

Possible themes for South African university degrees.

In general the white South African universities have not given serious thought to the kind of tertiary education that would be appropriate to the new South Africa. They operate on the basis that the (British) western model has universal validity, and any talk of change is suggesting a lowering of standards. As they see no need for fundamental change, their focus is only on ways of expanding their facilities to admit more black students into the existing system. So their concerns are : more funding for scholarships and expansion, improving the pre-university education system for blacks within the present parameters, and academic support programmes to help black students to cope with University education in the interim.

1..UWC is the one institution that has tried to raise the issue and is trying to adapt itself to be a "people's university", with some opposition from the other universities. Such a theme would thus be most appropriate, but you should also include something personal and comment on what you observed in Africa, what lessons etc.

Do you have strong views on what tertiary education in a democratic South Africa should be? I will be collecting some of Jake Gerwal's speeches and relevant articles and will bring them to you. A discussion with Harold Wolpe and Elaine Unterhalter and Thozamile Botha might also be useful. (You might find a more general discussion with Thozamile very informative) I attach a copy of a speech on academic freedom which I delivered to WUS last year, which raises a different but related set of issues, but more importantly, looks critically at the white universities. You may wish to raise the question of academic freedom also.

2. Second Institution

I understand it was established as a consequence of a long history of demands from the African people. The process that led to its establishment, what the institution became, and the experiences of its students are part of our political history, and that of our region. Though those present will know something of it, it would be important to refer to this.

On this occasion it will be vital to talk about what the institution has meant to you: your expectations when you first went there, what it stood for in African perceptions, and something of your experiences. In addition, you could talk of what education has meant to the African people historically and in modern times, the perversion of education under apartheid and the legacy for the youth of today.

This could provide the opportunity for you (drawing from the points above) to develop your thinking on the theme of education, and its importance for us today.



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Dear Chief,

I'm sorry for the delay in getting the enclosed to you. It is long, but hopefully set out in a way that can be read and understood in parts. Perhaps when we discuss I can clarify where necessary.

I have been considering possible themes for the two speeches, and would like to put forward some ideas for your consideration, in a general context of what you might say on your return.

We need to find a way of your making a political input and influencing what is happening taking into account the points you raised in our discussion. People want to know what you are thinking and how you see things, your experience and that of the ANC over the last 30 years, and the lessons for the present. (I have a specific suggestion for Conference which I would like to discuss with you.)

Outside of the closed meetings and rallies, you could develop your ideas on specific topics, drawing on your experience and going beyond what may be immediate problems - a kind of essay. Careful choice of subject and occasion, with tactful wording could make a vital contribution while avoiding potential problems. Such speeches would, most importantly, encourage many of those concerned about some current developments, to make the direct connections, and raise the issues.

As an example: if you thought it appropriate, one could take the theme of democracy, and expand it beyond the narrow focus of the current debate in South Africa; deal with the principles of democracy, and the importance of cultivating a democratic ethic in our society so that we not only negotiate a democratic constitution, but are able to function in a democratic manner throughout society and in all aspects of life. In that context, you could talk about the need for democracy to be the basis of all forms of organisation: not only the institutions of the state and government, but also political organisations like the ANC, universities, the economy, the judicial system, the UN, the international economic system and/or whatever else you want to develop.

On the two speeches, I cannot improve on my original suggestions of themes, but have elaborated on each in separate memoes, and suggested where some of the information may be found to help develop your ideas. Hope you find this useful.

Please let me know when I can come and see you.

Spence
Spence

THE DEATH OF COMRADE FRANCIS MELI

The Comrade left home on Tuesday the 2nd October 1990. He indicated to the family that a certain friend from London has arrived and he was to spend a few days with him in Johannesburg. He was apparently staying with this friend of his called Ben at Carlton Hotel. Ben had apparently left for London on Saturday the 6th October 1990.

Cde. Meli booked at the Hilbrow Protea Inn on Sunday the 7th October 1990, on Monday the 8th, a cleaner called Constance went to tidy Cde. Meli's room. She found him "asleep" and left the room without cleaning it. Again in the afternoon of the 8th, she went to check if Cde. Meli has awoken. She found him still "asleep" in the very same position as she found him in the morning.

She then informed the supervisor about this, however, since the hotel does not allow them to interfere with guests' privacy, they decided to leave him. The supervisor by the name of Rose apparently rang Cde. Meli and got no response.

This morning on the 9th October 1990, a cleaner by the name of Florence went to tidy the room. When she opened the room she found that there was a very bad smell and cde. Meli was still "asleep". She called Constance who cleaned the room on the 8th. They both went to check what was going on. Constance suspected that there was a serious problem because cde Meli was "sleeping" in the very same position as she left him the previous day.

The Manager was called, he discovered that Cde. Meli was not breathing and he was "cold".

The ambulance and police were called, the ambulance certified that cde. Meli passed away.

The hotel phoned the ANC office and we rushed to the hotel.

- * Police took statements from the above-mentioned witnesses.
- * Police took Cde. Meli's diary and a notebook.
- * Police took photographs of the corpse
- * We took Cde. Meli's clothes.

STEPS TAKEN

- We sent a message to the family through the Regional Office. Cde. Govan Mbeki is handling the matter.

MESSAGES WERE SENT TO:

- (a) President
- (b) Deputy President
- (c) ANC Missions
- (d) Regional Offices
- (e) All Departments

ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Statment to WUS/UNESCO Seminar: Paris May 1989

At one level, discussion of academic freedom in South Africa would provide a perfect case study of the way in which the state can take action against universities, academics and students. Some of the measures taken in South Africa are known, but because we are a racist society, and the world focusses on the well known white universities of Witwatersrand and Cape Town, one hears little of what is happening on black campuses in South Africa. Though one needs to elaborate on conditions there, one would not further our objective here, by simply recounting the catalogue of repression. Rather, I wish to focus on South Africa in order to illustrate aspects of the wider debate on academic freedom.

The South African case provides a useful illustration of aspects of academic freedom that are more obscure elsewhere. When dealing with such an extreme society - and let us not forget that apartheid has been declared crime against humanity and is the only policy designated as such since the Nuremburg trials and the recognition in international law of the crime of genocide - policies carried to the extremity throw up sharply those impediments to academic freedom that may otherwise be less apparant.

The international debate on academic freedom in relation to South Africa and within some circles inside South Africa, illustrates the difficulties and dangers of trying to examine academic freedom in isolation from other human rights within a society. How can we assert or seek academic freedom, claim freedom of expression or freedom to undertake research, when we live in an enviroment where there is indefinite detention without trial, political organisations are banned and individuals prevented from expressing their views, where books and newspapers are censored, and where to work peacefully for, or merely advocate, fundamental change in society is considered treason by the courts.

The call for the isolation of apartheid South Africa, including an academic boycott raises questions about the relationship between academic freedom and other human rights, and has often been opposed on the grounds that it amounts to a restriction on academic freedom. Those who advocate the boycott stress the link, and raise the responsibilities to the wider society of the particular individuals and institutions that claim this special freedom. The assasination of a white academic, David Webster, a few weeks ago illustrates the price that some academics have had to pay in South Africa for carrying our their responsibilities to society. He is not the only casualty. Others have been killed. Many have been denied jobs, or had their right to travel restricted by bans and denial of passports. Under the state-of-emergency we cannot know the full numbers or identity of the those detained, but over 30% of those known to be detained are students and teachers.

South African universities reflect the white domination within society. The failure of those who shape the academic system to examine and correct the inherent racism that prevails even in their own institutions has resulted in universities and the academic process sustaining apartheid. (4)

While the fundamental issues are raised more starkly in South Africa, they have a wider application. We need to examine, whether academic freedom can be considered and claimed without considering the responsibility of academics within and to society. The focus cannot remain simply on the unencumbered right to teach and undertake research, but must be expanded to include consideration of the structural context and the goals of the academic institutions within which we operate.

frene n ginwala

Black and white academics have recently come together to establish a non-racial democratic union - UDUSA, which will begin to address some of the issues raised here.

were to be subordinated to government control. As the Minister of Bantu Education explained in 1957:

Control by the government is needed as it was necessary to prevent undesirable ideological developments such as had disturbed the non-white institutions not directly under the charge of the government. (1)

The transfer to the Department of Bantu Education of the major "non-white institution" referred to: Fort Hare, was explained by the same Minister:

Where one has to deal with under-developed peoples, where the state has planned a process of development for those peoples, and where a university can play a decisive role in the process and direction of that development, it must surely be clear to everyone that the State alone is competent to exercise the powers of guardianship in this field. (2)

In many cases, control of these universities is now exercised by Bantustan authorities. The universities are simply designed as teaching institutions, to train people to service the Bantustan bureaucracy and institutions. Their function was not to promote the critical awareness, that lies at the core of the exploration of knowledge and must underpin academic freedom. Radical scholarship is kept off the campus by action against academics such as dismissal and deportation (the Bantustans being nominally independent of South Africa), and by brutal repression of student activities by police, the military or by vigilantes. The president of one Student Representative Council was publicly sjambokked (whipped) in full view of the assembled academics. Universities are closed down periodically, entire student bodies are expelled. Most of the expelled students are not admitted to any other academic institution, and have to leave the country or abandon their studies.

The black universities are literal battle fields today, some operating with an ongoing military presence on campus, others subjected to frequent police or army raids. How could it be otherwise in a society where war has been declared and troops are regularly deployed against the people in the townships, and the schools. The more so, because in South Africa, the struggle for education has become a very important component of the national liberation struggle. Discussion about the nature of education, about the meaning of academic freedom, the rights and duties of intellectuals and so on, have become features of the political debate within the mass democratic movement.

(1) Cited in Nkosingithi Gwala *State Control, Student Politics and the Crisis in Black Universities*, in Cobbett & Cohen *Popular Struggles in South Africa* James Currie 1987

(2) Ibid

The third factor, that brings South Africa into the limelight is that an important component of national liberation is the struggle to break the monopoly of knowledge and skills, to find more relevant forms of education, and to use knowledge and research to further the liberation of the whole society.

Academic freedom is one of the rights that vests only in a specific sector of society - though its benefits must accrue to all. But precisely because it is sectoral, the demand for academic freedom can all too easily be seen as an elite demanding privileges not available to other individuals in society. Rights which appear to benefit only a small segment, can only be acceptable to the wider society when they carry with them special responsibilities. It is not enough to say academic freedom cannot be considered in isolation from other human rights - it becomes incumbent on academics that in their statements, in their teaching, and in their research, they examine, take note of and draw attention to all violations of human rights. In the measure that academics fail to do so, they contribute to and bear responsibility for restrictions on genuine academic freedom.

Also, in the measure, they do not use their knowledge for advancing the human rights of all members of society, they open the doors for those who would threaten all freedom, including academic freedom - because in the final analysis it is the academics who bear responsibility for the intellectual and ethical climate of society.

The nature of society can itself create institutional and structural obstacles to academic freedom. Denying access to education to the majority of the population, or to particular sectors limits academic freedom and such exclusions exist in many societies. In South Africa, as elsewhere, the extreme poverty of the majority limits the numbers who enter tertiary institutions, as well as the performance of those who do gain admission. The educational opportunities of the majority of South Africans are also restricted by the discriminatory allocation of resources, with many times more being spent on white education than on that of blacks, with consequent effects in all aspects of educational, economic and social life.

In addition, as in most other societies, there are barriers that limit the participation of women in academic as well as economic and social life. We, South Africans are as yet seeking liberation. How do academics in societies that claim to be free account for, or justify, the denial of academic opportunities to women in their own societies, indeed, in their own institutions? How does one explain the low level of participation of women in this seminar?

It is all too easy to perceive threats and curbs on academic freedom that come from the state: "they" are the bad guys and academics and the academic community are the good guys. Not only is this inaccurate, but there is a danger in such a simplistic

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TO : THE PRESIDENT

FROM : THE OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL
HEAD - QUARTERS

9TH OCTOBER 1990

DEAR COMRADES,

RE : DEATH OF COMRADE FRANCIS MELI
- MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

WE REGRET TO INFORM YOU ABOUT THE UNTIMELY DEATH OF CDE FRANCIS MELI, MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AND FORMER EDITOR OF SECMABA.

FURTHER INFORMATION WILL BE COMMUNICATED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

approach, for it facilitates the general failure of academics to examine themselves and their own institutions.

There are many universities and academic opportunities for whites in South Africa, and much has been made of the high standards and academic traditions of these institutions. For decades, the privileged elite of academics within an already privileged white society suffered from the delusion that academic freedom existed in our country. Even today, there exists the misconception that academic freedom in South Africa was only restricted by the apartheid regime in 1959, when segregation was imposed on universities by law. Until that time, the exclusion of blacks from the majority of universities in the country, and from some faculties in all the universities was not challenged or perceived as a restriction on academic freedom, as the policy had been decided upon and was being implemented by the white academics.

Most of those who expressed their concern or opposed government restrictions on academic freedom in 1959, did not recognise the structural limitations that were inherent in a society in which the majority were disenfranchised. Even while they opposed segregated universities, they effectively supported a discriminatory education system and happily sent their children to segregated schools.

Similarly, when political organisations were declared illegal and their literature and other books banned, most academic objections subsided when university libraries were allowed to hold the banned literature and academics allowed access. It should be stressed, that academics effectively accepted censorship for the rest of society, so long as some of them could read and study this forbidden literature.

Thus many generations of white academics saw academic freedom in isolation, unrelated to other human rights and applying only to themselves; and unrelated also to the denial of human rights to others i.e. the black majority. They divided academic freedom on racial lines - and claimed it as a privilege for themselves.

To the structural and self inflicted limitations on academic freedom, have been added state imposed ones: legislative and other actions directed specifically against academics and universities as well as restrictions arising from the greatly increased level of repression in society generally.

Following, the introduction of a special curriculum for Africans, called Bantu Education, separate universities were established as part of the bantustanisation policy and the process of restructuring South African society along such ethnic and racial lines as suited those in power. As in other spheres of life, there was no valid scientific basis for these divisions. From the outset, there was no attempt to disguise that these institutions

Outside the African and other ethnic universities the contradictions within white academia remain. Many of the universities have taken a stand against attempts by the state to impose new restrictions on them. University authorities and academic staff have intervened on behalf of students who have been detained, or to try and prevent police raids on their campus. They have also made university halls available for political meetings. But most of them are still trapped by their historical perceptions, and the inevitable conflict when trying to deal with the imposition of restrictions on academic freedom in isolation from the repression within society and the oppression inherent in all its structures.

Thus university authorities claim credit for the number of black students now attending "white" universities, but make scant reference to the fact that despite their much vaunted academic traditions, their graduates (overwhelmingly white) repeatedly refuse to support black candidates for the few elected seats on the University Councils.

These same universities misuse academic freedom in collaborating, or at best allowing themselves to be used in promoting scientific and other exchanges for military and strategic purposes in the defence of apartheid. Many of their research projects are funded by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research which is notorious for providing the cover for the illicit transfer of military, nuclear and other technology, through its constituent organisations such as the National Institute for Defence Research, National Mechanical Engineering Institute and other ostensibly scientific institutions. (3)

Most South African universities remain part of a "white" world, and model their courses on its cultural economic and academic values. In addition, even those universities that admit black students, have not accommodated sufficiently to the political reality of South Africa. Courses are based and standards required which may not be sustainable in conditions of poverty, the ideologically imposed Bantu Education, and in a society at war. Effectively students are required to live in ivory towers. Given the level of resistance in the country, students are inevitably involved and often detained. Yet universities insist on following strict administrative procedures and those who fail are not allowed to resit examinations, and many lose their bursaries. As a result the number of drop outs is very large. These are some of the factors which explain the absence of black researchers and the domination of whites in South African studies. In our society education and activism have to go together, and the academic community has a responsibility to create conditions where this would be possible.

(3) For examples and documentation of the role played by the CSIR see African National Congress, Conspiracy to Arm Apartheid Continues, Bonn 1977.