Editorial

Challenges facing higher education governance practices on the African continent

J. Divala
Faculty of Education
University of Stellenbosch
South Africa
e-mail: 14824159@sun.ac.za

Y. Waghid
Faculty of Education
University of Stellenbosch
South Africa
e-mail: yw@sun.ac.za

Abstract
In this article we argue that higher education institutions on the African continent are faced with a dilemma in their patterns of governance. This dilemma arises from particular conceptions and expectations of higher education, on the one hand, and the relationship between higher education and society, on the other hand. Higher education institutions on the continent, particularly public institutions, are in many ways put in a corner in having to choose between serving the public interest and fulfilling the core business of higher education. This position is further complicated by the demands of globalisation and neoliberalism. In view of these challenges, we state that the claims to higher education autonomy have become more complicated, hence making such claims can be more difficult to understand at face value. The article mainly uses an interpretive/critical philosophical approach towards higher education practices.

INTRODUCTION: GOVERNANCE AND HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEMS

There are many challenges facing higher education in Africa today. Sawyer (2004, 16–27), for example, provides a good resumé of these challenges. Some
of these challenges include problems faced by African universities in increasing their capacity and enrolment, and the new demands created by such over-extended capacity, as well as the demands from the larger society. We note that the increase in capacity and enrolment also brings about other problems, such new forms of social exclusion for the majority of people who cannot participate meaningfully in university life because of economic hardships (Sawyer 2004, 21–22). In many ways the challenges faced by higher education on the African continent can be regarded as a ramification of Africa’s political history as well as of the pace at which economic and social development are taking place. Against this background, we interrogate such challenges over and above the aspirations of higher education systems on the continent. In this article we examine the systemic conditions that challenge the governance systems of higher education on the African continent. The ultimate challenge that we perceive the higher education system on the continent faces is whether higher education systems can have the autonomy to do what they proclaim to be doing, that is, teaching, research and community engagement, according to their own mandates.

This leads us to an examination of instances of autonomous governance and the extent to which such governance needs to toe the liberal line. We do this through examining some pieces of legislation for different higher education systems and evaluating the sentiments of some scholars writing on these systems as well as their practices. Obviously this discussion can only do justice to the higher education systems if the conditions within which the systems function are also taken into account. While this exercise does not claim to deal exhaustively with all the conditions that determine governance patterns on the African continent, we intend to highlight the relevance of higher education systems on the continent gauged against a number of factors, such as the production of autonomous citizens who are capable of embracing deliberative democratic patterns of life in a globalised economy. This mandate in itself implies the establishment of justice for all. But can higher education systems on the African continent really live up to this challenge?

HIGHER EDUCATION AUTONOMY AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Over the years several contested meanings have been offered to what institutional autonomy and academic freedom mean in higher education. Terminologically speaking, institutional autonomy is the same thing as university autonomy. From one angle 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). Other perspectives consider this right to entail the right of the
university to determine for itself on academic grounds who may teach, what may be taught, how it shall be taught, and who may be admitted to study (Berkhout, De Klerk, Taylor, Van Wyk and Waghid 2005, 1). These two perspectives are not exhaustive of what university autonomy is. But to a large extent these positions convey the idea that there is a constitutive dependency between academic freedom and institutional autonomy in the sense that the practice of academic freedom is vested in an autonomous community of lecturers and students dedicated to the service of truth (Hall 2006).

We argue that Saunders’s (2005) re-conceptualisation of institutional autonomy and other similar conceptions are problematic, if one takes into account certain philosophical implications of such conceptions of higher education in Africa. The problems that Saunders’s (2005) conception raises 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 an existence of a self in isolation, or what others can simply prefer to call a ‘wonderland’.

Does the conception of an unencumbered self really represent the conditions in which human beings live and universities find themselves operating? We definitely think not. Higher education institutions on the African continent and elsewhere are heavily implicated in the fabric of human life and being-in-society, which can also be called being-with-others. But we first need to clarify what autonomy implies per se and also what autonomous living implies. We suggest that an institution determines its course of life in liaison with other factors or agents that the institution may come into contact with (Berkhout, De Klerk, Taylor, Van Wyk and Waghid 2005; Hall 2005). But this contestation implies that we should first develop a clear understanding of the characteristic aspects of (institutional) autonomy and academic freedom.

Institutional autonomy, as used in higher education discourse, is used synonymously with university autonomy and refers to the parameters within which a university as an institution may do or not do certain things or offer certain programmes (Wolpe, Singh and Reddy 1995, 119). As such, university autonomy deals with the relationship between the university and other stakeholders such as parents, the state and other public and private funding groups. In other words, university autonomy refers to its broader framework of operation. Ajayi, Goma and Johnson (1996, 176) also argue that university autonomy protects the corporate rights of self-regulation which the state confers in legislation upon a university as an institution.

Academic freedom, on the other hand, refers to the kinds of immunity which 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. 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 is justified because of its functional significance in the advancement of knowledge, which demands on the processes of seeking objective truth not being corrupted by ideologies and other divergent interests (Ajayi et al. 1996, 177). This thinking assumes that the 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 by other factors such as social, cultural and political conditions.

Wolpe, Singh and Reddy (1995, 119) stress that academic freedom relates to the internal organisation of teaching and learning within an institution. For instance, it may refer to how a subject already approved may be taught, from what orientation, with the content that 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 principles of institutional autonomy. But the authors are also quick to caution that such freedom is not unlimited in the sense of the academic being wholly free in terms of choice of subjects and research tools, and that infringement of the rights of others be avoided.

In general, the assumption is that autonomy is never absolute. This means that its realisation must be accountable with respect to the terms and conditions of the governance structures in practice. As such, this assumption will tend to shift the meaning(s) of autonomy in relation to the defining circumstances characterising the relationships of higher education with its stakeholders. This article shows that claims to autonomy made by different universities on the African continent do not always mean the same thing.

Before we can provide a conception of autonomy in the governance systems of higher education on the African continent, it is essential that we adopt a working definition and understanding of autonomy. We take this route as a gateway to the question of whether a liberal conception of autonomy is relevant, or the extent to which it can become relevant; whether Africa, in particular, requires a different conception of autonomy in the governance of higher education systems, given the predominant governance environment that is prevailing.

A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING AUTONOMY

Historically, the idea of liberty has been evolving for many centuries. But the prominence of philosophical debates over the relationship between conceptions of freedom/liberty and autonomy intensified and took shape in the Enlightenment period
with the works of people such as Immanuel Kant, for example. The Enlightenment is marked as the beginning of liberalism. What is central in liberalism is the strong belief in liberties, especially those of the individual person, as opposed to the dictates of society, church or other predominant institution.

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

On the other hand, Lovett (2006, 1880) argues that before the seventeenth century political liberty was not especially controversial, since the notion of liberty had an uncontested meaning. This was largely because individual political freedom during this period was not considered an important political value compared to the freedom of the state from foreign control or the arbitrary will of another (state). Liberty was 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 tyranny or an autocratic king or leader. A full characterisation of the concept of freedom among the ancients can also be found in Skinner (1998 5, 98), who largely challenges the assumption that ‘the freedom of citizens is only possible within free states’. This conception is dominant in the classical understanding of freedom, but we cannot go into detail here. Berlin (2005, 517) further explains that in the ancient world man was not free, nor did he claim freedom because this world assumed that life is one, and that the laws and governments covered the whole of it.

To date, general discussions on freedom or liberty today tend to be distinguished by Berlin’s (1958, in Goodin and Pettit 2006) initial characterisations of liberty as positive liberty and negative liberty. In general terms, the idea of negative liberty involves the absence of external constraint or control on the individual person. In many respects the concept of negative liberty as the ‘absence of external interference’ does not accurately represent the full human condition (Raz 1986, 247).

Positive liberty involves the individual person’s capacity for self-determination. This is the capacity to map the course of one’s life and events according to one’s freely chosen alternatives. Positive liberty is the core of the ideal of autonomy.
Berlin’s (1969) conception of positive liberty is crucial for our understanding of governance practices in higher education in Africa, because it goes beyond practical or material independence, among other things. 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 we find 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 become. But these goals can be realised meaningfully by working with a positive conception of liberty.

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. In this regard, one finds the inner space to express oneself. 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, as understood within the Kantian framework. Freedom as autonomy implies mastery over one’s inner conditions. In many ways, autonomy can be considered as a combination of personal and collective self-determination. Because of the nature of any discourse on autonomy – such as the prerequisites of individual rights, freedom of thought for individuals, limitations on power, especially of government and religion, the rule of law, the free exchange of ideas, a transparent system of government in which citizens freely participate and achieve their goals – democratic discourse has also been naturally associated with it.

Although liberalism and democracy are essentially connected through the importance both place on the liberty of individuals, the two are not equivalent terms. Liberalism per se puts an emphasis on equal citizen rights by law and an equal opportunity to pursue one’s chosen goals and to succeed in life. In this sense, liberalism makes a preferential option for forms of governance where the governed freely and willingly give their consent to be governed and to the conditions of that government. Liberalism essentially opts for democratic processes, because democratic rule is capable of providing the necessary checks and balances needed to protect the rights of citizens, while at the same time developing citizens’ capacity to live democratically. Hence for liberals democracy is not an end in itself, but an essential means to secure the liberty of individuals and to secure their individuality and diversity.

In recent thought, autonomy has come to be conceived as part of an agenda to make a clear distinction between private life and public life (Berlin 2005, 517). This distinction is absent in the concept of the ‘liberty of the ancients’, as shown by Skinner (1998), because during this period liberty is measured by the liberty of group,
so much so that individuals could claim a condition of liberty in circumstances that were unfree as a whole. The modern understanding of liberty implies that human life should have a certain space where the public cannot encroach, where the individual self is left to his or her own devices to do as they pleases, provided one’s actions do not injure similar rights and claims of other members of society.

While Berlin (2005, 517) locates this shift, resulting in the distinction between public and private, in the separation of the secular state from church, Freeden (2006, 1877) identifies this shift with the birth of the ideal of maximum pleasure, or utilitarianism, as the goal of life. Freeden’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 many people as a ground for assessing the good in public matters. In this regard, the idea of freedom also became conceived as part of the broader agenda of self-ownership, such that the ‘scope and nature of the freedom we ought to enjoy becomes a function of our self-ownership’ (Kymlicka 2002, 138).

The idea of liberty that development as part of a broader agenda of self-ownership evokes the Kantian formulation of autonomy as self-legislation in human beings. Kant’s idea of autonomy or liberty is meant to be understood as self-government (O’Neill 2004, 181). In defence of this idea O’Neill (2004, 182) says that an autonomous person is one who is capable of legislating for the self. This self-legislation puts one under a moral law. Hence autonomy designates the capacity of ‘individuals to shape and govern their own lives’. Furthermore, ‘the principle of autonomy as a principle of our willing means that there are no external standards of reason. [We] invent standards for reasoned thinking and acting, [with] the sort of generally recognised authority that we would look for in anything that could count as a requirement of reason.’ (O’Neill 2004, 186).

Claims to university autonomy and academic freedom can also be understood from a similar Kantian perspective. If freedom is one’s moral capacity as a person to legislate for oneself, and if this capacity comes from within and not from outside, then the idea of freedom becomes an innate right (Kant 1965, 43–44). Within the society of human beings (and that of universities), this innate right implies equality and independence from others. While this implies that one is not expected to do more than one can also reciprocally bind others to do, it also means that universities, through their act of willing, become masters of their own operations.

We can also use Raz’s (1986, 247) conception of autonomy to clarify this point. Raz promotes the idea of autonomy as situated in life communities. In other words, Raz (1986, 247) argues that individual freedoms would only be possible if an appropriate common culture is also possible and available to support these freedoms. Autonomous life is one 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’ (1986, 371). In this
regard, autonomy has the capacity to change life. This understanding of autonomy is connected with the idea of the good. As such, liberalism becomes desirable because it offers the conditions for the distribution of basic human goods and the conditions under which people can enjoy these goods (Macedo 1991, 39; Kymlicka 1989, 12–13; 2002, 64). Kymlicka (1989 and 2002, 217) further 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:

Liberty is important not because we already know our good prior to social interaction, or because we can’t know about our good, but precisely so that we can come to know our good, so that we track our best-ness. Our interests would be harmed by attempts to enforce a particular view of the good life on people, (and) so the state should remain neutral concerning the good life (Kymlicka, 2002, 217).

Most understandings of academic freedom and institutional autonomy convey this source of understanding autonomy and how universities (should) do their business. This means that the good life can be lived through the exercise of autonomous choice. I note that some discourses on the nature of the public higher education system have suggested the idea that higher education should promote more public goods over and above the private goods that have increased because of the pervasive nature of an enterprise culture that has gripped higher education systems recently (Singh 2001, 11).

The idea of the good stands as a link between democracy and autonomy. The good plays this role by linking together the ends of autonomous life and that of democracy. We need to emphasise here that, while most models of democracy would promote the governance systems of higher education, it is the deliberative model of democracy that is better positioned to promote the required ends of democratic life, while at the same time promoting the activities of the academy.

What makes the deliberative framework superior is the idea that people have a ‘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). Gutmann and Thompson (2004, 3) further characterise the deliberative process as marked by the need for people to give reasons for their views in pursuit of common decisions. These reasons need to be accessible to all people concerned with the issues. The reasons must satisfy the reasonable judgement of others, hence they become public. Deliberative democracy is critical for achieving the good, because it is aimed at arriving at a decision that can be sustainable for a reasonable time. The holding of each other accountable for public reason means that deliberation is dynamic, for it consistently requires that decisions are continuously revised, depending on such issues as serve the common good. More deliberation has the advantage of increasing stakeholder participation and decreasing government
regulation (Gutmann and Thompson 2004, 34) thereby advancing the aims of deliberative democracy. This understanding mainly applies to public institutions, such as public higher education institutions.

The deliberative processes promise to resolve disputes in social choice, because their decisions are not made prior to the deliberation itself and they allow a wide range of relevant views and arguments to enter the debate, provided they reflect the genuine concerns, interests and convictions of discussants. Given a number of strengths of the deliberative ideal of democracy, it can only be affirmed that the model can achieve more in terms of promoting autonomy in higher education institutions than other models of democracy promise to offer. Similarly, the cultivation of future citizens in line with global demands, which is one of the things that higher education institutions on the African continent could aim at, can successfully be based on infusing deliberation into universities.

A PURVIEW OF GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS IN AFRICA'S HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEMS

Higher education systems on the African continent are characterised by similar conditions, but these conditions also occur to varying degrees. The conditions include the legacy of colonialism, the global market economy, and the nature of government or state control in higher education systems.

Most patterns of governance and legislations in higher education have not shifted much from those inherited from the colonial masters (Teferra and Altbach 2003, 4). At higher education in most African countries limited access is valued, for instance. Nevertheless, Lulat (2003, 19) also acknowledges that other institutions existed, but have absolutely no resemblance to, or continuity with, colonial systems. But in many ways the higher education systems on the continent started as replicas of first world universities. This is clearly shown by the fact that the first curricula and examinations were determined by university overseas. The degrees were also granted by these mother institutions (Lulat 2003, 19). This scenario changed in the post-colonial period, as nationalism tended to dominate most university frameworks.

On the other hand, Mittelman (1994, 144–149) claims that the governance of higher education in Africa is fundamentally driven by three forces, also considered as pressure points. They include: the force of globalisation, the state and the universities themselves. Of these three, Mittelman concedes that global forces play a bigger role in controlling the governance of higher education systems on the continent. The global imperatives play themselves out in three dimensions: global finance, development assistance and philanthropic activities (Mittelman 1994, 144). Other scholars such as Teferra and Altbach (2003, 5) think that governance in
higher education has been under heavy pressure from local governments in the last
decade concerning finances. Nonetheless, the discourse on higher education does not ultimately examine other ulterior forces making local governments behave in a specific way towards higher education systems. We could find one of the missing links in Sawyerr (2004, 5–6), who 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. In Sawyerr’s (2004, 4–6) thinking, globalisation seems to be the major factor driving the particular ways in which higher education functions today. He repositions higher education in relation to the economic forces which make higher education respond in particular ways. What Sawyerr may be leaving to us to resolve is the way these economic forces keep on influencing university governance, such that even the university’s own sense of autonomy becomes affected. We come back to this issue after indicating some characteristics of higher education on the African continent.

A random selection of public higher education systems on the African continent, such as those of Egypt, Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Namibia and South Africa, shows that the state/government is involved in the governance of higher education systems. Nevertheless, the extent to which local governments control higher education systems in their countries varies from country to country. For example, Ghana, Uganda and South Africa reveal that there are independent structures responsible for running higher education systems, although government may still maintain an oversight role. The other seven countries have forms of governance that range from moderate to high levels of state control or interference. For instance, there tends to be no distinction between government and state in Egypt (Said 2003, 285–300). In all of these the head of state is the Chancellor or titular head of higher education systems, and 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 other cases there are special statutes that allow government control over affairs in the academy (Ngome 2003, 362–367; Maunde 2003, 644).

There are clear signs that show that some systems, such as those of Malawi and Lesotho, use a federal system of governance (Ntimo-Makara 2003, 373). Altbach and Teferra (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. As such, the ‘governability’ of a higher education system reflects the level of its docility to state dictates, in some cases.

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 of national development by states. Hence ‘African [national] leaders find universities too visible and prestigious as national monuments to be given complete autonomy’ (Mwiria 2003, 33). Government influence over universities can include determining the running of the institutions through the allocation of important portfolios to the government’s favourite candidates, irrespective of competency. Mwiria observes that when most high offices are filled by way of nomination, there is a high chance of chancellors ‘sending directives to council through their key nominees, such as the minister of education or the vice-chancellor’ (Mwiria 2003, 34). Hence, ‘in many African universities, senates, faculty boards and heads of departments often rubber-stamp the wishes of the university chief executives’ (Mwiria 2003, 36).

Ghana and South Africa make claims to higher education co-operative governance, respectively. In these cases, government is considered to maintain an overseeing role in the whole governance of the higher education system. For instance, the legislative framework of South African higher education systems assumes government will take up its role in equal partnership with other stakeholders, such as the Council on Higher Education and the universities, although there is no mandatory implication that forces the minister of education to consult other partners, as implied in the use of ‘may’ in the legislation (Republic of South Africa, Act 101 of 1997, section 20). It is not surprising that several scholars argue that the way government handles issues relating to the higher education sector in South Africa goes beyond equal partnership and stakeholdership to government control. This control is viewed as the main source of the erosion of the basis of university autonomy and academic freedom. In this regard, Jonathan 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 legislation (concept) and 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).

Higher education systems on the African continent are also heavily subsidised by national governments. While the provision of training for 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 governments comes with a feeling that government should therefore take control of what is done in the university. Some common examples of this include control of levels of access by government, as is the case in Malawi; and reduction of state funding to universities because of their perceived failure to meet targets set by government, as is the case in South Africa.
The control of universities by governments still remains a big challenge on the African continent today, despite the fact that such control has been rationalised on various grounds, including the need for accountability for the spending of public funds, responsiveness to the demands of the nation, or the achievement of the public good (Singh 2001, 17). Despite the expectation that government should fund public universities, there is a growing sentiment that universities should be set free to decide what it does, for it is in the best position to judge what is good for the university. In some cases, for instance in South Africa, there are indications that there is a need to recognise the legitimate roles of both government and universities’ institutional autonomy, if the competing interests of the two partners are to be effectively managed (University of Pretoria 2005, 40–41).

In relation to these dilemmas, some would suggest that it is a question of finding a balance between the public interest and 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 cooperation between the partners. Most of all, any such operation depends heavily on the fact that the cooperating partners are fully aware of the terms, conditions and implications of their cooperation. Such a discourse would further lead to questions over what universities are mandated to do and under what circumstances. Taking this route brings one to the core of defining what academic freedom and university autonomy are all about. But in the foreground of this questioning is the idea that the structures of governance reveal the nature and the underpinning assumptions of academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

The challenges facing higher education governance on the African continent today are further complicated by the reality of globalisation. Castells (2001, 7) argues that at the centre of globalisation are emerging financial markets, and the integration of capital markets and money markets, working as a unit in real time. An aspect of the first factor can relate to higher education in so far as there is interdependence in financial markets and that successful higher education institutions are judged partly by their financial stability. In an attempt to be financially viable, many universities on the African continent have had to raise their student fees in order to meet the costs of running their institutions. Such moves can be read as a manifestation of the global market interface. This phenomenon has also given rise to the idea of ‘value-for-money’ as an important consideration in evaluating the activities or offerings of any higher education institution. Coupled with these challenging developments is also 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 candidate students in their universities. Nonetheless, not many countries on the continent have been successful in this aspect.
In a number of ways, the behaviour of higher education systems on the African continent corresponds well with Castells’s 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 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 and use the internet proves that the global means of communication are carrying more weight as more people begin to find this mode reliable and fast in broadening their knowledge interests. Nonetheless, the constellation of factors related to globalisation and the behaviour of higher education systems in a globalised environment raise a number of challenging questions. Are higher education systems today, and in Africa particularly, merely products of globalisation or initiators of globalisation?

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

What are the underpinning forces that influence change and practice in higher education in Africa today? Delanty (2004, 252) proposes that the identity of the university is determined neither by technocratic-managerial strategies nor by purely academic pursuits. In a ‘knowledge society’, knowledge cannot be reduced to its ‘uses’ nor 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’s (2004) refusal to reduce the role of the university to the function of reason alone nor to a function of the neo-liberal age alone, and the reflection of the power and prestige of the nation-state, manages to shift an understanding of the university as an institution providing a structure within which expert and lay cultures intersect with more specialised knowledge domains. Hence the university’s assumption of neo-liberal and globalised stances can be understood as the university’s repositioning of its very nature as it tries to accommodate the rising demands of the new global economy.

This article has tried to argue that, given the challenges facing higher education, governance in higher education systems on the African continent should embrace far more than constituted Acts, funding modalities and other things. While the idea of how structures are laid out is foundationally important, governance includes the way that such structures play themselves out in real-time cases; the roles and 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, as well as in the global village. These demands and challenges assume a people-driven higher education system in which the relationship with others reflects peoples’ aspirations towards attaining a better livelihood. We propose a continuous critique of these challenges by considering that higher education systems have the capacity to create power and have the capacity to affect and challenge power relations in any society because ‘knowledge is power’.

NOTE

REFERENCES


Challenges facing higher education governance practices on the African continent


