

# Academic Freedom in a Global Context: Challenges and Perspectives

## Call for Papers

*Transtext(e)s Transcultures: Journal of Global Cultural Studies*

Issue 16, 2021

### General presentation

The current global health crisis has ushered universities into remote learning, raising concerns about the freedom for students and teachers alike to express themselves “beyond the reach of the digital panopticon” (Villasenor, 2020) or to maintain interactive debates instead of pre-recorded online classes where knowledge is processed without being challenged. Besides, online platforms can be a tool to monitor academics' logging time or online activities. Targeted harassment by disseminating cherry-picked texts and videos used in class is another matter of concerns for individuals and institutions. In authoritarian regimes, pressures on academic freedom have increased in the wake of the pandemic, as recent cases in China have shown: historian Sun Peidong from Fudan University was severely harassed for publicly debating the crisis, Law professor Xu Zhangrun from Tsinghua University was suspended and placed under house arrest for being openly critical of the government, and several other scholars were under investigation for reporting on the lockdown or commenting related political measures. Yet, silencing academics and diminishing scientific research also happened in the US where President Trump continuously downplayed the severity of the virus and dismissed White House doctor and researcher Anthony Fauci, thus creating an atmosphere of distrust against scientists. In Europe, new threats to academic freedom have emerged in Hungary and Poland (where authorities removed or threatened gender studies). Hungarian-based Central European University was forced by its host government to move to Vienna in 2019. In France, threats to academic freedom on campuses have increased, stemming from students as well as groups outside the university (Beaud, 2019). In many other countries, the impact of the virus combined with a long-standing economic crisis, like in Lebanon, will have dire consequences with the cutting of less profitable academic programs and employment. In many ways, the pandemic has generally acted as a catalyst for latent systemic dysfunctions and often reinforced potential threats on academic freedom.

Academic freedom here is understood as the freedom to produce and share knowledge free from political, economic, or social hindrance to shed light on complex situations or issues. Academic freedom is restricted to members of research and education institutions who seek to

create knowledge “for its own sake” (Butler, 2017), not for industrial or commercial interests. Therefore, it is distinct from freedom of speech or other basic human rights as it is not an inherent entitlement of each human being, but rather a freedom attached to a specific community of people whose duty is to further develop knowledge in several areas. In that sense, academic freedom has a collective dimension but is exercised by a “community of the competent” (Haskell, 1996) who ensure that science is not politicised.

This special issue seeks to document and analyse the alarming rise in and diversification of threats to academic freedom in the 21st century across the globe. Suggested topics include, but are not limited to:

- \* History of academic freedom: the definition and scope of academic freedom have expanded through time. One objective is to illuminate contemporary realities by looking at changes over the past century.

- \* The preservation of academic freedom and institutional autonomy largely depends on the commitments of institutions. How can academic freedom be guaranteed and protected through university and other institutions’ formal engagement? Should academic freedom become a crucial topic of debates within the academic community, including students, scholars and administrators?

- \* The marketisation of universities and the race for “excellence” has created new threats to academic freedom: privileged funding of applied studies over fundamental research; partnerships and subsidies from profit-oriented private organizations or illiberal States with political agenda; the creation of management tools coming from the industry sector and the gradual withdrawal of public authorities in higher education and so on. How do economic imperatives continue to threaten academic freedom? Do they also create opportunities and which ones?

- \* Collaboration with academic institutions in authoritarian systems have created dependencies and sometimes led institutions or individual academics to self-censor and sometimes to be complicit with repressive regimes. How can this spill-over effect, or the impact of exchanges and partnership with institutions where academic freedom is not valued, be avoided? Can globally engaged universities create ethic guidelines to avoid such situations and be compelled to speak out when students and academics are at risk? How can global campuses guarantee academic freedom?

- \* How is academic freedom challenged by specific contexts, such as civil war, other forms of conflict or financial crisis, may it be global or national?

- \* Can so-called “cancel culture”, or the boycott of contested cultural or historical elements, threaten academic freedom by strengthening conformism and hindering any attempt to contradict a certain orthodoxy?

\* Some scholars may work in a context of relative academic freedom, but their research may endanger informants or colleagues from a less relaxed environment. To protect others, should academic freedom come with ethical limits and constraints?

\* How do power structures within a society (sexism, racism, hetero-normativity, etc.) impact the diversity of academic research, leaving out researchers from ethnic, gender or sexual minorities, and how does it impact academic freedom? Similarly, how can the homogenization of research and its production (largely dominated by English language) be a threat to academic freedom? What space should be given to research led and published in other languages, in particular non-European languages?

\* In authoritarian contexts, red lines can move fast. A research field, area or topic can suddenly move from “safe” to “risky”. How do we assess and redefine the notion of risk? Are some fields more affected than others? How to evaluate where the red line is?

\* In the past few years, several networks and fellowships for scholars at risk have been created to support academics who face threats because of their research or teaching. What forms of solidarity and mobilisation can be identified, and how can their effectiveness and suitability be assessed and improved? What are the organisations behind such initiatives? What are the new opportunities to protect and enhance academic freedom in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? How are technologies enabling or unsettling academic freedom?

\* So far, academic freedom does not appear as a standard in international comparative rankings. However, this is an important principle: excellence does not necessarily equate to academic freedom. Can academic freedom be measured and how? Can international rankings measure both excellence and academic freedom for a better understanding of how they relate to each other?

**We welcome contributions in English, French and Chinese.**

**Even if academic freedom issues can affect different fields of knowledge, we wish to limit our scope to humanities and social sciences.**

## **References**

ALLARD, J., HAARSCHER, G., PUIG DE LA BELLACASA, M., *L'université en questions. Marché des savoirs, nouvelle agora, tour d'ivoire ?*, Editions Labor, 2001

BARR, N. and CRAWFORD, I., *Financing Higher Education. Answers from the UK*, Londres, Routledge, 2005

BEAUD, O. "La liberté académique est de plus en plus menacée en France", *Le Monde*, 12 avril 2019.

BECKER, G.S., *Human Capital. A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis with Special Reference to Education*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1964

BERG, M. and SEEBER, B.K., *The Slow Professor. Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy*, Toronto, Toronto University Press, 2016

BILGRAMI, A. and COLE, J. R. (eds.), *Who's Afraid of Academic Freedom?*, Columbia University Press, 2015

BUTLER, J. "Academic Freedom and the Critical Task of the University", *Globalization*, 2017, Vol. 14, No. 6, 857–861 (p. 858)

CASSIN B. (dir.), *Derrière les grilles. Sortons du tout-évaluation*, Paris, Fayard/Mille et une nuits, 2014

CRAWFORD, S., ULMSCHNEIDER, K. et al. (dir.), *Ark of Civilization: Refugee Scholars and Oxford University, 1930-1945*, Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press, 2017

CURAJ, A., DECA, L., PRICOPIE, R. (eds), *European Higher Education Area: The Impact of Past and Future Policies*, Cham, Springer, 2018

DUCLOS, M. ET FJELD, A. (dir.), *Liberté de la recherche : Conflits, pratiques, horizons*, Kimé, 2019

FISH, S., *Versions of Academic Freedom: From Professionalism to Revolution*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2014

FRANGVILLE, V., MERLIN, A. and VANDAMME, P.-E., *La liberté académique : principes, enjeux et menaces*, Bruxelles: Presses Universitaires de Bruxelles (forthcoming), 2020.

GINSBERG B., *The Fall of the Faculty. The Rise of the All-Administrative University and Why it Matters*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011

HASKELL, T. "Justifying the right of academic freedom in the era of 'power/knowledge'", in L. Menand (ed.), *The future of academic freedom*, The University of Chicago Press, 1996, p. 44.

HUDSON, C. and WILLIAMS, J., (eds.), *Why Academic Freedom Matters*, Civitas, 2016

IGNATIEFF, M. and ROCH, S. (eds.), *Academic Freedom: The Global challenge*, Columbia University Press, 2018

LACKEY, J., *Academic Freedom*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018

MENAND, L. (ed.), *The future of academic freedom*, The University of Chicago Press, 1996

NELSON, C., *No university is an island: Saving academic freedom*, New York, NYU Press, 2010

VILLASENOR, J., "Why I won't let my classes be recorded", *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 2020: <https://www.chronicle.com/article/why-i-wont-let-my-classes-be-recorded/>

### **Schedule**

Deadline for proposals: January 15, 2021

Deadline for first drafts: May 31, 2021

More about "Instructions for authors": <https://journals.openedition.org/transtexts/103>

### **How to submit your proposal:**

Please submit a one-page document including an abstract and a short biography to [vanessa.frangville@ulb.ac.be](mailto:vanessa.frangville@ulb.ac.be) and [gwennael.gaffric1@univ-lyon3.fr](mailto:gwennael.gaffric1@univ-lyon3.fr)

### **About *Transtext(e)s Transcultures* 跨文本跨文化: *Journal of Global Cultural Studies***

*Transtext(e)s Transcultures* 跨文本跨文化 is a multilingual research journal created in 2006 which employs a double-blind peer review process. It is intended to be a forum transcending disciplinary as well as spatial boundaries for writers and academics throughout the global community. Its ambition is to provide a space for the imagining of new frameworks of accounting for and representing the world, a space in which different approaches and trans-disciplinary methods, may jostle to express the complexity and the diversity of human (hi)stories and societies.