PREFACE

I have wanted to write this book for some time. Intellectually, I conceive of it as growing out of my interests in inclusion and citizenship that I have been engaged with over the years, starting with my doctoral research that led to the publication of my first book *Education for Inclusive Citizenship* (Routledge, 2008). On a personal and professional level, having studied and worked in higher education contexts in the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Middle East, I have been struck by how discourses of academic freedom are shaped by the sociopolitical, geographical, historical, and broader geopolitical contexts. Issues deemed to be 'controversial' and broaching the limits of academic freedom in one context are championed in another, challenging discourses as well as quantitative indices of academic freedom that tell a story contrasting the Global North as a haven for academic freedom with the Global South as a context that punitively infringes on academic freedom.

This book aims to problematise this binary, illustrating the range of complex positionalities that arise and, fundamentally, how this links to the production of knowledge . . . or not: what knowledge is legitimised and what knowledge is 'forbidden'. It also recognises academic freedom and the production of knowledge as transnational – crossing national boundaries and contextualised in relation to the globalisation of higher education, our societies, and our mobilities across borders as students and faculty. As I started to engage with the academic literature as well as policy and media publications on the topic of academic freedom, four issues struck me. First, the majority of literature is centred on the United States and the United Kingdom, with a dearth of work on academic freedom in the Global South. Second, there is little empirical literature, and where there is, it is predominantly data

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 16:58:30, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108780629.002

collected in the form of surveys, rather than more in-depth sociologically informed ethnographic approaches that are able to engage with the socio-political, geographical, and historical contexts informing the nature and state of academic freedom and academics' lived experiences of academic freedom in relation to their research and knowledge production. Third, much of the preoccupation with academic freedom is elided with freedom of speech and related ideological debates between the political Left and Right as to the purposes academic freedom should serve, pitting freedom of speech against respect for diversity. Finally, the link between academic freedom and the politics of the production of knowledge is under-researched and is not typically addressed within a transnational frame.

So I have been driven to challenge the methodological nationalism prevalent in the academic literature and to take the empirical approach of ethnographic interviewing in order to hear the contextualised stories from academics working across a range of 'controversial' fields in the social sciences, humanities, and sciences in a range of country contexts – Lebanon, the UAE, the United Kingdom, and the United States. A number of these academics had worked in more than one of the four countries and/or had experience in conducting research in one of the other country contexts. The choice of these four countries was both intellectually and personally driven: I have been a student in both the United Kingdom and the United States, an academic in the United Kingdom and Lebanon, and my current university has a branch campus in Dubai, and I grew up in the Gulf from 1971 to 1990.

I started this research in 2019, when I collected all the empirical data and then produced a first draft by March 2020. It was at this point that the global COVID-19 pandemic hit, and long COVID, ill health, and homeschooling in lockdown put paid to my plans to submit the manuscript as I had planned in May 2020. It has taken me two years to find the time and intellectual strength to return to this manuscript. Paradoxically, I have also reflected on whether it is the right time for me to write this book on the topic of academic freedom or whether I should wait until I retire, given the range of contentious views and controversial topics addressed throughout the interviews. However, it is not the purpose of the book to engage in the granular arguments within the different controversial topics discussed, but rather the commitment is to interrogate processes of knowledge production that underpin this work; this overrides my anxieties about the potentially polemical engagements with this work. Please read it in this spirit.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 16:58:30, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108780629.002