REFRAMING CONVERSATIONS ON INSTITUTIONAL AUTONOMY, ACADEMIC FREEDOM, AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE CONTEXT OF EMERGING MANAGERIALISM AND CORPORATISM IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Institutional autonomy and academic freedom have for centuries been the bedrock of a typical university. Universities have always prided themselves as being accountable to their convocations on curriculum, who teaches it, who is taught, how it is taught, and the priorities of a research agenda. However, there have always been challenges to this autonomy and freedom, from states and estates, religious powers, and ideological factions throughout university history. The challenges have recently come from rising new managerialism, corporatism, and performativity in university activities, making institutional accountability increasingly answerable to external interests. This article examines changing discourses in higher education in the contexts of transformational imperatives and emerging managerialism, corporatism, and performativity. This intersection of transformational imperatives and market incursions dictates reinterpretation of institutional autonomy, academic freedom and new approaches to accountability in higher education globally and in South Africa. Neither academic freedom nor institutional autonomy can flourish without responsiveness to notions of accountability

Key words: Institutional autonomy, academic freedom, accountability, managerialism, performativity

INTRODUCTION

Contesting conversations on academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and accountability have been part of the discourses of a university from as far back as the birth of the first ones in the 11th century (Bergan, Egron-Polak and Noorda 2016, 3/10, 4/11; Kohtamäki and Balbachevsky, 2018). Early university charters, bestowed by monarchical and ecclesiastical authorities, addressed such matters as exemption for teachers and students from tolls and taxes, protection from injustice, and the right to award degrees and also stipulated conditions for operation: syllabuses, graduation requirements, library holdings, and codes of conduct (Gürüz 2011, 13–14).

One of the dominant perspectives that characterised early discussions of the status of a university, and therefore set it apart from other organisations, was that a university is autonomous and able to control and monitor its affairs independent of any external influences. This posture has, however, been contested by rival perspectives that acknowledge the community of scholars as but one of many stakeholders, each with demarcated roles, functions, obligations, and responsibilities apropos of a higher education institution.

The latter perspective departs from the idea of the academic collegiate and professoriate as sole decision-makers, to the recognition of markets as predestined players in the discourses of university academic freedom and institutional autonomy. Markets have recently exacted their influence in the form of an ideology cloaked in globalisation and, more importantly, through the incursion of neoliberal ideology that has shaped governments' policies and planning from the 1960s onwards. Furthermore, the neoliberal ideology has expressed itself through new policy direction and practice in higher education globally and in South Africa.

This article examines discourses around academic freedom, institutional autonomy and accountability that have epitomised the university sector globally since then, and in the South African context, characterised by moves in the systemic transformation of higher education. The article offers a critical analysis of the impacts of globalisation, and the rise of neoliberal ideology, new managerialism, corporatism, performativity, and entrepreneurship on institutional autonomy, academic freedom, and accountability in higher education, highlighting nuanced differences of interpretation of these concepts.

It is noteworthy that policy frameworks on institutional autonomy, academic freedom, and accountability in the South African context have been changing to contribute to the building of a democratic state since the 1994 democratic election. Despite these changes however, policy frameworks have always underscored co-operative governance that recognises specific roles of external and internal bodies.

This article is theoretical and conceptual in nature and draws on literature, inter alia: Magna Charta Universitatum 1988: paragraph 1); Gürüz 2011, 14; Maassen, Gornitzka and Fumasoli 2017, 2) and founding policy documents, including the national policy framework document National Commission on Higher Education (Human Sciences Research Council 1996); the White Paper 3 (Department of Education 1997a and the Higher Education Act, No 101 of 1997b) to conduct discursive nalysis on policy and practice on the changing conceptualisations of institutional autonomy, academic freedom accountability in the unique South African context. It also draws on Council on Higher Education reports (Council on Higher Education 2004, V; Council on Higher Education 2016, 54), and on Davie (1990).

CHANGING CONCEPTIONS OF INSTITUTIONAL AUTONOMY, ACADEMIC FREEDOM, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Institutional autonomy and academic freedom that became the hallmark of a classic university have had a lengthy period of protracted and contentious history as religious and political authorities, among others, expressed the desire to exercise control over university activities, including teaching, research, and individual expressions of the academics and students alike. It is generally agreed that, although institutional autonomy and academic freedom are distinguishable, the two are not mutually exclusive but are rather two sides of the same coin. The two concepts are, however, often erroneously infused in practice (Bleiklie and Kogan 2007, 478; Council on Higher Education 2003).

Institutional autonomy in a classic university is captured in the Magna Charta Universitatum that depicted European universities as autonomous institutions created to produce knowledge that is beneficial to society in general, and competent to control themselves, including regulating behaviours of staff and students independent of external powers (Magna Charta Universitatum 1988: paragraph 1). One such model, developed in the nineteenth century in Germany by Wilhelm von Humboldt, emphasised untrammelled freedom to teach, to learn, and to unify teaching and research; such ideas were, at the time, considered utopian (Gürüz 2011, 14). The doctrine of academic freedom was essentially derived from Humboldtian concepts of "*Lehrfreiheit* and *Lernfreiheit*" that created a framework for academic freedom initially in Europe and, subsequently, on a global scale (Goldstein 1976, cited by Bergan, Gallagher and Harkavy 2000, 123). More recently, several factors, including mass participation and consequent escalating costs, have "placed higher education in the public spotlight [that] did not provide universal approbation for the Humboldt … idea of a university" (Reilly, Turcan and Bugaian 2016, 4).

Debates have scrutinised relationships between autonomy, freedom, and accountability. There are, arguably, different versions of university autonomy, which may be equated with a form of institutional academic freedom, distinguishable from individual academic freedom. A distinction may be made between, on the one hand, "substantive autonomy", the "What of Academe" including staff and student selection, curricula and the research conducted, and, on the other hand, "procedural autonomy", the "How of Academe", including how universities address their missions, their administrative practices and personnel policies (Maassen et al. 2017, 3) in matters such as appointment, promotion, and the setting of key performance indicators generally.

Recent university autonomy policies have, at least in Europe, shifted from a "philosophical" to an "instrumental" perspective that exposes universities to "the vagaries of market forces" (Nokkala and Bladh 2014, 5). An increasing focus on managerial types of autonomy results in a view of such autonomy as an "external incentive *given* to universities to respond to various external stakeholders" (Kohtamäki and Balbachevsky 2018, 183, our italics).

Institutional autonomy

Institutional autonomy is often regarded as a matter between a university and the state. Governments worldwide engage in a "radical reform and reshaping of higher education to achieve economic, social and political objectives" (Reilly et al. 2016, 4). Citing the 2006 Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly resolution 1762, Lyer, Saliba and Spannagel perceive a "subservience" of higher education to governmental or market objectives, with a lack of clarity on who prescribes the objectives (Lyer et al. 2023, 15–16). State control of higher education varies, depending on the type of government. It can be, in a democratic society, a mutually dependent relationship (Maassen et al. 2017, 3), while the state in autocratic societies can intrude to the extent that it foists on institutions the "weaponisation" of higher education (Chirikov 2023). Other external actors – and universities themselves – can also compromise institutional autonomy (Gürüz 2011, 185). In the South African context, "institutional bureaucrats are also perpetrators [and] autonomy could in the end so empower institutional bureaucrats as to imperil individual academic freedom" (Habib, Morrow and Bentley 2008, 141). Another group of "violators" are identified: senior academics willing to sell abilities to "the highest bidder" (ibid.). This manifests itself increasingly in the guise of contract research, with the aim and outcomes subject to funders' expectations and timelines. Ultimately, there is no uniformity in the conceptualisation or the practice of university autonomy. It is influenced by a complex range of factors, such as the ratio of income streams (state funding, tuition fees,

private investment) and their proportional effect on academic activities (Gürüz 2011, 14). Note should be taken of differences, in respect of autonomy, between state-funded public and non-state-funded private higher education institutions; autonomy in the latter is usually subject to the attitudes of for-profit boards of directors.

Regarding individual autonomy vis-à-vis academic freedom, there are two ideally complementary interests, that of the faculty and that of a disciplinary sector; when they come into conflict, academic freedom assumes greater commitment to the discipline than to the institution (Kohtomäki et al. 2018, 182).

Academic freedom

Academic freedom is in a mutual yet often recalcitrant relationship with university autonomy. Debates on academic freedom raise several questions, including on what rights it is based, what its purpose is, whether it is the preserve of academics or a broad societal right, what permissible limitations, if any, can be placed on it, and, by extension, what the purposes are of universities and their claims to academic freedom (Lyer et al. 2023, 9). The question whether such freedom is the preserve of the academy, or a broad societal right is addressed in the South African Constitution (1996, Section 16(1)), which provides that "each citizen has the right to freedom of expression … this includes academic freedom and freedom of scientific research…this right applies not to institutions of higher learning or to academics specifically but is held by everyone." A question arises of how academic freedom, presumably the preserve of the academy, differs from the concept of "freedom of speech" that is – or should be – equally the right of all citizens, in the academy and beyond.

Accountability

The notion of higher education accountability also raises questions: accountable to whom, the relative answerability to various stakeholders (the state, government departments, taxpayers, external funders, quality assurance bodies, academic disciplines and, increasingly, students), the criteria applicable to the accounting, and how these criteria effectively measure the benefits of higher education teaching and research to social, cultural and economic well-being. A pertinent question is how much accountability is optimal; an excess can result in discovery stagnation, while a dearth can disable governments, the major funders of public higher education, from reassuring taxpayers that their money is being well spent. The increasing influence of accountability in the guise of commercialisation – which has aligned research management less with supporting independent individual research than with managing and

assessing research cohorts capable of realising marketable knowledge and products – creates "accountability-autonomy tensions that can be divisive and undermine the academic values of universities" (Narayan, Northcott and Parker 2017, 3). Part of these tensions is that over-accountability to external agents can be judged as a forfeiture of trust (Huisman 2018, 1).

Other less overt factors also affect public perceptions of institutional accountability. Faced with a burgeoning social demand for the gradual massification of higher education, the sector has had to contend with a number of challenges. These include the enrolment of students who have achieved the government-legislated minimum admission requirements without having adequate levels of academic literacy and numeracy. Institutions are expected to increase their pass, throughput and graduation rates, sometimes at the cost of appropriate levels of intellectual enquiry. Albeit subtly, managerial expectations of student success and research publication influence the concept of individual academic freedom. These expectations have led to academics' perceived loss of control, with ever-increasing influence on the part of corporate management, and its performance targets and indicators, with resultant "intensification of labour" and "perceived marginalisation of teaching" (Avis 2005; Reiners 2014, 24).

Recently, more insidious forms of accountability have infiltrated higher education institutions, including ideological predilection that has resulted in the banning of individuals from campus, cancellation of invitational lectures, and pressure to rescind financial support from certain corporate funders. Institutional management may be accused of prioritising the preservation of its corporate status over protection of its institutional autonomy and academic freedom..

ENCROACHING HAND OF THE MARKET ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM, AUTONOMY AND ACCOUNTABILITY WITHIN UNIVERSITIES

Beliefs about the power of the corporative managerial approach and management theory in the public sector have forced a shift towards an entrepreneurial culture in higher education (Laurillard 2000, 138). This has resulted in the incorporation of institutions into national drives for efficiency and productivity, which has triggered the adoption of new public management models of other public sector organisations (Lyotard 1984; Henkel 1997, 135).

The encroaching hand of the market embedded in new managerialism in higher education expresses itself in what came to be known as quasi-marketisation, to distinguish these behaviours from real market and business ethos and practices. Quasi-market behaviours mean ways in which institutions and faculties are encouraged to compete for money from diverse sources "from international grants and contracts, university-industry partnerships, investment

in professors' spin-off companies, or students' tuition and fees" (Slaughter and Leslie 1997, 11)

Encroachment of market forces into higher education

The term "academic capitalism" is often used as an umbrella term to designate market-like behavioural tendencies that typify higher education in the twenty-first century. While acknowledging some overlaps with other terms, academic capitalism describes profit-making activities by institutions and academics and, more importantly, how these profit-making behaviours play out in academic freedom and institutional autonomy discourse.

Two regimes of academic capitalism – old and new – are distinguishable in this article. The old regime is described as a social contract between academe and society where scholars enjoyed autonomy in their research agendas, which were funded by the state and industry where knowledge for the public good was paramount, and where any defence of commercial applications was frowned upon (Edgell 2004, 112).

Conversely, the new regime of academic capitalism takes the form of opening a new variety of possibilities for faculty work and remuneration into more commercial activities, and higher education competing to attract the best and brightest in a global pool of academic labour. The benefit is that a "market-oriented regime allows the market to allocate research resources on a competitive basis to research applications showing evidence of potential success. This approach is more targeted and efficient than pursuing pure science and hoping for serendipitous applications" (Edgell 2004, 112). This new regime typifies academic capitalism and how it has been reshaping the discourses of academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

This newer version of academic capitalism may be defined as:

> "an alternative system of rewards in which discovery is valued because of its commercial properties and economic rewards … knowledge is regarded as a commodity rather than a free good, and universities have the organizational capacity and are permitted by law to license, invest, and profit from these commodities" (Slaughter and Rhoades cited by Edgell 2004, 107).

Inherent contradictions in academic capitalism exist in relation to the academy. Slaughter and Leslie (1997) elaborate on this arguing that "university employees . . . are employed simultaneously by the public sector and are increasingly autonomous from it . . . they are academics that act as capitalists from within the public sector but are state-subsidised entrepreneurs" (Slaughter and Leslie 1997, 10). Specifically, the authors underscore the profit-making intent in academic capitalism as faculties and academics expend their academic wealth when they apply their scarce and performative knowledge and skills to

productive work that generates benefits to individual academics, to the public university, to the corporation they work for, and to society (Slaughter and Leslie 1997, 9). By selling their intellectual capital to external bodies, academics compromise and often forego their autonomy and academic freedom.

Entrepreneurial activities

Global economic austerities, changing financial systems, and the push for innovation have triggered the rise of entrepreneurialism that symbolises a different kind of market-like behaviour in higher education. The explicit objective is to look beyond government subsidy and student fees as sources of funding, and to raise additional funding from non-traditional, multiple sources such as entrepreneurship acceleration programmes, patents, endowments, letting facilities, providing consultancy to companies and municipalities for the benefit of faculties and institutions such as testing of materials for industry and agriculture, and developing a curriculum for pre-university education.

In defining an entrepreneurial university Clark (1998) identifies five organisational elements of transformation of the processes of raising additional funding from non-traditional sources: the strengthened steering core, the expanded developmental periphery, the diversified funding base, the stimulated academic heartland, and the integrated entrepreneurial culture (Clark 1998, 4). These activities have become accepted as survival strategies for institutions in an era of economic austerity, changing financial systems, and shrinking government funding.

INSTITUTIONAL AUTONOMY, ACADEMIC FREEDOM, AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

This part of the article focuses on how these concepts – autonomy, freedom and accountability – have, during the last three decades, since the emergence of a democratic state in 1994, shaped discourses in the South African higher education sector. The overlying decades of policy implementation and practice can be categorised as the periods 1994–2000, 2001–2009, and 2009 to the present (Council on Higher Education (CHE) 2008; (Council on Higher Education 2004, V; Council on Higher Education 2016, 54; Davie, 1990; White Paper 3 (Department of Education 1997) and the Higher Education Act, No 101 of 1997; Muller, Maassen and Cloete 2006, cited in CHE 2016,113)

It is necessary when examining policies and practices in the sector to distinguish direct, explicit from more hidden, tacit state steering. The overlying stages unfolded with three intersecting goals: development of the legislative framework and regulation to promote equity

of access and fair chances of success to all and redress of the skewed access to higher education; redefining the purposes of higher education in a constitutional democracy; and developing strategies to mitigate the irreversible pressure of globalisation and encroaching market language in higher education, influenced by the ideology of new managerialism.

The period from 1994 to the present has been distinguished by varying patterns of state intervention and interference through regulatory frameworks and regulations to redress the pre-democratic state's historical, racial, and divisive policies. Representing a departure from pre-democratic policies and practices and transition to a constitutional democracy, the 1994–2000 period was characterised by, inter alia, general policy uncertainties, political negotiations, and compromises (Muller et al. 2006, cited in CHE 2016,113). Policy initiatives in this period were specifically intended to redress fragmentation, uneven provision, and a racially-segregated sector. The foci were on the formulation of new policy and regulatory frameworks to redress the lack of access and equity and, more importantly, the creation of policies that reflect the principles, values, and goals of a constitutional democratic state, and guidance on implementation of such policies in higher education specifically. The harbingers of policy initiatives during this period include the National Commission on Higher Education (Human Sciences Research Council 1996); the White Paper 3 (Department of Education (1997) and the Higher Education Act, No 101 of 1997. The White Paper aimed at complete restructuring of the higher education sector. These documents underlined the significance and urgency of redressing inequities and inequalities of access to higher education that characterised the pre-democracy state.

The White Paper implicitly espoused a conventional approach when it described academic freedom as the total non-interference by stakeholders, including the state: "no censure or obstacles in the pursuit and practice of academic work… a precondition for critical, experimental and creative thought and therefore for the advancement of intellectual inquiry and knowledge" (Department of Education 2007 1.23). Promulgated as it was during the transition period, typified by uncertainties and contestations, this conceptualisation of academic freedom mirrored oppositional discourses of this principle that prevailed in the pre-democratic state. Thus, the White Paper seems to have borrowed from a narrow TB Davie (1990) "paradigmatic" approach which contradicted a general resistance to academic freedom within the context of pre-democratic state ideology and hegemony. This approach was used to counter the pre-democratic government's stranglehold on academic freedom in universities, especially in the then-advantaged liberal universities. At the same time, this approach disregarded the accountability of institutions in the way they were using public funds.

On institutional autonomy, the White Paper pronounces that this principle should be understood to mean granting institutions a fair degree of self-regulation and independence on student admissions, what to teach, pedagogies, assessment regimes and research. However, the condition was added that freedom and autonomy are granted within the context of public accountability and the national need for advanced skills and scientific knowledge (Department of Education 2007, 1.24).

The White Paper is unequivocal that institutions must be accountable to stakeholders, including their councils, and broader society. More importantly, institutions receiving public funding are expected to account for how funds have been utilised, demonstrate the results they achieve with the resources, and demonstrate how national policy goals and priorities are met (Department of Education 2007, 1.25).

The 2001–2011 period saw the development of new policies, amendments, and the clarification of uncertainties and diverse interpretations that existed during the previous period in the discourses on academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and public accountability. Although managerialist ideology's impact was already recognised in higher education in the previous period, market-like behaviours and how they increasingly shape the discourses were distinctively underscored in the National Plan on Higher Education (Department of Education 2001).

The Plan underlies the significance of preserving a balance between the three principles in public and private higher education during this second phase of transformation. It further dispels ambiguities, proclaiming that institutional autonomy cannot be used to undermine transformation processes necessary in the democratic state and confirms the co-existence of the three principles (Department of Education 2001, 11).

THE RISE OF NEW MANAGERIALISM IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Managerialism has multiple interpretations all of which denote shifts in values, purpose, mandates, management and governance of universities in the twenty-first century. Notably, where managerialism prevails in higher education, it is implicitly associated with increasing shifts from traditional academia culture, towards more market-like behaviours (Kogan 2004, 3). These behaviours have led to attempts to transform universities into corporate enterprises whose managers are akin to chief executives of corporates rather than being part of the collegiate of a typical university (Kogan 2004, 3). This resulted in staff management and

professional identities and the application of quasi-market mechanisms giving power to "quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations" to control universities (Reiners 2014, 23).
This trend arguably compromises the autonomy of higher education institutions, in that it brings to them the influence of corporate strategies that had, historically, been alien to a university ethos. It has opened university management to some of the rules typical of business and industry and, thereby, exposure to novel forms of public scrutiny that sit uncomfortably with the notion of institutional integrity.

Public accountability was significantly influenced by new approaches, from the 1980s onwards, to institutional authority. The term "neoliberalism", and terms subsumed under it – managerialism, marketisation – reshaped governments' political planning in areas such as the economy, health as well as higher education policy and practice. Despite nuanced differences, however, these terms are often used interchangeably to describe the quest for economic liberalism which initiated the language of the market, including a free-market economy, and individual freedom of choice (Maringe 2010, 17–34).

Some South African state interventions have unintentionally resulted in diminishing individual academic freedom and institutional autonomy compared with what institutions and academics enjoyed in the pre-democratic era. Exemplars include funding (a new funding formula, 2003), planning (PQMs and mergers), typological differentiation, and quality assurance systems: the implementation of programme accreditation and institutional audits on a national scale in 2004 (CHE 2016, 118), all of which impacted on freedom, autonomy, and accountability. The increasing state steering should be understood against the backdrop of global competitiveness and gravitation towards managerialism at the state level, while promoting social, public good in higher education, and a comparable rise of new managerialism at institutional and academic levels.

From discipline- to programmatic-planning

Prior to the restructuring process, universities had the autonomy to structure the qualifications they offered independent of outside influences. This was done arbitrarily with neither specific goals in mind, nor clearly formulated criteria or quality checks to justify decisions taken (Department of Higher Education and Training 2002, 5). However, this changed with the restructuring of the higher education sector for a democratic society on the one hand, and the growing pressures of globalisation and the associated market economy on the other.

In response to changing socio-economic conditions, discipline-planning, that had been the sole prerogative of institutions, was discarded and replaced by programmatic-planning. As the forerunner of the restructuring process, the National Committee on Higher Education

Curriculum Report proposed that the erstwhile qualifications-based learning programmes be replaced by programme-based planning to diversify access, and promote acceleration, as well as vertical and horizontal mobility (Human Sciences Research Council 1996). It was stated that the disciplinary depth would not be lost in the proposed programme planning but that the tradition of one or two majors that prevailed before the restructuring would no longer be practised (Department of Higher Education and Training 2002, 31).

Specific challenges to this proposed planning were multifold. Firstly, there were concerns about the seeming loss of institutional autonomy and academic freedom on how knowledge of disciplines was to be structured. Secondly, programmatic planning is founded on the same logic as an outcomes-based approach which privileges pre-specified exit-level outcomes borrowed from countries such as Australia and Scotland to respond to globalization. The latter was apparently embraced for pragmatic reasons to realise the government's ideology of widening access, especially for groups previously excluded from participating in higher education. This type of planning dilutes the autonomy that institutions enjoyed in terms of how knowledge in curricula of different fields was to be organised to form a qualification.

Institutional mergers and incorporations

Institutional mergers that became the trademarks of the transformation of the higher education sector in the post-apartheid setting explicitly, but sometimes tacitly, reshaped the discourses of academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and accountability in many respects. As in other cases of state steering policies on higher education restructuring, institutional mergers had two main purposes: to advance the government ideology of widening access to the sector for marginalised groups, to redress past inequalities and advance social justice, and to make the sector responsive to the changing economic conditions brought about by globalisation, and the increasing market influence on social, economic, and higher education policies and practices. However, the two objectives seem contradictory in that reducing the number of institutions had the opposite effect: of limiting access rather than widening it.

Before the reconfigured sector following the mergers and incorporations, institutions had relative autonomy to determine their purposes, missions and visions, student enrolment targets, curriculum and the knowledge they wished to impart, independently of external influences, including government. What they did not have was freedom to decide on the student profile; that was determined by apartheid law.

The reconfiguration process led to a weakening and, in some cases, the loss of institutional autonomy and increased state steering of the sector in the post-apartheid setting. Loss of institutional autonomy and identity occurred with the redefinition of original missions, visions,

mandates and purposes of institutions through the creation of institutional types that were allocated differentiated purposes: research institutions focusing mainly on the development of conceptual knowledge, universities of technology focusing on the production of more applied contextual knowledge, and comprehensive institutions that offer both conceptual and applied knowledge (Council on Higher Education 2016, 282). State steering through mergers had three purposes: advancing government's political and ideological programme of broadening access, equity and social justice, making the sector responsive to global imperatives, and reducing inefficiencies and duplications in the sector (Council on Higher Education 2000; Department of Education 2001, 79–83). Autonomy and identities were lost in terms of the market served; this affected student profile, admission requirements, and programme characteristics (Ntshoe 2010, 30). In line with the government's political agenda, the creation of institutional types was to address inequalities between historically-advantaged institutions that traditionally served privileged communities and historically-disadvantaged institutions for marginalised Black communities. However, no evidence exists demonstrating that the move widened access, especially for the marginalised groups. Moreover, it was mainly historically-disadvantaged institutions which, through mergers and incorporations, lost their autonomy while historically-advantaged institutions largely retained it in terms of their missions and purposes, although they are constrained in terms of which programmes they may offer.

State steering in institutional governance and management

The power of the Minister to hold university councils and management accountable where there are, or there is suspicion of, financial irregularities and corruption and where the rights of students and staff are compromised, is derived from the Higher Education and Training Laws Amendment Bill of December 2012 (Republic of South Africa 2012).

While the Minister's interventions demanding accountability have been successful in some cases, they have been met with stiff resistance from institutions who often hide behind institutional autonomy even where universities' councils, management, and senates have shirked their fiduciary duties, responsibilities, and obligations. The recent court challenges preventing the Minister from holding institutions accountable for effective governance and management failures suggest some ambiguities in the current legislation to safeguard the public's and other stakeholders' interests. This paralysis could be attributed to the notion of co-operative governance that requires consultations between the Minister and some of the stakeholders directly or indirectly involved in defective governance and management. But, in cases like this, the actions of the Minister appear to be more in the form of business rescue practice than overbearing managerialist meddling.

During the second and third decades of transformation in South African higher education the influence of markets in the sector resulted in the development of quality assurance systems and "audit" culture that, in turn, reshaped the principles of freedom and autonomy.

These developments signify a strengthened accountability to the state by both public and private institutions with a corresponding thinning of institutional autonomy. State intervention became necessary for several reasons. Although institutions may decide what programmes to offer within the national programmatic-planning regime, their autonomy is currently tempered by the state's obligation and responsibility to ensure that the programme offerings and curricula are of an acceptable quality. Institutions have become increasingly accountable to the State as the guardian of the interests of the public, students and staff, and for services provided by institutions to advance the government agenda of widening access and allowing for articulation and mobility within the sector. The widening of access to all students who qualify for higher education in the post-apartheid setting has had an impact on the autonomy of institutions to choose students they would like to teach, their range of offerings and research, and the availability and quality of infrastructure. State emphasis on universal access for advancement of its transformation agenda replaced the opposite emphasis, during the apartheid era, on the corralling of students into racial and linguistic camps. Government's agenda weakened institutional autonomy, as they had to realign their original missions and visions with those of their partners regionally and globally. Autonomy in research is often reduced when government funding is implicitly used to influence research that advances government's social and economic development as well as local, regional and international communities (Council on Higher Education 2004, V). Similar constraining of research autonomy can occur in cases of university-industry research collaboration when the demand from industrial funders is for closely-directed and prompt research outputs and products. Lucrative contract research and corporate consultancies can generate, for institutions and individual researchers alike, a form of academic capitalism, which has a potentially detrimental effect on the principles of freedom and autonomy.

Quality assurance, in the forms of institutional audits, national reviews and programme accreditation epitomised the demand for more accountability on the part of institutions as the system opened, expanded, and broadened to accommodate the burgeoning number and diversity of students seeking admission. The expansion of the sector has also led to accountability to the state in respect of the quality of programmes offered, and the quality of teaching and support provided to students by multiple providers (Council on Higher Education 2004, 2).

There is a widely-held notion, promoted by the media, that institutional rankings are reliable measures of quality in higher education. Although ranking institutions is not a policy

in South Africa, public institutions are distinguishable in terms of their types, each with their distinct missions, purposes, mandates within the differentiated system (Ntshoe and Selesho 2014, 174). Since the same standardised criteria used in global rankings are applied in the South African situation, institutional autonomy and identities are sacrificed, as institutions tend to drift away from their original missions, mandates and purposes and follow those of their global counterparts. The drift has resulted in homogeneity where all institutions wish to focus on research that is used "as the exclusive criterion for judging the performances of all institutions, regardless of their mandate" in the differentiated system in South Africa (Van Vaught 2007, 19).

More recently, the 2011–2024 period has been characterised by the acknowledgement of increasing state managerialism, and the need to develop a "post-managerialist knowledge-based governance, leadership and management model for South African higher education in the third decade of democracy" (Council on Higher Education 2016, 54). The post-managerialist approach seeks to offset the corporate model, which was the result of the adoption of "neo-liberal economic theory in terms of which universities were to be seen as enterprises selling a service (education) in competition with each other" (Harman and Tredgold 2007, 13–16). The emphasis in this period has been on the creation of a governance and management framework in higher education where different stakeholders exercise their fiduciary responsibilities to promote democratic accountability in the ongoing transformation of the sector (Higher Education Quality Committee 2015, cited by Council on Higher Education 2016, 54).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We argue that the three co-existing principles that have been the hallmarks of a classical university since the 18th century –academic freedom, institutional autonomy and accountability – merit conceptual reframing, taking into account global trends during the last three decades, and their influence on South African higher education policy since the emergence of a constitutional democracy. Interpretation of the three principles, and their inter-relationship, has been evolving in response to changing economic, political and institutional contexts, swayed by the ever-increasing influences of neoliberal ideology, globalisation, managerialism and marketisation. Traditionally there have been narrow interpretations of academic freedom and institutional autonomy, often with less regard to the demands of accountability. In the South African context, two main factors are relevant. One, a global concern, relates to how managerialism and marketisation have shaped responses, and to whom a higher education institution is accountable, and on what criteria, The other, of national concern, has been on how

the three principles advance the need for widening access, fostering transformation, and promoting equity and social justice, rather than curtailing them in the South African democratic state.

Neither academic freedom nor institutional autonomy can flourish without due responsiveness to the notion of accountability. A *laissez faire* approach to autonomy and freedom is dangerous as it can frustrate the implementation of national policies of redress and can be used as shields to avoid, or deflect, accountability to the taxpayer and, more importantly, to the public at large. Equally dangerous is a reneging of accountability to camouflage bad leadership, financial mismanagement and corruption in higher education institutions, whether public or private. It is, furthermore, untenable if individual academics exercise freedom in ways that undermine constitutional principles through lack of respect for cultural, religious, gender or linguistic diversity.

While government has generally been cautious about promoting the incorporation of managerialism and marketisation in higher education, current policies and practices suggest a subtle and tacit adoption of the language of these ideologies. This has had the effect of diluting the inter-dependence of the three principles.

There is often contradiction between institutions and individual academics tendentiously deploring neoliberalism and academic capitalism, while implicitly embracing them in their everyday practice. Such activities, dependent on marketable outputs and timelines determined by external funders, may undermine the unpredictability and variability of genuine research. They may also, at the behest of external funders, divert individuals, faculties and institutions from research priorities that are more compatible with institutional foci that accord with mission, institutional type, as well as local contexts.

Considering a decline in government funding of higher education, it is understandable that institutions experience the need for garnering additional funds from the marketplace. Entrepreneurial activities can, in many cases, be survival strategies, and many of the results of academic capitalism have manifested, directly or indirectly, public as well as private good. What is required is a robust critique of the extent to which corporate-style managerialism and marketisation in higher education have intruded on traditional approaches to disinterested academic practice, in teaching and in research. Accountability ought to be gauged in terms of responsiveness to the priorities of the society that funds and supports teaching and research, rather than the production of predetermined marketable knowledge and associated products. In that way the principles of individual academic freedom, institutional autonomy and public accountability are multi-layered and multi-faceted and can be regarded as inter-dependent,

mutually beneficial, and aligned with the appropriate identity of higher education institutions in a democratic state.

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