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Universities and the Right to Think in Africa

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Studies of academic freedom have mostly focussed on Europe and North America. Yet, any consideration of the societal crises in Africa cannot ignore the collapse of its universities and the very concept of academic freedom on the continent. Much had been expected of the universities. In Africa, the early post-independence universities took off on internationally competitive and solid foundations—thanks to the heritages and traditions bequeathed them by the colonial powers that established them. In these societies, the expectations associated with the formation and performance of the universities have their foundations in the historical evidence furnished by the definitions of success in the West. However, the postcolonial orientations of the universities in Africa have proceeded along different pathways. Ideas taken from one milieu to another can develop in unpredictable ways and may satisfy needs other than those served in their places of origin. Institutions transplanted from one society can be influenced by the practices prevalent in the receiving societies. The forces acting upon such interactions are complex. The resultant transformative impacts are also unpredictable. An appreciation of context is therefore compelling. This article discusses the crisis in Nigeria's political economy and its continued impact on the public universities from the late 1980s to the 2020s [Correction added on 26 July 2024, after first online publication: Preceding sentence has been amended for correctness.]

Background

Against the backdrop of an ongoing crisis in higher education in which academic freedom is increasingly under attack—Brazil, Hungary, India, Iran, and Turkey—and academic labour is mobilised to strike as in Nigeria, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America, current developments in Africa can be both clarifying and edifying. My entry points here are the academic disciplines in the universities in postcolonial Africa.

The history of the modern university is tied to the struggles against perpetual state control and the institutionalisation of social inequalities. Conversations on academic freedom continue to centre around academic and cultural expressions; academic disseminations and exchanges; campus integrity; freedom and right to research and teach; institutional autonomy; and the right to unrestrained public funding

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and support.[1] Its connections with democracy and the rule of law are undeniable. However, these vary across different settings over time.

Several contexts animate the violations of academic freedom. Of note is the characteristically conflictual and contradictory relationship between academics on the one hand and capitalists, owners of businesses, politicians, and the state on the other. Such relationships are globally challenging. The twenty-first century has been marked by an alarming escalation in violations of academic freedom. According to the 2023 Academic Freedom Index (AFI) global dataset,[2] more than half of the world's population presently lives in political systems and states where academic freedom, exchange of scholarly knowledge, and freedom of speech are restricted. Afghanistan, Iran, Myanmar, Russia, and Ukraine are among the lowest-ranked and most dangerous states in relation to academic freedom. A combination of anti-democratic, authoritarian practices and tendencies—extreme physical violence and military conflict—harm scholars and students in all of these states.

As Dolunay Bulut reported, from 2021, governmental pressure has repressed the administration of public universities and students' unions in China. Anti-government opinions by university academics have led to censorship and the termination of research appointments and teaching contracts. Censored issues and themes include assimilation and oppression of Tibetans and Uyghurs; criticism of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP); human rights activism and political dissent; Taiwan's democracy; the Dalai Lama; and the Tiananmen Square massacre. These were heightened and worsened under the Xi Jinping Government in which the overall number of disappeared, executed, imprisoned, and persecuted scholars and students soared unaccountably.[3] Institutional constraints and legal restraints have been imposed. These undermine academic collaboration and international mobility by Chinese scholars. In Hong Kong, state surveillance and other related practices have encouraged an exodus of intellectual labour with damaging implications. As Izabela Wagner has shown, the interferences and role of the state in Poland in professorial appointments, promotions, and tenure are compelling examples of such violations.[4]

In Africa, the relationship between the universities and the state has historically been strained. Three periods can be identified in this crisis experience. One, is the early post-independence period in African history (1960s–1970s). Attacks against academic freedom at this period took the form of autocratic-bureaucratic control; intrusive state dictation; and outright politicisation of the universities. From Algeria to Zimbabwe, the tension between these two is of colonial origin. The literature on higher education in Africa affirms the existence of foundational problematic relationship between the universities and the state.[5] This experience dates back to the colonial period. At its root was the perception of the academics-intellectuals-scholars by the state as enemies

[1] Arjun Appadurai, "The Right to Research," *Globalisation*, *Societies and Education*, Vol 4, 2 (2006), pp. 167–77 [Correction added on 26 July 2024; after first online publication: Footnote 1 was deleted and the subsequent footnotes were renumbered.].

[2] See *https://www.pol.phil.fau.eu/2023/03/02/academic-freedom-index-update-2023/#pagewrapper*. See also *https://academic-freedom-index.net/*.

[3] Dolunay Bulut, "Endangered Scholars Worldwide," *Social Research*: *An International Quarterly*, Vol 90, 1 (2023), p. VI.

[4] Izabela Wagner, "Presidential Professorships: The Tenure Process in Poland," *Social Research*: *An International Quarterly*, Vol 90, 1 (2023), pp. 189–214.

[5] Mahmood Mamdani and Mamadou Diouf, eds, *Academic Freedom in Africa* (Dakar: CODESRIA, 1994).

rather than collaborators in state building.[6] Colonial rule was central to the introduction of Western education in all African colonies. Its conditioning effects, however, constrained its future development. It also led to its postcolonial limitations. Colonial power denigrated knowledge production as subversive to its end. As Mahmood Mamdani recalls, during this period, Makerere was the only modern institution of learning in East Africa.[7] University of Dakar was the only university in Francophone West Africa. Ghana and Nigeria each had only one university.[8] University College Ibadan and University College of the Gold Coast were the only two throughout Anglophone West Africa.[9] In the Belgian colonies—Belgian Congo (1908–60) and Ruanda-Urundi (1922–62) and German Africa—Burundi, Cameroon, Namibia, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Togo[10]—the establishment of universities by these imperial powers was not primary on the colonial agenda.

From the 1980s, the context was defined by the impact of the contradictions in the character and nature of the state; the crisis in its political economy; the failure of the continent's cake-sharing distributive pressures by its neo-patrimonial elites and the role of external actors—notably the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank through the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). The resultant crisis has been compounded by the economic hardships experienced by the populations and the neglect of the universities by the state.[11] The present situation is marred by state repression and continent-wide resistance by university academic unions.

In Nigeria, heavy-handed governmental control accompanied by political interference and manipulation was experienced by the five first-generation universities in the 1960s. This marked the beginning of such aberrations. The Oyenuga affair at the University of Ife in 1964 and the J.R. Lindsay saga of 1964 at the University of Nigeria Nsukka were its high points.[12] These were followed, in the late 1980s, by the harsh economic impact of implementing neo-liberal governance by the major international financial institutions and the military regimes in Nigeria. The resultant crisis included an exploding population without plans by the state to harness, preserve, and transform such demographic potentials. Half-baked and ill-equipped university graduates thus roam the streets without civil or public service jobs nor skills for industrial and self-employment.

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[6] An exception to this hostility and rift between the intelligentsia and the state in Africa was Afrikaner nationalism. A strong connection existed between the Afrikaner universities and the state in apartheid South Africa. This has been researched, among others, by Andre Du Toit, "The Legacy of Daantjie Oosthuizen: Revisiting the Liberal Defence of Academic Freedom," *African Sociological Review*, Vol 9, 1 (2005), pp. 40–61. See also Thandika Mkandawire, "African Intellectuals and Nationalism," in *African Intellectuals*: *Rethinking Politics*, *Language*, *Gender and Development*, ed., Thandika Mkandawire (Dakar: CODESRIA Books; London and New York: Zed Books, 2005).

[7] Mahmood Mamdani, "Introduction," in Mamdani and Diouf, eds, *Academic Freedom in Africa* (1994), pp. 1–15.

[8] *Ibid*.

[9] *Ibid*.

[10] German colonies in Africa were later limited and reduced to Cameroon, Namibia, Tanzania, and Togo.

[11] Said Adejumobi, "The Structural Adjustment Programme and Democratic Transition in Africa," *Verfassung und Recht in Übersee*, Vol 29, 4 (1996), pp. 416–33. See also Claude Ake, "The Political Economy of Development: Does It Have a Future?" *International Social Science Journal*, Vol 40, 4 (1988), pp. 485–99.

[12] Uzodinma Nwala, "Academic Freedom in Africa: The Nigerian Experience," in Mahmood Mamdani and Mamadou Diouf, eds, *Academic Freedom in Africa* (Dakar: CODESRIA, 1994), pp. 176–91.

Introduction

Universities in Africa illustrate the harsh realities of higher education in an unequal world. Their current experiences highlight the contradictions of commercialising and privatising a public good in the neo-liberal age of Empire. Just like feeding, health care, and shelter, higher education is a human right. However, the conditionalities and constraints imposed on access to basic and higher education in Africa by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the nation states—violate this right. Africa is characterised by dependent capitalist economies that are structured by the operations of international and local forces to exist in permanent crisis. Autonomisation is the very essence of the state—both in political theory and also in the advanced capitalist societies in the West. No state in the world enjoys absolute or comprehensive autonomy. Nevertheless, a significant measure of relative autonomy is indispensable for state independence and sovereignty. As the fundamental instrument of political power, the unique feature of the state in Africa is that it is institutionally constituted in such a manner that it enjoys limited and sometimes, outright lack of autonomy from the contending external and internal social forces competing for access to its power.[13] In this process, it becomes immersed in the struggles between opposing interests. It is thus hijacked by the hegemonic—often international capitalist and local bourgeois classes. Here, the IMF and the World Bank are the hegemonic classes under reference.

In higher education, the lack of autonomy of the state in Africa is expressed in its inability to independently deliver functional education to its citizens without depending and drawing heavily on foreign aid and loan assistance from international development partners. This dependence has become endemic and pathological from the 1990s. Externally driven investments in higher education in Africa have never encouraged local development and self-rule. Such investments are not aimed at building development-oriented states capable of guaranteeing economic security and the welfare needs of African people. Decisions regarding their constituents do not reflect the needs of the societies to which they are adapted. These are aimed at intensifying foreign dependence by stifling innovation in the development of indigenous knowledges just as they also undermine the development of traditional medicine in Africa's health sectors. After more than three decades of such dependence, the states across the continent have become weaker. According to the World Bank, armed conflict, challenging macroeconomic conditions together with deteriorating livelihoods, economic hardship, and ongoing insecurity will be devastating in West Africa from 2024. These conditions are expected to worsen in Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria.[14]

Apart from the new patterns of conflicts, post-Cold War Africa is marked by a new regime of dependency and indebtedness to the major capitalist and pro-imperialist states in the world.[15] Given the absence of home-based institutional opportunities for establishing active academic careers as world-class scholars, total reliance on foreign aid has reduced African academics to consultants and data gatherers in high-level overseas research projects with their collaborators in the global North.

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[13] Claude Ake, "The Future of the State in Africa," *International Political Science Review*, Vol 6, 1 (1985), pp. 105–14.

[14] Business Insider Africa, "World Bank Forecasts Worsening Insecurity and Economic Hardship in Africa," Thursday, 28 December 2023. See *https://africa.businessinsider.com/local/markets/world-bank-forecasts-worsening-insecurity-and-economic-hardship-in-six-nigerian/98smgg2*.

[15] This list includes China, the European Union (EU), the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

I argue that beyond its colonial background, Africa's dependence on external actors in funding higher education has far-reaching implications beyond the education sector. This affects academic freedom and democracy in the universities. It also affects the state's capacity for distributive justice, equity, self-determination, the sovereignty of the state, and the overall well-being of the people. I draw on Nigeria and explain how the limited autonomy of the state in Africa and the crisis in its political economy contribute to ongoing brain drain and other problems in the public universities. I show how the contradictions between the aspiration for national ownership of development and research projects, and externally imposed dictations by IMF and World Bank coercion threaten the sustainability of such programmes and undermine international goodwill among the states. I underline the disproportional nature of the benefits distributed from such externally funded interventions and projects *vis-à-vis* their actual opportunity costs. I present the transformation of these neo-colonial relations as a *sine qua non* for decolonising higher education in the continent.

Nigeria's implementation of the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS) in 2006, a reform programme for administering the monthly payrolls and salaries of all Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) of the Federal Public Service—including the federal and state universities—is a more recent example of state-led political interference. According to Federal Government's sources, IPPIS was expected to achieve accuracy and efficiency in the disbursement of institutional allocations and funds to all Government's MDAs. It was also meant to discipline Government's spending and eliminate official corruption entrenched in the payment of personnel allowances and salaries. Following the approval by the Federal Executive Council (FEC) for the Bureau of Public Service Reforms (BPSR) late in 2005; its production was financed as one of the pilot-phased projects of the World Bank in February 2006. Its administration and management were transferred to the Office of the Accountant General of the Federation (AGF) in October 2008. It is the Federal Government's Information Communication and Technology (ICT)-based intervention for eliminating corruption-related indulgencies and practices like the payment of double salaries to single workers and ghost workers. By June 2020, about 696 MDAs had been enrolled and harmonised onto its platform. However, by centralising the power of MDAs to hire and pay their personnel, this system became over-bureaucratised. This poses immense problems for the public universities whose financial autonomy has been eroded. It also continues to generate heated debates and stiff resistance from the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU).[16]

In addition, the 2015 introduction of the Treasury Single Account (TSA) into the operations of all Federal Government's MDAs and Parastatals—including the public universities—(ostensibly to optimise Government revenues and spending) and the 2015 politicisation of the appointments and offices of the Vice Chancellors of all the federal universities by the All Progressive Union (APC)-led Federal Government under President Muhammadu Buhari are other examples. The 2023 Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards for the Nigerian University System (CCMAS) imposed on all Nigerian universities by the National Universities Commission (NUC) is the latest illustration of this autocratic dictation. Section 10(1) of the Education (National Minimum Standards and Establishment of Institutions) Act, Cap E3 of 2004 of the Federation of Nigeria empowers the NUC to lay down minimum standards for all

[16] On the articulation of such resistance, see ASUU. *ASUU Strike Bulletin*, Numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 (Giri, Abuja: Comrade Festus Iyayi Complex, University of Abuja Main Campus, 2022).

programmes taught in all Nigerian universities. As the main regulator of the Higher Education sector in Nigeria, in 2023, the NUC contracted the harmonisation of the contents of the curricular of all the disciplines in all the universities in Nigeria to independent subject experts chosen and coordinated by its officials.

Faculties with extensive or limited research and teaching experience in Nigeria's public universities were neither consulted nor represented in this development.[17] The resultant output was summed up by the Commission as constituting 70% of the overall contents of all the disciplines in Nigeria's public universities. Individual universities were required to work with officials of the NUC in producing their remaining 30% of the disciplinary contents of their curricular. Different branches of ASUU; individual academics and courses or subjects' teachers as well as the Senate Curriculum Committees of many public universities have critiqued and redacted the contradictions and tensions generated by this undemocratic invention of the Federal Government. Three points are compelling in these critiques. One, the Commission's action abolishes the disciplinary peculiarities, regional foci, rich specialisations, and variations with which Nigeria's public universities were globally identified and noted. Two, it revokes the ethical obligation and rights of university academics together with the Senate Curriculum Committees of individual universities in Nigeria for undertaking curriculum change and review. Three, it violates the provisions of the Universities' Autonomy (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Amendment) Act of 2003, which authorises the universities to determine admission quotas, quotes and requirements; manage their financial matters; and preside over curriculum change, development and review among other extant functions, powers and regulations of the universities. Notwithstanding these contraventions, the Federal Government proceeded upon its implementation.[18]

The internal dynamics of Nigeria's political economy tell a disappointing story of a promising start and a frustrating present that is contrary to the critique of the colonial experience, which accuses the European powers of the destruction of African institutions and societies by foreigners and outsiders. Ushehwedu Kufakurinani's discursive deployment of *epistuicide* for referring to situations in which a group of people destroy their own institutions and systems of knowledge valorisation—contradistinguished and differentiated from *epistimicides* undertaken by outsiders—is most appropriate for analysing Nigeria's distinctive context.[19] The challenges in Nigeria's public universities are the illustrations of this crisis. This began with governance failure, from the federal to the local government levels.

From the *annas mirabilis* of African history[20] to the mid-1980s, higher education in Nigeria benefitted from a comparatively healthy national economy as an exporter of

[17] This amounted to a violation of the ethics of expertise in decision making.

[18] Federal Government of Nigeria, *Cap E3 of the Education Act: National Minimum Standards and Establishment of Institutions* (Abuja: Federal Ministry of Education, 2004); NUC, "FG Insists CCMAS Implementation to Begin September 2023," *Monday Bulletin*: *A Publication of the Office of the Executive Secretary NUC*. Vol 18, 33 (2023), 28 August.

[19] Ushehwedu Kufakurinani, "A Promising Start and Frustrating End: The Rise and Fall of the Economic History Department, University of Zimbabwe," *History in Africa*, Vol 49, 1 (2023), pp. 349–60.

[20] Designated primarily from the 1950s to the 1970s and popularised by William Tordoff, this refers to the decade of African independence. Beginning with the old Gold Coast (Ghana), during this period, the highest number—seventeen states—acquired formal sovereignty in the continent. This periodisation ended with the independence of Zimbabwe (1980) as well as Namibia (1990) and South Africa (1994). See William Tordoff, *Government and Politics in Africa* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Press Limited, 1984).

refined petroleum and as a producer of most of the locally consumed products. Nigerian universities spearheaded the foremost decolonisation initiatives in knowledge production, alongside other interventions in Dakar, Dar es Salaam, Makerere, and Nairobi.[21] The universities' contributions were indexed by the solutions they provided for development and national transformation. In the First Republic (1960–66), the first-generation universities in Nigeria[22] were the brain boxes for the all-round achievements recorded by the Northern People's Congress (NPC) in the Northern Region, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) in the Eastern Region, and the Action Group (AG) in the Western Region. Examples of the initiatives by the universities included the Western Nigeria Development Corporation of 1955—that encouraged the establishment of cooperative societies and plantation agriculture for cashew, citrus, cocoa, coffee, oil palm, and rubber; and financed major corporations such as Airport Hotel, Lafia Hotel, Premier Hotel, and Western Hotel in Ibadan and Lagos. Likewise, the Division of Agricultural Colleges at Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) Zaria saw to the establishment of agricultural and marketing boards throughout Northern Nigeria.

In contrast to that more glorious past, from the late 1980s to the 2020s, Nigerians live in a precarious context marked by despair and loss. The emergent economic and socio-political order is underlined by debilitating conflict; rising national debt profiles and the falling value of the Naira;[23] worsening chaos, hopelessness,[24] insecurity, and instability. Nigeria offers a disturbing confirmation of Afro-pessimism; the collapse of the universities and violations of academic freedom in the continent. Beyond Nigeria's colonial background and neo-colonial character, the postcolonial state's capacity for conflict management, and also for mediating between contending social forces, groups, and interests, has been undermined by endemic fragility, institutional decline, and massive state failure. Nigeria therefore provides a relevant context for evaluating the problem of academic freedom for African intellectuals and their diminished relations with the state in the twenty-first century.

The declining quality of faculties, inadequate funding, poor facilities, infrastructure, and renumeration are the major signs of a crisis in higher education and the public universities in Nigeria. These factors have continued to elicit protest and resistance in the form of industrial strikes from ASUU—the apex body and union of university academics in Nigerian universities. This situation is likely to worsen given the diminished priority accorded to university education by successive Nigerian governments as the major funder of the public universities. University administrators are increasingly unprepared for this; and have made some poorly informed decisions when dealing with this decline.

Other problems undermine the management of this situation. There are no accurate census figures or other requisite information on national demographics. This means, in

[21] Ibadan School of History at the University of Ibadan inspired new forms of knowledge production at Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, the University of Ife, the University of Lagos, and the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

[22] These were Ahmadu Bello University, University of Ibadan, University of Ife, University of Lagos, and University of Nigeria Nsukka. The University of Ibadan was established in 1948. The others were established in 1962.

[23] *Daily Trust*, "Tough time for families as inflation soars to 7 year high," *Daily Trust Newspaper*. Tuesday, 18 July 2023. *The Guardian*, "Nigeria spends over 99% of revenue to service debts as inflation hits harder," *The Guardian Daily Newspaper*, Tuesday, 18 July 2023.

[24] "90 million Nigerians to fall below extreme poverty line," *Daily Times*, Friday, 29 January 2021.

the universities, there is an absence of reliable statistics. Expansion in the number of student enrolment and universities are therefore not complemented by commensurate funding.[25] Financial allocations to Nigerian universities do not reflect the diversity of academic programmes, faculty specialisations and staff populations, nor inflation or the harsh realities of a depressed global economy.[26] These factors exert pressure on state resources and have led to calls for the commercialisation and privatisation of higher education. In a context where the public universities depend on government grants for more than 95% of their capital and recurrent expenditures, the gap between student enrolment and the growth of expenditure is a critical factor. This variable is deeply problematic in Nigeria.

The Universities in Africa

The universities in Africa started off as relatively autonomous institutions. They were administered by university councils and conducted their own affairs. In Nigeria, this began in 1948 with the establishment of the University College Ibadan—an affiliate institution of the University of London. This became an autonomous university in 1962. In the same year, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria; the University of Ife;[27] the University of Lagos; and the University of Nigeria, Nsukka were founded. From that period, universities in Nigeria expanded and grew.[28] Their autonomy was, however, short-lived. A wave of arbitrary control led to autocratic political interference and state interruption in the late 1960s and 1970s. This crystallised into repressive state control. Depending on the specific political regimes of the individual states—civil, democratic, and military—state-imposed regulations were deployed for reducing the universities to the day-to-day running of the civil services akin to ordinary state parastatals. Nigeria was the most affected by this. At the University of Ibadan; University of Ife and University of Lagos, intrusive political involvement by federal politicians and state officials created ethno-linguistic divisions. These later generated unprecedented hostility and rancour. Tim Livsey has chronicled the major episodes of governmental assaults against the five first-generation universities in Nigeria.[29] These assaults led to a breakdown of university governance. They also fed into the destructive political rivalries noted.

The University of Lagos was a distinct casualty of repressive governmental assault in Nigeria. In 1965, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) in coalition with the

[25] In reviewing the progress made by Nigeria's public universities after submitting the Report of the Ashby Commission, A.I. Asiwaju ascribed the limitations of undertaking accurate historical analysis on Nigerian universities to the impact of this problem. Elsewhere, Cornelius Olaleye Taiwo attributed the disparity noted in the projected primary school registration under the Universal Primary Education and the actual registration two years following the launching of the programme to this problem. See Anthony I. Asiwaju, "Ashby Revisited: A Review of Nigeria's Educational Growth, 1961–1971," *African Studies Review*, Vol 15, 1 (1972), pp. 1–16.

[26] From 1975 to 1980, the percentage increase in Government's recurrent grant to all Nigerian universities was 13 per cent. In the same period, students' enrolment in all Nigerian universities rose by 98 per cent. See Nigeria, *Report of the Presidential Commission on Salary and Conditions of Service of University Staff* (Lagos: National Assembly Press, 1981). See p. 97.

[27] In May 1987, this was renamed Obafemi Awolowo University.

[28] As of August 2023, there are 258 universities in Nigeria: 50 federal universities, 60 state-owned universities, and 148 private universities. The key universities are the federal universities along with some of the state-financed universities.

[29] Tim Livsey, *Nigeria's University Age*: *Reframing Decolonization and Development*. Cambridge Imperial and Post-Colonial Studies Series (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 157–60.

Northern People's Congress (NPC) imposed party nominees on its Governing Council. The Senate of the University recommended the eminent botanist and educator Eni Njoku for reappointment. The Council disagreed with this choice. The decision by the University Council to replace Eni Njoku—the founding Vice-Chancellor—with Saburi Biobaku in February 1965 sparked off much controversy. As an Igbo supporter of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) in Yorubaland, Njoku's dismissal was interpreted as ethnically motivated. Conversely, being ethnically endogenous in Yorubaland, his ethnic homeland, Biobaku's involvement in Lagos was perceived as a follow-up to his political partisanship during the 1963 and 1964 dispute at the University of Ife. This escalated into a conflict and attracted the attention of students who erected barricades and plunged the campus into violence. Hoodlums and other violent non-members of the university community were imported into the campus as NNDP thugs. Lecturers and supporters of the NNDP accused the loyalists and staff of the NCNC of being responsible for planning the students' rebellion. The police were called onto the campus and the University was shut down.

For a long time after it was re-opened in June 1965, other crises in the University were discussed in ethnic terms. The Minister of Education Richard Akinjide of the NNDP condemned the NCNC and the Igbo Student Union for tribalizing the University. Editorials in national daily newspapers threw their support behind members of ethnic groups allied with their ownership and proprietorship. A majority of the expatriate lecturers stood behind Njoku and his Igbo supporters. Despite the division, hostility, and rancour created throughout the University and its environs by this heated political decision, the Federal Government did not withdraw its position. As Tim Livsey recalls, Njoku and many Igbo staff relocated their services to the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. This crisis underlined the place of Nigerian universities in national political competition *vis-à-vis* the significance of ethno-political and ethno-religious constituencies for national development.[30] Other public universities—federal and state—have also been characterised by episodes of aberrations and violations. These have been examined by scholars in other works.

Autocratic political control and state-imposed interference suffered by the universities in Africa and Nigeria have been accounted for by experts in the literature.[31] Their crippling consequences have also been underlined. However, the connections between the crisis in the continent's political economy and the ongoing collateral damage, deficits, and endemic underdevelopment of the universities across the continent have remained much of a grey area. Drawing on Nigeria's ongoing experience, this work establishes these connections.

African Universities and National Political Economy Challenges

Material conditions are the decisive formative forces for identifying the laws of motion in any society.[32] These constitute the essential point of departure for understanding the conditions for change and development. Production is therefore the material science for survival. The manner in which humanity are organised as they produce and reproduce their material and social existence is compelling for understanding the mode of transformation of the society. A political economy of Africa must therefore consider how the different social classes and social forces are organised—either in terms of

[30] *Ibid*.
[31] See all the chapters in Mamdani and Diouf, eds, *Academic Freedom*.
[32] Claude Ake, *A Political Economy of Africa* (Lagos and London: Longman, 1981).

dependence, disarticulation and domination; or cohesion and empowerment—and the implications of such organisation on the continuity and transformation of the society.

Applied to this study, a political economy of the universities in Africa must examine the problematic development of higher education during the colonial and early postcolonial periods. This must account for the untransformed character and nature of the colonial state as the material basis and context for the development of the postcolonial universities and the implications of this configuration for their existence and functionalities. Attention must be paid to the authoritarian role of the state in Africa in dictating the direction and operations of the universities from the 1960s to the 1990s. Two, the agenda and involvement by China, the European Union, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank among other external actors and agents in commercialising and liberalising higher education in Africa through privatisation in the twenty-first century, have to be accounted for. Three, is the national contexts of massive economic strangulations underlined by the debt peonage and economic hardship that feed into the emigration of Africa's active academic labour force and the exodus of its students. These considerations must highlight the continued impact of democratic-authoritarian regimes and the aborted and incomplete democratic transitions *vis-a-vis* the role of illiberal and populist politicians that are sinking Africa's national economies into poverty through diminished funding of the public universities, foreign debts, loans, and poor national priorities. Regional variations certainly exist. The broad pictures are however, the same throughout the continent from the late 1980s to date.

Academic freedom in Africa is a complicated problematic experience. Understood as a human right, the literature on higher education in Africa links academic freedom to democracy. The resultant scholarship is marked with a surge in publications relating academic freedom to democratisation.[33] The dominant narrative in this endeavour harps on the pathologies of power *vis-à-vis* how these undermine the institutional role of the universities in development.[34] The chief explanations here highlight the impact of the decades of authoritarian regimes and the role of the military as a corporate apparatus and a politicised institution for stabilising authoritarian incumbencies and sit-tight regimes.[35] In Africa, the trajectory of nation building and state formation followed autocratically repressive pathways. States historically developed and became absolute monarchies.[36] Here, the tradition of single men owning entire chiefdoms and vast expansive empires birthed the patrimonial states. This personalised relationship and understanding of state power did not change with either colonialism or self-rule. At independence, the states in Africa moved into one-party rule—symbolised by the dominance of the incumbents. Everyone looked up to the presidents or prime ministers as their demi-gods—for economic and political salvation. The 1960s to the 1990s were

[33] Hajer Kratou and Liisa Laakso, "The Impact of Academic Freedom on Democracy in Africa," *The Journal of Development Studies*, Vol 58, 4 (2022), pp. 809–26.

[34] John Higgins, "Academic Freedom and the Idea of a University," *The English Academy Review*, Vol 15, 1 (1998), pp. 7–23; Judith Butler, "Academic Freedom and the Critical Task of the University," *Globalizations*, Vol 14, 6 (2017), pp. 857–61. See also Stefan Collini, *What Are Universities For*? (London: Penguin Books, 1947).

[35] Julius Omozuanubo Ihonvbere, "The State and Academic Freedom in Africa: How African Academics Subvert Academic Freedom," *Journal of Third World Studies*, Vol 10, 2 (1993), pp. 36–73.

[36] Ancient Buganda Kingdom in East Africa, Oyo Empire in West Africa, the Emirate system in Northern Nigeria, and the Zulu Kingdom of Southern Africa are examples of these absolute Kingdoms.

Africa's decades of deep-seated authoritarian regimes. These laid the foundations for the current national economic crisis and the repression of academic freedom. In some of the states, election-like events and quasi-democratic experiments bequeathed the citizens with constitutional frameworks that concentrated absolute powers in the executives. In others, military regimes outrightly criminalised democratic, dissent opinion and outlawed free speech. No distinctions were made between the personal existence and interests of the incumbent powerholders and the public life and realities of the states. The apparatuses of the states were occupied by the coteries, families, and friends of the rulers. The allocation of national appointments and the operative patterns of economic and political succession revolved along kinship—neo-patrimonial, patron-clientele—relations. These one-man state-ownership structures undermined academic freedom and the autonomy of the universities in Africa. The first three decades of Africa's post-independence existence illustrated different dimensions of this challenge.[37]

The 1980s and 1990s saw a new turn in the extent of academic freedom in Africa. After the political interference experienced by public universities in the 1960s and 1970s; external economic control, hostile material conditions, and the resultant economic crisis made the 1980s "Africa's economic stabilisation decade." As the legacy of the colonial state decanted into a patrimonial autocracy, which decayed into crisis by the 1980s, this induced massive external and internal pressures for economic and political state reconfiguration.[38] By the 1990s, the serious erosion of the state in many African polities limited the scope for economic reform and opened the door for a complex web of civil conflicts. There was also a renewed saliency to informal politics, as local societies adapted to diminished state presence and service provision. The combined effect of the contradictions in the character and nature of the state in Africa; its limited or utter lack of autonomy together with the emergent crisis in its political economy undermined the role of the postcolonial states and universities in knowledge production. Mamadou Diouf laments this crisis with reference to the aftermath and context of the implementation of the SAP in Senegal and West Africa:

> On the eve of independence, Senegalese intellectuals were carriers of the historic hope of modernization, cornerstones in a process of economic and social development putatively geared to their people's welfare; and it was supposed that they would accomplish this mission with the help, requested or imposed, of those who had handed power over to them. From that high status the intellectuals of Senegal, both those generally acknowledged as well as those self-appointed have fallen into a state now described in brutal frankness as a breakdown.[1] Between the hopeful beginning and the bewildered present, Senegal's intellectuals have traced a historical path marked in turn by euphoria, crisis, illusions of ideological, sociological and economic experimentation, and different flavours of opportunism alternating, naturally, with adventurism, only to end up now, if only the journalists are right, in a state of apathy or, to be more precise, a condition of internal exile.[39]

[37] Angola, Cameroon, Chad, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Eritrea, Gabon, Libya, Nigeria, Senegal, Sudan, Togo, Zaire, and Zimbabwe are the major examples of Africa's post-independence paramount rulers in various guises—civil, military, and pseudo-democratic. These were ruled as one-party states or single-party states. They have negative records of academic freedom and the institutional autonomy of the universities.

[38] Crawford Young, "The End of the Post-Colonial State in Africa? Reflections on Changing African Political Dynamics," *African Affairs*, Vol 103, 410 (2004), pp. 23–49. Here p. 23.

[39] Mamadou Diouf, "Intellectuals and the state in Senegal: the search for a paradigm," in Mamdani and Diouf, eds, *Academic Freedom*, pp. 212–13.

Given the context of entrenched military rule and the elusiveness of development, Africa's economic crisis coincided with, and facilitated the accelerated influence of the IMF and the World Bank. These bodies took over the design and management of domestic economic reform packages for most of the states across Africa. The inability of African governments to perform these functions effectively led to an overreliance on these international financial institutions. Regretfully, contrary to their promised developmental revival and economic transformation for Africa,[40] their policy prescriptions for African economies pushed economic liberalisation and market reforms to the fore. These were crystallised in the SAP. The state had dominated the political economy of most of the nations and societies in Africa at this period. This policy, however, saw this stance as the core impediment to economic and social progress and bemoaned the creation of artificial price levels of goods and services through subsidy; its huge public expenditures and its perennially unproductive investments in the economy.

According to Said Adejumobi, SAP's solution lied in the retreat of the state; the drastic cutting down of its expenditures, tariff and trade reforms; and the enablement of the private sector to monitor the economy.[41] Variations are acknowledged and noted in the specific reform measures foisted on individual states across the continent. Nevertheless, the shared features included currency devaluation and market-determined exchange rates; demand management measures such as cuts in public spending, reduction of money supply and wage restraint; deregulation of economic activities including the elimination of price controls; removal of subsidies on energy and food; interest rate deregulation and liberalisation of trade together with the commercialisation and privatisation of education and the public enterprises. The advocates of SAP claimed that, with these measures in place, African economies would become globally competitive; productivity would rise; resources would be efficiently distributed. This would improve the welfare of people and societies.[42]

Most states on the continent introduced one form of adjustment reform or the other. Between 1980 and 1990, 241 adjustment programmes were put in place by thirty-six states in Africa. These were in collaboration with the IMF and the World Bank. Cameroon, Cape Verde, Djibouti, and Swaziland were the only exception. Previously, many states in Africa recorded significant economic prosperity and stability in the 1960s. Inadequate funding was not the problem of the universities in Africa at this period. However, owing to corruption and profligate spending as well as poor economic planning, the worsening fortunes of the world economy of the 1970s recycled themselves into the states in Africa. Nigeria's experience in this regard was both staggering and typical. As Africa's commodity prices declined; Nigeria's national income earnings on foreign exchange dropped. The reduction in economic activities was followed by heightened problems in the state's balance of payment.

The pro-SAP promises of the IMF and World Bank were not delivered. A number of works have accounted for the complicated necessity and unworkability of structural adjustment in Africa, Eastern Europe, Latin America and South Asia.[43] In Africa, SAP later turned out to be a class-based project that sought to create a stable environment

[40] World Bank, *Sub-Saharan Africa*: *From Crisis to Sustainable Growth* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1989).
[41] Adejumobi, "Structural Adjustment," p. 419.
[42] *Ibid*.
[43] Among other sources, see Gavin Williams, "Why Structural Adjustment in Necessary and Why It Doesn't Work," *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol 21, 60 (1994), pp. 214–25.

for capital accumulation by the foreign and local bourgeoisie. This was achieved by suppressing labour through wage freezes: that is, an insistence on strict work discipline and a reduction in the existing workforce through massive retrenchment in the public sector. SAP contracted infrastructure and limited the provision of social services in agriculture, education, health, and transportation. Furthermore, it weakened the political alliance and coalition that underpinned the states in postcolonial Africa. State clientelism and patronage that the military and other fractions of the local bourgeoisie survived upon were undermined. This further promoted struggles within the bourgeois classes across the continent. It also compounded the political crisis and the resultant class struggles underlying the political and social crises that have continued to undermine public policy across the regions. Herein lies the delegitimisation of the state in Africa that resulted from its authoritarian and repressive implementation.[44] In all the adjusted states in Africa, the evidence, even by the World Bank's own admittance and reckoning, by the end of the 1980s, more than one decade after the implementation of SAP, was that the majority of African populations became poorer than they were in the 1970s.[45]

Analytically, the IMF and World Bank's agenda for higher education in Africa is not premised on building developmental states in the continent. Industrialisation and the development of highly skilled labour force are not the priorities of these international institutions for Africa. The pursuit of industrialisation and production of specialised professionals—medical doctors, pilots, and university academics—has no place in its neo-colonial model. The vision of the Washington Consensus for Africa and the role of the state in that scheme conflict fundamentally with the expansion of secondary and tertiary institutions from the post-independence period. The nationalist focus from the early post-independence period emphasised industrialisation and manpower development through the acquisition of training in a wide range of specialised skills. The interventionist role of the World Bank, however, sought a rapid return to the colonial *mise en valeur* exportation of primary products through the cultivation and production of raw materials among other trading arrangements.[46]

For global capitalism, the end of the colonial state was to initiate the disarticulation of African economies and carefully reduce them to the export-oriented production of raw materials.[47] Under the regime and tutelage of the IMF and the World Bank, the essence of the postcolonial state is to finalise and preserve this process. Not surprisingly, at a meeting with the vice-chancellors of major African universities in Harare in 1986, the World Bank complained that international and national investments in higher education in Africa amount to a misallocation of funds that would have been better deployed elsewhere other than the education system. In 1988, the World Bank advised African Governments to (i) contain costs by lowering expenditures for academic and non-academic staff and student support; (ii) limit and moderate enrolment increases by freezing or reducing student intake; and (iii) recover costs by charging high tuition, initiating student loan schemes and raising fees.[48] Throughout

[44] Adejumobi, "Structural Adjustment," p. 420.
[45] World Bank, *Adjustment in Africa*: *Reforms*, *Results and the Road Ahead* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1994).
[46] Thandika Mkandawire, *Africa: Beyond Recovery. The Aggrey-Fraser-Guggisberg Memorial Lecture* (Legon, Accra: University of Ghana, 2015). p. 65.
[47] Claude Ake, *A Political Economy of Africa* (England: Longman, 1981). pp. 43–67.
[48] Mkandawire, Beyond Recovery. p. 65.

the 1980s, the World Bank's position was that the rate of return from the investments on higher education in Africa was lower than that of primary education in the continent. As reported by Kingsley Banya and Juliet U. Elu this neoliberal dogma has since become the central underlining principle on education policy.[49]

The Universities in Post-Cold War Africa

The 1990s witnessed an expansion in enrolment by students in African universities. Between 1994 and 2000, there were 2.5 million new students. Between 2000 and 2006 this increased first to 6.0 million and later 9.3 million. However, as Thandika Mkandawire observed, compared with Asia and Latin America, these ratios left Africa much further behind other regions of the global South.[50] Worse still, these comparative regional increments took place in a context of deliberate resource denial to tertiary institutions. This led to a dramatic fall in the public expenditure per tertiary student from US$6,800 in 1980 to US$1,200 in 2002. The distributed recent average of this comes to US$981 in 33 low-income states in Sub-Saharan Africa.[51] The net effect of this decline in funding has ranged from a fall in the ratio of academic staff to students—evidenced in unbearable workloads for teaching staff as well as overcrowded classrooms. This fiscal marginalisation and strangulation of the universities in Africa has gone hand-in-hand with the continued policy-making dictations and influence of the IMF and the World Bank. This was connected to the post-Cold War abandonment by international donors and financiers who withheld funding from higher education and the universities—a situation the states could not redress.

The conditionalities imposed on universities across the regions compromised their autonomy and eroded their relevance to the societies in which they are located. Their demographic representational reach in relation to their populations shrank. This period marked the beginning of Africa becoming the least-secured and most under-governed region of the world.[52] This crisis is best understood against the backdrop of the collapse of social protection that exacerbated the decline of the state across the continent. Outside the universities, a surge in young people with unfulfilled employment expectations became a major sign of social turbulence. Frustrated and unsuccessful in their quest for decent living conditions and unable to benefit from their education, a large percentage of African youths became the targets of contemporary Islamism[53] and militant Islamic

[49] Kingsley Banya and Juliet U. Elu, "The World Bank and Financing Higher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Higher Education*, Vol 42, 1 (2001), pp. 1–34.
[50] Mkandawire, Beyond Recovery, pp. 69–70.
[51] *Ibid*, p. 69.
[52] Stephen D.K. Ellis, "Africa after the Cold War: New Patterns of Government and Politics," *Development and Change*, Vol 27, 1 (1996), pp. 1–28. See also Crawford Young, "Deciphering Disorder in Africa: Is Identity the Key?" *World Politics*, Vol 54, 4 (2002), pp. 532–57.
[53] To contextualise the changing role of marginalised youths in Islamic mobilisations in Nigeria and to historise the development of contemporary Islamism in relation to its past in West Africa, see Ousmane O. Kane, "Islamism: What Is New, What Is Not? Lessons from West Africa," *African Journal of International Affairs*, Vol 11, 2 (2008), pp. 157–87.

radicalisation.[54] As their capacity for producing verifiable theoretical knowledge has continued to decline; African universities have been reduced to data-generating institutions. Most of the home-based African academics have lost the capacity to develop and lead original research agenda and projects. As international development and public policy partners continue to market different components of the "anti-politics machine," local African scholars must oscillate and vacillate in all directions to sell their data collection services to their international collaborators. This is their only option and possibility for faring well in the competition for research funding. The resultant hardship from such dire conditions has evoked drastic coping mechanisms. In addition to a brain drain; constrained career prospects for home-based African academics has led many to consultancy and other financially lucrative ventures—however intellectually unrewarding—as many have left the academia. The remaining colleagues in these universities continue to resort to beer parlour intellectualism, diminished international collaboration and empty sloganeering in the classrooms. Notwithstanding the ill-equipped laboratories and outdated libraries everywhere in West Africa, higher education and the public universities are not budgeted as priorities for national borrowing by the states. The loss of Africa's best and brightest minds to administrative and political appointments in and outside the universities continues to undermine the future of these academies.

As a result of the harsh effects of the World Bank-imposed economic repression, the contribution by African universities to the global stream of knowledge production dropped. Their comparative international rankings among other regional universities in the world have also flattened. The qualitative exceptions to this are the leading universities in South Africa. The QS Online Ranking of World Universities; the Shanghai Academic Ranking of World Universities; and the Times Higher Education World Universities Ranking are major examples of such universities ranking bodies. In all of these global outlets, South African universities rank higher than all other African universities. South Africa also accounts for about two-third of Africa's overall expenditure in research and development.[55] In Nigeria, the pressure to publish in the top international journals and the rise in influence of citation indexes have led to the demise of many local scholarly journals.

Having established how Africa's debilitating economic crisis impacts on higher education, the next section draws on ASUU and examines the emergence, role and

[54] As illustrated by Y. Francis Fukuyama, two developments account for the rise of militant Islamic radicalisation in Africa. One is the failure of liberal democracy to penetrate and take roots in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria—despite the interventions and social engineering undertaken in these states by the United States of America. To this is added the faltering hopes and nature of the democratic aspirations in Myanmar, Tunisia, and Ukraine—among other would-be democracies. The civil wars in Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen that followed the Arab Spring of 2011 are illustrations of that disappointment. Two, is the failure of the United States' invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq to defeat the terrorist upsurge that birthed the September 11 attacks. That enabled its mutation into the Islamic State as the oasis for illiberal and violent Islamism across the world. In Africa, this gave rise to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic West (AQIM) that sought to overthrow the Algerian government and set up an Islamic State as well as Boko Haram in Nigeria—the expanding militant group that demands the rejection of modern literature and Western education and its science, which it condemns as a sin. Here, the role of educated, uneducated, and unemployed youths has been active. See Y. Francis Fukuyama, *Identity*: *The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018).

[55] World Bank, *Financing Higher Education in Africa* (Washington DC: World Bank, 2010).

struggles by academic unions in the public universities in addressing this—including decades of industrial strikes in Nigeria.

Academic Unions and Democratic Struggles in Nigeria

Two contexts highlight the postcolonial struggles by academic unions for freedom in Africa. These are the early post-independence (1960s–1980s) period and the current phase (1980s–2020s). The first has been examined by scholars in other works.[56] The latest illustration of the struggles in the ongoing era of neo-liberal governance, in Nigeria, took place during the 2022 eight-month strike by ASUU. This began on Monday, 14 February 2022 and ended on Friday, 14 October 2022. In embarking on this strike, ASUU's aim was to compel the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) to deploy the University Transparency and Accountability Solution (UTAS); implement the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) signed with the Union on 23 December 2020; mainstream the Earned Academic Allowances (EAA); pay all ASUU members at Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) Ile Ife their EAA based on the stipulated guidelines; and publish the White Paper on the Visitation Panel Reports of all public universities. Other issues included the demand to address the victimisation of academics at Ambrose Alli University Ekpoma; Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University (COOU); Ebonyi State University (EBSU); Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT); and Kogi State University (KSU); approve and implement the renegotiated 2009 FGN-ASUU Agreement submitted for finalisation; and stop the proliferation of state universities.[57] It was prosecuted nationwide as comprehensive and total.[58] Its ashes are still rife. The impact of the state's ill-treatment of this struggle are yet to be examined in the literature.

The earlier history of these struggles dates back to 1980–1983 under the presidency of Alhaji Shehu Shagari. However, demands for autonomy have remained undelivered since then. In 1980, the Federal Government usurped the disciplinary powers of the Governing Councils of all the federal universities. In December 1980, following the report of the Justice Belonwus Visitation Panel, President Shagari directed the Governing Council of the University of Lagos to dismiss six senior academics without the right of hearing. This led to heated nationwide protests and strikes by the Union between 1980 and 1983. It was not until 1986 that the Supreme Court ruled in favour of their reinstatement. A continued arbitrariness marked the fifteen years of military interregnum. During the fifteen year period of military rule (1983–98), ASUU's struggles focussed mainly on the survival of the university system.[59] These were

[56] Jeremiah O. Arowosegbe, "Academic Freedom, Decolonization and the State in Africa," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, Vol 22, 3 (2021), pp. 275–97. See also Jeremiah O. Arowosegbe, "African Universities and the Challenge of Postcolonial Development," *Africa*: *Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol 93, 5 (2023), pp. 591–614.

[57] Emmanuel Victor Osodeke, *2022 ASUU Strike, ASUU Strike Bulletin*, Numbers 1 and 2 (Abuja: ASUU National Secretariat, Comrade Festus Iyayi Complex, University of Abuja, 2022).

[58] Attendance at statutory meetings of all kinds—College, Council, Departmental Boards, Faculty, and Senate; examinations, inaugural, and substantive lectures and teachings—are forbidden during a total strike.

[59] The survival of the university system was conceived in terms of three components: (i) conditions of service, that is, salaries and non-salary-related issues; (ii) defence of the right to education; and (iii) funding and university autonomy.

framed around anti-military rule demands for constitutionalism and democratisation. Other burning national issues were equally taken on board.[60]

From the mid-1980s, ASUU's firm stance against the Government's harsh policies, especially military rule and SAP, made it a target for state extermination. In 1985, the Buhari-Idiagbon regime retrenched several workers. It clamped down on ASUU as well as the National Association of Resident Doctors (NARD) and the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA). It arrested, detained and sacked the leadership and members of all these associations. ASUU resisted Buhari-Idiagbon's undemocratic termination of the cafeteria system and withdrawal of subsidies on students' accommodation. It struggled against the imposition of Decree Number 16 of 1984, which transferred the powers of the senates of all the federal universities to determine academic programmes to the NUC.[61] In response to the Union's opposition to SAP, General Babangida accused ASUU, together with the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) and the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) of planning to topple his regime. Of note at this period, was the gruesome murder of some students at Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) Zaria, during the anti-SAP protests of 1986, which degenerated into violence and was escalated by law enforcement agencies.

Sunday, 20 April 1986 marked the commemoration of the shooting of university students at ABU Zaria in April 1978. It began with a peaceful procession in all the halls of residence in the Samaru Campus. The only female hostel at that time, Amina Hall, normally out of bounds to male entrants, was included in this procession. This inclusion of Amina Hall attracted the displeasure of the university authorities. The Vice Chancellor, Professor Ango Abdullahi queried the Students' Caretaker Committee for leading male students into Amina Hall. The responsible students were paraded before the Students' Disciplinary Advisory Committee. This Committee recommended adverse disciplinary punishments. One final year student was expelled. Another final year student was suspended indefinitely. Through a memo, the Vice Chancellor forbad the swearing-in of the newly elected Student Union Executives. These unfriendly decisions unnerved majority of the students. To deal with these measures, the students invited the local branch of ASUU and Kaduna State branch of the NLC to intercede on their behalf. However, all efforts to secure audience with the Vice Chancellor were frustrated and thwarted. On 22 May 1986, the students demonstrated and protested the actions of the Vice Chancellor. They staged a peaceful *sit-in* in the administrative block of the University. They demanded that the Vice Chancellor—whom they had trapped in his office—met with them to resolve their grievances. In response, the Vice Chancellor invited the police. These dispersed the students with tear-gas. The next day 23 May 1986, as the students gathered at a rally and talked about the situation on the Campus, a contingent of armed para-military, riot mobile police—called "*Kill-and-Go*"—opened

[60] During the military administration of Generals Murtala Muhammed and Olusegun Obasanjo (1975–1979), ASUU fought against the debt peonage and Nigeria's re-colonisation by western capitalism. Under the Generals Muhammadu Buhari and Tunde Idiagbon military administration of (1983–1985), the Union pushed for a principled opposition to military dictatorship. Under General Ibrahim B. Babangida's administration (1985–1993), it struggled against the implementation of the Nigerian Universities Innovation Project (NUIP) and the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of the IMF; the privatisation of university education; and the World Bank's US$120 million loan.

[61] This Decree took over the accreditation of all academic programmes from their professionals and transferred it to the NUC. It imposed uniform standards on all academic programmes. It called them minimum academic standards.

fire and killed twenty students and other civilians. This massacre generated violent reactions in all university campuses nationwide.[62]

After its Delegates Conference of 1991 in Badagry, ASUU approached the Babangida administration for discussion on how to improve the working conditions of the teachers in Nigerian universities. This effort led to two rounds of negotiation. Chaired by Mr. Senas Ukpanah,[63] the first round broke down after it was mired by a disagreement on Government's offer on salary. This negotiation was suspended by its Chair on 30 May 1991. Its inconclusiveness was seized upon by the Government for imposing a unilateral salary package. Further efforts at securing the attention of the Government were carefully frustrated. Accordingly, on 14 May 1992, ASUU declared another strike. However, based on the intervention of an Industrial Action Process (IAP), this strike was suspended after one week. The IAP ordered both sides to resume negotiation. The Government did not comply with this order. This informed ASUU's resumption of its strike on 20 July 1993. In a diachronic display of force, for the second time, ASUU was banned on 23 August 1993. This time, the Union ignored its ban and intensified its struggle. The failure by the Government in its efforts at breaking this strike compelled its eventual negotiation with the banned Union. This second negotiation was chaired by the Minister of Establishment and Management Services Mr. Gilbert Owelle Chikelu. He also led the Federal Government's team. ASUU was represented by its national President, Dr. Attahiru M. Jega and other members of its NEC. The deliberations and meetings of this negotiation led to the 1992 FGN-ASUU Agreement.

Signed on 3 September 1992, the resultant Agreement represented a rare milestone in ASUU's history and in the trajectory of labour-state relations.[64] For the first time in Nigeria's post-independence history, the Union successfully pinned down the Government on a rational and workable understanding between labour and the state on the development and management of the universities. In addition, beyond its affirmation of the Union's right to collective bargaining with the state, this agreement provided for a periodic review of the funding needs of Nigerian universities according to the changing budgets, costs and needs of the respective courses offered by the universities *vis-à-vis* the changing dynamics and realities of the global and local educational markets. The agreement formed the basis for further struggles by the Union. Given ASUU's central role in anti-military rule movements and resistance, the 1992 agreement strengthened the commitment by popular forces to Nigeria's transition to democratic governance. It led to the establishment of the Education Trust Fund (ETF). This development provided the platform for the Education Tax Act of 1993 and later, the Education Tax Act Number 17 of 2003 that led to the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND) of 2011. Its promises were, however, short-lived as the next governments reneged on its implementation.

On 29 May 1999, Nigeria's Third Republic began with the presidency of retired General Olusegun Obasanjo. This followed fifteen years of uninterrupted military rule

[62] Abdul Raufu Mustapha and Shehu Othman, "The Recent Police Killings on Nigerian Campuses," *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol 13, 36 (1986), pp. 73–5. And, Abubakar Siddiqque Mohammed, "The Aftermath of the Ahmadu Bello University Students' Crisis of May 1986," *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol 13, 37 (1986), pp. 97–103.

[63] A former university lecturer, after transferring his services to the Federal Civil Service, Senas Ukpanah later became a Permanent Secretary in the Federal Ministry of Education.

[64] Federal Government of Nigeria, "Agreement between the Federal Government and the Academic Staff of Nigerian Universities," 3 September 1992.

(1983–1998). The Third Republic continued from 1999 to 2023. Other works have described the number of working days lost to ASUU strikes in Nigeria from 1999 to 2023.[65] I have also recounted here, the responses by individual administrations to the Union's recurrent demands. As earlier mentioned, in 2022, ASUU's latest industrial dispute with the state in Nigeria spanned about eight months—from 14 February 2022 to 14 October 2022. Late in 2022, ASUU succumbed to legitimate pressures from the courts, federal politicians, and other stakeholders, and ended this strike.[66]

Conclusion

Academic freedom and university autonomy are problematic and threatened all over the world. However, given the repressive character, statist, and untransformed nature of the colonial societies inherited by most postcolonial states, the realities are particularly gloomy across the global South. In these societies, state autonomy and capacity are weakened by the dependence on international economic and political institutions for funding support. With different dynamics, Algeria, Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Egypt, India, Nigeria, and South Africa share similar experiences with Mexico, Tunisia, and Uruguay. In these states, the economic crisis of the 1980s led to renewed government hostility towards public universities. This was expressed in spending cuts in annual budgets for higher education and public universities. Brazil is a major illustration of this nightmare.

Nigeria's return to civil-democratic rule has not resolved the crisis in the universities. It is also difficult to see an end to the underlining causes. Nigeria's transition to civil-democratic rule enabled hitherto suppressed grievances to be fiercely articulated by previously unheard groups. Notwithstanding this democratic opening, the Federal Government's responses have been informed by its perception of the education sector as incapable of delivering constituency gains and political returns for the politicians. Between 1993 and 1998, the late General Sani Abacha described Nigerian universities as the least productive segment of the state in Nigeria.[67] Following the admonition and tutelage of the IMF and World Bank, other regimes have also evaluated the performance and relevance of the universities based on business outcomes and profit motives. The demand to provide facilities and funding for the public universities, continues to fall on the deaf ears of Nigeria's governing class and ruling elites who have been viewed as being more interested in patronage and the siphoning of public funds for electoral victory than in the development of the universities. These challenges and other pathologies described in this work, suggest a discouraging future for higher education and the public universities in Nigeria.

Perhaps, a few articles are not enough to fully articulate the gravity of colonial tribulations and postcolonial governance failure under various authoritarian—civil, military, and pseudo-democratic regimes—across the continent. The enduring existential challenges confronting the regions continue to unfold in different dimensions in the lives of the people. As the resultant crisis continues to affect the universities, the agenda to arrest the hostile situations are undermined by other complications. Most worrisome in the entire crisis dynamic are the repressive responses by the state in Africa. These are largely underlined by governmental push-backs against such struggles. In Nigeria, the pattern has been for the state to accuse ASUU, NANS,

[65] Arowosegbe, "Academic Freedom," p. 291.
[66] On the exchanges surrounding the termination of this strike, see Arowosegbe, "African Universities," pp. 607–10.
[67] See The Editorial, *The Guardian Daily Newspaper*, 1 November 1997.

NLC, and other active Unions of intended regime subversion. The epic illustration of such state-led assaults and repressions are the 1986 killing of twenty undergraduate students at ABU Zaria and the End SARS protests against Police brutality in Lagos, Nigeria in October 2020.

The current post-strike period is marked by "*work-to-rule*" and other industrial conflict practices. Local branches of ASUU have exhibited several reactions. Many university teachers have died of despondency and ill-health. ASUU estimates that sixty lecturers have died nationwide during the post-2022 strike struggles for the payment of their Earned Academic Arrears.[68] As the best brains continue to abandon the career and relocate away from the universities, Nigerian universities are losing ground as the nation's think tank.[69] Several students have relocated for overseas education.[70] Outside the universities, fuel subsidy removal; hike in electricity tariff; increment in university fees; national currency devaluation; refusal by federal and state governments to grant local government autonomy together with unbearable inflation and worsening insecurity continue to underline the precarity of human existence in Nigeria. Matters are not made better by the prodigious spending of state officials. From 1999 to 2023, Nigeria's debt profile has increased by over 685%.[71] In 2024, Nigeria's national debt stands at N87trillion.[72] In November 2023, President Ahmed Asiwaju Bola Tinubu received the National Assembly's approval to borrow additional N26trillion.[73]

Given these underlining conditions, the crisis in Nigeria's public universities and their resultant struggles will continue for a while. The Government's management of the crisis together with its responses to it, continue to undermine future struggles for academic freedom, employment, the quality of education, university autonomy and wage increment. President Tinubu's Government (29 May 2023–29 May 2027) has attempted numerous close down against the struggle. It harassed and unsuccessfully pressured ASUU to sign an undertaking not to proceed on further strikes—as a condition for paying past months' salaries of the outstanding eight months salaries.

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[68] This excludes those that died during the 2022 eight-month strike action. See Wale Akinselure, "ASUU, earned allowance arrears: we lost 60 members in three months," *Nigerian Tribune*, Friday, 24 May 2024.
[69] Gabriel Dike, "Varsities losing ground as nation's think tank," *The Sun*, Tuesday, 14 May 2024.
[70] At the University of Maiduguri, in 2024, infrastructural collapse compelled students to prepare for examination under street lights.
[71] Collins Olayinka, "How hunger thrives in states amid N6.58trillion FAAC allocation in 2023," *The Guardian*, Saturday, 24 February 2024.
[72] Adekunle Sulaimon and Gbenga Olonininran, "Economic hardship: protesters hit Lagos streets despite police warning," *Punch Daily Newspaper*, Monday, 26 February 2024. See also Vanguard, "Hardship: protesters defy police warning, hit Lagos streets," *Vanguard Daily Newspaper*, Monday, 26 February 2024.
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Conflict of Interest

Neither an actual nor a potential conflict of interests exists in this work.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.