

Political Ideology and Academic Autonomy in Ethiopia

Ashenafi A. Aboye^{a*} and Amy Scott Metcalfe^a

^a*University of British Columbia, Canada*

*Corresponding author: Email: ashenafi.alemu@ubc.ca.

ABSTRACT

This study explores whether State political ideology in Ethiopia influenced the academic autonomy of that country's universities. It asks what the historical trends in the development of higher education show about political ideology and its relationship with university autonomy in the Ethiopian context. After reviewing different university autonomy models (Berdahl, 1990; Choi, 2018; Ordorika, 2003; Reilly, Turcan & Bugaian, 2016), the study delineates the primary stakeholders of academic autonomy, namely, academic staff, students, and the government. It discusses academic autonomy in a comparative light across three regimes in Ethiopia, namely, the Imperial (1916-1974), the Socialist (1974-1991), and the Revolutionary Democratic regimes (1991-2018). Data from various sources show that in all these three regimes, the State negatively influenced academic autonomy, including by imposing a particular political ideology that was favored by the government in power at the time. However, the form and level of State influence have varied across these regimes.

Keywords: academic, autonomy, Ethiopia, ideology, universities

CONTEXT AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Several higher education researchers have studied academic freedom, quality of higher education, governance and administration, and reform in the Ethiopian higher education system (Asgedom, 2007; Assefa, 2008; Gebremeskel & Feleke, 2016). Some of these studies have discussed institutional autonomy, as well as aspects of reform such as enrollment, expansion, funding, and government interference in the university's governance. Gebru (2013) contends that these studies (see Asgedom, 2007; Assefa, 2008)

consider institutional autonomy to be part of academic freedom. He also contends that “university autonomy has been operationalized as institutional freedom” (p. 279).

University autonomy is a generic term, and its exact definition is often contested and in flux (Piironen, 2013; Salter & Tapper, 1995, as cited in Yokoyama, 2007). University autonomy has in its meaning, from referring to the “the capacity to decide upon one’s own laws or conditions of living,” to “moral freedom,” and more recently, has served as an “umbrella term” alongside academic freedom and institutional autonomy (Piironen, 2013, pp. 129-130). It is even more problematic to discuss the status of autonomy and equate it with academic freedom because as Bladh (2007) notes, “it is always possible to have institutional autonomy but not academic freedom, since the institution might itself suppress speech even without pressure from the outside” (as cited in Piironen, 2013, p. 131).

Researchers acknowledge similarities between university autonomy and academic freedom, while also recognizing distinctions between the two (Berdahl, 1990; Guruz, 2011; Piironen, 2013; Yokoyama, 2007). One basic difference lies in the fact that academic freedom concerns itself with the rights, duties, and responsibilities of individual academics, while autonomy concerns itself with the rights, responsibilities, and power of the institution to make decisions about its internal affairs, goals, and programs (Berdahl, 1990; Billinton & Li, 2000; Gebru, 2013; Reilly, Turcan, & Bugian, 2016; UNESCO, 1997). In an attempt to explore university autonomy in the Ethiopian context, Gebru (2013) reviewed legislative and research documents, concluding that “Legislatively speaking, universities in Ethiopia are autonomous, as they initially were” (p. 286). Gebru’s (2013) conclusion can be interpreted as the legal recognition given to academic autonomy in institutional as well as national legislations.

Unlike research that equates university autonomy with academic freedom, there is a paucity of literature that speaks directly to specific aspects of university autonomy in Ethiopia, including its relationship with the political ideologies that were dominant during different historical and sociopolitical contexts. Social scientists discuss political ideology as referring to a set of values and ideas which consist of political action and commitment to achieve a particular social order (Erikson & Tedin, 2003, as cited in Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009; Freedon, 2006). Freedon (2006) argues that ideologies “facilitate (and reflect) political action” (p. 19). They enforce particular political orientations in the civic and political spheres of national and local institutions such as universities. Universities also play a significant role in the production, dissemination, and legitimation of particular values such as political ideologies (Kerr & Castells, 2000, as cited in Cloete & Maassen, 2015). African universities’ competing political elites harbor conflicting ideologies (Cloete & Maassen, 2015). These kinds of relationships between ideology and universities, specifically political ideology and the academic autonomy of universities, need rigorous analysis.

Scholars have examined university autonomy from different perspectives such as those of students, staff, government, external stakeholders, donors, and others (Arikewuyo & Ilusanya, 2010; Asgedom, 2007; Gebru, 2013; Guruz, 2011; Ordorika, 2003; Piironen, 2013; Semela, 2007; Smith, 2014; Yokoyama, 2007). Some of these scholars adopt and develop distinct models for understanding university autonomy and its interaction with respective governments (Choi, 2018; Ordorika, 2003; Reilly, Turcan, & Bugian, 2016). Southern (1987) argues that universities should be protected from bureaucratic control and political interference by governments (as cited in Smith, 2014). Likewise, researchers have pointed out the relationship between universities and governments while discussing institutional autonomy (Billinton & Li, 2000; Guruz, 2011; Ordorika, 2003; Reilly, Turcan, & Bugian, 2016; Smith, 2014; Yokoyama, 2007).

There is much research that indicates that university autonomy is impacted by governments in a range of countries. For instance, Billinton and Li (2000) assert that the Dalian University of Technology in China is under the leadership of the Communist Party of China. In contrast, universities in Canada and Britain operate in political conditions that do not have intense political involvement in their operations (Billinton & Li, 2000). Similarly, Ordorika's (2003) analysis of the situation at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) shows that the government has been relentless in trying to control and shape the stature of the university towards a particular political orientation. This has, at times, resulted in frictions in the university-government relationship. Whereas in England, "conditional autonomy" empowers academics and institutions only when they fulfill national or established norms (Yokoyama, 2007). The legislation in Nigeria enables the government to influence the country's universities (Arikewuyo & Ilusanya, 2010).

The current study aims to explore academic autonomy and how it relates to and is influenced by political ideology in Ethiopia. It offers an analysis of the relationship between political ideology and academic autonomy at universities in Ethiopia. The study aims to identify how the State's interference, specifically, the imposition of its political ideology, has impacted the country's higher education system. This aim can be achieved through addressing the following research questions: 1) How does political ideology influence academic autonomy in Ethiopia's universities? 2) What do the historical trends in the development of higher education show about political ideology and its relationship with university autonomy in Ethiopia?

To do so, the study draws on a critical review of earlier scholarly contributions on the topic, along with personal accounts of scholars with a wealth of experience in the country's higher education system. Other sources of verbal data such as a Library of Congress lecture and a radio interview are incorporated into the analysis to arrive at a more complete understanding of academic autonomy and its interaction with political ideology in Ethiopia's higher education system. The study compares the situations in the Imperial (1916-1974), Socialist (1974-1991), and current Revolutionary-Democratic (1991-2018) regimes. It provides a different perspective on understanding academic autonomy in Ethiopia with reference to the political context in which the universities in this country operate. This study will add to the scarce literature on the interaction between State political ideologies and academic autonomy of higher education systems.

ACADEMIC AUTHONOMY: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Berdahl's (1990) university autonomy model has been used by researchers such as Billinton and Li (2000) to understand university-government relations. Earlier research had combined academic with administrative autonomy while discussing university autonomy across contexts (Hanly, Shulman, & Swaan, 1970). Autonomy is frequently discussed with accountability. Whereas autonomy refers to the power to govern without external controls, accountability refers to the requirement to demonstrate responsible actions to some external constituency, and autonomy and accountability have an inverse relationship whenever they exist (Berdahl, 1990). Similarly, researchers also understand university autonomy as an aspect of academic freedom (Gebbru, 2013). Berdahl's (1990) contribution is relevant here because it discusses university autonomy as consisting of academic freedom, substantive autonomy, and procedural autonomy. Whereas substantive autonomy refers to the "the power of the university or college in its corporate form to determine its own goals and programs – the 'what' of academe" – procedural autonomy refers to how the institution achieves its goals (Berdahl, 1990, pp. 171-172).

Ordorika (2003) develops an alternative model of institutional autonomy. His work begins as a critical appraisal of Daniel Levy's (1980) book entitled *University and government in Mexico: Autonomy in an authoritarian system* (as cited in Ordorika, 2003, pp. 363-364). Unlike Berdahl (1990), Levy (1980) discusses university autonomy as consisting of appointive, academic, and financial autonomy (as cited in Ordorika, 2003, pp. 363-364). In Levy's (1980) model, as cited in Ordorika (2003), appointive autonomy includes the hiring, promotion, and dismissal of faculty and the selection of university officials. Likewise, academic autonomy includes curriculum and course selection, the establishment of degree requirements, and academic freedom, among other things.

Ordorika (2003) argues that Levy's (1980) understanding of university-government relations is not complete because it takes for granted that the university-government relationship is based completely on stable structural and decision-making systems and legal frameworks. Ordorika (2003) suggests an alternative to this model, re-envisioning academic autonomy as academic and campus autonomy. Significant in Ordorika's (2003) alternative model is a recognition of three dimensions of the governmental influence on university autonomy, namely, "instrumental, agenda control, and ideology" (p. 365). Besides, Ordorika's recognition of academic autonomy as inclusive of academic and campus autonomy is relevant because such an inclusive approach embraces issues of student access and campus policy which may require the intervention of the government officials.

Reilly, Turcan, and Bugaian (2016) developed "a holistic view" of university autonomy, which they referred to as "institutional university autonomy" (p. 239). The "institutional university autonomy" model connects the organizational, finance, human resource, and academic aspects of the university with what they identified as five interfaces: government-university, university management-university staff, academic staff-students, university-business, and university-internationalization. Even though this model of institutional autonomy includes various stakeholders, the focus of the current article is the entry point for political ideology and its imposition on academic affairs. In the light of this focus, only two of the five interfaces, *government-university* and *academic staff-student* are relevant to the present objective of understanding how a government's political ideology impacts the (academic) autonomy of the university.

Likewise, Choi (2018) in developing indicators of university autonomy that can be used to evaluate academic and institutional autonomy. To this end, Choi (2018) categorizes these indicators into academic staff, administrators, and students. For each of these categories, five stakeholders are identified: academic staff, students, government, industry, and society. "Particular purpose" and "indicators" are also assigned to each stakeholder to facilitate the evaluation and measurement of autonomy. Even though Choi's (2018) stakeholder model is interesting as another holistic approach, it may, however, not capture all relevant stakeholders. The number and kind of stakeholders may change in different contexts, disciplines, and even geographies. Global developments such as the internationalization of higher education may also impact what is listed in the stakeholder model and the respective autonomy indicators.

There has been less scholarly attention to addressing academic autonomy and the role of the State's interference in this autonomy. Specifically, there is a lack of research on how academic autonomy is impacted by the State's imposition of political ideology. The current study, which is informed by Berdahl's (1990) distinction between substantive and procedural autonomy, Ordorika's (2003) alternative model, Reilly, Turcan, and Bugaian's (2016) *institutional university autonomy* model, and Choi's (2018) stakeholder approach, delineates academic autonomy from the perspectives of three key stakeholders: academic staff, students, and the university. In this sense, academic autonomy comprises the autonomy of

the professoriate to design courses, decide on the content of their courses, and teach theories and perspectives they deem appropriate to the context of the institution and the needs of their students. The study operationalizes academic autonomy as the autonomy of the students to enroll in the programs of their choice, provided they fulfill the requirements set out by their respective institutions.

In the larger context of the institution, the study makes use of the term academic autonomy as it relates to the autonomy of each of the units within the university to decide on the content of their courses; design, run or withdraw programs; confer degrees, awards, titles, and honors to those who fulfill the institution's requirements; admit students and establish criteria to admit new students; and appoint and hire faculty members, academic leaders, and department heads, along with the participation of students and/or their representatives. In this sense, any form of State involvement or the State's imposition of a particular political ideology that hinders the performance of academic stakeholders – for example, students, faculty members, or individual units in the academic wing of the university – would be considered a form of State interference or its violation of academic autonomy. Unlike most of the studies by Ethiopian educational researchers which treat institutional autonomy as a part and parcel of academic freedom, this study explores whether these aspects of academic autonomy are undermined or negatively affected by the government in Ethiopia. The study investigates whether the State's political ideology has undermined or affirmed the academic autonomy of the country's universities.

ACADEMIC AUTONOMY AND POLITICAL IDEOLOGY IN ETHIOPIAN UNIVERSITIES

The higher education system in Ethiopia is still being developed. Despite the establishment of the first higher education institution during the Imperial regime in 1950, not much has changed in terms of academic autonomy and the State's political interference. This section presents academic autonomy in the three regimes since the establishment of the first university, namely: the Imperial (1930-1974), the Socialist (1974-1991), and the Revolutionary-Democratic (1991-2018) regimes.

The Imperial Regime

Modern higher education started in Ethiopia in 1950 during the regime of Emperor Haile Selassie, with substantial support from the governments of the United States and Canada. On March 20, 1950, the Emperor decreed the establishment of Trinity College, which later changed its name to the University College of Addis Ababa (UCAA) (Burke, 1960, as cited in Asgedom, 2007, p. 102). At this time, the emperor appointed a Canadian Jesuit, Dr. Lucien Matte, as the founding president of the university college (Abebe, 1991, as cited in Asgedom, 2007, p. 103). The governance of UCAA included the Emperor as a Chancellor and appointed members of the university board who were also government officials and ministers, including the Minister of Defense and Minister of Justice. This shows that academic staff was marginalized from decision-making. As a result, the university college could not avoid state influence and control (Asgedom, 2007; Gebremeskel & Feleke, 2016).

The university was modeled after Ethiopian Orthodox Christian traditions, partly due to the Emperor's outlook and the firm stand he and some of the individuals who were recruited as board members held. Religious affiliation had inhibited the university from becoming a secular institution. The imprint of this focus on religious ideology is still visible on the university's premises. For instance, the entrance to the Institute of Ethiopian Studies in the College of Social Science and the Humanities has a motto on the main entrance, written in the Geez language which is a language used only by the clergy. Asgedom (2007) states that the university college was characterized by a multitude of student voices and student engagement in

several societies that have their publications. Reflecting on his visit to the university in 1973, Mazrui (1978) stated that the students had “profound and understandable dissatisfaction with the Ethiopian imperial system as they knew it” (p. 262). However, the students were free and able to express their dissatisfaction, which signaled some degree of academic freedom and academic autonomy.

Imperial Ethiopia was “a unitary state” and the prevailing political situation encouraged knowledge dissemination that favored respect for the King and the unity of the country (Asgedom, 2007; Yimam, 2008). However, there was no organized State political ideology that was imposed on the academic autonomy of the university in terms of course content and academic decisions. The Imperial regime has been credited for the degree of autonomy it gave the country’s professoriate. For example, in an interview on Sheger FM radio, Professor Mesfin Wolde-Mariam mentioned that the Emperor even visited the Teferi Mekonen School to listen to the grievances of students (Birru, 2014). Such relative degrees of freedom enjoyed by the then students appear to be in stark contrast to the experiences of present-day students, some of whom have witnessed radically perverse physical violence on many of the university premises across the country (Gezahegn, 2019). Yimam (2008) affirms that the Imperial regime was open to criticism and created an academic environment that was relatively conducive to exercise academic autonomy. Higher education in Ethiopia in the beginning of the Imperial regime was inclusive in terms of students’ gender and ethnicity. Scholars like Smith (2013) state that the emperor embarked on the national integration project which engaged missionaries who contributed to primarily religious knowledge production and dissemination in multiple languages. However, this tendency of inclusion of multiple ethnic languages was later considered a threat to the hegemonic project of the dominating ethnic group at the time, resulting in the minimized use of other ethnic languages and dwindling production of knowledge using these languages (Smith, 2013). This provides evidence to tracing the contours of the ideological interference in academic autonomy and the State’s imposition on knowledge production. Regarding college admission, connections to the Royal family and the educated, urbanite, political class were an asset. However, this trend was quickly changed by the regime because of the need to have increased enrollment as well as representation of the major ethnic groups in the academy.

The Socialist Regime

Higher education in Socialist Ethiopia was significantly impacted by the Marxist-Leninist political ideology once the *Socialist regime* came to power in 1974 (Semela, 2014). Intellectuals’ resistance to the military regime and the changes in the curriculum that were imposed on faculty members had a degrading effect on the condition of higher education and academic autonomy (Gebremeskel & Feleke, 2016; Kenaw, 2003). The literature indicates that this time was probably the worst in the country in terms of academic autonomy and individuals’ academic freedom. There was virtually no form of academic freedom and institutional autonomy at all. The nation witnessed the deteriorating condition of intellectual life, intense brain drain, and isolated educational system (Asgedom, 2007; Girma, 2013; Saint, 2004).

Asgedom (2007) argues that during this period, enrolment of students had “drastically gone down by nearly 50 percent as a result of dropout, killing, imprisonment, and joining the freedom fighters” (p. 159). The factor underpinning these reasons was civil war and unrest. Higher education institutions during the Socialist regime were characterized by being under intense control by the State and university administrators. Academic leaders were appointed based on political loyalty rather than merit (Gebremeskel & Feleke, 2016; Gemed, 2008). Some of the regime’s moves proved to be highly immobilizing, as they involved “security surveillance, repression of dissent, [and] mandated courses on Marxism” (Saint, 2004,

p. 84). Scholars like Kenaw (2003) argue that academics were required to design courses that espoused Marxist-Leninist ideology and to publicize the regime's ideology. This is an important indicator of the State's interference in the academy, imposition of political ideology, and violation of academic autonomy.

Unlike in the Imperial regime, academics in the Socialist regime were required to design courses that reflected State political ideology and affirm the relevance of the ideology to the country's development (Kenaw, 2003). The burden of such requirements was heavier in courses in the colleges of Social Sciences and the Humanities than in any other field of study. As to the science fields, such impositions were common in the first-year introductory courses that are more or less related to Social Sciences and the Humanities and other vital skills courses such as Critical Thinking and Writing, among others.

All these indicate that the regime was coercive (Gebremeskel & Feleke, 2016; Geda & Berhanu, 2000; Semela, 2014). The violation of academic autonomy is attributed not only to the direct censorship and pressures from Marxist-Leninist ideology but also to the hostile and threatening political atmosphere and civil war, which inhibited teaching, research, and service (Gebremeskel & Feleke, 2016; Kissi, 2006; Semela, 2014). The State also introduced "Politics" as a subject in high schools, and the publication and distribution of "Politics" textbooks all over the country signaled that the imposition of the State reached even down into the high school level to incorporate Marxist-Leninist ideology.

Individuals were appointed as college deans and university administrators, and to other positions only if they were believed to be loyal to the regime. The Socialist regime collapsed in 1991, an event that coincided with the global shift in power, specifically the emergence of the West as dominant and the fall of the Soviet empire. The lack of military and financial support from the Eastern Bloc and the global financial crises which hit Sub-Saharan Africa catalyzed the end of the regime. As a result, the imposition of Socialist ideology on academia in Ethiopia came to an end.

The Revolutionary Democratic Regime

The Revolutionary Democratic regime lasted over a quarter of a century until it came to its end in 2018. Public protest and the Oromo students' movement in Ethiopia have brought about a change in the political sphere since 2018. Currently, this regime is replaced by the *Prosperity Party* under the new Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali (Ph.D.). Since Prime Minister Abiy has been in office for less than two years, there is not sufficient data or related literature about the situation of higher education since 2018. However, many scholars examined higher education in Ethiopia during the *Revolutionary Democratic* regime. In this regime, higher education witnessed major trends such as a dramatic expansion both in terms of enrolment and physical infrastructure. Parallel to this, it also experienced repression of academic freedom, the State's interference in the governance of higher education, and visible influences from global actors such as the World Bank and others (Assefa, 2008; Gebremeskel & Feleke, 2016; Molla, 2014; Teferra, 2014). Even though it is important to understand the mainstream ideology to discuss whether the State imposed a particular political-ideological orientation on the academic autonomy of the universities, the case in this regime is rather difficult. The difficulty emanates from rather frequent changes in the regime's political ideology and to the obscurity of the ideology that it has claimed to follow for over a quarter of a century. Bach (2011) argues that the Revolutionary-Democratic regime has undergone several changes in its ideology. For instance, the regime abandoned the Albanian model that it followed during the civil war, and then adopted "Revolutionary Democracy," which hints at the tendency to adopt, in the words of Bach (2011), "the Democratic project through revolutionary means" (p. 641). After that, the regime changed its ideology to the Developmental State ideology.

These changes in ideology imply variation in the intensity and level of the State's interference in the university's autonomy, including academic autonomy. Moreover, the dramatic expansion of higher education institutions adversely affected the working conditions of the country's academics (Alemu, 2008). In line with this, Akalu (2014) describes the current expansion as being "ideologically driven" (pp. 394-395). The regime advocates the "instrumental development" model of the university, which regards the university as "a producer of appropriately skilled professionals and applied knowledge" (Maassen & Cloete, 2009, p. 13). Similarly, the government developed a new education and training policy that redesigned degree programs to be completed in three rather than four academic years to fill the skilled labor gap more quickly. To adjust to the three-year requirement, courses, especially those related to basic language and communication skills, critical thinking, and other fundamental skill areas, were eliminated outright. Moreover, the government had designed civic and ethical education courses for first-year college students across the country, but many students complained that the content of the course was mere indoctrination. This proved to be another aspect of the State's interference in imposing its political ideology through course content and syllabus design.

The government also adopted a 70/30 enrolment model which requires universities to admit 70 percent of their newly joining students into the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) disciplines and the remaining 30 percent in the fields of Social Science and the Humanities (Teshome, 2007, as cited in Rainer & Ashcroft, 2011). The move deprived universities of their right to select and admit students in their existing programs. Rather, universities were pressured to adjust to these changes, in some cases admitting students without any basic inputs and resources such as laboratory equipment.

The number of higher education students in Ethiopia exploded at the turn of the millennium. The total number rose from 180,286 in 2006 to 600,000 in 2013 (Teferra, 2014). Enrolment had reached a total of 778,766 students in 2015, who were enrolled in 46 public and 130 private higher education institutions (Ministry of Education, 2017). With the move towards "liberal" ideology, the regime slowly adopted neoliberal ideological positioning, which encouraged the emergence of private higher education institutions. Privately owned higher education institutions have grown from 37 in 2003 (World Bank, 2003) to 130 in 2017 (Ministry of Education, 2017). Taking the rise in private higher educational institutions and the inclination of the government towards liberal ideology into account, researchers argue that the expansion in the country's higher education system is ideologically driven (Akalu, 2014).

The Revolutionary Democratic regime adopts the *Developmental State* ideology. The regime views higher education as a driver of the economy, and supplier of skilled labor. This view resulted in the dramatic enrolment of students. The increased enrolment, in turn, created institutional atmospheres that require academics to devote most of their time to teaching and administrative duties with a minimal focus on research and professional development (Tessema, 2009). On an invited lecture at the Library of Congress in the United States, Dr. Aklilu Habte, ex-president of Addis Ababa University, argued that higher education in Ethiopia under this regime was "too much politicized" (Library of Congress, 2010). Two other areas in which the government influences academic autonomy are the appointment of the university presidents and the promotion of academic staff.

Faculty promotion is approved by each university's Board of Governors. However, these boards are accountable to the government; they are chaired by an external person appointed by the ruling party. A frequent criticism is leveled against this regime for firing 42 professors and lecturers from Addis Ababa

University, most of whom were tenured, without any reasonable grounds (Assefa, 2008). Such criticism would exemplify interference into academic autonomy and the tenure system. Also, the State's political ideology under this regime was imposed on Ethiopia's universities. Even though the ideological orientation of the Revolutionary Democratic regime is constantly changing, it continued to undermine academic autonomy.

As discussed above, this had been visible in the design of curricular content and course syllabi, the introduction of new courses such as Civic Education, and an increased role in decision-making regarding the enrollment and admission of students, leadership appointments, and the promotion of senior faculty, among others. The violations of academic autonomy relate to issues of academic freedom and in most cases, they straddle the academic freedom-(academic) autonomy boundary.

CONCLUSIONS

This study is undertaken to identify whether State political ideology has been imposed on the academic autonomy of Ethiopia's universities. The study discusses the different conceptualizations of university autonomy, while also acknowledging the similarities and differences between university autonomy and academic freedom (Berdahl, 1990; Guruz, 2011; Piironen, 2013; Yokoyama, 2007). Before delving into the analysis, the study delineates the primary stakeholders within the academy in academic autonomy, namely academic staff, students, and the government. For this purpose, various models of academic autonomy such as Berdahl's (1990) substantive and procedural autonomy, Reilly, Turcan, and Bugaian's (2016) institutional university autonomy model, and Choi's (2018) stakeholder model are considered, among others.

The analysis highlights the relationship between political ideology and academic autonomy in Ethiopia's higher education system since the opening of the first higher education institution in the country in 1950. Data from a variety of sources show that in all the three regimes, namely, the Imperial, the Socialist, and the Revolutionary Democratic regimes, the State influences academic autonomy. The State imposes its political ideology in various forms. Interference in academic autonomy was minimal in the Imperial regime, except for the influence of the King, Emperor Haile Selassie, and his commitment to the Church. The Socialist regime was the most direct in its interference in the academic autonomy of the universities, requiring faculty members to incorporate Marxist-Leninist ideology in their course syllabi (Kenaw, 2003). The Revolutionary Democratic regime did not subscribe to a single ideology throughout its tenure, but it nonetheless influenced the academic autonomy of universities in various ways. The influence ranges from forcing institutions to change academic programs, the duration of programs, and degree requirements to designing new courses such as Civic and Ethical Education by the Ministry of Education. The regime is also known for its interference in the appointment of university leadership, as manifested in the direct appointment of the universities' presidents, taking upon itself the right to promotion, along with other examples.

The study is in line with findings from other studies conducted in Ethiopia such as that by Assefa (2008). Although those studies explore autonomy in its generic sense and as an aspect of academic freedom, they are still in line with the current study in the sense that all of them show the influences of political ideology on university autonomy, be it academic or institutional autonomy. Gebru's (2013) analysis of legislative documents shows that universities are supposed to be autonomous, as this is enshrined in higher education proclamations and other legally binding documents, regardless of what is practiced on the ground.

A practical and more detailed investigation into specific aspects of autonomy such as academic autonomy, as is discussed here, shows that in all regimes, the country's universities have experienced imposition from the government through State's political ideology.

The findings of this study are also in line with other studies such as that by Billinton and Li (2000), Guruz (2011), and Ordorika (2003), whose analysis confirms that governments in other countries also interfere with the autonomy of universities. The current study does not take into account the threats to academic autonomy from within the university itself. As a result, topics like the political affiliation of faculty members and political partisanship of individual faculties and their impact on academic autonomy are not dealt with. Thus, a thorough investigation into the different aspects of autonomy would enrich researchers' insights. Particular to the socio-political context of the country, a working document, a reference manual, or a form of guideline developed by the universities, in collaboration with the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, would significantly enhance the capacity of university leaders and administrators to preserve and profess institutional autonomy. This study acknowledges that the nature of the constituent parts of autonomy is too different to be treated in a straightjacket and as constituents of academic freedom.

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