affect the governance of higher education institutions on the African continent. Before I proceed, it is important that I clarify what I understand *cosmopolitanism* to mean and its relationship to globalisation.

Once again, it is important to remember that globalisation is often used to refer to the broadening of the economic market to operate at a global or worldwide level. But in many cases, the terms *empire* and *globalisation* are used synonymously

with each other. Nevertheless, this usage does not adequately reflect the intricate nature of cosmopolitanism because each of these terms, empire and globalisation, designates a limited form of operation (Benhabib, 2006: 16). If these terms are to be used in place of cosmopolitanism, they are likely to reduce cosmopolitan norms only to claims reflecting the rights to life, liberty, equality and property. In this way, cosmopolitan norms would be regarded as dependent on free markets and trading practices. On the other hand, the idea of empire is conceived as referring to “an anonymous network of rules, regulations, and structures that entrap one in the system of global capitalism” (Benhabib, 2006: 16). This shows that the two terms empire and globalisation fall short of the larger implications of the nature of cosmopolitan norms.

The concept cosmopolitanism can be traced to the Ancient Greek tradition, where the term stood for “citizens of the world” (Nussbaum, 1997: 59). This understanding of the concept departs from its associations with globalisation because it considers humankind as more important than any claims of belonging to one’s own state or native land. In other words, proponents of cosmopolitanism, such as Nussbaum (1997), argue that individuals should be primarily considered as citizens of the world. Given this position, the concept of cosmopolitanism is heavily loaded with considerations over “what is human in humanity” (Appiah, 2006: 134). According to Appiah (2006: 135), a cosmopolitan outlook promotes the connection of human beings “despite their difference”. Appiah argues that human beings are essentially connected to each other despite their affiliations to different nation-states and territories.

There is also a general tendency to align cosmopolitan norms with democratic self-determination. One assumption is that the spreading of democratic rule across countries is tied to cosmopolitan norms, but this association does not say much about the causative factors of any of these two conceptions. Hence simply equating cosmopolitanism with democracy may be equally problematic because democratic institutions tend to operate in a localised fashion and become legitimate within localised circumstances. When nations adopt democratic rule their sovereignty remains valid within the borders of the people who participated



in the democratic process and agreed to the rule (see also Benhabib, 1996). Considering the conditions under which most democracies thrive, such as the need for some consensus from a specific group of concerned people, any democracy will only be valid within specific conditions. It is important to note that this thinking does not imply that democracies have nothing in common because of their specificity. The rules and processes on which democracies are established are themselves universal. But on their own, democracies designate a national identity and not much of a cosmopolitan identity. Nevertheless, it can be affirmed that human beings are connected through their skills and their imagination as human beings, as well as their common potential. The image of the connection through humanity also builds the foundation for cosmopolitanism in the field of higher education.

What then are cosmopolitanism and a cosmopolitan identity? Brock and Brighouse (2005: 2–3) indicate that cosmopolitanism has its roots in the Stoic tradition and the idea of a ‘world citizen’. On the other hand, Dwyer (2004: 171) considers globalisation and cosmopolitanism as aspects of the same process. He draws most of his comments from the ideas of Delanty and Falk. Although the notion of world citizen that lays the foundation for the notion of cosmopolitanism can be traced as far back as the Stoic period, the notion denotes a process of global internationalisation where nation states, which are historically located in space, become subjected to forms of international law and in which citizens acquire the special status of being ‘citizens of the world’ by virtue of their common humanity. Consequently, this process culminates in the idea that people can move and transact their lives across different nation borders unhindered (Dwyer, 2004: 171). In this regard, nation-states no longer act as reference points for the different activities that people carry out and the demands that they make, for the activities appeal to broader sources of authority than the nation-state. This broader community of human beings directly refers to one as a citizen of the world, something different groups are infused with as they make their claims beyond the thresholds of their particular nationalities.

The above understanding shows that cosmopolitanism designates matters relating to both identity and responsibility (Brock & Brighouse, 2005: 2–3). At the level of identity, cosmopolitanism indicates that human existence or life is influenced by different cultures. In other words, it is not possible to find uniquely homogenous aspects of life in different countries. Forms of life that one finds in one place, although they may have features particular to the local environment in which they are found, are not purely influenced by the local environment. Life is essentially influenced by several factors that may not belong to one culture to such an extent that it (life) becomes heterogeneous. At the level of responsibility, cosmopolitanism believes that individual human lives are focussed outwardly and are concerned about obligations that are not only local, immediate and obvious but also relate to the distant other. In other words, a cosmopolitan perspective is interested in the obligation people have to others beyond their friends and relatives. Although this is the case with regard to the obligations that people have towards others, the cosmopolitan positions are not unanimous on the extent to which people have a specific regard for the distant other.

At the centre of a cosmopolitan perspective is the idea that each person is a subject of equal moral concern and that each person can act autonomously within her or his own range of options. In this regard, cosmopolitan norms take the claims of each person seriously without subjecting them to group norms as a standard of measurement. As much as cosmopolitanism gives each individual the right to make these claims, it is also part of the cosmopolitan norms that such ways of looking at life necessarily imply that each individual carries the responsibility for the choices that he or she makes. The rationality and freedom of human beings reside in individuals and not the groups they belong to (Held, 2005: 15–16).

## **6.2 How do cosmopolitan norms arise?**

How do cosmopolitan norms acquire their being? Benhabib (2006: 20) proposes a project of mediations whereby the cosmopolitan norms first acquire the status of positive law by using some aspects of democratic foundations. For instance, a

group of people that decides to govern itself by some rules that it willingly chooses and debates between the members can discover that it is not only this group that follows these principles but that other groups also agree on similar rules as appealing for their own governance. At this point the norms emerge as universal. Through the process of public reason and deliberation, democratic states allow their citizens to become convinced of the validity and usefulness of cosmopolitan norms. Through the practice of these norms citizens reiterate their positive principles and incorporate them into democratic will-formation processes through argument, contestation, revision and rejection (Benhabib, 2006; Post, 2006). According to Benhabib, democratic reiteration, which comes in the form of constant re-emphasis of positive laws and their utility in society, causes the political practices of the people to generate a body of laws that mediate between universal norms and the will of democratic majorities. Through this process of democratic reiteration, the substance of democratic law, which is fundamentally rooted in the local practices of the people, also changes. In the end, the law becomes reconstructed according to the norms of ethical universalism. This then is one of the first formulations of cosmopolitan norms. Benhabib (2006: 49) also highlights the fact that the reiteration has the capacity to change the boundaries of democratic states by altering and expanding the definition of the sovereign people or the demos, the subjects of democratic rule, to include persons such as those who may be referred to as both legal and illegal aliens.

Democratic reiterations do not completely abolish the distinction that exists between universal ethical norms and the particularity of positive law, but they can only be ameliorated through the process. Hence, the act of constituting a democracy spells out two closely related ideas that tend to blur the universal aspect of democratisation. Benhabib (2006) argues that democratic legitimacy is an act of self-legislation whereby people bind themselves by some agreed laws, which in turn define their community. As such, “democracies require borders” (Benhabib, 2006: 33). One understanding from this position is that although democratic norms may be considered to be legitimately generated by an act of sovereign legislation, the understanding of cosmopolitan norms assumes that

contemporary democracies should be framed in view of norms that transcend specific enactments of these democratic majorities, in the sense that such democratic majorities, although inevitable “reiterate the principles and incorporate them into democratic will-formation through argument, contestation, revision, and rejection” (Benhabib, 2006: 49). Consequently it would not hold to think that democracies are impervious to transformative acts of collective will.

The above understanding enforces the nature of cosmopolitan norms. In other words, cosmopolitan norms are those norms that people create in full perspective of their democracies and their reiteration of the principles they live by. But most of all, it is when the democratic norms and the reiterations recreate new forms of understanding (something similar to a synthesis in Hegelian dialectical process of reality), transcending those that people already have, that cosmopolitan norms emerge. This creative nature of the cosmopolitan norms also implies that the processes by which people created their understandings are themselves contingent and subject to revision as the conditions and perspectives of life continue to reshape in the process of life. This presupposes that the norms are not impervious at all. Considered from another perspective, Benhabib’s (2006) cosmopolitan norms can be seen as a revision of her earlier explanations of deliberative democracy alluded to earlier on in reference to her understanding of deliberative democracy (Benhabib, 1996).

Can cosmopolitan norms mediate between conceptions of university autonomy globally and in Africa? I think that my exposition of the rise of cosmopolitan norms spells out a particular way in which people may begin to understand issues of institutional autonomy and academic freedom. Having mainly argued for positive liberty or situated autonomy as the most relevant condition for African higher education systems, I am compelled at this stage of the argument to state that conceptions of autonomy within and without the university require a cosmopolitan perspective if these conceptions are to address the locally defined challenges of higher education while at the same time maintaining the identity of the university that has existed for ages. This can happen if universities on the continent continuously reiterate their shared understandings of autonomy as lived

and perceived from their different social, historical and economic positions. Such reiterations have the potential of creating cosmopolitan forms of autonomy that speak to both the local environment as well as taking on board what other universities have for ages considered as central to this autonomy.

In order to understand cosmopolitan norms better, one may ask what imperatives lie behind the force of cosmopolitan norms. In one sense, cosmopolitan norms ride on citizenship theory and its ramifications on a global scale. The primary ground on which cosmopolitan norms can be built is the idea that people decide to live in harmony in a society according to their agreed terms of reference. In this way, the experience of local self-governance stands as ground for any emergence of cosmopolitan norms. In many ways, citizenship claims cannot be separated from the claims that one makes towards the national in terms of one's rights and obligations. The general picture of citizenship is one that is situated in time and space. But as indicated above, people do not live in isolation. There is a further shared understanding of living in the same world and partly being determined by the same regulatory natural forces. People may wish to look at this as their given shared fate. The shared understanding of living in the same world gives rise to the global identity in the way people relate to each other as world citizens. In this way, what people ultimately refer to as cosmopolitanism is a "hybridity, fluidity, intermingling and interdependence of peoples, cultures and practices" across the globe with this understanding of shared fate (Benhabib, 2006: 175).

Probably Benhabib's (2006) main concern is to try to find a way in which people can fashion their political and legal institutions in such a way that they manage to govern themselves, amidst the growing conflicts and differences. But such an approach to life potentially creates dilemmas. Post (2006: 1) points out that despite the apparent need for a universalistic ethic, it is hardly possible to establish this ethic because governing of communities is mainly possible within the bounded identity where power and control is seen to operate within specific frameworks of representation, accountability, participation and deliberation. In other words, imagining the case of unbounded communities creates serious

challenges as to how the communities operate and probably whether they are real or not. Political will and political power are bounded within specific confines of operation without which such power comes into effect. While acknowledging that “the universalism of our ethics ultimately derives from our capacity to draw a transcendent sense of equality and dignity applicable to all”, Post (2006: 2) emphasises that the particularism of people’s laws ultimately derives from the well-grounded borders of their states. As such, a cosmopolitan perspective may be perceived as primarily aimed at taming the nation-state and as creating a lawless state.

Nevertheless, I wish to restate that from an ethical standpoint, it may be possible to establish what people owe others, their fellow citizens, and what they owe those beyond the confines of their locality and even future generations. This consideration becomes problematic to the law and its application because the law itself does not provide ways of its application beyond the constituents of the law, that is the nation-state, and specified countries that may have standing protocols with the nation-state. In this regard, it may be conceded that the hybridity found in cosmopolitan norms has become a way of taming the nation-state on the assertion of unbridled sovereignty that often arises in contemporary life and discourse. If people were to go the route of positive law, their universal ethical standards or regard for others would not find the space to be legally enforced because there would be no juridical authority required to enforce such a law and there would be no body to enforce this understanding and make sure that appropriate redress is given for any injury done.

I need to indicate here that the world of human rights, despite its differential implementation and promotion, is one area where a universalistic dimension, in the name of the international human rights declaration, appeals beyond the local and the national and becomes applicable in all similar cases. Nevertheless the dilemma persists with regard to making human rights laws conform to positive laws of particular nation-states. I am tempted to think that the numerous attacks that people have made on human rights bodies as toothless and not forceful enough may be attributed to their cosmopolitan nature. Even though this may be

the case, a human rights conception that is infused with democratic and deliberative reiterations has the potential of sailing through such criticisms.

Benhabib's (2006: 16) initial response to this paradox created by cosmopolitan norms and their enforceability draws heavily on the Kantian notion of a cosmopolitan right. Her main attempt is to begin resolving the inadmissibility of conditions of exclusion when it comes to the positive laws of particular states. In relation to this idea, Benhabib (2006: 22) suggests that strangers and illegal aliens can only be seen as protected when the law of world citizenship is made limited to the conditions of *hospitality*. She argues that the law of hospitality necessarily intersects with the democratic authority of ordinary positive law and that it "delimits civic space by regulating relations among members, strangers and bounded communities" (Benhabib, 2006: 22). The interface between positive law and democratic law is made possible because democracies by their very nature possess transparent public spheres that are designed to translate ethical views of citizens into positive law of the state (Benhabib, 2006: 71). Hence the broader global society increasingly endorses the idea that both legal and illegal aliens are entitled to equal human rights with an understanding of friendship.

### **6.3 The role of cosmopolitan norms in enhancing higher education systems to promote social justice**

How does one begin to justify the role and foundations of cosmopolitan norms in the governance of higher education systems? Does it really matter whether one develops a cosmopolitan perspective or not? One can begin to answer these questions by understanding the context in which cosmopolitan norms are built. For instance, Benhabib (2006) develops a clear conception of these norms from a discourse about the practice of legitimating unethical actions, which can be done by particular national states through their legal structures. In this particular case Benhabib's discussion took shape in view of the crimes of war, or the injustices that the Nazi committed towards the Jews. Of course this probing takes into account the fact the perpetrators' own state, in this case Germany, sanctioned these actions. Benhabib then proceeds to suggest that people need a body of

norms that transcends the local legal positions of positive law. They need norms that are universal and enforceable beyond the borders of particular nation-states. This indicates that within the German state, this behaviour towards others was legal and therefore also regarded as right. The quest for transnational norms can be considered as the beginning of formulating cosmopolitan norms. It is also possible to consider the relevance of cosmopolitan norms in the context of the xenophobic attacks on foreigners in South Africa that have taken place in the middle of 2008. Reflecting on these circumstances poses serious challenges to universities' role in engendering democratic civic virtues and the extent to which these values and virtues are required to be cosmopolitan.

In line with Benhabib's (2006) views, I argue that transnational norms, although they provide the ground on which cosmopolitan norms are built, are not necessarily equivalent to cosmopolitan norms. In order for one to understand this puzzle, Benhabib (2006: 16) distinguishes international norms of justice from cosmopolitan norms of justice. International norms of justice designate particular inter-state arrangements, enforceable through equally recognisable legal agents. In this case the agreed laws surrounding intergovernmental issues are enforceable. On the other hand, cosmopolitan justice has broader margins than international norms of justice. While the international norms of justice accrue from specific arrangements of nation-states, the cosmopolitan norms of justice accrue to individuals by virtue of these individuals being considered as moral agents and legal persons in a worldwide society, whether or not particular states formally subscribe to these norms as signatories. The difference with international norms of justice is that these are dependent on the nation-states and are valid as long as their agreements are still binding legally; in other words, they depend on whether a particular state is a signatory or not.

If it is the case that cosmopolitan norms stand in so far as individual persons exist, it can be argued that such norms are not dependent on the agreements people make between each other. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, although it arose from international protocol and arrangement between nations, is considered as cosmopolitan norms and universally binding. In this case, the



Universal Declaration of Human Rights assumes a cosmopolitan understanding because it is central to what being human means and involves. As such, these norms then cannot be ranked among the international justice norms, although international justice norms are at liberty to draw from them.

What Benhabib brings to people's attention is the idea that cosmopolitan norms particularise on the identity of the person and what the individual person deserves. Merely being human comes prior to all other considerations and arrangements. Hence, cosmopolitanism becomes distinct from other notions because "love of mankind" in this sense is prior to "love of one's country". This version of cosmopolitanism can also be said to be different from other conceptions of cosmopolitanism that tend to represent human nature as a form of "hybridity, fluidity, and that it is a fractured and an internally riven nature" (Benhabib, 2006: 18). I think that the idea of cosmopolitan norms as hybrid, fluid, and fractured gives in too much to ethical relativism and can easily lead to nihilism or the belief that "nothing exists, and that if anything exists then it is incomprehensible or cannot be communicated" (Stumpf, 1988: 33). In this form of relativism everything is in flux and reality has no firm ground on which one would begin to build some norms in life. Such relativism *cum* nihilism attacks the core that acts as a basis for recognition of the other as an equal and a distinct human being who deserves respect and recognition irrespective of belonging or association.

A cosmopolitan perspective that gives priority to the individual human being and due recognition of one's situatedness is aligned towards the discursive scope of ethics, which encompasses or presupposes a universalistic moral standpoint in its norms of conversation. When one considers the meaning of this position in practical circumstances, it implies, among other things, that the discussions that people may engage in are not determined by any boundaries prior to the meeting of difference and setting the rules of conversation. Similarly, the discourse on higher education autonomy in Africa cannot be the concern of only the citizens of a particular nation but a concern of everyone who may be affected by it. The position is a complete equivocation of Benhabib's (1996: 70) original

contribution to deliberative democracy where she holds that decisions affecting the well-being of a group should be seen as the outcome of free and reasoned deliberation among equals, within principles of equality and symmetry, and made in conditions where all can initiate speech, interrogation and debate about the issues concerned (Benhabib, 2006: 18). By bringing the same conception to the fore, Benhabib (2006) intends to firmly ground cosmopolitan norms in a conception of discursive democratic ethics where the rules guiding the discourse are not prior to the discussion itself, although its assumptions may be. In other words, discursive norms require the concerned people, irrespective of their national boundaries, to first settle the norms guiding their discussion with equal recognition of the worth of each participant. According to Benhabib's (1996) understanding, the norms of moral conversation are not limited to people living within specific nationally recognised boundaries but include all who qualify as human beings. She restates the following:

Every person, and every moral agent, who has interest and whom my actions and consequences of my actions can impact and affect in some manner or another is potentially a moral conversation partner with me: I have a moral obligation to *justify my action with reasons* (emphasis in the original) to this individual or to the representative of this being. We are all potentially participants in such conversations of justification (Benhabib, 2006: 18).

Of course one can query whether Benhabib's initial norms of discursive democracy do not explicitly lead to a cosmopolitan view. But this position would not fully represent Benhabib's discursive deliberations. I acknowledge that when a group of people discusses issues that concern them, it is important to establish the people who are concerned about those issues. This acknowledges people's global connectedness and how actions, although perceived as distant, may affect others, including future generations. This identification of the concerned may initially mean that at some point one has to draw a line as to who will be included in the deliberation. But a second consideration of 'anyone who is concerned' fundamentally breaks down the walls some people have put in place

to exclude other people from conversation. These walls can relate to language as much as they can relate to formal association and economic position.

When considered from the first ground, processes regarding identification of those affected by an issue can further imply that a particular group becomes aware of its members having some common grounds that hold the group together. The deliberations need to be localised as opposed to being generalised. But even if this may be the case with democratic discourse that wants to be legitimate, being affected by an issue or becoming concerned is not limited to spatial belonging or any other form of social or cultural belonging. Furthermore, the norms on which such rules of conversation are established and how decisions are arrived at may not be special to a particular group. The norms can be applicable across the board if one maintains that all human beings are rational and capable at arriving at solutions to things that affect them and that they are also capable of doing this by listening to the reasons each one of them brings to the table. In other words, the nature of the norms that any democratic group can legitimately call democratic is universal and can be considered as cosmopolitan at the same time.

I wish to quickly draw on two other aspects of the democratic discourse and how they can be considered as a foundation for cosmopolitan norms. I have in mind characteristics of democratic deliberations that meet the conditions of being discursive, public and open-ended and that one needs to expect the unexpected to happen, or the idea that such discourse is potentially unpredictable and inconclusive as it keeps in wait for a better argument (see Habermas, 1996; Waghid, 2004). The publicity of these norms is evoked from the understanding that discussions are open to all the concerned members. These members determine the agenda and the rules of the discourse. But most of all, the discourse itself is a public discourse. By implication members of the democratic community do not hide any agendas from each other if the other is an interested member. But due to the nature of these deliberations and given some of the conditions I have described above, democratic deliberations exhort members in the democratic dialogue to expect the unexpected to happen. In other words,

members taking part in the discourse need to have the understanding their *modus operandi* and the consequent deliberations between them can lead to offending others, although this may not be intentional. As a result, every deliberative act should have an inbuilt capacity to facilitate forgiveness and respect for the other as part of the building pillars of a democratic culture (Waghid, 2005: 331).

The discursive nature of democratic dialogue has the potential of resolving tensions (Benhabib, 2006:19) and can meaningfully improve deliberations concerning the African higher education system, which in many forms are engaged in intractable disputes. Democratic discourse pays particular attention to how people understand themselves as citizens and members of the deliberating group. By implication, this understanding of belonging revolves around whom and what one excludes or includes from the forms of conversation and the nature of issues requiring public conversation.

For the above argument to remain valid, I need to acknowledge that there is a possibility that assuming unity between various bounded communities can be dangerous. This is why, according to Benhabib (2006), it is imperative that any democratic discourse of a cosmopolitan nature include a philosophical *project of mediations* and not ‘totalisations’ or reductions of forms of life. The democratic life being promoted here is itself a mixture of different forms of life, experiences and expectations. It is an expression of diverse forms communing. This means that the public sphere has to transform in such a way that there is adequate conversation between the different forms of life, between the moral and the ethical, between the ethical and the political, and also between the political and the legal dimensions of life. Hence the discursive atmosphere that Benhabib (2006) advocates here as part of the cosmopolitan perspective is one in which the governing norms of conversation are perceived as neither merely moral nor just legal but as dealing with the morality of law in a broader context beyond its domestic domain.

The African higher education system can be a site for the promotion of cosmopolitan norms and values. Higher education systems on the continent are

by their composition multi-ethnic and multicultural, and of late they have been turning multinational. When higher education systems consciously and progressively promote the values that connect humanity and its values by simple mediations, they can in fact further develop the cosmopolitan norms. But for higher education systems on the continent to perform this role effectively, they need to develop within their practices a democratic deliberative process whereby all opinions are considered without any bias. This implies that the different higher education systems, although they are characterised by different historical, cultural, social, economic and political environments, need to constantly discover the higher moral ground for advancing their purposes within the different societies while at the same time contributing to the ends of humanity as such.

When the cosmopolitan position is considered from the context of human rights, Benhabib (2006: 20) stipulates that human rights claims work with a cosmopolitan perspective and operate legally regardless of one's membership in a bounded community or nation. For instance, human rights claims can be made by any form of immigrant in a foreign country regardless of whether the person is a legal immigrant or not. Such a conception can be achieved by removing differential treatment between local students and foreign students in the different higher education systems on the continent.

I now turn to the imaginative dimension of the democratic theory, which acts as a basis of cosmopolitan norms necessary for the transformation of higher education systems so that they become more autonomous. In this space, I claim that the ideal of imaginative thinking is necessary for and central to the building of a cosmopolitan perspective. Imaginative thinking and compassionate action have the capacity to attune people to expecting the unexpected in human interaction. In one of his expositions, Waghid (2005: 331) proposes a conception of citizenship education through compassionate action and also claims that this way of looking at citizenship enriches the ideals of a deliberative and democratic society, as one can find in other contemporary scholars such as Habermas, Young, Benhabib and many more.

Waghid (2005: 331) derives his thoughts on imaginative and compassionate action from Hanna Arendt's 1998 book titled *The Human Condition*. The theory of imaginative action believes that action is an initiation into motion. But this initiation into movement or action is particularly relational in the sense that a person who acts sets into motion a sequence of other actions and/or reactions. While one can have full control of oneself and one's intentions, the other self or person who interacts with one or responds to an initiation into motion can never be fully grasped and predicted in the same way that one understands oneself and predicts one's own behaviour in given circumstances. As such, an action towards other people necessarily becomes dialogical in the sense that *action* brings people or subjects into dialogue. This dialogue can also be considered in an action-reaction sequence.

Using the dialogical nature of human actions towards other humans, Waghid (2005: 333) argues for the need for compassion and forgiveness in realms of human interaction. This proposal is founded on the belief that once a person sets (action) into motion, what is said or done cannot be reversed in time and space. Although one can wish one had not said or done the particular things, the fact that the deed has been done or the words have been spoken cannot be reversed. With this understanding in mind, Waghid (2005) proposes that the teaching for democratic citizenship should particularly give room for forgiveness and create a deeper sense of understanding of the other.

I want to extend the concept of imaginative action and forgiveness so that it can also be used as a foundation for cosmopolitan values in enhancing higher education systems on the African continent. In relation to this proposal, one can consider the place of the African university as enhanced when the university takes up the challenges issued to it by the emergence of cosmopolitan norms. The university can be considered as a melting pot of different cultures and thought patterns, or as a home ground of different reasons. This means that the university in turn uses and promotes cosmopolitan values as it tries to fulfil its mission to teach and serve the community and do research.

When imaginative action is given room within the spaces of the university, it gives individuals the capacity to experience the other and what it means to be the other in different circumstances. In turn, this approach allows universities on the African continent to cultivate a culture of friendship between students, lecturers, other university personnel and the greater society. In this sense, imaginative action works in strengthening civic reconciliation by engaging members of society in dialogue (Waghid, 2005: 339).

The idea of compassionate and imaginative action cannot be exercised within any specific borders or conditions except that of belong to the community of human beings. The human condition suffices in the sense that the underlying force is the question of sharing a common humanity and that by virtue of this nature people are capable of sharing in other's experiences and imagining themselves in other people's positions. The idea does not negate knowledge of oneself but rather advocates the breaking of individual shells so that people can reach each other and share the struggles that they may be experiencing. While Waghid's (2005) elaboration of imaginative and compassionate action does not explicitly reveal itself as a cosmopolitan perspective, the explanation that I have offered in terms of how compassionate and imaginative action can be exercised clearly shows that the concept is based on a cosmopolitan understanding of reality and the simple sharing of the same human condition.

Benhabib's (2006) cosmopolitan view, which I have elaborated on at length earlier on, is heavily tilted towards a Kantian formula of a universal right as an entitlement that every person carries by virtue of being human. In this regard, it is important to note that Kant's cosmopolitan rights are distinct from two other forms of rights although all of these are interrelated in the way their claims are formulated. These two are the domestic rights claims of individual persons within a nation and the claims guarding treaties between sovereign states (inter-state rights). The cosmopolitan rights are distinct on the ground that people claim them between each other irrespective of nationality or bounded community. They do this by virtue of being human and not merely by simple existence in a global village (Benhabib, 2006: 21). Such a perspective borrows heavily on the

anticipation of each human being as a potential participant in human conversation or the anticipation of each person as a potential sufferer as a result of one's action, to follow the imaginative route.

To Kant, the condition of being a potential participant in human conversation forms the root of his concept of *hospitality*.<sup>9</sup> In the ordinary sense, the idea of hospitality implies doing someone a favour because that person is perceived as a stranger and also as somebody who cannot claim from one the specific behaviour being displayed. Quoting David Held, Benhabib (2006: 31) states that cosmopolitan sovereignty places its primacy on individual human beings as political agents and on the accountability of power in treating others as co-agents. Hospitality in this regard refers to cases where human rights claims are not bound by particular nation-states but are by their very nature cross-border claims, claims that can be made by any anonymous persons by virtue of being persons.

The above point brings me to reiterate the intricate nature of democratic states and their legitimacy. I have argued that while democracies believe in an exercise of power authorised by the people, these people necessarily have to belong to specific communities or states within which they can exercise their democratic power and mandate leaders in such circumstances. But at the same time, the principles within which democracies operate are such that they have their reference to internationally recognised democratic practices that in turn legitimate any new organisations or practices as democratic or not. At this point, the idea of “the rights of the person” (Benhabib, 2006: 32) becomes the major reference point for such democratic practices. Although such networking of the relationship between the universal and the particular may be seen as antagonistic in terms of its trade-offs that also seem to fall on the universal condition, it is this core that acts as another nerve for the cosmopolitan ideal. In other words, the reference to ‘cosmopolitanism’ is not a reference that completely transcends the local and the particular, *per se*. This is so because it is in the local and particular

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<sup>9</sup> The concept of hospitality is used differently from the way people ordinarily know and use hospitality in human dealings, such as offering friendly reception to visitors.



that the universal becomes evident and the universal begins to be applied in other similarly positioned cases. Benhabib (2006: 32) confirms that “modern democracies act in the name of universal principles that are then circumscribed within a particular civic community”.

Like other theoretical frameworks such as the democratic theory or the citizenship theory, it is possible to consider the cosmopolitan norm as layered or differentiated, depending on its points of emphasis. For instance, Dwyer (2004) considers that globalisation is an initial stage in the process of cosmopolitanism. But this stage uses the position of the nation-state as a basic unit of analysis (Ritzer, 2007: 3–4). Nevertheless, I note that this way of considering cosmopolitanism may eventually conflate globalisation with cosmopolitanism. On the other hand, the view may also simply mean that globalisation does not have all the elements that make cosmopolitanism to be what it is, that it is a less developed form of cosmopolitanism, if one is allowed to put it that way. What distinguishes cosmopolitanism from globalisation at this point is the idea that cosmopolitanism is essentially a normative norm, whereas globalisation characterises the way operations, mostly economic in nature, take place. I will now consider Beck’s (2007) view as an example of a normative claim in terms of stipulating the understanding of cosmopolitanism.

Using Beck’s (2007: 153–164) view requires me to make a preliminary distinction between methodological nationalism and methodological cosmopolitanism, which Beck similarly makes. While Beck (2007) has given a number of characteristics distinguishing methodological nationalism, one can sum them up as representing a particular view of citizenship or belonging that tends to put a binary division between the nation-state and the other, between us and them. This position also argues that networks of human activity, although they can gain broader acceptance beyond the national, are essentially constituted by the identity of the nation-state. In methodological nationalism, society is subordinated to the state and each of them tends to be defined in terms of the other. In other words, the predominant point of focus and analysis is the nation-

state, but all other relationships or networks are understood on the basis of the nature and operations of the nation-state.

Methodological cosmopolitanism does not spell the death of the nation-state, as many have predicted. In methodological cosmopolitanism, the nature and functions of the nation-state in human networking are not demolished. A cosmopolitan perspective rather considers this nation-state not as a predominant factor of analysis or a point of origin. The nation-state is considered as one player among many players in the global world of many players. In this regard, the either 'us' or 'them' is dissolved in a network of relationships to the extent that the 'inside-out' boundaries become blurred in reconstituting human activity. I return to this point later in this chapter when I begin to consider how cosmopolitan norms can further enhance the governance of higher education institutions on the African continent.

At this point I would agree that Beck's notion of a normative cosmopolitanism as it is laid out is yet to be realised. Ritzer (2007: 3–4) argues that this is the case because most of the networks of interaction between institutions still constitute themselves in terms of the national first and only later do they consider the broader implications. Nevertheless, the idea that the national ceases to be national and the international also ceases to be international is still persuasive in the way relationships and activities are constituted. This means that the national or local operates through what may be perceived as a symbiosis of the internal and external to the extent that maintaining the primary distinction (internal and external) is no longer an issue. What then remains are networks of human relationships operating without any regard of the physical locality of association. Castells (1996) expresses a similar conception in his discussion of globalisation.

While appreciating the ways through which cosmopolitan norms can enhance higher education governance on the African continent, it is important to note that the nature of cosmopolitan norms creates paradoxes and enormous challenges in the governance of higher education institutions on the African continent. This is the case with the particular nature of African circumstances (alluded to earlier in

this work) and the role universities are understood to play in the new age. Among other things, universities are considered to be constituted within specific nation borders and operate under the watchful eye of the nation-state in many instances, as the discussion in Chapter 2 clearly shows. Universities strive to achieve the objectives set by the different nation-states in which they are located. Nonetheless, I want to argue that universities are not confined to these spaces as they also have to remain universities within the broader frameworks of what universities are. In particular contexts, one can think of the role of universities in cultivating the future citizen. I think that given the consideration here, universities in particular African states would pay a huge amount of attention to developing the human capacity of the nation-states in which they are. But such an activity needs to be motivated and even challenged by the global demands of a cosmopolitan person who is capable of functioning beyond the particular nation-states in which one is framed. In this case, vibrant citizenship education within nation-states can meaningfully be achieved by concentrating on the development of a deliberative democratic person within African universities. This is the new space that universities in Africa have to occupy.

### **6.3.1 The feasibility and role of cosmopolitan norms in enhancing higher education systems on the African continent**

In the discussion above, I have outlined a normative conception of the nature of cosmopolitan values and further made an option for it by locating spaces within the university where cosmopolitanism can be made effective. In this section, I first analyse the possible source of cosmopolitan values within the conception of a university before moving on to consolidate the view that universities on the continent have the potential for being sites for the promotion of cosmopolitan values. Secondly, I consider how the cosmopolitan values, when positively acknowledged and promoted, further impact on the nature of the university business, in a further postulation of an African university that promotes imaginative action, hospitality and respect.

Most expositions on cosmopolitan norms basically start off from Kant's notion of a universal moral order and assume the position as proven. For instance,

Linklater (1999: 37) uses the Kantian foundation to argue for regard for others beyond the members of one's immediate communities. This boils down to regard for strangers. When one considers the role of the university, there is something within the nature of the university that is aligned to regard for others beyond one's immediate confines. In the first place, the university, as a centre of exploration and learning, depends on the universal understanding that human beings are capable of reaching newer levels of thinking every time they begin to engage with issues of knowledge. This understanding is similarly influenced by the idea that reason is objective and public and/or general. In other words, the capacity to think and be innovative is a human condition and is not a special privilege of a particular race, tribe, nation or class of people. Naturally, universities cannot promote ethnicity or favour certain privileged groups at the expense of those who reasonably qualify to study at the university.

On the other hand, Readings' (1996) exploration of the nature of the university fundamentally becomes a cosmopolitan perspective, particularly when one thinks of the university as the centre of reason and excellence. Although reason and excellence can only be traced or tied to a particular time and space, the natures of reason and excellence are not confined to time and space. In other words, standards of reason and norms of excellence are borderless despite the fact that particular nation-states may adopt different levels of checking reason and excellence in their institutions. This implies that universities, by their mandate of promoting reason and excellence in various fields of life, operate in a cosmopolitan frame.

Furthermore, in many cases the university's core agenda is centred on the development of the human being and its race. Although the human being can meaningfully be developed within certain frames of cultural thinking, the consideration of every human being as a 'thinking self', as Descartes coined it, becomes the centre of the university's belief that knowledge can be cultivated and promoted in human beings. Universities today stand out because of their predominant association with reason (pure or practical). One can also consider what universities are in relation to ideas of the university as the soul of every

nation. This Platonic infusion attempts to depict the nature of the university as locally situated and universally framed. The university becomes the central nerve in the life of a nation.

Can universities in Africa live up to their cosmopolitan expectation? If they can, are they not shaking of the shackles of their own local confinements or the national obligations? When one begins to consider ways through which a university can live with its cosmopolitan mandate, it is possible to be bogged down by the historicity of the university. In this regard, there is a temptation to think that the cosmopolitan mandate is a pollution of the mission of the university and the particular mission of universities in Africa. I think that such conclusions are unnecessary regarding the university, even if one is given a full account of the conditions in which African universities operate.

Although nation-states in Africa understand the university as their main route of cultivating nationalism and the core for creating the workforce, universities are mandated to produce citizens who can fit into the local or national force. But at the same time, universities also have a duty to create citizens who are globally mindful and competitive. This is the mandate to create global citizens. But for such citizens to be globally mindful and competitive, it is not only their economic and managerial skills that need to be developed. These citizens also need to be imbued with the requisite qualities and capacities if they are to live a critical and meaning life project. Due to the polarisation of existence that has overtaken the human race in terms of the 'haves' and 'have-nots', the special qualities that need to be cultivated in citizens need to be in line with the current plurality of values in multicultural settings. One way of reaching this point is for universities to teach students what it means to be on the peripheral side of life and experience how life is for others who are different. In mind I have a case in mind where students would want university education irrespective of whether they come from urban or rural places, but after graduation, there is an inclination to prefer the urban settings for a workplace. While this particularly has to do with personal choice, I argue for a negotiation or a balance of this personal choice

with the overall good of society. Promoting the good of society can happen in both the urban and rural settings.

The conditions under which universities in Africa operate require that students and lecturers practice imaginative action and compassionate action as part of paying respect to each other. The ideals of imaginative action and compassionate action are not unique to forms of life on the African continent. Although people naturally struggle to resolve the differences between cosmopolitan norms with different and unique legal, historical and cultural traditions and memories of people, Benhabib's (2006: 70) proposal that people must respect, encourage and initiate multiple processes of democratic reiterations is one solution. The idea of democratic reiterations signifies adoption of the democratic principles and constant self-reminder and critique of one's own forms of democratic life as a way of developing better forms of democratic conversation. It is only within these democratic reiterations that the fundamental principles and processes of society are re-posed, re-signified and re-appropriated into a new body of knowledge and beliefs through the urgency of all people concerned, which are both the majority and minority groups (Benhabib, 2006: 73). Cosmopolitanism and its norms thus embrace a phase of new meaning making, signification and re-articulation.

On the other hand, Hutchings (1999: 17–18) proposes that in circumstances of difference and diversion as those articulated by Benhabib and others, one should try to draw on what is universally applicable from the distinct forms of life. In other words, whereas politics is founded within the particular ways of organising society that are practice-based, a cosmopolitan perspective looks for moral foundations for the practice. This is particularly due to the nature of being human, which Hutchings (1999:17) says is centred on two distinct orders or natures although they operate together. On the one hand is the natural order that determines human life in relation to its bodily or physical requirements. On the other hand is the moral order that strives to go beyond the embodiment of human life in search of the universally binding principles.

One criticism that clearly comes up in relation to the moral order is the assumptions that make human beings capable of being moral. Despite the problems evoked by such assumptions, the moral dimension in human life cannot be ruled out. It is in this regard that a cosmopolitan perspective appears to remain aloof to the practicalities of human life although reason, *per se*, cannot be separated from the life forms at the same time. But due to the nature of reason, there is a certain universality attached to them. A cosmopolitan perspective is one that is unprejudiced by parochial loyalties and as such gains specific forms of authority transcending the local boundaries of authority. This is more the case because the conception of the cosmopolitan perspective is one that requires one to cultivate a critical mind that is capable of exercising itself above the parochial interests, one that can manage to be above the local in self-reflection.

A cosmopolitan perspective of higher education systems cannot meaningfully develop future citizens if it fails to cultivate critical inquiry by students. The goal towards developing critical inquiry demands that the particular disciplines that make up the knowledge body transmitted by the university need to be infused with a philosophical perspective. For instance, educating for the future requires that disciplines such as the (natural) sciences, engineering and others similarly located should not only be interested in producing experts in these fields, such as physicists, mathematicians, astronauts and engineers, but also in producing citizens who are capable of manoeuvring in a complex and dynamic world. Commenting on Kant's works, Hutchings (1999: 17) recommends the teaching of philosophical studies to all future citizens. It is hoped that such an approach in developing future citizens would create individuals who will not be bound by the identification with purely individual or national interest but who will be governed by the ideals of reason as an end within a kingdom of ends.

In other words, a philosophical perspective on life and the art of making critical judgements in the different fields that people specialise in necessarily involves a cosmopolitan take. I do agree that Hitchings' interpretation of the Kantian cosmopolitan perspective puts an obligation on universities in Africa and the world at large to shift their focus towards developing cosmopolitan citizens who

can manage to handle the local demands as well as the international demands with a touch of reason. In other contexts scholars even propose the teaching of thinking and critical thinking skills right from primary school (see Hand & Winstanley, 2008).

Stevenson (2003: 41) adds that cosmopolitanism in contemporary democracies requires the creation of institutions that enable the voice of the individual to be heard irrespective of its local resonance and also irrespective of whether it is between states or within a state. In this regard, cosmopolitan values are conceived to be the major agents of change. Hence, citizens including those involved in university teaching and research need to be re-educated in such a way that they can manage the negotiation of the self in relation to others in the different spaces that they are engaged in. This draws the cosmopolitan values to a healthy respect of others for what they are and not what one would gain by such association.

What I have elaborated above is very close to Benhabib's cosmopolitan value of friendship. In the idea of cosmopolitanism, no institution or society or life is considered as completely self-sustaining. Stevenson (2003: 43) argues that people's personal lives are less regulated by norms and hierarchies than ever before. Although this regulation can mean an increase in social inequalities, it also implies that there are possibilities for freedom and creativity. With regard to social dynamics within university spaces in Africa, it means that there is a need for intercultural or intergroup dialogue and the opening up of different academic spaces to become public spaces that can create inclusive forms of dialogue. If this is to take place within the life of the university in Africa, it would require that the recognition of difference, respect and cultural identity be taken seriously because "cosmopolitan politics requires a dialogic view of the self. As the social world loses its capacity, once and for all, to fix moral hierarchies through tradition, this opens the cosmos to the difference of others" (Stevenson, 2003: 62).



When these ideals of cosmopolitanism are actively promoted in the spaces of the university, the practice enables the universities to develop characters that are capable of viewing themselves from the generalised attitudes and perceptions of other people. In view of the ideas of Dwyer (2004) and Beck (2007) that I have discussed above, the cosmopolitan perspective becomes a compelling case for consideration in the way higher education institutions are managed on the African continent. For instance, Beck (2007: 170–171) provides several reasons why a cosmopolitan perspective is compelling. One of these is the situation of unjustifiable inequalities between countries and within countries. If such social and economic or political constraints were to be adequately tackled for the upliftment of the human condition, nation-state orientations would not deal with these problems adequately. Higher education systems stand a better chance because of their capacity to rise above the nation-state. Similarly, a university programme that is only focussed on addressing the local needs of people cannot go far in its own agenda.

In so far as norms of equality are locally defined, only little progress can be achieved in terms of reducing inequalities because such a conception of equality lacks cross-reference with neighbouring countries and systems. By implication, this lack of cosmopolitan norms would also pose enormous challenges for other social delivery systems, such as (public) higher education, and concomitant notions of justice that a society will have. The main claim I am making here is that cosmopolitan norms, when favourably developed within the university system, have a capacity to improve people's sense of justice and their consequent forms of life. In this regard, universities can be considered as places for the creation of empowerment. Similarly, transformation of institutions in terms of global expectations would become difficult in cases where the nation-state is the predominant basis for critical analysis in university discourse. This is so because the locally based forms of life become highly valuable only because they emanate from experience, but this does not imply that they are valuable for creating a future nation within the contemporary cosmopolitan challenges.

### 6.3.2 The centrality of hospitality and respect and an exclusion of love and care as cosmopolitan values

The neo-Kantian perspective that Benhabib (2006) uses as a way of achieving the ends of cosmopolitan norms can be achieved through the ideas of hospitality and respect for persons. Kant advocates that in human interactions, persons should treat each other not merely as means but also as ends. In this regard, respect for persons can be on the basis of the person's own good and not for what one would benefit from him or her. Haydon (2006) further explores the implications of the idea of promoting respect for persons and cultures as a ground for global citizenship, among other things. Haydon (2006: 459) argues that *friendship* is an underlying attitude that human beings need to have in relation to their fellow humans. But the promotion of citizenship, which Haydon (2006) uses as a foundation for cosmopolitanism, gives in to many varied conceptions of how different peoples conceive the idea of citizenship and who they include or exclude as members within particular frames of citizenship. The general promotion of citizenship norms can be misleading because it apparently exonerates inhuman treatment of 'non-citizens' within particular contexts.

It is mainly in relation to notions of *friendship* and *respect for other persons* within conceptions of citizenship that can give one a better reading of cosmopolitanism. In this regard, Haydon (2006) gives the example of respect for different cultural contexts as a condition for fulfilling the attitude of respect. Understanding of different cultural contexts enables one to focus on individual cultures as entities in their own right that need respect. The focus is put on the fact that human beings live and interact through different cultural perspectives. As such, the respect in question is not necessarily aimed at a particular culture as such but at respecting different cultural contexts within which human beings operate. This condition is a seedbed for cultivating friendship. Through such a perspective, the individual cultures will also be respected. Quoting from Raz, Haydon further argues that "respect is neither an emotion, nor a feeling and nor a belief. Respecting other people is a way of treating them" (Haydon, 2006: 459).

Respect is grounded in the actions of people towards each other. In this regard, Haydon (2006) does not only treat respect as an attitude but also as a virtue, just as friendship is. Higher education systems on the African continent can engender respect by taking the views of students, staff and other stakeholders into systematic controversy. Respecting others implies treating them as rational beings and hence expecting that the views that people express in a teaching forum be considered on merit and not the status of the persons expressing the views. Given that the idea of respect has been mainly promoted in order to achieve the ends of *friendship* as Nussbaum suggests, aspects befitting the notion of cosmopolitan respect cannot be detrimental to friendship itself. Expecting reasons and asking for reasons is just a human moral obligation that universities on the African continent can enhance in advancing the ends of society in Africa. In this case, attitudes of hatred, xenophobia and other negative feelings towards others are detrimental to friendship and inimical to the idea of respect as much as ideals of ‘love’ and ‘care’ that do not live up to the demands of ‘universal respect for humanity’ undermine cosmopolitan values (Haydon, 2006).

The nuanced argument from Haydon (2006) makes a case for the exclusion of love and care within the frames of universal respect. A number of reasons are provided for this move. In the first case, love seems to operate within realms of individual contact and it tends to fade away with distance. One may also want to consider this as the natural condition of love as ‘love at first sight’. A defence for love as a way of promoting respect can equally promote parochialism or sectarianism. On the other hand, the idea of care faces similar difficulties in the sense that it falls within interpersonal contexts and the conditions within which love and care can be exercised may not necessarily create a sense of shared belonging or shared sense of fate across borders (Haydon, 2006: 461–462).

Having considered the above, one can say that the notion of respect has a stable standing only when conceived from the neo-Kantian frames of doing to others what one would not want done to oneself, which eventually leads to the conception of human beings as living in a community of ends (Haydon, 2006: 463). Hence, one can respect someone or something independently of how the

person or thing affects one's relationships or feelings towards certain things. This observation on the notion of respect calls for a recognition of persons or things merely as *objects of respect*. On the other hand, the idea that people share a life in a community of ends was later picked by Rawls (1971), in a framework of a just society, to explain the fundamental human desire to live in a fair system of cooperation among equals, away from considerations of favouritism. In this regard, citizens see themselves as sharing the same world and caught up in the same structures of power and politics (Haydon, 2006: 463).

Adopting the notion and practice of respect for persons as simply objects of respect demands a number of turning points in human practice and the organisation of higher education systems on the African continent. For example, it is not possible to pass judgement on the lives of others people while one is stuck in one's own perspectives. Similarly, one cannot make a fair assessment of the different forms of life and the different circumstances people find themselves in without at least understanding and sharing their experiences, in some way. Understanding the other implies trying to see reality from the other's point of view or standing in the others' shoes.

While the attempt to see reality from the point of view of the other can imply that individual differences are taken into consideration, this does not mean respect is a kind of blind obedience to the other. One has to consider how one's speech and action would be understood in the world of the other, as much as the other would also have to take into consideration how his or her actions and speech would be understood in one's own world. In this sense respect becomes dialogic. Also at the heart of the notion of respect for the other is a concession that critiquing the other for what the other is and being open about it ensures that the other is not respected blindly. From these ideas, it is clear that if one claims that "respect" is one's reason for not taking the other person into systemic controversy, then one is actually disrespecting what personhood entails in the other.

Respect for persons is itself grounded in respect for the rational and moral capacities that distinguish persons from other entities; and the individual

possibility of developing those capacities is grounded in a context that necessarily transcends the individual (Haydon, 2006: 469).

This notion shifts from many implications that consider valuing the other for utilitarian purposes. It insists on seeing an intrinsic goodness in the other beyond one's local confinements, a cosmopolitan other.

#### **6.4 Concluding remarks**

This chapter has outlined central ideas that comprise a cosmopolitan perspective. Through this explanation I have also argued for the place of higher education systems in formulating cosmopolitan norms. Furthermore, I have argued that higher education institutions are the best possible places on the continent where cosmopolitan values can be nurtured and further promoted in society through the cultivation of appropriate civic virtues in students. This means that higher education systems should focus not just on the economic benefits of the system but also on the important civic role of the university as a central function where the autonomy of the university can be enhanced. Doing this will enable higher education systems on the African continent not fall victims of the impact of neoliberalism and globalisation. But at the same time higher education institutions would also manage prepare future citizens who can navigate between the local and the international.

Taking the above position seriously has a number of implications for the way higher education is to be governed and conducted and the extent to which higher education considers intercultural aspects as integral to its functions. Higher education systems on the African continent are expected to recognise and promote different cultural contexts and not only privilege a few, if their mandate to cultivate respect is to succeed. Through this promotion, it is urged that culture will become a central element at the foundation of human life and not an element that has to be deconstructed. The cultural context is the milieu in which human beings find meaning and value. It is through the same cultural context that people discover new meanings of autonomy. As such overlooking this context in the

structuring and governance patterns of higher education would only be detrimental to the human life higher education claims to support and promote, as much as undermining its own autonomy. On the other hand, respecting different cultural contexts does not in itself mean that everything goes, as value pluralism seems to be claiming. The position of value pluralism stereotypes cultures and is antithetical to the claims of cosmopolitan values, let alone of deliberative autonomy.

If the cosmopolitan norms are to be enhanced in higher education through democratic deliberative processes, it is important that cultural respect be equally recognised. In many circumstances, celebration of diversity seems to steal away or blur the importance of respecting inherent differences among people. In many cases, higher education systems have tended to promote the majority or superior culture over and above minority cultures. Given my line of argument in this chapter, it can be concluded that no celebration of people's diversity would be meaningful if the texture of the diversity is not properly recognised. Recognising this texture implies seeing why others are different and what makes them different. It goes to the extent of evaluating the grounds for difference which the different / other would understand as unique to itself and worth of recognition. Higher education institutions on the African continent cannot abrogate their duty towards the promotion of cosmopolitan values in which respect for the other is central.

The task of making cosmopolitanism a reality is not foreign to the nature and functions of the African university, *per se*. This being the case, the promotion of friendship and respect cannot be adequately carried out outside the frames of democratic deliberation. In fact, democratic deliberation provides the conditions within which respect can be effective. As a member of a democratic society, one needs to be willing to listen to the ideas of others and to their reasons for what they think is true and of value to them. But one would not be doing them justice if one just listens and nods one's head at their ideas without taking their ideas and reasons into systematic controversy.

With regard to respecting the integrity of others, Beck (2006: 49) mentions one of the challenges facing a cosmopolitan perspective. When people begin to take cosmopolitanism for what it is and expects of them, they realise that cosmopolitanism demands that they have universal procedures or norms that should be upheld at all cost. These norms also have to do with instilling the notion of universal justice. Universal justice requires that people be fair across the board. Nevertheless, cosmopolitanism becomes challenged in the process of giving equal recognition to the voice and rights of others when doing so means giving way to forces that are inimical to the ends of a just society. Beck highlights that these inimical forces are actually predators of cosmopolitan norms. In this case, the cosmopolitan norms seem to allow the use of force against the rights of others if such rights are conceived to be detrimental to the ends of a just society. At the end, what makes cosmopolitan norms stand out is not what they aim at but what they aim to avoid at all cost (Beck, 2006: 59). In other words, cosmopolitan norms are intended to avoid annihilation of others and their cultures. Such a perspective puts a special responsibility on public institutions, such as higher education institutions on the African continent, not to be agents of conflict, ethnic cleansing, xenophobia and other evils to society.

Some of the issues I have raised above particularly point to the difficulties of conducting education in a cosmopolitan world and /or a world that is denied being cosmopolitan, as could be seen in a number of African universities. One thing that the cosmopolitan perspective is challenging in education in general and in higher education in this particular case is people's capability to pose and reflect on the questions, What is education to us? What does higher education mean to us in our age? I have discussed how cosmopolitanism as a perspective can influence one's perceptions of the other, especially the distant other. I hold that through the norms of respect of the other for what the other is and through friendship, universities can begin to create a cosmopolitan citizen capable of facing the world with its multiple challenges.

Biesta (2006: 147–149) answers this challenge for higher education as he proposes that what education can offer best is to create a world where individuals

share their worldly responsibilities, balanced between engagement and openness. According to Biesta (2006: 148), the challenge confronting higher education on the African continent is the “responsibility (to prepare) for what is to come, without knowledge of what is to come”. Higher education systems should manage to prepare future generations for what is to come without restricting the boundaries of what is to come because people have no knowledge of what is to come. This is where higher education has the responsibility to educate people for openness. Biesta’s (2006) ideas propose a redirection in the way higher education is conceived and conducted. While some may be preoccupied with preparing students for global economic competitiveness, Biesta’s (2006) understanding is that at the same time people cannot foretell the nature of future economic competitiveness. Hence their mandate lies in preparing future generations to take responsibility for the world in openness. Such openness, although influenced by local demands and circumstances, is not controlled by them. Higher education only does itself a favour by cultivating appropriate virtues and capabilities in students, which allow students to engage with their world in an open and friendly manner.



## **CHAPTER 7**

### **THE CIVIC ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES: SOME CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS**

#### **7.1 The civic role of African universities**

In this dissertation, I have argued that liberal autonomy is relevant to African higher education governance systems on the grounds that no university can meaningfully perform its mandate in any society if its system does not seem to favour rationality and promote objectivity among its students, staff and surrounding affiliates. In my view, a liberal conception of autonomy is also constituted by the capacity of higher education systems to promote critical thinking, authenticity and responsibility within one's local environment. This position shifts the liberal conception to a liberal communitarian position but at the same time avoids the dangers of becoming another grand narrative. The discussion in Chapter 4, Section 4.5.7 has raised the point that every education system, higher education or not, inherently aims to achieve some good both in individuals and in society in general. No system would be called an education system if it promotes perversion of the values that people who subscribe to the system have. The direct opposite of education is of course indoctrination, while a weaker form of education would be the route of technical education. I have not dwelt on the latter because they are not the focus of this dissertation. Technical education in itself does not provide enough grounds for the cultivation of character, especially one that is aligned to cosmopolitan values.

One other crucial element of liberal autonomy, which in my view acts as a seedbed for the civic role of the university, is the idea of community, whether community may be considered from the point of view of an encumbered self or an unencumbered self. In this discussion I have made a preferential option for a position of liberal autonomy that is rooted in and informed by the self-understanding of one's circumstances. In this regard, I have argued that university or institutional autonomy and academic freedom in Africa need to be understood within the context of the social, historical, economic, political and

cultural factors that inform the purposes of higher education governance in Africa. Truly, these claims promote a communitarian liberal conception of autonomy within African higher education system. The liberal communitarian position is the main position that informs me of the possible civic role of higher education in Africa within a cosmopolitan perspective. Within the liberal communitarian understanding of autonomy, universities can manage to negotiate between their local demands and needs while at the same time paying adequate attention to what makes a university be what it is. The liberal communitarian position also has better chances of mitigating the negative influences of both neoliberalism and globalisation on higher education institutions on the African continent.

African universities can move towards achieving their cosmopolitan goals by maintaining universities as public spaces engaging in a critical and reflective manner in the life of society, its politics as well as its economics. Universities can do this by incorporating into the various disciplines critical thinking skills and other necessary rational dispositions. My usage of the views of Gutmann and Thompson (2004) has shown that nations cannot be democratic if schools are not any way close to promoting democratic deliberation. I have argued further that although Gutmann and Thompson (2004) seem to have their focus on schools in general, a country's education system is a manifestation of the kind of teachers in the schools and that the teachers are themselves products of their own training. This connection put enormous obligations on the university system in so far as developing citizenship virtues is concerned.

Universities on the African continent conduct their business in environments that are riddled with a number of inequalities due to colonialism, tribal politics and many other social ills. Despite these conditions, universities world-wide are also known for their potential to create economic gaps in societies between those who have a university education and those who did not make it. This double challenge puts the African university that aims at achieving cosmopolitan justice in a difficult position. One way of resolving this paradox is for the university to first acknowledge its challenges and the relevant characteristics of life within which it

is operating. The university in Africa needs to engage in an honest interrogation of its circumstances and the possible ways through which it can ameliorate the conditions of inequality and injustice in society. Such a path can be achieved by taking all affected parties on board where the university through its functions of teaching and research takes the problems into systematic controversy using deliberation. Poverty, conflict and armed struggle can be minimised through universities' abilities to mediate between people's reflexive thoughts, thereby generating inclusive solutions to the problems.

## **7.2 A synopsis of the project, its foundations and the researcher's position**

The questions that have been raised through this thesis were formed after a period of entertaining simplistic conceptions about the operations of autonomy and its relationship to higher education governance. At the heart of these simplistic conceptions was the view, which I held rather uncritically, that autonomy exists in split opposites, that a situation is autonomous or not simply based on whether it is determined or not. This position leans heavily on liberal individualism. In its simplistic version, to a large extent ascribable to the influence of some modern philosophers such as Spinoza, Nozick and many more, this position does not recognise autonomy in conditions that are determined, irrespective of the forms of determinism. I also thought that this simple equation between freedom and lack of external influence should apply in cases at all times. When I began reflecting on higher education practices, I was taken aback by the realisation that the version of autonomy I was relying on was very simplistic and depended on problematic assumptions. I assumed that an autonomous higher education institution should have the freedom to teach whomsoever it wants to teach in whatever way it chooses, as well as the freedom to choose whom to hire, without regard of external influence and circumstances. Some academics today still propose this format of understanding academic freedom and institutional autonomy. An examination of forms of the encumbered self and situated autonomy led me to a re-examination of some of the positions I had assumed as philosophical fact and inevitable.

In this re-examination, I began to ask myself, Is it possible for a public system to claim autonomy, in full awareness of its public role? Is it possible for a university to claim autonomy when it is controlled by the state? Does the claim to live and organise life and institutions according to the local demands, as is the case with many African institutions, mean that such institutions have become communitarian and that they have necessarily juxtaposed themselves against liberalism and that they are not autonomous? I came to the conclusion that some of the views I held regarding autonomy and the activities of the university and what it meant to be communitarian in outlook were too simplistic. This personal repositioning of understanding engendered the quest to understand the different forms of autonomy and the need to investigate whether liberal conceptions of autonomy are relevant in governance arrangements of higher education systems on the African continent and the extent to which such liberal conceptions can enhance governance arrangements in Africa's higher education systems.

The above question, which has become central to this work, examines two key issues. On the one hand I have scrutinised the liberal tradition and analysed the different strains of liberalism. Notably, my discussion has centred on distinguishing between conceptions of autonomy that tilt towards a negative liberty from those that are prone to positive liberty. I have made a preferential option for positive conceptions of autonomy and defended the conception of a situated self as a preferred and meaningful understanding of an autonomous self. Inevitably this discourse has led my thinking to be grounded on a liberal communitarian philosophical position. Within this position, I discovered a route that still positions liberal conceptions of autonomy to be relevant to higher education governance on the African continent due particularly to the challenges facing African higher education systems. On the other hand, I have examined how different higher education systems are governed on the African continent. I have done this through a purposive sampling of nine countries and examined the higher education systems, which also happen to be public. In almost all the cases, there are clear claims indicating that the systems are autonomous by people who have done some empirical studies on the systems. But given the nature of this exercise, my first task, among others, has been to take such claims to systematic

controversy. According to this analysis, most of the claims of autonomy amount to constitutional regulation or legislation of the university by the state as autonomous institutions. In addition, I have also discussed the fact that a number of these cases show instances of heavy state presence in the operations of higher education institutions. While one would be drawn to conclude that such cases reveal lack of autonomy, this dissertation argues that the presence of the state through funding and other mechanisms is not a sufficient indicator for lack of autonomy. There is more involved in assessing whether a higher education institution is autonomous than a simple stratification of governance arrangements. The processes through which the state becomes involved in the running of the higher education system are crucial for any assessment of autonomy or lack thereof. Again, I have argued that conditioning higher education institutions to be responsive to the local demands of society does not *per se* amount to lack of academic freedom and institutional autonomy. I have argued for a deliberative engagement between all stakeholders in higher education in Africa as one of the conditions for an autonomous institution.

In concluding the examination of governance arrangements on the African continent, I have argued that these arrangements show more signs of being nonliberal. This is exemplified by the fact that in some cases there is no distinction between the state and the higher education sector, as is the case in Egypt. While most state presidents are at the same time chancellors of the higher education system, their chancellorship is not only titular but affect appointments and policy directions in the higher education systems itself. Such occurrence become indicative of a lack of deliberative engagement between stakeholders and is likely to lead to institutions of higher learning becoming less autonomous. In cases where co-operative governance is in place, there is a conception that government, the university and society are equal partners in the governance of the higher education system. The only problem that exists in these cases is that some people think, and rightly so, that the way government handles issues relating to the higher education sector goes beyond equal partnership and stakeholderhood and gravitates towards government control. This form of control is viewed as the main source for the erosion of the basis for university autonomy

and academic freedom (Jansen, 2004: 4) because the changes taking place both in the legislative concept and the practice of higher education constitute a “gradual but systematic erosion of historical standards of autonomy that were ingrained within the institutional fabric of universities” (Jansen, 2004: 5).

The belief that governance of the higher education sector on the African continent is far from being liberal becomes justified by the tendency to operate the higher education sector as part of state machinery. In so far as the voice of the state carries more weight than the voices of other stakeholders in the governance structures, such arrangements can be regarded as nonliberal and merely tools of political engineering. The fact that appointments are made on political and not professional grounds, as has been reported to be the case in Egypt and Zimbabwe, and the fact that tertiary education is still considered as part of a national project of self-development and self-realisation, as Sawyer (1994:25) shows, points to the fact that states do not want to allow the higher education sector to determine its own course of life (to be autonomous). This is so despite the states’ claims that their higher education systems are autonomous merely by virtue of their legislative frameworks. Such a condition can only indicate smaller levels of autonomy rather than full-blown autonomous practices. Similarly, such instances may have few elements of the constitute elements of liberal autonomy as discussed earlier in this dissertation.

The queue from an original conception of higher education governance and autonomy has led me to the examination of the development of higher education systems in places like Germany, England and the United States in order to discover common elements regarding the governance of these institutions. By way of conclusion, I have made the point that no one system of higher education can claim to have one determining pattern in so far as reason, culture and excellence are concerned. A system becomes known as favouring the cultural pattern when it shows that more of its characteristics lean towards and emphasise the university as the place for the recreation of culture. I have argued that such a claim does not in any way imply that the same system may not have elements that promote the domination of reason or values of excellence. Similarly,

questions of university autonomy will also have to be interpreted differently given that the different systems are likely to understand autonomy from their unique and privileged positions.

Using Readings (1996) I have highlighted possible conceptions of autonomy and their ramifications for autonomy. The idea of the University of Excellence is closely connected with ideas of neo-liberalism and globalisation. I have used this model to argue that globalisation and neo-liberalism have irretrievably pushed the identity of the university into a corporate identity (Considine & Marginson, 2000: 41). This discussion connects issues of globalisation, neo-liberalism, cosmopolitanism and higher education discourse.

On autonomy, I have argued that there are various claims to autonomy made by each system, which are so diverse that no single picture of autonomy can be constructed, and that the claims are far from meaning the same thing. My discussion on autonomy is influenced by the quest to find forms of autonomy that speak more to the African experiences of higher education than the general conceptions of autonomy that one can find in the history of philosophy. Nevertheless, such a quest cannot overlook the historical shapes that the concept has taken. My examination of Skinner's (1998) distinctions between the liberty of the ancients and that of the moderns rests on this reason.

The dominant picture I have tried to provide on the issue of autonomy indicates that autonomy or liberty can be understood either as a factor of the group or of the individual. As a factor of the group, notions of liberty exist indistinct of the communities of practice. Once a society is considered free, individuals living within it are also considered free and their freedom is not regarded as prior to that of the community but only as a factor of the community. This view inherently disregards the recognition of individuality and the making of meaning that individuals attach to life. One cannot dismiss the fact that liberty primarily belongs to individuals. Nevertheless, I have tended to prefer the second option, which upholds individual liberty in the sense of a living autonomous self that is at the same time encumbered in its life circumstances. Despite the lack of a

homogenous position in this line of thought, I maintain that when autonomy is considered as part of the whole life of a person or corporate body, the conception is better positioned to promote the good for which the person or body exists. It is in this recognition of the situatedness of being that the concept of a deliberative process of engagement can also be sustained.

I have personally attached much importance to questions of autonomy per se. At the back of my mind is a conviction that clarity on conceptions of autonomy assists in understanding educational issues because education and autonomy are internally linked. Gutmann and Thompson (2004: 35) argue that the public schooling system in any democracy is appropriately placed to prepare future free and equal citizens. By implication, this thinking would mean that the educational discourse finds its proper place within the frames of autonomy, among other things. Hence Gutmann and Thompson (2004) also argue that if there is no deliberation in public schools, it is less likely that this would exist in other institutions. By aiming at developing the individual's capacity to think and form opinions of one's own, among other things, education aims at developing people's autonomy. This is more the reason I consider analysing the type of relationship needed between education and autonomy, therefore transferring such discourse to implications for higher education and African higher education systems in particular. This confirms Kirk's (1955: 16–17) position, in reference to the life of the university in its beginnings, that "the academy possessed freedom unknown to other bodies and persons because the philosopher, the scholar, and the student were looked upon as men consecrated to the service of truth; and that truth was not simply a purposeless groping after miscellaneous information, but a wisdom to be obtained, however imperfectly, from a teleological search".

In the subsequent chapters, I have argued that the challenges facing higher education institutions on the African continent cannot be considered as complete if one does not at the same time consider how the mandate of the public university to creating future citizens can be carried out efficiently given that the world no more operates in segmented units in so far as the knowledge economy



is concerned. I have noted that neo-liberalism and globalisation have become the major characteristics of the corporate world today. Despite the fact that these major characteristics both have external origins to Africa, they interlace in important ways. Neo-liberalism can be seen as global just as globalisation can be seen as neo-liberal. Underlying both of these ideologies is a conception of liberty that promotes the individual and activities linked to the promotion of the individual. When neo-liberalism and globalisation are considered from the way they influence discourse and governance approaches in African higher education systems, the African universities have to negotiate – or struggle – with both in their reconfigurations as well as transformation towards ‘localised’ relevance and ‘globalised’ recognition and competence. This is because what is considered African is in many ways community oriented.

I have further noted that because of differential development paces between Africa, generally regarded as the third world, and many countries of the northern hemisphere, generally regarded as the first world, neo-liberalism and globalisation, when applied to higher education governance on the Africa continent, force a compromise between internationalisation and localisation. But in their efforts to develop societies and their own institutions, higher education systems on the African continent bargain between the need for international recognition and relevance on the one hand and the need to remain relevant to the local needs on the other hand. In furthering this argument, I have looked at Delanty (2004), who argues that the different conceptions of the university are relational. This position entails a fundamental critique of what constitutes modernity and the role of the university as a key institution in modernity. In this conception, modernity is not an end to reason and culture but rather serves as a progressive extension of different forms of communication into all spheres of society (Delanty, 2004: 244–245). Delanty does not think that the corporate identity of the university replaces other identities of the university such as the ideal of reason and culture. As such academic freedom can exist alongside market freedom as the university negotiates its course of life, and the presence of neo-liberal practices in the university does not mean the end of the University of Reason. Such an understanding squarely places the identity of any university within the lived

experiences and practices of the communities the university operates in. Similarly, conceptions and practices of institutional autonomy and academic freedom can only make sense within a liberal communitarian perspective.

In Chapter 6 I have discussed cosmopolitan citizenship and the role of higher education, particularly the extent to which the cosmopolitan norm can assist in reshaping higher education autonomy discourse on the African continent. The discussion on cosmopolitanism has started with an initial distinction with regard to the concept of globalisation. In this case I understand globalisation as the broadening of the economic market to operate at a global or worldwide level. On the other hand, I have used cosmopolitanism mainly in the way Benhabib (2006) and Appiah (2006) use it. These scholars use the idea of cosmopolitanism to represent the broadening of an outlook that promotes the connection of human beings irrespective of their national or societal boundaries. Cosmopolitanism concentrates on “what is human in humanity” (Appiah, 2006: 134). In this case all human beings are primarily conceived as citizens of the world.

The conception of people as citizens of the world is centrally connected to the democratic theory. In this dissertation I have shown my inclination towards a deliberative model of democracy. Such a model is seen to operate alongside a cosmopolitan perspective if considered from the angle of Benhabib’s discursive community rather than John Rawls’ basic just society. Cosmopolitanism affirms the connection of human beings in their skills, imagination, as well as their common potential. This conception of a cosmopolitan person is the main leeway for cosmopolitan values in African higher education systems as well as other systems.

Cosmopolitanism designates matters relating to both identity and responsibility (Brock & Brighouse, 2005: 2–3). At the level of identity, cosmopolitanism indicates that human existence or life is influenced by different cultures. In other words, it is not possible to find uniquely homogenous aspects of life in different countries. Forms of life that one finds in one place, although they may have features particular to the local environment in which they are found, are not

purely influenced by the local environment. At another level, the level of responsibility, cosmopolitanism believes that individual human lives are focussed outwardly and are concerned about obligations that are not only local and obvious but relate to the distant other as well. A cosmopolitan perspective is interested in the obligations people have to others beyond the framework of friends and relatives and in a situation where nation-states no longer act as reference points for the different activities that people carry out and the demands that they make (Brock & Brighouse, 2005; Dwyer, 2004). This form of belonging creates a sense of inclusion for different groups of people as they make claims beyond the thresholds of their particular nationalities.

A take on the cosmopolitan norms leaves a number of implications for the governance of higher education institutions on the African continent. Among other things, higher education systems on the African continent are expected to recognise and promote different cultural contexts and not only privilege a few (see Haydon, 2006). If the cultural context is the milieu in which human beings find meaning and value, undermining this context in the structuring of higher education would itself be detrimental to the human life higher education claims to support and promote. Yet again the duty to promote different cultural contexts cannot be meaningful outside a deliberative democratic culture. This means that higher education systems on the African continent need to be modelled within the frames of deliberative democratic values and norms. Genuine deliberative processes have the capacity of building respect and recognition of differences between people with different backgrounds, which is normally the case in any higher education setting on the continent.

Cosmopolitan norms are better positioned in creating conditions of justice for all on the African continent. The patterns of higher education on the African continent that I have analysed in Chapter 2 point to a picture of higher education that carries along elements emanating from its colonial past, which in many ways has not fostered equality for all people. Two clear examples in this regard include the fragmented system of higher education on which co-operative governance is being built in South Africa. A number of the examples also show how political

influences such as the hiring and firing of high-ranking personnel on political grounds, the insufficient numbers of enrolment to offset the effects of underdevelopment and many more can tarnish the image higher education has on the continent. In view of these factors I have argued for a system of higher education governance that allows the university some freedom but one that manages to offer a critical examination of the lived circumstances of people and their worldview. This is the situated autonomy that carries elements of both liberalism and communitarians. This proposal for higher education autonomy on the continent is in tandem with Africa's experiences as well as giving space for universities to be globally competitive in the knowledge economy. Biesta (2006) summarises the cosmopolitan challenges for higher education by arguing that what education can offer best is to create a world where individuals share their worldly responsibilities, balanced between engagement and openness. Hence higher education on the African continent is endowed with a "responsibility for what is to come, without knowledge of what is to come" (Biesta, 2006: 148).

### **7.3 Some limitations of this study**

As I sit back and reflect on the process of writing this dissertation, I imagine academic challenges to the ideas I have about the nature and function of higher education on the African continent. Some of these challenges I have already met. In particular, I will endeavour to answer one possible challenge in this space: that the work is too idealistic or too theoretical for educational purposes, and if anything, just another grand narrative that can address Africa's problems.. Imagining this possible challenge takes me back to my chosen methodological framework. This work is an example of possible works open to students in the area of philosophy of education. Hence by its nature this work is not supposed to be empirical as some would envisage. The analysis of governance structures on the continent did not require special empirical investigation into such practices because a great deal of data is already available on how higher education governance is managed on the African continent and other continents. Hence the sampling of cases to closely examine has also been a purposive random sampling merely based on sufficient available material already recorded about a specific

higher education system. Secondly, I consider the fact that a philosophical analysis in the domains of critical inquiry, in which this work is rooted, would fit in any other case that one may think about. Any possible case – countries not included in the sample of countries and their higher education – would not necessarily create methodological and philosophical discomfort.

Thirdly, this dissertation does not propose another grand narrative that is insensitive to the needs of Africa and its higher education system. The proposition for the cultivation of a cosmopolitan citizenship is made in view of clear challenges to such a project. Some of the challenges include the idea that higher education discourse on the African continent is better off concentrating on regional networking and collaboration. While this move is good for the life of higher education, governance of universities does not need to restrict itself to preparing simply an African citizen who will fit and operate in an African society. Doing so would mean dividing Africa to social, geographical and political boundaries. Current society and the vision of members of different societies today are not confined to their geo-political boundaries. Such boundaries confine thoughts about selfhood to local ethnic belonging than belonging to the whole human race. It is on such grounds that irrespective of the negative effects of globalisation and neoliberalism on higher education systems in Africa, I still propose a move towards the cultivation of a cosmopolitan and deliberative citizen in higher education systems.

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