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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Obstacles to Academic Freedom in Tunisia: A Psychoanalytical Reading at a Historical, Geopolitical and Socio-Cultural Crossroads as Witnessed by a Tunisian Academic

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Abstract Tunisia has a middling rank on the Academic Freedom Index and, in 2017, a Tunisian University Charter was created. Despite that, many symptoms show the withering of academic freedom. This paper proposes a psychoanalytical reading within a multifactorial hostility to the implementation of academic freedom in Tunisia. I present this account from my own trial by fire as a Tunisian woman, academic and researcher in a scientifically "peripheral" country struggling with what I call "the epistemology of Procrustes's bed". A holistic understanding of the hindrances to academic freedom may contribute to its democratization and to ethical and equitable science.

Keywords academic freedom · Tunisia · Procrustes's epistemology · equitable encounter

Initial Thoughts and Introduction to the Tunisian Context

Academic freedom is undoubtedly a universal and well-defined concept. For instance, the UNESCO (1997) introduces it as follows:

> The right, without constriction by prescribed doctrine, to freedom of teaching and discussion, freedom in carrying out research and disseminating and publishing the results thereof, freedom to express freely their opinion about the institution or system in which they work, freedom from institutional censorship and freedom to participate in professional or representative academic bodies. (para. 27)

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Needless to say, the concept's universality doesn't spare it from appearing differently in diverse realities under the influence of sociocultural and political contexts. Indeed, the very nature of academic freedom as a two-way process makes it variable, since it is a co-construction between the academic's practices to preserve it and the corresponding legislation that limits or defends it. In the Maghreb, legislation on academic freedom is often weak and leaves much to be desired. Daguzan (1998), in his article tackling the relation between state politics, science, research, and technological development in the Maghreb, provides a description of the region's attempts to establish effective research and development strategies, and notes that:

> [These attempts] were accompanied by policies of technological transfer, the effects of which often turned out to be inadequate. Often poorly evaluated and over-dimensioned, these policies, compounded by poor social conditions for the scientific and technical elites *in situ*, prevented the emergence of a local research & development system and (despite training efforts) of a medium- to high-level class of technicians. As Michel Branciard (1994: 138) notes, "the technological graft has not yet succeeded". (para. 7)[1]

Attempting to analyze the underlying structural reasons for the region's precarious and misaligned relationship with research and development, he continues:

> No technological transfer can be successful unless it corresponds to the average general scientific and technical level of the country in which it is carried out … However, in most cases and in most countries of the South, the transfer of technology has been blown out of proportion by the desire of governments to acquire the most advanced technology at any price (both literally and figuratively), as if to ward off a perceived intolerable backwardness and, in the case of countries that had experienced colonization, as a form of reparation … The implementation of these transfers [from the colonizing countries to the colonized] often proved ineffective. (Daguzan, 1998, para. 18)

The desire to acquire at any price, the need for reparation, and the defense against the intolerable, all notions loaded with meaning that place us firmly in the unconscious; and what better framework to grasp this than psychoanalysis? Beyond the figures and statistics, the aim of this paper is to question the effectiveness of independence and the relationship to freedom itself in certain contexts, to detect the distortions that we no longer consider, and which take on their full force and vigor in a "work of the negative" as elaborated in the oeuvre of Kaës and inspired by Bion (1962). The negative of transmission is understood in this context as the psychic objects transmitted without being integrated or made transformable, making the psyche incapable of exposing them as parapraxes or even symptoms, and rendering them unreachable and thus more sinister and influential. Could we then consider that a syndrome of narcissistic injury can in some way be responsible for the disruption in the sense of freedom within former colonies and neo-colonized countries?

[1] This and all other translations from French sources are by the author.

I would argue that the colonial legacy massively distorts the meaning of freedom, and divests those who experienced the damage directly from transmitting its innate and universal nature. The collective trauma imposes a period of stupefaction facing the individual traumas that result from it, and imposes asynchrony on the attempts to elaborate them. It creates very different ways of retrieving and bringing awareness to the idea of natural freedom and rights, in spite of and in line with the slow healing of the narcissistic injury dealt by colonization.

In his introduction to *Peau noire, masques blancs*, Frantz Fanon (1952/1986) underlines the arduous nature of questioning colonial relations (and, more broadly, relations of domination) and their effects on different spheres of subjectivity, whether intimate, social or political. He writes:

> There is a fact: white men consider themselves superior to black men. There is another fact: black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect. How do we extricate ourselves? A moment ago, I spoke of narcissism. Indeed, I believe that only a psychoanalytical interpretation of the black problem can lay bare the anomalies of affect that are responsible for the structure of the complex (Fanon, 1952/1986, p. 12)

Academics are not immune to such perils. Demonstrating the equal power of one's mind can be even more tempting in scholarly circles. The demand for freedom is often the by-product of an intellectual awakening, and academics are likely to shoulder a greater responsibility in this regard. Subsequently, where mass trauma has distorted the relationship to liberty, academic freedom necessarily struggles to exist. Affiliation with international models and charters that act as safeguards is certainly a step towards installing and protecting this ideal, but this process often takes place on seismic ground. Academics are then left to their own personal journeys of awareness regarding dominations, alienations, and the "self-liberation" (Lazali, 2018/2021) that ensues.

This was certainly the case in Tunisia's history: indeed, it was an intellectual elite that orchestrated the country's liberation, and it was the same elite that formed the first political party to hold the reins of the Tunisian republic when it gained its independence in 1956. Such a status entails greater responsibility and complexity for academics, making them judge and jury, with the paradoxical task of constructing and supervising what is under hard and hazardous development. However, their role remains essential in guaranteeing safeguards. This is scarcely a comfortable task, as it requires surviving not only the mass traumas brought on by oppressive political regimes, but also the additional weight of colonial history: a cocktail prominent in countries of the Global South in general but more specifically in the Maghreb. This context is an example of how gaining freedom is never enough to ensure its sustainability, and of how the creativity of researchers and their free and authentic reshaping of their fields' ethics serve as an essential part of the process.

From this angle, Tunisia can be examined as a place where academic freedom has been – and continues to be – a work in progress. Installing and practicing it is a real obstacle course conditioned by and torn between historical, geopolitical,

religious, linguistic and socioeconomic determinants. This is a field of forces whose effects are not always predictable, nor do they necessarily encourage freedom – quite the opposite, in fact. The complexity of a colonial history lies in its alienating potential: it familiarizes us with "double binds" and paradoxical messages, if only through an image of the colonizer as familiar, but foreign, cohabitant but also as offender with a shared but cleft history, a mixed but opposing memory. Lazali (2018/2021) points to what she terms the "Algerian paradoxes" among the ravages of colonial trauma on Algerian society, which appear in the relationship to freedom, religion, institutions, politics, and the Other more generally, and denounces the insurmountable breakdowns of subjectivation. She attests that "the subject strives towards inner freedom, but never acts on it. Unbeknownst to it, the power of servitude holds it in place. These paradoxes plague psychoanalytic treatment" (p. 30).

These same paradoxical tendencies are ever-present in the Tunisian academic environment. This strikes me as an opportunity to apply a psychoanalytical lens to it, which may present us with a unique understanding of the multifactorial and complex status of academic freedom in Tunisia today by re-interrogating freedom's (r)evolution and its relationship with the actors within academic circles, and unmasking the paradoxes and dissonances in this relationship.

In fact, the Tunisian university remains in great part dependent on its French counterpart (Siino, 2004). The training of future professors at Tunisian universities was strongly influenced by the French, especially in early independence. Up until the mid-1970s, by which time Tunisia's first professors obtained their doctorates, many students had completed their undergraduate studies under French professors in Tunisia (known as *coopérants*), and continued their postgraduate studies in France, also under their supervision. The intense relationship between the two systems was consequential in the structuring of the Tunisian academic field.

In light of this complex panorama, this paper aims to expose the ways in which diverse determinants resonate and interconnect to advance or hinder the development of academic freedom. It also attempts to explore the perspectives and solutions that may consolidate the progressive path towards it. In the first part, I describe my country's journey to freedom, and the obstacles and impediments that litter it, be they unchanged or festering, and I present the symptoms of the withering of academic freedom in such unfavorable, even hostile, transitional and ever-evolving contexts. In the second part, I give the example of my own "trial by fire" as a young Tunisian woman, professor, and researcher. Beyond sexism and ageism, I also discovered covert violence due to my intersectional belonging to an Arab, Muslim, socially patriarchal and communitarian, previously dictatorial ex-French colony, which is considered a peripheral consumer in the scientific world. I experienced being perceived in the framework elaborated by Spivak (1988): "If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (p. 287). From that point, I will share resilience resources, not as a matter of rights and duties, but above all, as a way to step out of the shadow and contribute to a global flourishing of a freer, more ethical and equitable scientific community.

Academic Freedom in Post-Revolutionary Tunisia

These last years, Tunisia has held a relatively stable mid-table ranking on the Academic Freedom Index. In 2017 the Tunisian University Charter was created by Tunisian academics as a safeguard against the contamination of the university space by an extremist political Islamic ideology. Habib Mellakh, the president of the Association Tunisienne de Défense des Valeurs Universitaires, declared:

> The period of democratic transition following the Revolution of December 17, 2010 to January 14, 2011 experienced serious violations of academic freedom and a questioning by religious extremists of the academic standards of teaching and research that they wanted subject to their sectarian dogmas, particularly on the occasion of what they called the "ghazoua" of Manouba, when they tried to impose the wearing of the niqab at the university. The post-revolutionary period also exposed and exacerbated the decline of Tunisian universities in international rankings and the numerous dysfunctions that the centers of excellence, who train brilliant students in demand in Tunisia and elsewhere, do not succeed to hide. It is in this context of heavy threats on the autonomy of the university and the quality of teaching and research in higher education establishments and scientific research that was born the idea of developing a Tunisian University Charter. (Association Tunisienne de Défense des Valeurs Universitaires, 2017, pp. 7–8)

With that said, the claim that "Islamism" is the only threat to the anticipated flourishing of academic freedom in Tunisia is overly simplistic and reductionist. Various other obstacles must be enumerated and analyzed to grasp the depth and complexity of the situation, some of which are steeped in the colonial and neocolonial history of the region, others in its religious and linguistic evolution, etc. To illustrate this, we can recall the heavy colonial footprint in Tunisia, rooting postcolonial mimicry (Bhabha, 1984) with its tendency to deform research and teaching to fit its mold. Then, there's the endemic imposter-syndrome and self-censorship internalized by academics with little exception. There's also a diaspora of qualified experts suffering from both intellectual and financial destitution. Some examples are even more time-specific, such as Kais Saïd, the current president of Tunisia, who was elected for his key posture as an academic in the field of law, and whose touting of the so-called great replacement of Tunisians by sub-Saharan immigrants has led waves of foreign African students and intellectuals to flee the country. This list is far from being exhaustive.

Before elaborating further, I want to refer to Karran et al.'s (2017) discussion of the attacks on academic freedom and their manifestations on different levels (see Figure 1). Disposing of this map of violations facilitates awareness of the overt and covert transgressions, and of the extent and variety of the registers within which the oppression of academic freedom is exercised or perpetuated.

Working from peak to base, the pyramid describes the concentration of infringements on freedom on a national scale and categorizes them by repression intensity, with liberticidal state policies that trickle down from the top, to the

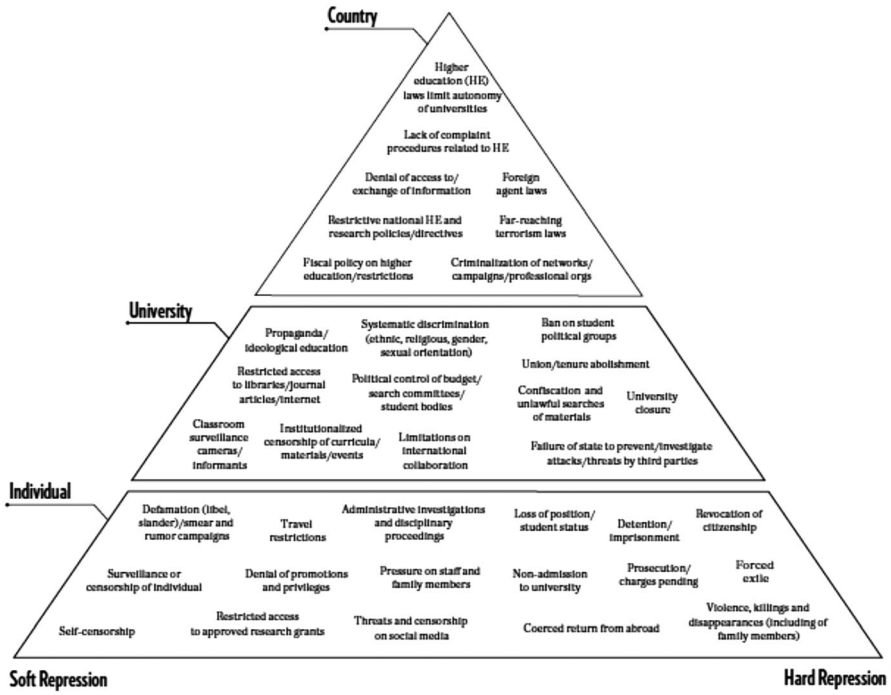

Figure 1: Political repression in the university sector. Source: Hoffman and Kinzelbach (2018, p. 10)

institutional level (the university, in the case of academic freedom). On this level, institutional violence can be seen as an extension and specifier of state violence. Left to right, a typology of possible oppressions is described, ranging from the least to the most extreme in terms of the scale of the attacks on academic freedom within the country, the university and the individual. The space of the university is sandwiched between the totalitarian excesses of the state, which in turn contaminate the space of individual academic freedom at the base of the pyramid. This graphic thus demonstrates the interlocking and reciprocal contamination in both the upward and downward flow of transgression between objective (institutional) and subjective (personal) spaces. While this representation lends itself to a decisive and factual precision, it unfortunately limits our ability to grasp the complex resonances between various obstacles. This hinders the integration of the covert and difficult-to-measure damages consequent to the attacks on academic freedom that stem from a nation's history. There are also unconscious obstacles that only a psychoanalytic approach can unmask, linking the manifest and the latent, the individual and the group, the past and the present, the conscious and the unconscious. Linking Figure 1 to the Tunisian context, self-censorship does not seem to be a soft repression in reality, since it goes beyond the individual making time-specific changes to their speech, and finds its roots in systemic issues of imposed censorship, colonial history, and linguistic domination. The academic is likely to internalize the violence suffered (presumably originating outside the base), and to consciously or

unconsciously deny themselves a certain degree of freedom of thought. However, this seemingly logical causality does not sufficiently denounce the potential gravity of self-censorship. From a psychoanalytical perspective, there is reason to suppose that when self-censorship is linked, through resonance and possible traumatic revival, to previous experiences of deprivation of freedom in personal, but even more so, transgenerational and national history, it can become more serious and acquire, over time, a structural rather than conjunctural dimension. It then becomes part of the psychological functioning and, beyond the individual, becomes liable to be transmitted to others as formatting and conditioning of freedom, of which the academic themselves is the actor. In Tunisian university circles, professors are often hostile to their students' questions, initiatives and creative emanations. Do they fear a reversal of roles, a loss of power? Can transmission only take place in a tyrannical mode? In any case, we must question academics' relationship with freedom, and their dangerous familiarization with submission and passivity. Indeed, Lazali (2018/2021) notes that, over time, censorship acquires functions in an oppressed group and becomes part of its functioning without disturbing it. She writes:

> Censorship maintains the status quo between the subject and the community, between the subject and the political order, and finally between the subject and the Other who lives within it. Obeying the censors offers the major advantage of appeasing interior conflict, but this conflict is consequential for subjectivity. (Lazali, 2018/2021, p. 21)

In fact, imagining a pyramid specific to the Tunisian context would reveal a more organic trickle- deprivation of freedom, interwoven with colonial oppression, the dictatorial regimes that have succeeded one another since independence, and the lasting infestation of institutions and citizens by this symbolic violence and its effects.

Domination and Intersectionality Issues: Focus on "Academic Violence"

Colonial domination is far from having disappeared. At best, it has become thinly veiled to evade the "inadmissible" in matters of human ethics. What I call inadmissible relates to the apocalyptic fantasy of a massive dehumanization looming from a trauma memory. This memory acts as a common substrate that recognizes the damage of wars and crimes against humanity.

In Hans Christian Andersen's tale, "The Emperor's New Clothes", the people are asked to see what does not exist as a metaphor for their subjugation. It is inversely analogous in the situation of colonial violence: people are asked not to see what still exists, dressed in new clothes. However, this injunction to blindness cannot go unnoticed. Researchers in the humanities are ethically bound to detect and denounce injustices against nations and individuals. If they cannot avoid or erase those already produced, then they can alert, bear witness, and attempt to prevent recurrence and infestation since "the non-separation with the colonial *spirit* makes history a current event" (Lazali, 2018/2021, p. 197)

This background of domination issues and inequitable landscape in contemporary globality (Derivois, 2017) reaches and contaminates the academic sphere and international scientific relations. The theories emerging from the decolonization of knowledge and intersectional studies are useful tools to more holistically identify, detect, and understand the impacts of a diffuse polymorphous violence.

The so-called "peripheral" countries of the Global South, de facto former colonies, have become laboratories for experimental university reforms by the countries of the North. They endure the imposition of research themes lacking added value to them, yet deemed urgent and relevant in northern countries, in order to access collaboration opportunities and funding programs. This configuration positions researchers from the Global South as the mere intellectual workforce of "knowledge-producing" countries. Human resources are thus plundered just as natural resources were during the colonial era. Fanon speaks of the "wretched of the Earth", and I see the researchers in this context as wretched in their own Earth.

Similar instrumentalizing policies in the absence of protections to academic freedom can be as damaging to the minds of the countries of the Global South as nuclear tests were to their natural capital. Through two examples of this damage, I would like to explore from a psychoanalytic perspective the contemporary consequences of domination and inequity on academic freedom in countries of the Global South.

Interlocking Violence

In 2019, I used the term "interlocking violence" to describe the movements of inter-contamination of violence (Mokdad Zmitri, 2019) which infiltrates the different spaces of the subjective constitution – the intrasubjective, intersubjective and transsubjective spaces. (Berenstein & Puget, 2008). When the psyche is unable to elaborate a form of violence within one of these spaces, it processes it by transposing it on another in an attempt to contain the uncontainable. I wrote:

> In the process of subjective constitution, it is therefore natural to see the different spaces become contaminated by the corollary violence and conflicts that animate them. This contamination is not a linear phenomenon managed by a logic of posteriority-anteriority in the reaching of a space by the other, but a fervent moment of resonance, of interference, determining for the subjective constitution. (Mokdad Zmitri, 2019, p. 148)

Interlocking violence is also related to the resonance of violence at the levels of the individual, the group and the nation. This means that violence known through the history of a nation is likely to permeate the institutional and private spheres, and be reflected in the psyche, and the links that bind couple and family (Mokdad Zmitri, 2023). The whole world experienced similar resonances during the Covid-19 pandemic. A similar idea was underlined by Lazali (2018/2021) who noticed that "institutions reproduce and exacerbate the tears in the social fabric, wreaking even more untold havoc by re-enacting practices of violence" (p. 15).

In academia, freedoms are severely restricted under dictatorial regimes. The university is a group, an institutional space, which cannot escape the transgression of human rights in such contexts. On the contrary, the "intellectual elite" may exacerbate transgressions when faced with the choice between legitimizing a violent regime or facing its wrath. After the revolution, the Tunisian state found legitimacy in the new political awakening, and left the country's intelligentsia to face disrepute and neglect in the form of deep cuts to research budgets, unemployment for graduates, etc. This is how a colonial legacy superposed onto years of dictatorship leaves neither a nation nor its individuals, let alone its universities, unscathed.

What goes on in mostly state-owned academic institutions often reveals the politics and ideologies at work on a much larger scale, and Tunisian universities have often been instrumentalized in this way. At the dawn of independence, for example, Bourguiba (the first president of Tunisia) took radically progressive political decisions, and waged a war on illiteracy that was implemented with breakneck speed and secular intentions to the detriment of the hegemony of religious teaching at the time (Siino, 2004). The Tunisian university got off to a flying start, grappling with power games, and serving as a tool to displace entrenched colonial violence in the intra-societal space, creating a binary between the unwelcome traditionalist conservatives and the heroic Bourguibist progressives. Siino (2004) drawing on Ben Slimane's work, writes:

> The clearest break with the previous situation came with the shutdown of the University of the Zitouna mosque, a thousand-year-old institution (founded in 840) and the centerpiece of the former social order. This desire to break with some of the attitudes and institutions inherited from the past signaled the rise of the nationalist and modernist elites, drawn from the petty bourgeoisie, and their desire to control the educational sphere by setting up a new space for the production of knowledge and "modern" behavioral and cultural models, where "turban-wearers", "sheikhs" and "beldis" would no longer have their place. (para. 5)

Thus, began the role of the university as an intellectual authority that justifies and reinforces the political powers that be. Under Ben Ali and the Second Republic, the university's role evolved: the target audience for intellectual propaganda was no longer the people, but the international stage. A scramble for excellence and international "*m'as-tu vu*" was underway, with the aim of wooing the world's great powers. Siino (2000) testifies:

> This shift in the frame of reference for higher education policy has been accompanied by a marked change in discourse. From the egalitarian developmentalism of the sixties and seventies, which aimed for mass training, we have moved on to a discourse that increasingly emphasizes so-called "excellence" training, reserved for an elite that embodies the values of competition, openness and performance. (para. 46)

In the post-revolutionary period following the fall of the Ben Ali dictatorship in 2011, and after a reign underpinned by oppressive police control, the university took the reactive position of expelling all security forces from campuses. It also

happened to find itself prey to various social movements and political struggles. Within that whirlwind, the university was left without cover and a happy medium between policing and security is still hard to find today.

In 2020, the curriculum suffered from financially imposed political decisions. With the reform of the bachelor's and master's courses in 2019, the body of the profession of academics and practitioners in psychology was scandalized to discover that the Ministry of Higher Education had planned to substitute the Psychology course with one containing fields ranging from the psychology adjacent (education sciences) to the completely unrelated (entertainment). This came at a time when ambitions and efforts were moving towards regulating the profession according to international standards. Instead, the mobilization of academics, students and clinicians was spent on maintaining the status quo. This draws a parallel with Nicolae Ceaușescu's decision to shut down the psychology faculty in Romania for 13 years. A Romanian psychologist testified: "At the time, in 1993, this discipline was taking its first steps in Romania, because, under the communist regime, the psychology faculty was closed. The regime did not want to be challenged by people who are awake, capable of thinking for themselves, autonomous and free" (Kuong, 2020).

Locally Crafted Forms of Violence

At a certain point, being immersed in so much violence and transgression forces us to internalize it despite ourselves. Exposure to pervasive violence compels internalization, prompting victims to innovate in brutality as a method of coping. The oversimplified frustration-aggression theory fails to explain the sustained adoption of violence as a defense mechanism. This internalization, recalling the idea of fundamental violence in the work of Jean Bergeret (1984, 1994), represents a survival mechanism for individuals navigating trauma. In the Tunisian university setting, systemic issues such as favoritism, sexism, and harassment are not only what they seem, but they represent a locally produced culture of violence enhanced by its previous victims.

What Does the Linguistic Landscape Reveal about Academic Freedom?

Tunisia's history has been a cultural melting pot reflecting the country's geographical openness on multiple fronts. This merging of cultural influences is seen in the spoken language of Tunisians, which while often referred to as an "Arabic dialect", remains entirely different from Modern Standard Arabic. The Tunisian learner begins their schooling in the heart of this paradox. Their mother tongue is *Tūnsi* (*Derja*) while they learn classical Arabic in primary school (*Fuṣḥā*).[2] The latter therefore has the official status of the mother tongue while it ought to be considered a first foreign language. The learner quickly falls into

[2] I will refer to *Derja* as *Tūnsi*, since this is the term by which Tunisian people refer to their language.

incomprehension and confusion seeing that they are blamed for not speaking classical Arabic when they haven't been exposed to it prior to school. The discrediting of the mother tongue is partly a vestige of colonialism. The conditioning of knowledge by the status of languages continues throughout the entire academic journey. This hierarchization of languages culminates in different profiles for different university courses. In Tunisia, most classes are taught in French or Arabic. The ones taught in English occupy a distinguished status due to their rarity and compliance with modern global standards, making them highly desirable and viewed as superior. While psychology courses are entirely taught in French, the psychologist speaks Tūnsi with their patients. The paradox therefore continues at all levels of learning and this conditioning hinders critical thinking and freedom of choice.

A Tunisian demographer, Sofiane Bouhdiba (2011) writes:

> Since the end of the independence movement which shook the continent, the issues surrounding the French language have been the subject of great debate in the African countries formerly colonized by France, particularly in West Africa and the Maghreb. For some, mastery of the French language remained a means of accessing modernization and socioeconomic development, while for others, it was on the contrary an insidious post-colonization strategy. (p. 1)

The tensions induced by these diverging views of French not only as a language but as an element of one's identity are still relevant today and are aggravated by the introduction of yet a third language into the mix: English, being the language of choice for younger generations due to its significance as the "global language" and the one most commonly used in scientific communication, creates an additional burden to this struggle. As an attempt to level the playing field for Tūnsi facing these immensely resourced foreign languages, I consider my experience teaching "Tūnsi for psychologists" an example of encouraging the freedom to pursue reparations of sorts for an academically overlooked language that is invaluable for the reduction of the gap between the theoretical knowledge received in French and the practical communication and building of a therapist-patient relationship.

In the psychology department of my home institution, the current linguistic panorama is made up of a majority of perfectly French-speaking, moderately English-speaking teachers and a majority of perfectly English-speaking, moderately French-speaking students, which is becoming the new norm for younger generations. The changes in linguistic references accompany and reveal an evolution and a change of mindset. Consequently, a liberticidal battle is taking place between the Francophile elders and the Anglophile younger generations, presenting English as a form of defiance – not unlike slang in the way that it's made to be misunderstood by the elders and to signal the generational gap…

While linguistic variety is beneficial to knowledge, relations between English and French don't appear under a model of mutual enrichment, but one of the replacement of one domination by another. When the relationship to a language induces a scientific monoculture, there is reason to be concerned. My anthropologist colleague, Myriam Achour Kallel and I demonstrated how much linguistic "formatting" contributes to "ready-to-think" and we argued that:

> To broaden the theoretical focus, it is a great advantage to have access to scientific productions from a variety of sources. However, access to these productions from our country has French as its main language. Firstly, many researchers pursued their studies in a French-speaking country (France, Belgium, Canada). Secondly, research exchanges between France and Tunisia are in turn more dynamic than with other countries. This linguistic factor also has the effect of limiting access to the predominant language of scientific production, English. On the other hand, the question of the use of Arabic in scientific production in Tunisia is far from settled. This configuration of the research field thus limits the linguistic "comfort zone" and thereby reduces the scope for comparative choices. (Achour Kallel & Mokdad Zmitri, 2011, p. 249)

We also supposed that if Maghrebi academic circles don't make their relationship to language an object of study and research, they won't be able to produce knowledge. Indeed, I often tell my students that polyglossia is the path to scientific interculturation, and above all opens access for poor countries.

The Problem of Restricted Mobility for Academics

Freedom of mobility is a fundamental human right, and it is one that is restricted for citizens of the Global South. To visit the majority of northern countries, Maghrebi citizens, including academics, are subjected to mobility regulations that are increasingly restrictive, making uncertainty a daily occurrence in the professional life of a Maghreb researcher.

A column in the French newspaper *Le Monde* conveys the great dissatisfaction of researchers from the South with regard to the mobility restrictions which overwhelm and denigrate them: "We undertook to gather testimonies from researchers, academics and doctoral students applying for visas in French consulates, from Tangier to Cape Town, from Dakar to Nairobi, from Lagos to Cairo, and as far as Pondicherry and Tokyo. The conclusion is clear: multiple unfortunate, absurd, even humiliating experiences have reached us" (Le Monde Collectif, 2023).

Indeed, invitations I receive to give courses or conferences in France cost me in visa fees. The only way around this is being hired full-time, meaning when maximum gain is possible for the host institution. Lengthy visa processing times also means there is a risk of missing scientific events. A researcher from the South absolutely doesn't know the luxury of simply preparing their paper and taking the plane! Often, they spend a huge amount – leaving them out of pocket and causing financial difficulties, especially with a low salary – to pay for an international career.

This uncomfortable restriction on researchers' freedom of mobility can be seriously damaging to scientific collaboration. Maintaining it announces a fantasy of omnipotence and self-sufficiency among knowledge-producing countries, freezing them in a dual classification of scientifically "producing countries" versus

"consumers countries". The ever-increasing consequences of these politicized attitudes of contempt will continue to manifest on all parties.

This contempt can also stimulate a violent and reactive manifestation of the "narcissism of small differences". If academics claim to deserve free and comfortable mobility more than others, they unintentionally create a hierarchy of worthiness to freedom of mobility. This creates a dissonant claim: should I proclaim a freedom that lends itself to segregation? Is my fellow citizens' lack of freedom a sufficient price for securing my own?

Witnessing Attacks Against Academic Freedom

Testimony allows experiences of distress to escape from their impersonal character, that is why I am taking the example of my own journey as a Tunisian academic to better illustrate how academic freedom can be attacked or encroached upon in the Tunisian context. As a student, I was surprised by some observations that aroused in me a great deal of sensitivity to the more subtle manifestations of assault on freedom of thought.

- I noticed confusion in some professors when they were faced with critical questions or comments from students, as if they were not prepared for this to be a part of their job. So, I wondered, are the theories presented to us holy and untouchable? If so, why teach us about "falsifiability" as a necessary quality of scientific theories? My confusion grew when I attempted to uphold the frameworks we learned to this standard and was repeatedly told that I could not question them yet, and that I must instead absorb all I can. Once we had to produce dissertations, some of my classmates, used to absorbing as they were, would ask professors for a research subject. This, again, made me wonder: How can one have look forward to a career in research when the subject of their study is devoid of any affective attachment on their part? Where would they get the passion? I imagine such a career would be unbearable. The cherry on top is that the same professors who would have discouraged independent thought up until that point would refuse to offer a ready-made subject, responding: "Didn't you ever learn to think by yourself?"
- Throughout my studies, I was disturbed by "ready-to-think" manifestations such as the idea that psychoanalysis was incompatible with Arab and Muslim social fields due to our religious and dictatorial contexts. This repeated but unfounded claim, in my opinion, goes against the very nature of psychoanalysis as a practice that stemmed from the heart of oppression, seeing as it was contemporary to the Second World War and its fascist delirium. I found it unfair to be forced to proclaim this incompatibility, and challenged myself that I would prove the opposite and shape psychoanalysis to my field's needs.
- As an assistant professor, I had to present my career project as a researcher and my pedagogical work to a jury of my peers as part of the process to be promoted to a higher academic rank. The feedback I received was that "too much passion and creativity can be harmful to pedagogy". This was particularly discordant

with an experience that directly preceded it; at a conference in Bordeaux, I presented a paper in which the creative aspect in my work was in fact the subject of praise. The whiplash from these paradoxical messages was worthy of perfectly illustrating Harold Searles's (1959) "effort to drive the other person crazy", and made me for a moment ponder whether the logical conclusion from this sequence of events was that I must go to France so that my passion and creativity would be well received. While I understand that creativity might be more welcomed in a higher-ranking university (unlike my then institution which did not break into the top 100, nor the top 1000 universities worldwide for that matter), that did not help me understand why I couldn't, as a Tunisian, access the schools that do welcome these traits with ease. In the end, I realized that praise wasn't truly a compliment! Years later, I was in a position to share with my students a space in which to exchange experiences, and that's where a student with a keen critical mind taught me that what I experienced has a name: "microaggression".

- A year before the revolution, in the dictatorial context of Ben Ali's Tunisia headed by a single uncontested party, I was selected to participate in a conference in couples and family psychoanalysis in Buenos Aires. I was unable to raise funds and colleagues advised me to contact an NGO whose target population was women and mothers in particular, and which was capable of funding researchers who fit in their pool of beneficiaries. On the phone with the president of the organization, I was asked to justify the legitimacy of my claim to these funds, which I explained through a brief overview of my scientific contributions and the significance of this trip to my career as a researcher. To my surprise, she expected, instead, a show of loyalty to the ruling party, and required an explanation as to why she never saw me attend a meeting or applaud a policy or praise the country's dictator.
- A final anecdote takes place during the same dictatorial regime, when I worked with a group of professors and PhD candidates to create an association for the development of psychoanalysis in Tunisia. I was elected secretary general and given the mission of seeking authorization for the organization to begin its practice from Ministry of the Interior. We were denied permission to practice, so I thought it would be natural to ask the reason. It was of course an open secret that this security branch of the government had one job: make sure that no dissidents to the regime or their relatives were accorded membership or given a leg to stand on in civil society. But this was a scientific organization, not a political one. Oddly enough, my question was met with overt hostility from the officer I was addressing, who warned me that "I didn't look like someone who could handle trouble" and gave me a chance to turn around and leave, which I took with great shame for my country, a country that I didn't feel cared to encourage scientific questioning, let alone take questions on administrative processes.

Within such a context where social and political subjectivities are under influence, the notion of freedom deeply suffocates. The mechanisms of control and repression are vicious and taciturn and are similar to these unconscious pathogenic

and defensive alliances which form the negative pact according to Kaës (2009). Such a pact is sealed in collusion with areas of trauma to favor silence and secrecy. For its part, the weight and age of the non-elaborated trauma, just as in families with secrets, places shame and guilt on the subject who cannot free themselves without becoming aware of the forms of their alienation. Disalienation becomes an act of freeing freedom itself from its status as a forbidden desire in oppressive contexts. Here is the great challenge to be taken up by academics.

With No Sufficient Guarantee of Academic Freedom, Each Academic Must Act

In this section, I share the remedies I think I found and the paths of resilience I undertook to contribute to respect of academic freedoms in a hostile context. I will expose two facets of resistance and resilience: one that is related to teaching and the other to research.

As a professor and during my years of experience, with the great support of my students, I structured a kind of classroom charter that I discuss with them at the beginning of each new semester. The symbolic charter brings together what I call ethical-pedagogical principles.

- Addressing future contributors to knowledge involves sharing this freedom-building project with them and inviting their participation. My courses in the Examination for Professional Practice in Psychology (EPPP) and my course "Tūnsi for psychologists" lend themselves to this, as they present opportunities for reflection and critique. I invite my students to debate and reflect on social issues, and exchange with them beyond the content of traditional training to create a space of co-construction. Dedicating these courses for this approach is in itself a position of engagement and manifest adherence to the stimulation of critical and free thinking, and a sort of implicit validation for students' need to make creative choices and express their passion for their chosen academic path. An intersubjective language and transmission operate consciously and unconsciously in the service of a liberating non-conformity. While there is no explicit restriction on my pedagogical choices, these choices go against the general climate fostered in the university, which is extremely protective of the near sanctity of the professor's aura, hostile to collaboration with students, even riddled with ideas of persecution and dethronement.
- The prioritization of academic curiosity and excitement about research interests is another practice I value highly in my classroom. I model this by introducing myself to my students through my own research interests. It seems important to me to encourage students to see themselves in various profiles of our profession. This also presents me as a person they can discuss their own research interests with, which would make these interests seem less complex and distant. It is – in my mind – the professor's responsibility to contribute to the construction and co-construction of a professional ego ideal. The objective is to awaken early curiosity about a theme and to implicitly validate the inquisitive spirit and

individual freedom of thought and expression. The history of psychology is full of examples showing the success of an approach that brings together clinical practice and research in the pedagogic relationship. This is the case at the school of social psychology of Enrique Pichon-Rivière (1971), one of the leaders of Argentine psychoanalysis. This school was structured through the exchanges between learners in the encouraging presence of the professor. Each session was uniquely anchored in the context of the group, and led in a virtuous loop to the conception of "the task" as a group, organized by Pichon-Rivière (see Jaitin, 2002). In my own teaching, when a topic new to me or the students emerges in class and is taken up as an interesting subject to debate, I do not hesitate to modify my course to include it. Students thus have tangible proof that they are co-authors of their course and take ownership of it with more commitment and responsibility.

- In order to deploy university education based on a free spirit, particularly within a societal climate which does not sustain it, professors are faced with a need to develop their capacities for psychic containment (Ciccone, 2012) and empathy towards their students. For my part, I started at overwhelming compassion, and had to work to mature my empathic skillset. Had my empathy remained predominantly affective (Tisseron, 2017), it risked subjecting myself and students to bonds of dependence likely to hinder a progression towards autonomy. At the same time, being a professor of psychology in a context of pressure and iterative trauma is not like being a professor in any other field. The student cannot be blamed for needing help, understanding, and containment, for issues inside and outside the curriculum. This unique position occupied by the professor-psychologist enables them to act in favor of their students in ways that are sensitive to both positions, not to the point of confusing student and patient, but while still curbing hostility to the student's needs and enabling them to express and fill them. With this in mind, I had to adjust and regulate my posture. If this is an almost inevitable professional deformation, I had to be aware of it and use it wisely (Mokdad Zmitri, 2023).

Each Researcher Has to Think Outside Procrustes's Bed

Reflexivity (Hatton & Smith, 1995; Jorro, 2005) and creativity seem to be the keys to thinking outside the box. In this vein, I want to share how practicing reflexivity, doubt, self-criticism and self-evaluation led me to redefine my epistemological position and liberated my productivity.

In my experience, employing a Eurocentric theoretical framework far-removed from the context resulted in pathologizing entire cultural practices. It is only by swapping the classical intrasubjective model for a more culturally sensitive one, namely intersubjective psychoanalysis, that I no longer saw "juxtaposed" subjects, each in turn, but an analysis of the link between the subjects as an entity of study and intelligibility of family and group functioning. It was a matter of "seeing" and being sensitive to the mechanisms and modalities of the group, where it takes

precedence to over intimate and dual relationships: a prioritization that serves as an important maneuver for the survival of the communal.

In short, this was a major reframing that broke the vicious circle of the numerous risks linked to the first posture, that of imposing theoretical models on the field regardless of whether they are "offbeat" under the effect of a "ready to think" (Achour Kallel & Mokdad Zmitri, 2011) ideation where the theory is paramount to everything, leading to various routes of pathologization and hasty unfounded interpretation. This is the dilemma I termed "the epistemology of Procrustes's bed", where if the field does not fit the bed of the theory, it gets stretched or slashed until it does.[3] Such automatisms in thought and research condition and subjugate the academic freedom of the researcher, afflict censorship, and manifest as an internalized and much more insidious form that is self-censorship.

In the light of these epistemological upheavals, it became urgent to address the position of a researcher from the Global South in the contemporary scientific world as an object of study that brings the human and social sciences on board as the locomotive of reflection on the choices made in terms of theoretical affiliation, design of research protocols, etc., an incomparable exercise of academic freedom.

Experiencing doubts, questioning, and learning from experience has allowed the development of a counter-posture to the epistemology of Procrustes's bed, which I name the epistemology of the "equitable encounter" between theory and field. If Procrustes's bed is the metaphor of the heavy restrictions which imprison thought and scientific production in the countries of the Global South, then conversely, the "equitable encounter" is a manifestation of free thinking since it allows a fair dialogue and helps the field express its particularities and thereby re-inform the theory, enrich it and diversify it.

I share these opposing postures to invite reflection from the reader on their own mode of operations.

A Concluding Note

This paper looked into the relevant basis offered by psychoanalytical background to deeply understand the path to freedom in general, and academic freedom specifically. For psychoanalysis to be completely welcome at the university, its presence must be regulated by inscribing it in an independent and extra-territorial position (Laplanche, 2004). The main reason is that psychoanalysis helps to develop an iconoclastic and critical state of mind. It refines the anti-conformity (Fromm, 1971) necessary for the worldwide development of academic freedom and for equitable science.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

[3] Procrustes is a character from Greek mythology who used to stop travelers, lie them on an iron bed and stretch their bodies till they reached the exact length of his bed.

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