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In memoriam Prem Naidoo

PREFACE

In 2004 the Council on Higher Education hosted a colloquium to commemorate the first decade of democratic government in South Africa. The focus of the colloquium was an assessment of the state of higher education after ten years of policy making and implementation. The colloquium gathered vice-chancellors of public higher education institutions, leaders of private higher education institutions, representatives from the Department of Education, and other government departments, stakeholder organisations and statutory bodies as well as policy analysts and specialists in higher education.

The CHE took the opportunity to invite Prof. Colin Bundy to give the keynote address at the colloquium. Prof. Bundy's address stirred a great deal of comment and engagement during the colloquium and in the months thereafter.

The importance of the debate suggested that Prof. Bundy's paper should be published in *Kagisano HE Discussion Series,* a CHE publication dedicated to stimulating debate among the higher education community. Each issue of *Kagisano* is structured around one central piece to which different authors are invited to respond. In this issue of *Kagisano* the central piece by Colin Bundy is discussed by four authors. The CHE wishes to thank Prof. Bundy and the four contributors, Prof. Sipho Seepe, Ms Piyushi Kotecha, Dr Mala Singh and Dr Lis Lange, for the time they took to prepare the pieces contained in this publication.

As this issue of *Kagisano* was being finalised the CHE was shocked by the untimely death of Dr Prem Naidoo, who was the Deputy Executive Director of the HEQC. Prem was very interested in understanding the ways in which policy is translated into practices and he was himself a particularly keen 'translator'. It is because of this that the CHE dedicates this issue of *Kagisano* to Prem's memory.

Council on Higher Education

GLOBAL PATTERNS, LOCAL OPTIONS? CHANGES IN HIGHER EDUCATION INTERNATIONALLY AND SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTH AFRICA

Colin Bundy*

This paper does not claim to present original research, although it draws on recent studies of British and South African higher education. It also derives from my own experience of working in universities in two different societies. It reflects this experience very directly, as it tries to assess what the implications might be for South African policy and practice of major shifts in higher education in the UK and other advanced capitalist societies. The text below – save minor corrections and amendments – was presented to the CHE colloquium in November 2004.[1] As I noted at the time, the colloquium provided an extraordinary discursive space: one shared by academic theorists, university administrators, students, those responsible for making policy and those charged with implementing policy. The opportunities provided for collective reflection by this mix are rare, anywhere, and possibly unique. South Africans involved in higher education should cherish them.

This paper comprises two linked sections. Section 1 analyses changes in higher education internationally since about 1980. It draws most heavily on UK data, but refers also to European, North American and Australasian experiences. It notes that essentially similar shifts – massification, marketisation and managerialism, overseen by the regulatory state – emerged with striking synchronicity in advanced capitalist societies. It considers aspects of governance, pedagogy, academic professional identity, and the social function of contemporary universities.

Section 2 assesses higher education in South Africa over the same period, with particular reference to practice and policy over the past decade. It asks, firstly, to what extent did the late apartheid years insulate South African universities and technikons from the changes affecting higher education globally? Secondly, to what extent have these changes impacted since 1994? And thirdly, has such impact compromised policies designed to transform and reconstruct higher education provision and outcomes? In short, this paper locates itself in the task of probing South African higher education in what Saleem Badat has called 'the paradoxes, ambiguities, contradictions, possibilities and constraints' of local and global policies and conditions.[2] Finally, Section 3, rather than concluding, asks a number of questions.

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1. REINVENTING HIGHER EDUCATION IN ADVANCED CAPITALIST SOCIETIES

A familiar trope in writings on higher education emphasises the longevity of universities: famously, Clark Kerr noted that some 80 institutions existing in 1520 had survived into modernity – and 66 of these were universities. This emphasis on continuity and durability is not very helpful in coming to terms with the fact that more than half the world's universities were founded after World War II. Nor is it an adequate starting point for comprehending the quite startling changes that have affected universities in recent decades, but especially since about 1980.

All universities, ancient and modern, have been subject to powerful forces of change in the past quarter century. These changes involve the transition from elite to mass provision, the construction of radically new relations between government, society and universities, accelerating penetration of academic life by the market and market relations, and a series of new demands and expectations coming from other social actors – fundamental revisions of how universities are defined, governed, funded and influenced by fields of force external to them. They also involve new ways in which universities manage themselves and carry out their core activities; the construction of new professional identities; the accommodation of existing values and norms to new circumstances; and a series of experimental engagements with other social actors – major shifts in how universities have sought to define, govern, fund and shape their own field of social activity.

These changes are particularly visible in the British case, where the university system has undergone 'a more profound reorientation than any other system in industrial societies'.[3] But, as I try to indicate with some comparative glances at European, Australasian and North American cases, developments in the UK exemplify those that have affected higher education globally. Indeed, international comparisons suggest that the British experience is in many ways paradigmatic of changes in the OECD countries – and highly suggestive for changes currently under way in a number of middle-income countries.

These similarities between developments in higher education across a number of societies reflect a convergence of policies and ideology more broadly during and after the years of the Reagan, Thatcher and Kohl administrations. The transformation of universities in all advanced capitalist countries is imbricated and implicated in an epochal shift. This shift has seen a retreat from Keynesian in favour of neo-liberal macro-economic policies and a reduction in public spending. It has seen the impact

of informational technologies, and the discourse of globalisation. The gearing between these dual sets of change – material, organisational and ontological shifts within universities and economic, political, cultural and technological shifts on a global scale – is peculiarly transparent in the United Kingdom.

1.1 Massification of higher education in the UK

It may not be entirely true that Britain 'stumbled absent-mindedly into mass higher education'.[4] But it is certainly the case that British higher education expanded from elite to mass provision in the space of a single generation; that the UK in the 1960s had the least accessible higher education among industrialised nations but is now in the upper reaches of international measures for participation;[5] and that this rapid process had profound implications for university finances, for teaching and learning, for the academic profession, and for what is expected of higher education within society. Consider just a few indices of accelerated change. In 1961, only 4.1 per cent of the age group was at university. The participation rate reached 15 per cent (Martin Trow's widely cited measure for a mass system) only in 1987; yet by 1992 it stood at 28 per cent. Between 1987 and 1992 participation virtually doubled: as Peter Scott wrote in 1995 'It was only yesterday, during that turbulent half-decade, that Britain irreversibly acquired a mass system'.[6] Today the participation rate is 45 per cent, and Blair's government has a manifesto goal of raising this to 50 per cent.

Although the British experience was particularly hectic, its broad contours were replicated fairly closely in other OECD countries. Expansion of student numbers meant that existing universities grew larger and new institutions were created. What once appeared an instance of 'American exceptionalism' now looks much more like an issue of periodisation. There are real parallels between the British, European and Japanese experience of the last 20 years with American experience in the two decades after 1945, chronicled most famously by Clark Kerr in 1963.[7] Between about 1965 and the late 1990s, higher education in Europe saw unprecedented growth, with two main spurts. These two phases of accelerated expansion were significantly different in terms of underlying policy and ideology, of how they were funded, and of how universities were interpellated with their societies.

Take the British case. The surge from the mid-1960s to the late 1970s was the final phase of a political culture characterised by expansive welfare state provisions, Keynesian budgets and a confidence in the benefits of technology. University education was held to be an important socio-economic good and its main beneficiaries were graduates. It was a welfare benefit, a social good, and

the important issue was its distribution. The bullish tone was famously present in the 1963 Robbins Report, produced at the high noon of the postwar welfare state: 'We take it as an axiom that courses of higher education should be available to all those who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue this and wish to do so.' Most remarkable, in retrospect, was the sanguine pronouncement of the government White Paper accepting the Robbins Report: 'Plans are being put in hand and resources will be provided accordingly.'[8]

The second growth spurt was very different. It was carried out by the governments of Margaret Thatcher and John Major, 'far more committed to rolling back the frontiers of the welfare state than any other European government'.[9] Expansion was accompanied by a funding squeeze and by the deployment of a series of new policy tools intended to change the behaviour and alignment of universities. The Thatcher years also saw the crystallisation of a new, utilitarian view of universities. The socio-economic benefits of higher education were expressed in terms of national economic competitiveness; universities were a tool, a resource, for human capital development and the production of relevant skills. In the early 1980s, the emphasis initially was on efficiency through improved governance. By the end of the '80s and into the '90s, there was a new, explicit enthusiasm for efficiency achieved by market relations within higher education.

1.2 Markets

There is by now a considerable literature on how universities have been exposed to or penetrated by market relations over the past two decades. This section can do little more than introduce some of the main themes. These include a major shift away from public funding of higher education towards greater revenue from more market-oriented or entrepreneurial activities; an increasingly explicit 'academic-industrial research agenda' and a concomitant commodification of intellectual production; and the entrenching of a powerful market discourse.

Right across the OECD economies, full public funding for higher education was called into question during the 1980s and subsequently. In Britain, public spending per student fell by 40 per cent in less than two decades. Here, as elsewhere in the OECD, the post-welfare state expansion has precipitated a more or less permanent financial crisis.[10] Universities across the industrial world have had to 'do more with less'; their internal functions have been subjected to 'efficiency gains' while their relations with the state have been recast in terms of greater accountability and performance audits. British academic salaries have fallen relative to other public sector professions; the physical infrastructure on many campuses has decayed. As in other advanced capitalist economies, the proportion of funding for universities from the public purse has fallen

and the proportion from other sources has had to increase. The decisive change in the funding of higher education has been the changing ratios of university income: less public spending, more 'user costs' (or tuition fees) and more revenue from universities' own endeavours.

In the UK, this led to the introduction of tuition fees for British students in the mid-1990s (a move preceded by the introduction of much higher fees for international students in 1979). It also spurred the development of 'third stream' income: contract research, consultancies, spin-off companies, science parks, professional fundraising, the commercialisation of intellectual property, etc. Universities were plunged into quasi-market relations (quasi-market because certain prices and costs remained centrally regulated). They competed for student numbers, for research grants, for status and esteem, for contracts and for endowments. Inevitably, universities behaved more like businesses. They incentivised certain kinds of behaviour; they sought competitive advantage through market research, branding and public relations; and they made decisions based on those prices and costs that they could control or influence.

The commodification of higher education has had a 'crucial, pervasive structural effect'.[11] A simple illustration of this is the extent to which decisions on curriculum are made on grounds of affordability, rather than on grounds of academic desirability. This has led to the large-scale closure of departments in certain disciplines – classics, philosophy, area studies, but also physics and chemistry are especially at risk – and last year this prompted the then Education Minister, Charles Clarke, to point out that decisions made for valid market reasons at individual institutions could imperil subjects of national strategic importance.[12] In the United States, an ex-President of Harvard has taken stock of the impact of neo-liberal influences on universities in that country and concluded that 'universities show signs of excessive commercialization in every aspect of their work'.[13]

The marketisation of the academy has been promoted by potent discursive strategies. Universities routinely use the language of commerce and competition. Risibly similar mission statements invoke 'excellence', 'efficiency', 'productivity' and 'marketable skills'. In the process, as Mala Singh has observed, the notion of social accountability and responsiveness 'is being thinned down and reduced to the terms of market responsiveness'.[14]

1.3 Managers

If the Thatcher years brought expansion and a new funding regime, they also transformed the governance of British universities. 'New Public Management' was pioneered in the

National Health Service and in local government. It promoted decentralisation, market mechanisms and performance targets; it reduced the available workforce despite a rhetorical emphasis on quality and customer service. Over the past 20 years, New Public Management principles have been systematically applied to British universities. A recent comparative study concludes that 'the UK is probably the West European country where managerialism has emerged in its most virulent form'.[15]

The most important political technologies (to borrow from Foucault) have been the construction of forms of external audit and internal compliance. The concept of audit 'has broken loose from its moorings in finance'[16] and serves now as description and prescription for all sorts of processes that can be reckoned and reported in column after column of quantification. At SOAS we submit annually torrents of data on students: how many enrol, drop out, complete, and with what grades; we report on their age, their ethnicity, on how many come from certain postcode districts – and we repeat the exercise for faculty and staff, for classroom size and occupancy rates – and for much else besides.

The audit culture, in other words, has created an intricate grammar of requirements and measurements. It rests upon a self-justificatory vocabulary of quality and best practice and accountability. 'Quality' writes Louise Morley 'parades as a universal truth and therefore continually extends its domain' while accountability 'appears to be a kind of penance that is now being paid for former autonomy'.[17] Good practice is measured through performance indicators and monitored through quality assurance mechanisms. Continuous improvement defined in terms of rising productivity is the state of grace aspired to by strategic planners.

At the national level, the defining characteristic of the governance system is 'steering at a distance' – a combination of central control and decentralised authority. Universities are simultaneously deregulated (that is, permitted to become more entrepreneurial and more competitive) and more effectively regulated, through compliance with centrally set norms. Institutions and individuals are in Foucault's words 'caused to behave' in ways consistent with desired outcomes. Such behaviour – compliance with externally imposed expectations – is precisely that described by Lyotard as 'performativity'. In my weaker moments, I find myself wondering if there is a civil service unit somewhere in the bowels of Westminster charged with the enactment of *The Postmodern Condition.*

At the institutional level, the most striking feature has been the intensification of more managerial forms of governance, with much borrowing from the private sector and from American universities.[18] British universities have seen vice-chancellors styled as CEOs (and many appointed from the private sector); they have grown accustomed to strategic plans, organisational re-engineering, management-by-objectives, and the vocabulary

of devolved budgets, cost centres, and line management. Frequently this has resulted in the reduction of powers of older, collegial structures. Managerialism in British universities has been defined in terms of three overlapping elements. It is a narrative of strategic change constructed in favour of new processes and structures, a distinctive organisational form, and a practical control technology.[19] Because universities raid the same conceptual larder as the policy makers, they tend to replicate on the campus most of the features identified at the national level. Thus decentralised units compete for funding tied to centrally determined targets or benchmarks, performance is quantified and rewarded accordingly, and an 'ethos of beratement and surveillance'[20] is replicated locally. The logic of performativity penetrates the campus and the corridors, creating a 'climate of unease and hyperactivity'.[21]

Both sets of changes – different funding regimes and new relations of power and governance – that I have described for the UK have been mirrored internationally. Marilyn Strathern speaks of higher education being 'moulded and managed according to what seems an almost ubiquitous consensus about aims, objectives and procedures'.[22] Although some European countries still provide university education free to all students, most have embraced some level of tuition fees. Sweden embarked upon its 'reforms' of the public sector in 1977, two years before Mrs Thatcher formed her first government. Australia and New Zealand have in certain respects provided the purest commitment to market based privatisation strategies in higher education. Australia provides a 'compact and transparent' case study of neo-liberal modernisation; and New Zealand, with a much smaller system, has gone further than anywhere else in devising an outcomes based unit standards system permitting educational 'products' to be 'packaged, moved, compared and traded with ease'.[23] And, strikingly, in the last decade a number of developing countries have drawn assiduously on the lexicon of modernisation, privatisation, competition, quality assurance and benchmarks in refashioning their university systems. South Korea and Malaysia are cases in point – the South African instance is assessed in Section 2.

Thus far I have discussed the exogenous pressures on universities that emanated from the state and the market. Alongside these was another zone of turbulence, another set of changes pressing in upon universities in the latter decades of the 20th century. These may be categorised, broadly, as changes in the production of knowledge – or more accurately in the production, consumption, circulation and conservation of knowledge. They are genuinely international in scope and impact, and are listed as often in analyses of globalisation as in studies of higher education. I am not going to make even a token attempt to summarise this considerable literature, but will merely list some of its salient findings – they will be familiar to a CHE audience.

- The exponential growth of information and communications technology.
- The shift away from knowledge that is academic, disciplinary, homogenous and hierarchic to knowledge that is applied, transdisciplinary, reflexive and horizontal.
- The demise of the enlightenment model of knowledge as coherent, autonomous and self-referential.
- The simultaneous globalisation and fragmentation of academic disciplines, so that disciplinary expertise is no longer unitary and cohesive but diffuse, fluid and opaque.

1.4 A sense of loss?

Having viewed British universities from outside, let me now invite you within, into the domain of practice, into the academic profession. It so happens that there is a rich strand of enquiry, yielding vivid ethnographies of the lecture hall and common room.[24] Much of this work has been published in the past three or four years, as British academics sought to come to terms, intellectually, with life in the 'education panopticon'.[25]

The territory was mapped by Halsey, in a magisterial and melancholy study called *Decline of Donnish Dominion*. Halsey conducted three large-scale surveys in 1964, 1976 and 1989 and his data shows conclusively how directly and adversely the academic profession has been affected. Terms and conditions of employment deteriorated and relative salaries slumped. Members of the profession are older. The younger ones are disproportionately non-tenured staff, typically on research contracts. 'The atmosphere is different. It is both busier and more apathetic, newer and more neglected, more impersonal, more fragmented.' The profession has been proletarianised. Academics have less autonomy, less secure employment and fewer promotion prospects. Accompanying all this is a corrosive loss of status and esteem.

It is an international phenomenon. In his major study of the academic profession in the United States, Rhoades argued that academics are 'managed professionals', increasingly subject to managerial decisions and increasingly stratified. In Australia, Marginson analysed the 'deconstruction of academic professionalism'.[26] For Britain, Morley identifies a 'powerful discourse of crisis, loss, damage, contamination and decay in higher education'. British universities – like the National Health Service or the railways – have become a site of social anxiety and fear. Loss has become 'constitutive of current academic identity'. [27]

And, yet, intriguing recent work on identity formation has charted the collective capacities of resilience, recovery and resourcefulness among academic communities. A study of

a post-1992 university, buffeted by funding crises and highly managerial leadership, uncovered a variety of behaviourial adjustments to market-driven and top-down change rather than any linear outcome. The spectrum of response included resistance, distortion, compliance and enthusiasm.[28] Similarly, Henkel has argued that despite the tendency to bureaucratisation of their workplace, British academics generally are engaged in a process of 'reprofessionalisation'. They are rearticulating core values around the centrality of research and the value of teaching. She also posits an emerging new identity: the academic manager. Departmental chairs and faculty deans play a role that verges on the heroic, adapting to new institutional tasks while defending core values of collegiality, collective professionalism and academic autonomy.[29]

2. SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION: LOCAL PROBLEMS, GLOBAL SOLUTIONS?

The first point I want to make is one of periodisation. An unintended consequence of the apartheid era was the delayed arrival in South Africa of the changes that spread so rapidly across higher education globally from about 1980. Universities in South Africa remained largely insulated from the global 'climate change' prior to 1994. This was due partly to the academic boycott of the 1980s, which meant that academic traffic into South Africa slowed to a trickle – and also that South African academics mistakenly 'continued to believe that they were part of contemporary developments in higher education internationally'.[30] But the insularity and self-referentiality of the system went beyond these diminished contacts. It derived too from a level of state funding that remained constant while it was being whittled away elsewhere; from the high degree (by international comparison) of institutional autonomy exercised by white universities; and from correspondingly muted requirements by the apartheid state that universities should embrace 'modernisation'.

In consequence, the experience since 1994 has sometimes seemed like a film projected at fast speed: the sequence is recognisable, but seems jerky, exaggerated and frenetic. It is only in the past decade that HEIs have been required to submit strategic plans to government, to contemplate quality assurance, to envisage funding tied to outcomes, or to have their student and staffing profiles monitored against targets. They now compete with each other, especially for student places; but also with a burgeoning and unprecedented private sector. HEIs comply with new forms of governance, experiment with different delivery modes, admit vastly different student bodies, and tailor curricula and qualifications to a National Qualifications Framework. Simply to enumerate these changes indicates the accelerated similarity of what has occurred in South Africa with what has taken place over a longer period elsewhere. On one

campus after the other, institutional innovations closely replicated models designed in the US, the UK, continental Europe and Australasia. 'Much of what appear[ed] as free-swinging market behaviour or strategic invention' was directly imitative; not so much an exercise of autonomy as a reactive response to exogenous pressures, drawing upon an imported repertoire.[31]

And yet (drawing on my experience in two post-1994 HEIs and on my reading of the South African literature) there is currently little reflection in South Africa on the overall direction being taken by the sector, on the resemblances between local developments and those studied in detail elsewhere, or on the reasons for this isomorphism. Instead, and entirely understandably, it is *local* issues that preoccupy analysts and policy makers in South Africa: issues such as transformation, redress, the crisis in some HDIs, 'size and shape', and mergers. In what follows, I attempt to reconsider aspects of recent South African higher education experience as refracted through the comparative lens provided by Section 1 above.

2.1 Three pillars of policy

Two major policy documents marked the years of the Mandela government: the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) which reported in May 1996 and the White Paper, *A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education,* promulgated in August 1997. They did not write on a clean slate. Considerable intellectual activism went into the production in 1992 of a National Education Policy Initiative and a pre-election framework statement by the ANC.[32] But the NCHE – in its sheer scale, its formal remit by a new government, its *modus operandi* and its impact on subsequent policy deliberations – was unmistakably a milestone.

The NCHE commissioners (a mix of NEPI veterans, institutional heads and representatives of business and labour) worked to a demanding schedule of site visits, public hearings, study groups and conferences, and lengthy drafting sessions. In addition, some 100 experts (including senior international participants) were grouped in five task teams: they carried out a vast body of research, produced about 100 reports, and placed these – together with submissions, responses and feedback – on what may have been the first electronic policy database anywhere. The process was exhaustive, highly consultative, and fed by a huge flow of data and analysis.

The NCHE Report was hailed domestically as 'a massive participatory drive towards policy formulation' and internationally as 'one of the best tertiary education policy documents ever written'.[33] The most sustained questioning of the Report has been mounted by Jonathan Jansen within a broader critique of post-apartheid policy as

'political symbolism'. He holds that the state was preoccupied with 'settling policy struggles in the political domain rather than in the realm of practice' and that a 'fascination with new policy statements, rather than their implementation, may continue to constitute the dominant mode of policy engagement with education'.[34] Others, while acknowledging the undoubted symbolic content of the NCHE – its demarcation of a foundational post-apartheid dispensation – have argued that it also contained more substantive proposals or that symbolic policy does not necessarily involve a failure of implementation.[35]

The NCHE Report identified three central attributes of a future, transformed, unitary higher education system: **increased participation, greater responsiveness** and **increased cooperation and partnerships.** Its first central policy proposal, then, was growth or massification: more students, and from a broader distribution of social groups and classes. The NCHE estimated the overall participation rate for the 20–24 age group as 19.8 per cent and projected that the rate would reach 30 per cent by 2005 (a rise in student numbers from some 800 000 in 1995 to about 1.5 million.) The assumptions on which this expansion was postulated were simply wrong, particularly in terms of numbers of school-leavers qualified to enter higher education; yet the Report's advocacy of growth was sophisticated and far-reaching.

Mass access, the NCHE shrewdly saw, was the policy which could address the tensions between equity and development imperatives: 'if South Africa is to compete economically ... it will need increasing numbers of skilled professionals and 'knowledge workers' ... *and* the great bulk of this increase will need to come from the black community'.[36] The Report was well aware that massification was also a driver of differentiation and efficiency. It would involve changes to curriculum, qualifications, and quality assessment; it would require greater cost-effectiveness, and, more provisionally, would probably require universities to increase their private and external income.

The second main pillar of the report was 'responsiveness' to societal interests and needs. The NCHE was influenced by the 'mode 2 knowledge production' debate and heralded an epistemological shift from canonical, disciplinary knowledge systems to more 'open', interactive and externally receptive systems. It also claimed that such interaction would lead to the incorporation of the perspectives and values of previously silenced groups, but this attempt to balance equity and development tensions remained largely hortatory. The third pillar called for greater cooperation and partnerships in governance structures and in the operations of higher education. It was inflected by the international literature on higher education as a site of functional interdependence between multiple actors and interests. How have these three objectives fared since 1996?

In terms of **increased and broadened participation**, the major gain of the past decade has been a sustained acceleration in the number and proportion of black, and particularly African, students at universities and technikons. In 1993 African students (by headcount) comprised 40 per cent of enrolments in universities and technikons; by 1999 this proportion had risen to 59 per cent; and by 2002 to 65 per cent. In absolute numbers this represented a rise from 190 000 in 1993 to 332 000 by 1999, or an increase of 74 per cent. On most of the historically white campuses, the increased enrolment of black students has been even more dramatic. Overall, changing patterns of access to higher education in South Africa amount to one of the most rapid and socially significant demographic changes, anywhere, in the contemporary era.

However, upon closer scrutiny this positive development is more ambiguous than it seems at first glance. The *proportional* increase in the numbers of African students was due partly to falling enrolments of white students. There were 220 000 white students in higher education in 1993, but only 164 000 in 1999. The reasons for this decline are still somewhat conjectural, but they appear to involve a move into private institutions, an increased tendency of white school-leavers to go overseas, and issues of affordability for less affluent white families (but who earned too much to qualify for student loans under the National Student Financial Aid Scheme, NSFAS). What this meant was that the overall participation rate for the age cohort 18–24 years actually fell from the 16 per cent achieved in 1993/4 to 15 per cent in 1999/2000. The access gains also prove less healthy when measured against student success levels. A dismaying and wasteful number fail to complete their courses, retention rates fell in universities and technikons, and student drop-out rates were as high as one in five in 2000.

Moreover, the substantial rise in African student numbers masks what has been called 'the skewed revolution'.[37] African students are disproportionately enrolled in distance programmes; in the humanities as opposed to science, technology and business degrees; and in undergraduate and diploma courses. Finally, although hard evidence is scarcer than anecdotal accounts, it appears that the South African case is similar to other experiences of massification, in that expanding access does not lead directly to increased equity. The participation rates rise most steeply for the more affluent: 'Because the trade-off [between marketisation and equity] is not forthrightly faced' the overall effect is 'to widen stratification and widen exclusion'.[38]

What of the NCHE's second cardinal criterion, **responsiveness to societal interests and needs?** This was always a profoundly ambiguous brief. South African universities were expected to be vehicles of social redress: broadening access, setting targets for

improved racial and gender balances, attending to the educational needs of first-generation students, improving success rates, and inculcating democratic values of tolerance, citizenship and the common good. They were ***simultaneously*** required to excel in the market place: to diversify their funding base, establish niches, add value, hustle for clients, out-compete their neighbours, service industry and commerce, and produce employable graduates.

The outcome was as unanticipated as it was unintended. A handful of institutions seized the responsiveness agenda scripted by Burton Clark. They reinvented themselves as 'entrepreneurial universities'. They diversified their curricula, ran market-oriented courses, experimented with new delivery modes, and entered into profit-making public/private partnerships. They recruited large numbers of new (black) students, housed mainly on satellite campuses where they could operate unchallenged by government regulations or competition.[39] With highly managerial leadership styles, they shifted from milking the military-industrial-research complex of late apartheid years and filled their pails instead from incentive schemes promoting applied research in support of the post-apartheid economy. These were the Afrikaans-medium universities, with Pretoria as the most successful prototype, closely followed by the Free State, Potchefstroom and RAU (Rand Afrikaans University, now the University of Johannesburg).

In stark contrast, the weaker historically black universities went to the wall. They lost staff and students to historically white competitors, tenuous academic cultures grew weaker, and a mix of 'crisis management and decision-avoidance'[40] led to a dismal pattern of falling enrolments, mounting debts and endemic conflict. This was the 'supreme irony for South Africa's first black majority government but entirely explicable from the perspective of students' who voted with their feet. The existing biases of the funding formula, deregulation of the system and the promotion of market relations brought about 'a new, differentiated, but demonstrably more unequal new landscape'.[41]

The NCHE's third pillar was **cooperative governance and partnerships**. It was elaborated in the 1997 White Paper as an ambitious and capacious agenda with three tiers. Firstly, governance at institutional level should become more democratic and participatory, identifiable stakeholders were to be accommodated, and a new statutory governance structure – the Institutional Forum – would represent this plurality of interests. Secondly, intra-institutional cooperation and collaboration was intended to bridge inherited identities. Thirdly, at national level cooperative governance was presented as a variant of state supervision, distinct from state control or state

interference, 'based on the principle of autonomous institutions working cooperatively with a proactive government and in a range of partnerships'.[42]

At the institutional level, the outcome was far from the anticipated 'stakeholder democracy'. The statutory institutional forums brought relatively few changes 'in the way these [institutional] structures function, particularly in relation to the participation of previously disadvantaged groups'. Instead, the single most striking feature of the multiple demands on universities saw 'institutional leaders beginning to play a more pivotal role in the governance and management of their institutions'.[43] And, most fully in some Afrikaans-medium universities and technikons, but generally across the system, South African higher education took on most of the features identified in the comparative international literature on New Managerialism.[44]

Cloete and Kulati have made a valiant attempt to reconcile managerialism and cooperative governance at an institutional level.[45] They distinguish three forms of institutional governance since 1994: managerial leadership (subdivided between strategic managerialism and unwavering entrepreneurialism), transformative leadership (subdivided between reformed collegialism and transformative managerialism) and crisis management (or failed leadership). The heroes of their saga are the second category: but their story line is weakened by the fact that this category comprises only one university and one technikon. It is telling that their extensive bibliography does not include a thoroughgoing critique of 'stakeholder' governance, a sardonic but forensic demolition job by an educational philosopher.[46] It is equally striking that South African studies of recent shifts in higher education management simply do not engage with the critique of 'new managerialism' developed elsewhere.

The second tier of cooperation has effectively been overtaken by the programme of mergers. As the CHE audience is well aware, since May 2002 the merger programme has dominated the higher education policy domain. It has survived legal challenges, institutional opposition, and sustained media and academic criticism. George Subotzky's unease is representative. Minister Asmal, preoccupied with the size and shape of the system, focused his policy on reducing the number of institutions.

> From the outset, however, it was never clear how this reduction would necessarily advance the policy goals of efficiency (mergers are not a cheap option), effectiveness and systemic equity (despite numerous mergers between previously advantaged and disadvantaged institutions). In the absence of a compelling rationale, the minister's single-minded insistence on system pruning appears to be primarily motivated by the political need to achieve demonstrable

> change … to stamp his change on the system by removing the anomalies of apartheid planning at all costs.[47]

And indeed the process is fraught with all the difficulties that mergers face anywhere: complex human resource issues, the challenge of meshing institutional cultures, and the possibility that some of the new institutions will be too large, too amorphous and too geographically distributed to be easy to govern. But the merger project is not driven primarily by considerations of efficiency or scale. It seeks to alter an institutional landscape (in Asmal's pungent phrase) 'largely dictated by the geo-political imagination of apartheid planners'. The onus is perhaps on the critics of mergers to develop a convincing alternative: one that realistically reflects the vision and imagination of post-apartheid planners. For whatever problems the mergers generate, it is difficult to think of a more efficacious mode of landscape engineering.

The third level of cooperative governance – a benign form of state supervision – has also leaked credibility in recent years. Cloete and Kulati speak of a 'gradual transition from a steering to an increasingly centralised approach' by central government; Kraak goes further and identifies a shift from state supervision to state interference.[48] Several critics of the merger programme drew attention to its 'coercive' nature. Whether one characterises governance at the system level as centralisation, interference or coercion, it can hardly be denied that the major change has been an increasingly interventionist role by the state. The National Plan of 2001 is a robust version of state supervision by any international comparative perspectives.

2.2 Local urgency and global imperatives: Whose hand holds trumps?

South Africa's higher education policy makers have had their setbacks since 1994. Some of these are the familiar shortcomings of policy making in any society: unintended or unanticipated consequences, varying expectations from different quarters, failures of fit between implements and objectives – and so on. But underlying or framing these deficits has been a profound policy dilemma: strongly countervailing pressures upon policy options that are accurately if incompletely described as 'local' and 'global' in nature. Muller noted that by 2002 universities were grappling with some 30 'change initiatives' under the master term of 'transformation', being pursued as high policy at a hectic pace:

> Diverse as these 'transformation' policies are, they all face in one of two directions: they are directed towards equity and access … on the one hand; or innovation and economic development on the other. To put that in different terms, the redemptive longings driving higher education transformation in South Africa are salvation from the dead hand of apartheid on the one hand,

> and progress towards global economic competitiveness on the other. These two longings anchor the political theology of restructuring in South Africa.[49]

The nature of these dual demands has been recognised and theorised since before the ANC even took office. Between 1992 and 1994, a series of policy interventions argued that policy formulation 'had to locate itself between sets of tensions or contradictions, particularly between equity and development'. [50] However, recognition of the dilemma is one thing; its resolution something else entirely. My argument here is that the dilemma of competing imperatives continued to be addressed rhetorically while in reality the scales tilted increasingly towards the global and away from the local field of force. I agree with Maassen and Cloete, who bluntly state that in South Africa as in most other countries, 'the national higher education agenda has been made subservient to the global reform agenda'.[51] In Muller's suggestive terminology,

> The logics of these two redemptive longings, are, unfortunately, contradictory – the logic of equalisation ... is in strict contradiction to the logic of differentiation ... – but this contradiction rarely if ever becomes visible in the policy discourse itself, and the contradictory ensemble constructs a discursive alibi for the overall transformation agenda that placates but can never resolve the salvation anxiety driving the 'new governance'.[52]

The 1997 White Paper spelled out with commendable clarity the double challenge, global and national, facing policy:

> The South African economy is confronted with the formidable challenge of integrating itself into the competitive arena of international production and finance ... Simultaneously, the nation is confronted with the challenge of reconstructing domestic social and economic relations to eradicate and redress the inequitable patterns of ownership, wealth and social and economic practices that were shaped by segregation and apartheid.

Two years later, the Council on Higher Education quoted this passage and added: 'The challenge is, of course, formidable yet unavoidable and requires creative, innovative and courageous responses if higher education is to contribute positively and decisively to the economic and social needs of our country.'[53] Well, yes – but exhortation translates poorly into implementation. The CHE rhetoric poses several questions (as Badat first pointed out). Should every university grapple with both horns of the dilemma? Or should some tackle the domestic equity horn and others the global modernising horn? And who should take this decision? Universities and technikons individually? Or the sector? Or

the state? And if, at institutional or system level, pursuit of agreed equity objectives was compromised by equally compliant pursuit of efficiency gains, which suit was trumps?

In 2001, with the publication of the National Plan, the questions continued to be fudged but the answers were more legible. The Plan opens by citing the White Paper's key challenges: 'to redress past inequalities and to transform the higher education system to serve a new social order, to meet pressing national needs, and to respond to new realities and opportunities.' But it proceeds in a different register:

> the role of higher education in a knowledge-driven world ... human resource development ... high-level skills training ... production, acquisition and application of new knowledge ... the changes associated with the phenomenon of globalisation ... development of an information society ... limited resources used efficiently and effectively.[54]

The *content* of the National Plan, noted one commentator, 'differed from a whole series of earlier policy discussion documents'; it 'confronted much more openly ... the crises facing higher education'; it marked an end to 'symbolic policymaking' and a shift to 'substantive, procedural and material policy' approaches; and it stressed 'efficiency and globalization and the knowledge economy'.[55] Explicitly, Fataar argued that the discursive shift apparent in the National Plan stemmed from 'congruence' between higher education policy and macro-economic policy. Adopted in 1996, the macro-development path of GEAR favoured export-led growth, fiscal orthodoxy, deregulation, privatisation and incentives to foreign capital; and with the National Plan 'an economic rationalist discourse had come to settle on the higher education discursive terrain'.[56]

3. SOME QUESTIONS INSTEAD OF CONCLUSIONS

Section 1 of this paper identified certain trends affecting universities globally. There has been a clear process of convergence or mimesis. Policies, practices and ideologies relating to higher education have become more similar. At the level of higher education *systems* broadly similar 'reform' packages are being put together all over the world. They include 'criticisms of traditional academic norms and values, the reinforcement of the economic role of higher education, the emergence of managerialism, an increasing role for external stakeholders, diversification of funding sources and the rolling-back of public funding'.[57] There has emerged a set of assumptions, norms and ideas about how universities are defined, governed and funded, how they manage themselves and how they carry out their core activities – and this policy package is frequently associated with what is called 'globalism' or 'globalisation'.

The first question, then, to pose to those at the CHE colloquium is: what are the implications for South Africa's universities and technikons? Within your institutions, how far have similar changes or notions already affected your working lives – and are they likely to accelerate? Within government, is it possible to formulate policy selectively, adopting this element of the international model, adapting that, and rejecting the other? Or is there an overall policy package – ideologically coherent, internationally endorsed – that is for all practical purposes irresistible? Is there in effect a higher education equivalent of the Washington Consensus that shapes macro-economic policy across emerging economies as much as mature capitalist states?

The second question stems directly from the first. To what extent does the South African government's macro-economic strategy, its stated assumptions and priorities, indicate that a local wrapping of the global policy package is likely? Do discursive shifts towards 'efficiency', 'planning' and 'benchmarks' move the system closer towards the global pattern? This is a crucial question given that it has long been acknowledged that there is a policy tension in South Africa between equity and development. Has the post-apartheid institutional landscape successfully addressed this tension? Or has the system become not only more differentiated but less equitable? This was a central finding of the multi-authored stocktaking published in 2002.[58] Jansen argues that policy since 1994 has 'routinely reflected discourses and practices associated with globalisation' and that market-led 'reforms' will see a reneging on fundamental equity goals. He predicts that race will become increasingly less important, and class more salient, in the differentiation of educational provision. Poorer, rural African students will be siphoned off into inferior institutions – a class outcome that is 'the real tragedy of globalisation'.[59] Is this alarmism or a timely warning?

Thirdly, it is generally accepted that South African HEIs must be differentiated. But are they to be differentiated by institutional mission, by market allocation, or by policy directives (central steering)? If higher education is to become more competitive, does it not follow that there will be winners and losers? In Australia, for example, 'the government-constructed market is leading to greater vertical differentiation between institutions. In a competitive system there are bound to be winners and losers, and the gap between these two increases over time'.[60] It is clear that in South Africa differentiation after 1994 was fairly rapid, and that market shares entrenched the lines of an older, racially inscribed hierarchy. Will the merger programme reverse this outcome, or simply ensure that there are smaller numbers of winners and losers?

Fourthly, will South African higher education become subject to the negative aspects associated with 'the audit culture' elsewhere? Is it possible to introduce a national qualifications system, the HEQC, and the monitoring and evaluation measures

inherent in the funding/planning nexus, without importing in addition a whole set of unintended consequences? It is noteworthy that similar questions have been raised directly by the Council on Higher Education. They point out that

> The rise in the preoccupation with monitoring, performance indicators and evaluation was an integral part of the state demand for accountability of publicly funded institutions which internationally reached its zenith during the 1980s … when the state was pursuing deregulation and the market was rediscovered as the invisible regulator of socio-economic processes … In the developing world, the urgency for accountability and evaluation has usually come hand-in-hand with international aid funds (e.g. IMF, World Bank) that more often than not have worked towards the generalisation of a globalised view of society, government and economy, disregarding contextual issues as well as local discourses and practices.[61]

It is vitally important that these warnings are voiced by a body like the CHE. Yet the brute question persists. Can any monitoring and evaluative system operate *independently* of these underlying policy objectives of the Treasury?

Fifthly, if massification, marketisation and managerialism have impacted significantly upon the academic profession elsewhere, will the same happen in South Africa? Will academics here experience a similar relative decline in salaries, less secure conditions of employment, less autonomy, and less esteem? Two studies suggest that such parallels are already under way. Webster and Mosoetsa identify deteriorating relations with 'management', an intensification of workloads, a loss of shared identity and feelings of impotence as key concerns for their interview sample. Koen emphasises continuities with apartheid-era institutional differentiation, but also discusses declining job security, increasing reliance on temporary staff, salary slippage relative to other public sector opportunities and heavier workloads.[62] None of this is particularly surprising, in comparative terms; but perhaps the most urgent question for South African higher education is how these changes may impact upon the reproduction and transformation of the South African academy and intelligentsia. Will South African universities be able to produce, develop and retain a new and demographically representative generation of scholars – or will a haemorrhage of talent to private sector and state opportunities thwart this goal?

Finally, it is highly encouraging to note (as several external commentators have done) that South African higher education policy makers are significantly more open to critical engagement than is the norm elsewhere. Individuals in key implementation roles have considerable academic expertise on education. There continues an important

set of discussions between policy makers and policy critics. It is difficult to gauge, as this juncture, how much capacity the critical impulses in the academy and in the state possess and what they will yield. Will the post-merger landscape generate real institutional differentiation, or a newly sedimented set of winners and losers? Will equity considerations be successfully reinserted as a real driver of policy (as opposed to the rhetorical trope it has become)? Can the very real local issues of post-apartheid South Africa be translated into progressive policy outcomes, or will they be subject to the globalising tendencies of the post-industrial world?

It is clear that researchers, policy-oriented institutes and some key players in government inhabit the local contradictions. Whether they can contradict global habits remains to be seen.

IN NAME ONLY? THE CASE OF THE UNIVERSITY

Piyushi Kotecha*

IS THE UNIVERSITY AS AN IDEA AT ITS END?

Ever since Bill Readings' provocative, if problematic, *The University in Ruins* in 1996, higher education critics have been debating the imminent demise of the university as it is historically known (Readings, 1996). Readings ascribed this death to the growth of a pervasive globalisation that undermines the Humboldtian notion of the university as the institution that creates citizens for the nation-state. He argued that if nationalism is no longer a unifying feature and graduates no longer owe their allegiance to a country but are rather transnational citizens, then the core function of the university falls away. Add to this the rise of a techno-bureaucracy which governs the running of the university and, for Readings, we have to adapt to an idea that is in ruins. This kind of thesis is no longer seen as an aberration and whether the cause is globalisation, the demise of tenure and the growth of part-time teaching staff, changing enrolment patterns or Ronald Barnett's idea of supercomplexity, the cries can be heard of 'The University is dead, long live the university' (Barnett, 2000).

Indeed, something fundamental has changed in higher education and its impacts are being felt in different ways across the globe. Colin Bundy recognises the same lineaments as Readings but his interest is to trace a trajectory from where the UK, and most other OECD countries, find themselves at present, back to the challenges facing developing countries like South Africa. His thesis is a simple one and the narratives that he uses to argue his case are essentially cautionary. If South African higher education is not careful it will find itself in a position similar to the massified, audit crazy, managerial institutions that presently typify the UK higher education sector. While he does not go so far as to question the condition of the modern (or postmodern) university, the picture he paints is bleak. Moreover, the threat to universities in developing countries is such that

> in the last decade a number of developing countries have drawn assiduously upon the lexicon of modernisation, privatisation, competition, quality assurance and benchmarks in refashioning their university systems. (Bundy, 2004:6)

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However, it seems to me that there is an important question that underpins his warnings. If South African higher education is to avoid the dim prospects that Bundy outlines, we need to go to the heart of the matter and ask meta-questions about the identity of the contemporary university, its functions and purposes especially within the context of Africa. What are the uses of a university in this radically changed society? Does the university still exist in the form conceptualised by Cardinal Newman in 1854 when he delivered his lectures on the idea of the university? What does the future hold for tertiary institutions and what form will they take in their response to this change? Equally urgent – in the South African context – is that the identity of higher education is largely unknown. What, for example, of the identity of the comprehensives – will they remain as universities with a deeper breadth of courses or will this hybrid formation be neither a university nor a university of technology?[1] The answers to these questions are not simple and in some instances cannot even be given at this stage. However, if this paper can go some way towards clarifying the issues of identity, what it can do is address Bundy's first two questions – what are the implications of globalisation for South African higher education and how likely are they given the state's macro-economic policy?

In addition, to ask what South African higher education *is* entails an implicit understanding of what it has come through, of the forces that have given it shape and continue to do so. As Bundy points out, the identity of the university is shaped by the endogenous and exogenous pressures imposed on it by civil society, state policies affecting higher education, the ever-changing allure of specific disciplines and courses for students – not to mention the shifting human capital needs of the country. Beyond these moulding forces is the more remote, but nevertheless powerful, push and pull of globalisation. Massification and the growing demand for lifelong learning, together with the growth of ICT channels, has meant that the global access to markets and information has been revolutionised, with knock-on effects on the way that teaching is delivered, assessed and constructed in response to technological innovation. In addition to this upheaval on all fronts, the South African university faces the challenge of responding effectively to international pressures while still existing largely in recovery mode after mergers and other policies directly related to the transformation agenda. The temptation, if not the reality, is for the South African higher education institution to 'ostrichcise' itself by adopting a rigid mode of doing what it can, protecting the interests of the institution as best it can and adopting a passive-aggressive, head in the sand approach to all incoming disruption. Given the huge challenges facing our education sector, immense expectations have been placed on the doorstep of higher education. Not only is it expected to act as a gateway that ensures access to students wishing to move into higher education but simultaneously it is expected to guarantee standards of excellence

while addressing a continued disparity between school-leavers as a result of apartheid inequality and a school curriculum that, in general, does not fully equip scholars to make the transition to university students.

It becomes increasingly important to consolidate a sense of what the university is in itself and what its uses are in this present time. These qualities need to be extracted, articulated, examined and changed if necessary within this context of transformation. A return to Newman and von Humboldt – arguably, the architects of the modern university – may provide the means of isolating a few core ideas, a mantra if you will, with which to continue to define the university even given the seismic changes that have occurred since the 19th century.

THE NECESSARY AND THE SUFFICIENT OF THE UNIVERSITY

To ascertain what the modern university is it is useful to resort to a fundamental philosophical distinction. What is necessary for a university to exist and what is sufficient? Does the university have to exist in a specific location, what minimal infrastructure does it need to qualify as such, does it have to fulfil all of the requirements of the university such as teaching, research, library facilities and community outreach?

Returning to Newman's *The Idea of the University* may appear a regressive move in so far as educational theorists have apparently graduated from many of the debates that he started. In this postmodern world there appears to be a naïve certainty about the eminent Victorian's assumptions regarding the purpose of higher education. At face value, who would need to return to topics like the uses of a liberal education, the end point of knowledge, or the need for the student to obtain an 'acquired faculty of judgment, of clear-sightedness, of sagacity, of wisdom, of philosophical reach of mind, and of intellectual self-possession and repose' (Discourse 7.1)? While it may be conceded that these are important qualities for the student to possess and for the university to offer via its teaching, the higher education landscape is so altered that it makes Newman's recommendations appear a little antiquated. How, for example, would it be possible to find an equivalent to the 'gentleman's qualities' that he so reveres? Has Newman's gentleman simply become the graduate and if this is the modern reincarnation, what of the moral qualities that he thought were *sine qua non* for the gentleman to possess? The modern graduate is not conceived in moral terms (not to mention the gender bias in 'gentleman') and does not have to possess any qualities apart from the ability to pass the requisite examinations and assessments. In fact, the emphasis on increasing graduate throughput can often mean that the acquiring of knowledge – not to mention morals – translates into a knack for passing which, in turn, trickles down through the system,

affecting the strategies and tricks that students and staff alike use in order to engage in the distribution of 'knowledge'.

More difficult to translate is the unquestioned essentialism that permeates Newman's arguments. The terms 'truth', 'sagacity' and 'value' are used unproblematically and to serve a variety of (largely Christian) ends. Even the core concept of the liberal education has undergone a shift from his understanding of liberal as free (Latin *liber*) to the modern reading which locates liberalism as opposed to conservatism on the one hand and as designating a kind of indecisive moral flabbiness on the other (see Barnett, 1990).[2] Newman's treatise, however, merits repeated recourse simply because beneath the Victorian façade lies an intuition and perception that is vibrant and astute and as relevant today as it was originally for the Irish religious meritocracy.

The modern university is caught in a web of tensions. The institution finds itself in a complex landscape where the university has not only changed in accordance with a changing society but also no longer serves as obvious a purpose as hitherto. Moreover, its members are caught up in this modern upheaval, which makes their roles unclear:

- Is the student a privileged participant at the feet of knowledge or a demanding customer?
- Is the academic staff member a dedicated teacher and/or researcher or a star attraction and research entrepreneur selling his or her insights to international academia or the business community?
- Is the administrative staff burdened under the weight of debt collection from student fees, outdated ICT channels and general lack of capacity, or is it a sleek – partly or fully outsourced – bureaucracy?
- Is management constituted via *primus inter pares* and largely unversed in business demands or made up of those who have forsaken or elided the first among peers notion of leadership and pursue sponsorship, linkages with business and cost reduction?
- Finally, does the higher education institution have a clear sense of mission and purpose or does it veer whimsically between fashions and management trends that appear to work elsewhere?

Obviously, these are ideal and caricatured types but the point remains that the stressors at all levels within the university suggest a picture far removed from the tranquil academy upon which Newman bases his university. Nevertheless by way of an opening gambit, Newman can be used to raise a few central concerns that continue to bedevil higher education debate.

For Newman the university is firstly a *site*, a distinct geographical place that is pleasing to the eye and conducive to the communication of knowledge: 'such as this a University seems to be in its essence, a place for the communication and circulation of thought, by means of personal intercourse, through a wide extent of country' (Newman, 1854).[3] On the surface this need for an idyllic setting is simply to encourage the free flow of knowledge between teacher and student. Behind this desire for a conducive setting is the idea that knowledge can only be circulated if there is a gathering of like-minded individuals who, in Socratic vein, arrive at knowledge via dialogue between teacher and student. It is not difficult to understand what Newman is after here. The university is a place where knowledge is gained via interaction with others; it is a live rather than a recorded act, an intimate rather than remote space. The site also matters because it is beyond the scope of the public sphere; it is necessarily removed from human concourse which would distract from its purpose. And this space – imbued with a sense of the university as a sanctum from civil society – fosters the arrival at knowledge via a friction of minds rubbing up against each other in order to negotiate and produce new knowledge and correct what is already known. The ubiquitous presence of the distance and virtual university would, on the surface, seem to militate against its fulfilling Newman's criteria. The exigencies of budgetary constraints and increased demand for higher education may mean that many of today's universities are hardly the pristine Platonic academy that Newman calls for. In spite of this, a drab surrounding does not seem to militate against the university's existence, assuming that there is, at least, a genial and healthy discourse between the teacher and the student. But even this must be questioned in an environment where students often find the institution alienating and the academic staff preoccupied with the pressures of publishing, researching and teaching, not to mention continually measuring performance, and carrying out a host of other time-consuming bureaucratic functions that demand attention and have come to encapsulate modern academia.

So the question 'Where is the university?' must be answered by saying that there is nothing that limits its existence anywhere. It is less a geographical fact than it is a kind of space where an intellectual something happens. Samuel Weber goes some way towards defining this space when he describes the campus residence that provides, for many Western students, a home:

> Students leave their families not just to study, but also to live on campuses that function *in loco parentis*, as the phrase goes. The campus of the university thus functions as a key station along the way that leads from the family to society. (Weber, 1999)

Whether physically or metaphorically, the university signals an important break with the school system and marks a hiatus between the family and social reality, between the past and the future, the secure and the unknown. Obviously this assertion must be tempered by the array of different student circumstances – living with parents, engaged in part-time study or distance – but the idea of the *alma mater* endures. The university occupies a space that is as much psychological as physical. Even institutions that operate largely via a correspondence channel are 'made real' by the student although the student may never set foot on campus. It is the need on the part of the student to imaginatively populate the prescribed text books, assignments and study guides with unique, antecedent staff in order to begin a dialogue with these materials of study.

In this space, the academic is privileged to occupy a permanent place in a transitional location. He or she should act as an overseer as youth engages with the collective history of thought. Moreover, the tenured academic has the economic ability to buy a place in society while belonging outside of its corporative identity. The picture painted here is idealised, given the managerialism that holds sway at many higher education institutions, but the point remains that irrespective of the extent to which the higher education institutions are governed by neo-liberal imperatives, at the everyday level of staff–student interaction this space still defines the institution and gives substance to the concept of institutional autonomy.

WHAT DOES THE UNIVERSITY PRODUCE?

At first glance, a university produces graduates, publications and patents as its material outputs and knowledge as its conceptual output. Jarolslav Pelikan describes the 'what' of the university as a four-legged stool that balances teaching, research, the library and community outreach. These legs support the diffusion (teaching), production (creation), collection (the library) and handing over of knowledge (community service). But if knowledge is central to what a university does, it is equally a nebulous output and beggars neat definition. Pelikan understands Newman's knowledge as that which transcends information but does not necessarily attain the level of wisdom; he perceives it as a distinction between the What, the How and the Why (Pelikan, 1992). This neat distinction means that the production of knowledge involves a manipulation of information and a critical understanding of how information works at a meta-level. For Newman, a further attribute is necessary: a university produces use-less knowledge. Newman's famous claim for the purpose and end of knowledge reads as follows: 'for I consider Knowledge to have its end in itself. For all its friends, or its enemies, may say, I insist upon it, that it is as real a mistake to burden it with virtue or religion as with

the mechanical arts'. (Newman, 1996[1854]:86) This casting of knowledge as an end in itself is reminiscent of Plato's attacks against the artist, but whereas Plato sought to downgrade the artist because he or she did not produce anything that was true, real or material (unlike the craftsman), Newman uses the same terms of reference to argue for knowledge as valuable precisely because it does not become circumscribed by a specific destination. Knowledge, like the work of art, is sufficiently opaque to allow it to be interpreted in numerous and ingenious ways, with the result that it is always evolving and growing. If knowledge cannot be harnessed to serve any one purpose, it is the cornerstone of liberal education: 'that alone is liberal knowledge, which stands on its own pretensions, which is independent of sequel, expects no complement, refuses to be informed (as it is called) by any end, or absorbed into any art, in order duly to present itself to our contemplation' (Newman, 1996[1854]: Chapter 5, Section 4). It is marked by a curiosity that is interested in where a line of reasoning will end irrespective of the consequences for the thinker.

This view seems idealistic in a climate where the utilitarian value of knowledge is evident throughout university culture. Knowledge and its production have become deeply contested at both departmental and institutional level: knowledge in the service of the state or business, knowledge as intellectual capital and prospective patents, and knowledge as possessing use-value that must be protected, marketed and sold to the highest bidder. If knowledge production has acquired this value for the academic, this image is also often re-enforced by the university, which often makes its own claims over its staff's 'intellectual deliverables'. So concerned was Newman for an understanding of knowledge as free floating that he holds that the university is essentially a site for communication rather than the advancement of knowledge. This does not mean to imply that knowledge has no economic value or does not support class based interests but that it is a by-product of intellectual dialogue, of concentrated minds engaged in a higher inter-course as one branch of knowledge collides and communicates with another. Hence the university

> is the place to which a thousand schools make contributions; in which the intellect may safely range and speculate, sure to find its equal in some antagonist activity, and its judge in the tribunal of truth. It is a place where inquiry is pushed forward, and discoveries verified and perfected, and rashness rendered innocuous, and error exposed, by the collision of mind with mind, and knowledge with knowledge. (Newman, 1996[1854])

The core point of the university then is to bring together as many schools of thought as possible in a collaborative gesture that will expose error and perfect discoveries in an

environment where 'the intellect may safely range and speculate'. What is immediately apparent is that what Newman saw as a precondition – the thousand schools joining together in the production of knowledge – has, in effect, never become normative and while disciplines and schools may occupy the same physical space, the interaction between them has been mostly non-existent or even openly hostile. The insularity and self-contained notion of the university that describes the space of the university is reflected in miniature at the departmental level (see in this regard Bernstein, 1975).

Institutional autonomy can be partly understood in these terms as the dividing off of a space – the university – which will allow this kind of engagement to occur in the belief that the end result, the graduate, will re-enter civic society for the betterment of that society and armed with 'truth'. However it is evident that terms like 'truth' and 'knowledge' have undergone a transformation in our collective understanding. Knowledge has undergone a semantic shift in line with the requirements of a knowledge economy. Contemporary use of the term almost requires that knowledge has a use, and especially an economic use. And while it might be understandable to laud the democratisation and proliferation of knowledge, it does throw into disarray the very product that once was the sole preserve of the university. As Lyotard puts it:

> Knowledge is and will be produced in order to be sold, and will be consumed in order to be valorized in a new production: in both cases, the goal is exchange. Knowledge ceases to be an end in itself. It is widely accepted that knowledge has become the principle force of production over the last few decades. (1984: 4–5)

If what a university produces is now little more than a commodity and if knowledge is available, via ICT channels, to everyone then this casts doubt on the university's core function: '***teaching*** universal knowledge' (Lyotard, 1984: Preface). What does it actually do that sets it apart from the in-house 'universities' of Microsoft or Shell? The speed of change, the proliferation of information and the shifting face of the workplace also raise the real threat that by the time the student has acquired the knowledge to graduate that knowledge will be obsolete. And nowhere is this more evident than in the idea of the university as a repository of knowledge via the library. The internet has so democratised access to knowledge that one of Pelikan's constitutive pillars is fundamentally devalued. But as Pelikan points out, the idea of the university is a four-legged stool and if the teaching and library legs are presently under scrutiny, the other legs – research and community outreach – seem intact.

THE UNIVERSITY AND THE PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE

To understand in a modern context what a university is is to understand what it produces. While Newman was content with a vision of the university as essentially a teaching institution, von Humboldt (1767–1835) insisted that the institution was a cultural site that disseminated existing knowledge and produced new knowledge through research:

> To von Humboldt goes the credit for evolving a conception of the university as a cultural site, where new knowledge is produced, not just passed on … The educational ideal of *Der Forschung, Der Lehre, Der Bildung,* research, teaching and formation, is his. (Hardcastle, 1999)

Bildung or the ongoing formation of the self via study and research was to occur via a tertiary education that focused on producing new knowledge in a collaboration between the student and the teacher:

> It is furthermore a peculiarity of the institutions of higher learning that they treat higher learning always in terms of not yet completely solved problems, remaining at all times in a research mode [i.e. being engaged in an unceasing process of inquiry]. Schools, in contrast, treat only closed and settled bodies of knowledge. The relationship between teacher and learner is therefore completely different in higher learning from what it is in schools. At the higher level, the teacher is not there for the sake of the student, both have their justification in the service of scholarship. (Quoted in Elton, 2001)

This collaboration means, firstly, that although a comprehensive understanding is the goal of education, it is remote, and, secondly, that the spirit of the university is based on an excited uncertainty and anticipation in the face of 'not yet completely solved problems'. Although von Humboldt believed that an end point would arrive in which all was known, the operating mode of the university was always in a state of enquiry and discovery. In this state of flux it was essential that the teacher had the freedom to explore any branch of study that was of interest given an integrated and unified understanding of knowledge. It also ensured a freedom on the part of the student to challenge or interrogate the teacher's solutions and pronouncements. In fact, *bildung* is predicated on individual freedom and becomes the justification for the autonomy of the institution (see Lüth, 1998:53). Like Newman's gathering of schools engaged in a never-ending debate that would detect and remove error, von Humboldt's academic freedom was an attempt to protect a space where knowledge could be discovered or created (in this regard see Tierney, 2001). That this space should be free of state intervention

was partly based on the weakened state of Prussia after the Napoleonic wars and partly on the argument that the university was not only educating the nation to a certain level, but that it was incubating a national culture and a sense of national identity. The overriding argument against state intervention was simply that 'for Humboldt, the state is a dangerous bureaucratic apparatus, which is the very antithesis of his romantic vision that values individuality and spontaneity' (Valls, 1999). The idea of academic freedom is, early on, predicated on complex and conflicting tensions between a belief in the state as myopic and bureaucratic and a belief that the university upholds and refines a national identity and culture. Crudely put, the state must refrain from involvement in the affairs of the university in order to allow the university to produce a better nation and consequently a better state.

Humboldt's notion of the student and professor arriving at new knowledge and Newman's perception that personal interaction is necessary for teaching to occur has, over time, become a more elitist process that really only occurs at postgraduate level and, more precisely, at doctoral level. In South Africa, postgraduate students account for 29 per cent of the student population but only seven per cent are at masters and one per cent at doctoral level (DoE, 2005). Moreover, the number of PhDs (with or without strong publication records) is far below US, UK or Australian counterparts. What this means in effect is that the South African situation lags behind and that research output is negligible in comparison with international baselines.

But if South Africa is not producing enough research, neither is it producing enough of the right kind of research. As implied during the above brief exploration of knowledge and its new forms, research is increasingly becoming a solution to a problem posed by entities external to the university; not only the obvious incentives offered by the business community, the entrepreneurial reflex that generates patents, offspring businesses and lucrative consultancy projects. There is another shaping of what kind of knowledge is produced via research. Here, what can be researched and what are viewed as viable research areas are directly or implicitly decided by the state. Bundy puts the case when describing the UK situation as a move

> towards greater revenue from more market-oriented or entrepreneurial activities; an increasingly explicit 'academic-industrial research agenda' and a concomitant commodification of intellectual production … (2004:4)

This is corroborated by Robert Cowen who describes the UK reforms as follows:

> The university reform movement in the 1980s and 1990s is centred around making university systems efficient and relevant. The concept of efficiency

> includes measurement of university production (of knowledge) and the test of relevance includes making what is researched (and taught) useful to the national economy. (Cowen, 1996)

The interest of the national economy was also one of the drivers behind the Department of Education's National Plan for Higher Education (2001) and was built into the neo-liberal foundation of South African developmental strategy. Moreover, the R&D Strategy released in August 2002 takes as its point of departure President Mbeki's guidelines for wealth creation in a global economy. Extracts are worth quoting because the consequences for higher education are as relevant as they are to HRD in South Africa.

- 'We have to exert maximum effort to train the necessary numbers of our people in all the fields required for the development, running and management of modern economies.'
- 'We have to ensure that as many of our people as possible master modern technologies and integrate them in their social activities, including education, delivery of services and economic activity.'
- 'We have to devote the necessary resources to scientific and technological research and development ...'
- 'We must also identify and develop the lead sectors that will help us further to expand the base for creation of wealth and give us the possibility to compete successfully within the dynamic world economy'. (Government of South Africa, 2002:3)

These points are revealing in so far as they all involve or imply the language of education – to train, to master, to conduct and encourage scientific and technological research and to develop lead sectors. While these remarks obviously have implications for FET Colleges, this macro-economic strategy impacts directly on higher education and the kind of knowledge that is required by society. This was also made explicit in the National Plan:

> There is an endemic shortage in South Africa of high-level professional and managerial skills. Particular shortages are in the science and economic-based fields, and especially in information technology, engineering, technological and technical occupations, economic and financial occupations and accountancy and related occupations. These are also the fields in which future demand is likely to be the greatest. (DoE, 2001:18)

It is clear that the state has high expectations of what higher education can deliver. It is also clear that it believes higher education has the obligation to contribute to the country's development. At first glance it may appear that the UK higher education is also committed to the development of its host country, but there are subtle and important differences. For the higher education sector in South Africa the drive is not unconditionally towards market efficiencies because the sector is still guided by the need to simultaneously solve redress issues and the future needs within the economy. And if OECD countries are struggling to meet the research output challenges brought on by global competition; how much worse is it for South African higher education, underresourced and overburdened? How then can it realistically address 'the rapidly changing nature of social and economic relations associated with the phenomenon of globalisation' (DoE, 2002:22).

THE UNIVERSITY AND THE COMMUNITY

So far it is possible to question each of Pelikan's necessary constituents of the university and in doing so to find that the meaning of the core term has shifted or diminished in value. What then of the role the university plays in relation to the community? Two distinct roles come to mind. First, it would appear that the university has a duty to the immediate community via a 'town and gown' arrangement whereby the privilege accorded to the institution is paid back in kind through initiatives that make use of academic expertise in order to offer assistance where possible within the proximity of the university. Second, the university, as a concentration of knowledge and love of the good, should act as an ethical repository and delivery channel via academic critique of social events as well as producing the so-called critical citizenry equipped with the tools to expose error and espouse the common good.

At face value it would appear that this leg has become a prime part of the university's identity, but less as an enabler of the community and more as a neo-liberal business partner. The increased drive within universities to achieve sustainable third stream revenues and the emphasis being placed on innovation and the adoption of managerialist styles within the leadership suggest that the university is largely integrated with, and integral to, the wider business community. This role increases precisely because of this redefinition of knowledge as commodity. The university finally has something tangible to sell and the community is reconceived as the client. On reflection, however, this understanding of community outreach cannot be sustained. The original intention cannot be guided by a profit motive. Outreach is part of the social bargain that should exist between the university and the 'real world'; institutional autonomy is guaranteed in order to ensure that the production of

knowledge within the university is fed back into the community for its benefit. The freedoms accorded to the university necessitate an obligation to ensure a reciprocal flow of knowledge back into society without (primarily) the attraction of material gain. As Keele and Nickman put it:

> If faculty wish to continue receiving the freedoms that they have come to take for granted as givens in academic appointments, perhaps their duties and responsibilities to those outside their institutions should be taken more seriously. A meaningful institutional commitment to active participation as citizens in local communities, rather than the cloistered, monastic academic life often practiced, would be a healthy start. (Keele & Nickman, 1999)

This understanding of the university's purpose is integral to Newman's and Humboldt's readings of the matter and is bound up with the accountability that comes with the privilege of its unique position within and without society. We might question their lofty claims regarding the university as the producer not only of knowledge, but truth. What matters is that the university has, since its conception as a religious interface and space for thinkers to gather, had an ethical clause within its very architecture. It has been assumed from the beginning that the university has an obligation to provide an ethical beacon for society.

However, the unquestioned ethical responsibility has been weakened in part by the postmodern deconstruction of absolutes such as 'truth' and, more seriously, by the growing need to meet the market on its own terms; the former has cast doubt on the neutrality and validity of ethics by questioning the veiled interests (Western, white, male) at work behind the most apparently innocuous ethical statements, and the latter has opened up the university to neo-liberal interests that rationalise and deceive in the name of profit. In this line of argument, community outreach can all too easily become the corporate equivalent of social responsibility programmes where the real agenda is to build a brand while appearing to empower communities. This is not to suggest, on the one hand, that corruption is an inevitable consequence of participation within the market or, on the other, to hold that universities are the new ethical order in the 21st century, but simply to chart the tremendous burdens – definitional, historical and structural – under which higher education labours.

On virtually every front there is an attack that seriously questions the identity of the university, its uses and the frame of reference it has used to argue for its elevated position in society.

WHAT REMAINS OF THE UNIVERSITY?

Bundy says that

> intriguing recent work on identity formation has charted the collective capacities of resilience, recovery and resourcefulness among academic communities. (2004:8)

This analysis of the modern university is not intended to be comprehensive; the intention is to expose the fractures that are increasingly apparent and to go some way towards explaining the difficulties of trying, systematically, to grasp the necessary and sufficient features of the university today.[4] In South Africa, the same debates surface with the added complexities of a mutilating history and changing state–sector relations internally and more generally within the context of the continent.

So far, the argument has proceeded along the lines established by Pelikan's image of the stool with its four legs. In other words, the university has been defined according to its most obvious and visible features. However, identity transcends characteristics. In the same way that we are not simply the sum total of features and body type, so is identity expressed through actions in relations with others. Identity in this sense is a performative act and while it is evident that an understanding of the university based on its parts tends to offer a somewhat battered image, we cannot exclude the fact that the university's identity is constituted by its relations with other organisations, especially its relations with the state. Anthropomorphically the South African university may be bruised and scarred but it continues to exist materially and its identity (as a juristic person) is proclaimed in its internal and external relations with other institutions. To understand the continued uses of the university requires:

1. An awareness of its *changing nature* in the face of postmodern conditions. This implies that the identity of the institution is fluid and open-ended. This point has been camouflaged by the extensive transformational agenda under which higher education has operated for the past seven years. Transformation implies a fixed period during which a certain set of conditions are eradicated and replaced by another set that will bring about equity and excellence once and for all. As a strategic approach it failed to grasp the shape-shifting landscape that is higher education and showed a narrow understanding of a sector that, for the past decade at least, has been defined by its need to change in response to the transformations occurring internationally.
2. An acceptance that the university's identity is *relational* and that it will continue

to exist or disintegrate depending on how it governs and controls its relations with others. As obvious as this may be, the future of both the university and the whole of higher education is a governance issue. State, business, community and civil society relations will determine the identity of the higher education institution of tomorrow.

3. The realisation that although a university may have a solid sense of its place in history, its traditions and reputation, this is no longer sufficient in order to guarantee itself a settled sense of what it is. As hinted at earlier, the modern university produces courses that are either relevant or marketable, graduates who are either enquiring meta-thinkers or have learnt the 'passing game', and publications that are either profound contributions or are simply taking up space in sponsored journals and often written by academics pressurised to 'publish or perish'. What this means in effect is that the university has already – whether it likes it or not – been ***commodified***. This economic reality is ubiquitous across the globe and is inscribed in the way that GATS was originally conceptualised. It means that the university is both a supplier of a service to civil society and an object/commodity that the state and society wants to invest in. So while a university may think of itself as a provider of public good and a bastion of ethical clarity, it cannot ignore the reality that it produces commodities that the market either wants or does not want.

To see the identity of the university as relational, fluid and commodified suggests a postmodern (and cynical) reading of the sector, but this would only be partly true. The idea of the university was always an idea and as such a visionary and ideal conceptualisation of what the university could become and could offer. Albeit cursory, the historical tracing of ideas works from the premise that the likes of Newman and Humboldt still have much to offer and can act as touchstones in this debate. Humboldt's ***bildung***, for example, is apposite in relation to the student in this postmodern university:

> One mission of university education could be the preparation of students for an unpredictable, ambivalent and sometimes unjust life, and to strengthen their self-criticism and capacity for critical thinking, as well as their sense of responsibility and tolerance of difference. In short, universities should prepare students to cope with permanent change. (Kivinen & Ristela 2002)

Although the kinds of pressures under which modern students labour may differ from those of Humboldt's students, the concept of formation of the self remains as relevant today even if the absolutes are no longer guaranteed. Dominick LaCapra's

critique of Readings' attempts to uncover a lineament of the university that has not been contaminated by modern changes in foci remains similarly relevant. After acknowledging the classic features of teaching, research and service, he adds a fourth which he calls 'critical intellectual citizenship', the importance of which 'is to affirm a certain idea of the university as a locus of discussion and debate about issues that are not confined to one discipline or area of expertise' (LaCapra, 1998). As laudable as this attempt to find a new space upon which the mission of the university can stand may be, it is in fact exactly what Newman proposed in his desire for a dialogic interdisciplinarity. It is the magnitude and speed of change that persuades us to think that the higher education paradigm has shifted beyond the reach of our founding thinkers on higher education. Paradoxically though, what is required is a sense of historical process that can return the debate to the central tenets upon which higher education is based and to constantly raise these tenets as interrogated markers that show us how far we have travelled and (perhaps) how close to the fundamentals we still are.

Perhaps one of the ironies in the South African case has been that the isolation brought about by the apartheid boycott was relatively quickly followed by transformation, restructuring and mergers; with the result that our universities have been inwardly focused for the past 25 years at least. As a result we have retained a relatively untroubled sense of identity and purpose. That we finally emerge from this isolation into a global higher education world that is radically different coincides with definitional problems for our institutions as they awake to find themselves merged, or reclassified as 'comprehensives' and 'universities of technology'. If, in this semantic free-for-all, we accept that identity is relational and we concur with what Bundy calls the 'resourcefulness of academic communities', it is likely that the South African universities of tomorrow will become increasingly differentiated. In accordance with capacity, regional location and mission, each institution will forge an identity in relation to these forces. That means that we may well see institutions that foreground not only research per se but also research in discrete and narrow areas where there is already infrastructure, funding and expertise. It may also mean universities that specialise in development or become centres renowned for their teaching. The opportunities are virtually endless. In other words, the fracturing of identity will mean that institutions are no longer all things to all stakeholders, but will be shaped by mining specific veins within the ideal of the university.

The university of the future will, in all likelihood, be unable to sustain the four 'legs' that Pelikan believed to constitute the university. It is foreseeable that there will be increasing differentiation, both in South Africa and internationally, in line with institutional competencies. What is clear is that we have not yet found a

differentiation model that will optimise our sector. The efforts of the size and shape, the mergers and the PQM have adopted an incremental approach towards increasing differentiation in line with the NCHE (NCHE, 1996) and White Paper 3 (DoE, 1997). The acceleration of change brought about by globalisation, however, means that we may need very different institutional identities and differentiation models if we are to respond not only to South Africa's future HRD requirements but also to those of the region and the continent.

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SYMBOLIC POLICY AND 'PERFORMATIVITY': SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION BETWEEN THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP BLUE SEA

Lis Lange*

INTRODUCTION

In *Global patterns, local options?* Bundy uses the changes that have occurred in higher education in advanced capitalist societies since the 1980s as a heuristic tool to analyse what has happened in South African higher education since the inauguration of the first democratic government in 1994. His argument is that South Africa's higher education system was protected by apartheid's isolation from the more devastating manifestations of the European and US neo-liberal experiences in higher education. Ironically, the integration of South Africa into the global society and economy after 1994 seems to have had a comparatively worse effect on public universities and ex-technikons, which now see their autonomy and their funding curtailed and find themselves competing with each other and with private providers of higher education for elusive students and third stream income – to mention only some of the features of the system. According to Bundy, post-1994 higher education policy and practice have not only failed to solve the inherent tensions between equity and development but also generated a higher education system whose profile contradicts its stated policy ends. These failures are to a large extent, in Bundy's analysis, to be attributed on the one hand to the government/state's inability to find local alternatives to global trends beyond the discursive level characteristic of symbolic policy and on the other to the pervasive influence of international trends in higher education.

In Bundy's analysis South African higher education, led by the hand of the state bureaucracy, has entered into postmodernity and all seems to indicate that also here in the South there is somebody in the bowels of the Union Buildings or, more modestly, at 123 Schoeman Street, who has been charged with implementing *The Postmodern Condition.* In South Africa too a search for 'performativity' seems to be informing the need to report to government, the introduction of quality assurance regimes, and the focus on monitoring based on performance indicators. This stage in the development of higher education seems to have been entered with 'little reflection in South Africa on the overall direction being taken by the sector, on the

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resemblances between local developments and those studied in detail elsewhere, or on the reasons for this isomorphism'. Consistent with this evaluation, Bundy suggests a number of areas that need further investigation and points out that, underlying the 'normal' setbacks in policy making experienced in South African higher education, there is a 'profound policy dilemma: strongly countervailing pressures upon policy options that are accurately if incompletely described as "local" and "global"'. This dilemma, in Bundy's opinion, has been solved by tilting the scale towards the global. Following South African analysts, he relates this movement to the reorientation of the country's macro economic policy in 1996 to a model based on export-led growth, fiscal orthodoxy, deregulation, privatisation, and so on.

The fact that most of Bundy's observations are supported by a host of local literature indicates that academics, analysts and researchers and, to a large extent, policy makers share a fairly high degree of awareness about the issues at stake.

This response to Bundy's paper explores only some of the issues raised in his paper, by examining three topics. First, it explores possible intellectual strategies that could help us better understand the changes that have occurred in South African higher education and how they differ from those taking place in advanced industrial societies. In particular, this response tries to assert the value of a more nuanced and contextualised analysis of the relationship between higher education institutions and the state in different types of capitalist societies. Second, it argues that policy implementation needs to be supported by an analysis of the changes that have occurred at system level and that this in turn implies the need for 'measurement methodologies' to be developed to assess the extent of change. Finally, through a more detailed discussion of the Council on Higher Education's conceptualisation and practice of monitoring, it tries to address what I consider to be the underlying question in Bundy's paper: whether it is possible to achieve progressive ends using tools with conservative origins.

GLOBALISATION, POSTMODERNITY AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Based on specialised literature, Bundy provides a characterisation of universities in advanced capitalist societies under neo-liberal governments that distinguishes between external and internal features. External features are those that affect the organisation and governance of higher education institutions; internal features are those elements that affect the core functions of teaching and learning and research.

From the mid-1960s to the late 1970s the UK saw the final stage of the welfare state and Keynesian budgets in which education was seen as a public good essential for broadening democratic participation and attaining higher levels of technological, and therefore economic, development. The 1980s, on the other hand, heralded a different interpretation of the relationship between education, economic development and democracy. Under Thatcher the welfare state receded. Education was not an unambiguous public good but a matter of public as well as private investment in which the state was interested only so far as universities produced human capital development and specific skills needed for national economic competitiveness. Participation rates were no longer predominantly a matter of expanding democratic rights and developing the citizenry but of producing a professional working force otherwise known as knowledge workers.

In the UK this process led to the introduction of tuition fees, third stream income and the general commodification of education, and the introduction of managerialism and entrepreneurship, efficiency, accountability, audit, performance indicators and targets. This in turn, to a large extent, changed and distorted the universities' *raison d'être*, making them more concerned with inputs and outputs than with knowledge per se.

From the perspective of the actual business of higher education institutions, the production and transmission of knowledge, these changes were accompanied by the introduction of inter- and trans-disciplinarity, the apparent demise of the enlightenment model of knowledge (and the subject who knows), and the globalisation of knowledge thanks to the growth of information and communication technologies.

The fundamental change in the relationship between universities, state and society during this period has been analysed and explained in countless publications since the 1960s and Bundy's references are testimony to this. Yet often these analyses look at higher education and the state outside capitalist development as if globalisation were a stage of particular intensification of technological development and not a stage in the development of capitalism or the introduction of a new mode of production. Unfortunately, despite the existence of a large body of literature focused on the changes in capitalist societies since the 1970s, most higher education research is still very self-referential.[1] The dearth of, for lack of a better name, a political economy of higher education which situates universities in the context of social reproduction within post-industrial capitalism makes for weak insights in many of the current analyses of higher education. These analyses focus on predominant trends in higher

education such as the incorporation of management principles into the organisation of universities, the reduction of state budgets, the marketisation of academic offerings, and so on. However, as much as these trends are clearly identifiable in most national higher education systems, they point to the symptoms rather than the causes of the processes under way. Most importantly, this type of analysis leaves very little space for identifying and exploring political, organisational and theoretical alternatives to the predominant discourse and practice.

The fact that neo-liberalism is seen mostly as a political manifestation in the state and an ideology without investigating its deeper material underpinnings detracts, in the case of the analysis of higher education, from a better and more complex understanding of the role of universities in class reproduction. The lack of historical analysis implicit in this has two fundamental consequences. One affects the analysis of national higher education systems because it obscures the specific forms of capitalist development in advanced capitalist countries, thus allowing for heuristic devices and the interpretations derived from them to be extrapolated to developing countries. The other affects the conception of higher education institutions themselves. Universities are presented as divorced from their own history. It is as if change had taken place out of bureaucratic whim rather than as the result of a socio-political process in which higher education institutions played an active part. It often seems that we have forgotten that the massification of higher education was a response to broad political and social phenomena. We forget that there was a time when women, black people and working people could not study at universities. The transformation of the role and position of higher education institutions in society had internal consequences for these institutions in terms not only of their forms of organisation and governance but also of the content and the pedagogy of their three core functions of teaching and learning, research and community engagement.

Situating higher education institutions more sharply in the context of a specific stage of capitalist development and its political, social and cultural implications, however, does not mean that the actual description of the symptoms will change or that the existing analyses are wrong. It means that on the one hand it is possible to see HEIs as playing a role in a larger set of social contradictions and to analyse the implications this has for the production and transmission of knowledge and for the nature of the relationship between HEIs and state and civil society. On the other hand, a sharper contextualisation of higher education systems means that it is possible to seek intellectual, political and organisational alternatives or mediations that can exercise a level of critique and help develop practices which could have a political effect in changing the present position of higher education in most countries.

The weak theorisation of higher education from a historical and political economy perspective is mirrored by the absence of a reflection on social agency in terms both of institutions and organisations and the individual subject. It is interesting that while most critics of neo-liberalism's manifestations in higher education decry the rising of performativity as the most prominent feature of postmodernity, very few actually draw any conclusion about its impact on higher education institutions' perceptions of themselves, their capacity for agency and their role in the formation of the subject. This has several consequences, fundamental among them being the development of a narrative that describes universities' predicaments oblivious of the long *durée* of these institutions' history (institutions as innocent victims of a philistine state) and without giving them any credit for introducing creative responses, passively and actively resisting government-imposed policies, or even for reading more into those policies than actually stated. (Interestingly, Bundy's analysis only mentions in passing some of the more 'creative' responses of individual academics, not of the institutions as such, to the onslaught of managerialism in the UK.) Analyses that rob institutions of their agency not only assume that institutions have no interests in social development, but also obliterate reflection on the intersection between philosophy, sociology and pedagogy that might help to understand better (and respond more aptly to) the consequences of, for example, universities enrolling 'clients' instead of students, or what the role is of the (by now) visible hand of the market in the development of citizenship. The elements of this field of intellectual and political enquiry which I am loosely calling a political economy of higher education are not a given, but rather under construction, and do not take place within higher education as a discrete field of knowledge. The development of such a perspective requires the contribution of a number of other areas of knowledge. It needs an updated theory of the state, an analysis of informational (post-industrial) capitalism that reconciles the general with the particular and looks into the new mechanisms of class formation and reproduction in both industrialised and developing societies. But this political economy also needs to understand the philosophical underpinnings of what constitutes citizenship, and of social inclusion and exclusion in democratic societies. To integrate these elements in order to analyse higher education is an ambitious intellectual agenda which has as its main purpose to understand better so as to act more effectively.

Within the context of this proposed set of enquiries one should be able to get a better grip on the specific tensions and contradictions that make South Africa's 'postmodernity' very different from the UK's.

THE NEED TO KNOW. CONSERVATIVE TOOLS FOR PROGRESSIVE ENDS?

The anachronism of apartheid not only protected South Africa from neo-liberal reforms in higher education; it also 'protected' South Africa from postmodernity at the ideological and political levels. While other developed and developing democratic societies were grappling with the crisis of the left, and the simultaneous death of the grand narratives and of the subject, South Africa was 'living' a grand narrative developed through decades of political struggle. The liberation movement was affirming the importance of the subject as citizen and as a person morally committed and entitled to building an inclusive society based on the principles of social justice. The Constitution, with its Bill of Rights, was guaranteeing the juridical and legislative value of these principles and every piece of legislation was to take its cue from this. Higher education policy was not an exception. In this sense, South African higher education policy was informed not by neo-liberalism but by social justice principles and the idea that it was possible to collectively embrace a political project.[2]

The higher education system that the country inherited from apartheid was racially segregated and administratively divided. Mission differentiation depended not so much on the resources, position and visioning of the institutions themselves as on the state's allocating roles in class (system) reproduction to the institutions. The quality of teaching and learning and research production and the levels of community engagement in each of the 36 higher education institutions that then formed the higher education system were uneven and so were the financial and human resources these institutions counted on to discharge these functions. The level of participation in higher education in South Africa was low at the same time that the distribution of headcount enrolments per race did not reflect the demography of the country or respond to the need for skills geared to the construction of a more distributive economy and a democratic society.

In this context, the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE, 1996), White Paper 3 (DoE, 1997), the Higher Education Act and, finally, the National Plan for Higher Education (DoE, 2001) proposed to transform the higher education system for it to serve a collective political project. For government, institutions and society to know whether this transformation was being successful – i.e. whether the system was more equitable, provided better quality education and produced better and more graduates across all race groups to take up jobs in the economy and be good, committed citizens – it was necessary to establish whether and how individual institutions and the higher education system were changing.

How can we know without asking questions? How can we come to conclusions without generating information that could be analysed? How can we tell that today we are better than yesterday without establishing some yardstick to measure the difference? How can we understand the effects of policy implementation without using gauges that can indicate whether change is happening in the desired direction or whether policy is having unintended consequences? How can we decide whether change is happening because of the effect of policy or because of the pressure brought to bear by other 'external' factors? Bundy can tell us that the South African higher education system has not attained its 1997 'local' goals because not only are there figures to compare 1994 enrolments with 2004 enrolments, there are also cohort studies that were designed to establish the throughput rates of students per aggregated CESM (Classification of Educational Subject Matter) category, level of study, race and gender. A similar set of questions and answers apply to the management of higher education institutions. How can we improve faculty throughput rates, and equity profiles in particular programmes, if there is no information on which to base decisions? Yet these measuring activities, whether they take the form of statistics required by the state or self-evaluations against criteria to establish minimum thresholds of quality or the efficacy of quality management at institutions, are, according to Bundy, another symptom of South African higher education falling into the trap of performativity and managerialism. This analysis, which is actually close to a dictum, is too narrow and unproblematised to help solve the real problems faced by institutions and the state in the process of measuring. Just as we need analyses of higher education institutions that situate institutional change in a more nuanced socio-political context, so also do we need analyses of the neo-liberal state that do not conflate tool and motive. Accountability based on information is also a fundamental element, if not the only one, of the functioning of the democratic state.

THE CHE'S EXPERIENCE

Taking the above remarks as my point of departure, I would now like to turn to the CHE's experience in conceptualising and developing a system for assessing policy implementation. In this process the CHE has had to deal not only with the problems of trying to measure the attainment of policy goals that had a symbolic character, but also with the methodological and conceptual critique level to monitoring because of its conservative origins.

Whether the state was 'fascinated with making political statements' more than with the implementation of policy, as Jansen has suggested (Jansen, 2001), does

not detract from the fact that certain aspects of the symbolic policy were actually interpreted and acted upon by higher education institutions themselves. A case in point is the enormous impact that the debate on mode 1 and mode 2 knowledge, included in the NCHE and variously translated into other policy documents, had in the system by the time of the first submission of three-year rolling plans required by the Department of Education. Although there was no government directive asking institutions to programmatise their curriculum and more or less do away with teaching and learning within the disciplines at the undergraduate level, this is what, with a few exceptions, effectively happened. Most institutions, particularly those that, in the early days of the democratic government, felt more vulnerable to an ANC government, developed their own discourse and practice of what they understood as transformation. 'Responsiveness to the needs of society', as suggested in White Paper 3, had a wide range of institutional manifestations of which the entrepreneurial university is only one. Yet many higher education institutions understood it to be the recommended model. Whether it was the lack of clear directives from government or social actors' reading of the situation that generated implementation outcomes which were ludicrous or almost counter to the intentions of policy makers, is an issue that cannot be discussed here. The fact remains that, with or without government direction, policy implementation did take place before the launch of the National Plan for Higher Education in 2001. The underpinnings of this process of policy implementation and its consequences and outcomes, whether wanted or unforeseen, needed to be identified and analysed.

The development of a monitoring system capable of measuring whether and to what extent higher education policy goals were being implemented and with what effect, had been in the CHE's suite of projects since 1999. Lack of personnel in the secretariat and the need to concentrate the CHE's attention on other issues meant that the project only took off in 2002 when the NPHE and the restructuring of higher education were already under way. In developing a framework for monitoring policy implementation the CHE had to take into account the observable local dynamics as well as the international literature and experience of monitoring. Among the local issues were the inherited unevenness of the higher education system, the need to redefine the relationship between higher education and the state and society in a democratic dispensation, and the overwhelming importance of all the issues included under the shorthand of 'transformation'. The international literature had its collection of detractors and proponents of monitoring systems and their impact on higher education systems. However, in general we did not find outside South Africa proponents of a monitoring system for higher education who were struggling to monitor 'transformation'. The dilemma for the CHE was how to develop and

implement in a consensual manner a methodology which was so directly linked with the rise of the evaluative state and make it work to support the local political project.

At the conceptual level the CHE tried to solve this problem by assuming the critique of the evaluative state (Neave, 1998), the audit culture, the drive for quantification and the importation of a model of higher education à la World Bank (Marginson & Mollis, 2001). The CHE's embracing of the critique of the evaluative state was accompanied by a conception of the purpose of monitoring as not so much accountability, though this was present in the proposed framework, as self-reflection and the generation of knowledge about higher education. The CHE indicated that the outcome of monitoring should be progressive and reflective thought and action. This conceptualisation of monitoring was informed by an ethical conception that operates counter to postmodern wisdom: there is truth (that can be known) and there is good – particularly, there is a public good. This conceptualisation was possible because the CHE took its cue for giving content to the monitoring system from the national policy on higher education, which had formulations that function more at the level of principle than at the operational level.

The CHE recognised that monitoring in the context of the evaluative state had bureaucratised the relationship between higher education, the state and civil society and that the system it was intending to develop had precisely the opposite purpose: to deepen democracy through identifying the obstacles to its achievement. Given this approach to monitoring and in order to further mitigate the risk of bureaucratisation, it was necessary to effect yet another conceptual and methodological operation. Thus the CHE saw monitoring as part of a conceptual continuum of which evaluation and research were fundamental components. In particular, social science research was included in the monitoring and evaluation system as a mechanism of internal critique, intended to provide conceptual and empirical protection against falling into the trap of practising monitoring as a technology. The last step in the attempt to conceptualise monitoring outside the evaluative state was to investigate the relationship between information, knowledge and democracy and establish a link between evaluation and deliberative democracy (see Patton, 2000).

Taking all of this into account, the CHE identified the following as the main purposes of the monitoring and evaluation system which it was proposing:

- The generation of knowledge about how higher education transformation takes place.

- The sharpening of the CHE's advice to the Minister of Education.
- The improvement of higher education through applying new knowledge about systemic and institutional transformation.
- The strengthening of democracy by disseminating the analysis and interpretation of data so as to generate the public space for critically interrogating policy development and implementation.
  (CHE, 2004:2)

The overall conceptualisation as described so far still needed to be translated into a methodology that could effectively generate a monitoring and evaluation system that was useful for the purpose for which it was conceived and that could actually be accepted by its potential users, particularly by higher education institutions. The development of a methodology for monitoring was informed by the understanding that what was being monitored was social change and that therefore a number of principles from the social sciences had to be brought to bear on the design of the system. The CHE thought that the following assumptions needed to inform the design and operationalisation of the monitoring system:

- In democratic societies, policies are the result of historically conditioned political contestation, conflict and cooperation between social actors with different interests and unequal power. This implies that different historical circumstances generate new power configurations which need to be reckoned with to understand social change. In this sense, a monitoring system needs to focus on a particular area of policy implementation, such as education needs, in order to understand its broader social context.
- The legacy of apartheid in higher education is a system differentiated by individual institutions' identities, capabilities and resources, which conditioned the way in which institutions accepted, responded to or resisted the transformation agenda. In this regard, a monitoring and evaluation system cannot operate only at the system level. The unit of analysis has to be the institution.
- The process of translating symbolic policy into implementation does not happen only at the level of the state and is not always congruent or comprehensive. A monitoring system cannot assume or expect correspondence between policy and implementation but rather a variety of individual strategies which depend on a number of institutional and contextual issues.

However, based on a democratic conception and informed by a social sciences methodology, the monitoring system still had to measure. But what would be measured

and how would it be measured so that this monitoring system would not be just another collection of performance indicators that generate a tired compliance response on the part of the institutions? In this regard, the fact that the CHE could not, even had it wanted to, monitor HEIs and/or the system for accountability played to the CHE's advantage, and the result of the consultative process indicated that institutions did not reject the proposal outright and that in general the monitoring framework was fairly well received, though institutions raised important questions about the relationships between monitoring and the different aspects of the quality assurance work of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC).

Because monitoring is a Department of Education function and the CHE decided that its monitoring would take place within the data and information available within the national System of Innovation, it was not necessary for the CHE to collect new data but rather to bring it together. The CHE was to act as a warehouse of relevant higher education and higher education-related data. Thus, the process of implementing the monitoring system necessitated identifying a number of indicators, some of which, for example those related to teaching and learning, already existed in HEMIS (Higher Education Management Information System), while those related to research were collected by various government bodies and research institutes. The CHE function in this regard was not to generate indicators or collect data but to bring together in an interpretive manner what already existed. The most important aspect of this process was the attempt to work with indicators as diagnostic tools which had no explanatory validity per se. Indicators within the CHE monitoring system are not measures of performance against externally set targets; they are measures of change in relation to individual institutions' points of departure. Moreover, the methodology was based on the idea that to make sense indicators needed to be put in relation to each other and read together with qualitative information.

Another important aspect of the implementation of the system was that it was designed to look at institutions in historical and comparative perspective and in themselves. Put differently, if one of the purposes of monitoring was to understand social change, then the lens with which to look at the institution was change itself, which could only be measured over time. Given the policy watershed of 1994, change needed to be measured as 'before' and 'after'. Thus the CHE proposed to establish time series starting with 1996 as a base year and then looking at higher education with HEMIS data (2000 onwards). Because the monitoring system was informed by a 'contextual' understanding of change, each institution would be looked at in its own right, in relation to similar institutions, and only in the last instance in relation to the system and specific system based targets or benchmarks. The focus on understanding

and not simply on measuring an institution in relation to performance indicators seems a suitable approach for a monitoring system which is more concerned with understanding and improvement than with accountability.

The actual implementation of the system is too recent to comment on as regards its results, its influence on the institutions or its actual ability to steer itself away from the technology path. Despite the analytical approach, the monitoring system per se does rely on quantitative indicators of input and output in the educational process. The analysis of indicators of transformation in various aspects of the three core functions is done in the knowledge that what matters is not so much the discrete figures analysed in a time series as the relation between inputs and outputs. More specifically, what matters and can illuminate our knowledge of higher education are the questions that the 'distance' between inputs and outputs suggests we investigate more deeply. Some of these issues are being brought to the attention of the HEQC in the context of institutional audits.

The system is still very new and not fully implemented. Much more work needs to be done before we can assess whether the CHE has managed to use a monitoring system to help individual institutions and the higher education system to become more reflective, and closer to fulfilling the promises made in higher education policy.

CONCLUSION

In this response to Bundy's article I have argued that we need a far more nuanced and contextualised analysis of higher education institutions in relation to capitalist development and class reproduction in different socio-political contexts to actually understand the variety of relationships that exist between the state, higher education and society and how these are mediated by locality. In the case of the South African higher education system I suggested that Bundy superimposes the characteristics of the neo-liberal state as it operates in advanced industrialised societies because he finds elements of managerialism and performativity in the system and does not take into account the importance that different political discourses and practices can have in the configuration of relationships between social actors. I have particularly taken issue with Bundy's assumption that the use of tools to measure change in relation to policy goals can automatically be equated with a conservative view of higher education and the state. Measurement and the tools one chooses to measure with are not intrinsically good or bad. The purpose for which the tools are used needs to be taken into account in any analysis of the progressive character or otherwise of a monitoring system or other form of measurement for ascertaining change in the higher education system.

The CHE developed a monitoring system to understand how the implementation of higher education was helping to achieve the general societal goal of constructing a democratic dispensation based on social justice. The practice of monitoring as it is unfolding at the CHE indicates that it is possible to measure without buying into the conceptualisation of the evaluative state. To keep the activity of monitoring from bureaucratisation and its development as yet another technology of power à la Foucault or from its becoming a checklist of transformation features, the monitoring system has to face its limitations. A monitoring system, for example, cannot focus conceptually or practically on the work that teachers and researchers and students do in the pursuit of knowledge because it is good, interesting, and fun. It cannot focus on the educative interactions that help the development of citizenship. What has become clear in the practice of monitoring is that there are no monitoring indicators that can actually respond to these and other similar areas of enquiry. In other words, the CHE believes that the understanding of higher education cannot be reduced to monitoring. At a practical level this implies working with quantitative indicators while making explicit that there are aspects of education which (fortunately) cannot be measured, but can be researched.

This, however, does not mean that monitoring does not run the risk of becoming a technology, inducing bureaucratisation and intellectual paralysis. To minimise these risks it is necessary to build mechanisms for critique into the system and maintain a healthy measure of scepticism as to the completeness of the knowledge obtained using this methodology. A better proposition, I think, than throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

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GLOBAL PATTERNS AND LOCAL OPTIONS: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF BUNDY'S PAPER

Sipho Seepe*

Presented at a time when the country was gripped in the euphoria of the ten year celebration of democracy, Bundy's paper was a welcome relief. It was a relief neither because his reflections of the last ten years are unproblematic, nor because he offers new insights or provides answers to higher education challenges – but because he breaks ranks from the now perfunctory oblations that masquerade as critique.

Underpinning the paper is a notion that higher education is under siege worldwide, and that South Africa is no exception to this. The paper posits a view that 'the national higher education agenda has been made subservient to the global reform agenda'. Those who have thought that the country's higher education policies are a result of South Africa's consultative processes are under a serious illusion.

Perhaps in anticipation of the reaction his paper might elicit, Bundy prefaces it by proclaiming that it must not be seen as representing original research but as derived from observations of his experience in South Africa and the United Kingdom. One cannot quibble with 'personal reflections'. Nor can one quarrel with Bundy's observation and identification of the major shifts that have taken place in higher education – *massification, marketisation,* and *managerialism.* Indeed, universities have been subject to powerful global forces. These forces have fundamentally redefined the way universities are defined, governed, and funded. These forces and the accompanying shifts have brought about 'radically new relations between government, society and universities and have accelerated penetration of academic life by the market and market relations and a series of new demands and expectations coming from other social actors'.

To make his case, Bundy cleverly combines what normally might be two self-contained articles – one providing an insight into higher education elsewhere, the other reflecting on developments in South African higher education post-1994. Linking the two, he intends to highlight the similarity of developments and shifts. In doing so, he conjures a sense of inevitability of outcomes flowing from the perceived replication, and thus discounts the notion of local agency.

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Most people would agree with his description of higher education experiences in the UK, Australia, and New Zealand, but few would agree with the seamless extrapolation of this experience to developments in South Africa. Many scholars will also take issue with the silences, the contradictions, and the sweeping statements that underlie his observations and his failure to see the particular in the general. There is much to quarrel with in Bundy's paper. A few of his observations are worth considering.

MASSIFICATION

Massification in UK was a result of two major policy thrusts. The first took place in the 1960s when Britain's commitment to education was premised on the view that education is a social good and should therefore be equitably distributed in society. Resources were allocated accordingly. The second thrust was informed by a utilitarian view of universities where 'the socio-economic benefits of higher education were expressed in terms of national economic competitiveness; universities were a tool, a resource, for human capital development and the production of relevant skills' (Bundy, 2004).

For Bundy, 'similarities between developments in higher education across a number of societies reflect a convergence of policies and ideology'. This is perhaps one of the critical weaknesses of his reading. Such an inference is not sustainable. He is too quick to make such a conclusion – although it is necessary to the story line of his argument.

In its advocacy for massification, South Africa was not merely trying to mimic this trend. Massification is a matter of national redress and an attempt to redress the historical injustice of the exclusion of the majority. It is more nuanced; it has moral as well as economic and social justifications.

It does not take much to show that similar strategies applied in different contexts may produce different results. Similarly, different strategies in different contexts can lead to similar outcomes. That people agree on the same approach does not mean that they share the same ideology. A simple illustration is the struggle against apartheid. The anti-apartheid struggle drew into its ranks business leaders, unions, churches, communists, and so on. They were all united in opposition to the system for different reasons. It would be incorrect to infer subscription to a common ideology on the basis of the unity in action against apartheid. Nothing captures this more than the ruling party being a broad church and its members acting synchronistically on party issues.

One needs only to consider, as Nkondo has argued, how the principles of equity, democratisation, development, quality, academic freedom/institutional autocracy and

effectiveness /efficiency have been co-opted from a liberatory philosophy of education to sophisticate and legitimise the domination of a neo-liberal – or even neo-conservative – political economy of education. As we know, these principles and goals are ideologically flexible and like prostitutes they are well disposed to serve anyone (Nkondo, 1998).

MARKETISATION

Bundy notes that most universities, as can be seen from the UK and OECD countries, have had to do more with less:

> their internal functions have been subjected to 'efficiency gains' while their relations with the state have been recast in terms of greater accountability and performance audits. British academic salaries have fallen relative to other public sector professions; the physical infrastructure on many campuses has decayed. As in other advanced capitalist economies, the proportion of funding for universities from the public purse has fallen and the proportion from other sources has had to increase. The decisive change in the funding of higher education has been the changing ratios of university income: less public spending, more 'user costs' (or tuition fees) and more revenue from universities' own endeavours.

Public funding for higher education in South Africa is similarly declining. Kotecha and Stumpf have used a UNESCO study to show that South Africa's proportion of public higher education funding of GDP of 0.75 per cent is significantly lower than the average of 0.81 per cent in the 84 countries studied. In the 15 other African countries included in the study, the average proportion of GDP spent on higher education was 0.85 per cent (Kotecha & Stumpf, 2005). They use CHE research to show that

> In 1986, public subsidies made up 51 per cent of all income for historically advantaged universities. This had decreased to 40 per cent in 2003 … For historically disadvantaged ones, public subsidies as a proportion of total income decreased from 66 per cent in 1986 to 51 per cent in 2003.

While it may be true that public funding to higher education in South Africa has declined, the reasons are not the same as those for the decline in Britain. In Britain the reductions in the fiscus for higher education may have been informed by a Thatcherite preference for the private, a suspicion of the efficiency of public institutions, and the desire to put the sprawling public higher education sector 'on terms' demanding greater quantifiable efficiency gains. In South Africa the context was different: the overriding argument against increases in higher education expenditure is the competing fiscal demands

from the inherited massive social deficit (housing, health, primary education, water and sanitation). Higher education had to compete with these compelling demands. Not only did the democratic imperatives of accounting to the taxpayers as to how the resources of the state were being allocated across these competing imperatives result in fiscal squeeze on the sector, but also the inequalities in the sector had to be addressed. Higher education in South Africa had largely served the interests of the white economy and white interests and reallocations needed to be made internally to the sector. It is equally true that had it not been for the misplaced priority of 'saving the continent', funds earmarked for arms acquisition could have been made available for higher education.

Bundy is correct to point out that marketisation has led to commodification of higher education. This has resulted in a situation where 'decisions on curriculum are made on grounds of affordability, rather than on grounds of academic desirability'.

MANAGERIALISM

As in South Africa, British higher education has become victim to a culture of audit and a vulgar form of managerialism. Bundy observes that

> The most important political technologies (to borrow from Foucault) have been the construction of forms of external audit and internal compliance. The concept of audit 'has broken loose from its moorings in finance'[Strathern, 2000:2] and serves now as description and prescription for all sorts of processes that can be reckoned and reported in column after column of quantification.

To amplify his point, he continues:

> At SOAS we submit annually torrents of data on students: how many enrol, drop out, complete, and with what grades; we report on their age, their ethnicity, on how many come from certain postcode districts – and we repeat the exercise for faculty and staff, for classroom size and occupancy rates – and for much else besides.

However, it is important to mention that for whatever reasons the British government seeks this information, in the South African case it is the kind of information that policy makers cannot do without if they are to monitor progress and institute measures aimed at addressing the historical legacy of racial exclusion.

Bundy's second point in this regard will resonate with those who have raised concerns about the direction that universities are taking in this country:

> At the institutional level, the most striking feature has been the intensification of more managerial forms of governance, with much borrowing from private sector and from American universities. British universities have seen vice-chancellors styled as CEOs (and many appointed from the private sector); they have grown accustomed to strategic plans, organisational re-engineering, management-by-objectives, and the vocabulary of devolved budgets, cost centres, and line management.

The vulgar application of managerialism in SA is best captured in the way that some vice- chancellors are proud to declare that they are not academics (*Mail & Guardian,* 2004). When silence reigns in the academy when a leader of an institution proudly proclaims that he is not an academic then there is cause to worry. Under the pretext of following the 'global trend', there are universities in South Africa where the vice-chancellor is now called the CEO. Such mimicking transposes to the academy the language of business and/or the factory without interrogating how this reshapes practice in profound ways. Universities are not factories, nor business enterprises. Their core function is knowledge generation and dissemination. In a sense, Jansen's prophetic question ***When does a university cease to exist?*** is upon us (Jansen, 2004).

With regard to the South African experience post-1994, Bundy notes that

> HEIs have been required to submit strategic plans to government, to contemplate quality assurance, to envisage funding tied to outcomes, or to have their student and staffing profiles monitored against targets. They now compete with each other, especially for student places; but also with a burgeoning and unprecedented private sector. HEIs comply with new forms of governance, experiment with different delivery modes, admit vastly different student bodies, and tailor curricula and qualifications to a National Qualifications Framework.

For Bundy, these developments are nothing short of imitative. It is as if the sector is trying to catch up with developments elsewhere following years of isolation. However, there is more to these developments than an attempt to imitate. In this regard, three points are worth highlighting.

ACADEMIC ISOLATION

First, Bundy conveniently exaggerates the academic isolation. There is little doubt that the academic boycott of the apartheid years ushered in a form of insularity in the South Africa higher education. Indeed as Bundy points out, this led some to 'believe that they were part of contemporary developments in higher education internationally'. The isolation was not as complete as implied. An exaggeration is however necessary to fit into Bundy's story line. Despite the boycott, a number of South African universities, in particular the historically English universities, established working relations with universities in the UK, the US, Canada and Europe. Many South Africans continued to benefit from scholarships and exchange programmes offered in these countries.

South African higher education was, however, insulated from developments taking place in the African continent. This isolation was largely self-imposed and in line with the racial bigotry that characterised the South African academy. Nothing of value was expected from Africans and, by extension of that logic, from African universities. Regarding this, Mamdani remarks that

> Both the white and black institutions were products of apartheid, though in different ways. The difference was not only in the institutional culture, that the former enjoyed institutional autonomy and the latter was bureaucratically driven. The difference was also in their intellectual horizons. It was the white intelligentsia that took the lead in creating apartheid-enforced identities in the knowledge they produced. Believing that this was an act of intellectual creativity unrelated to the culture of privilege in which they were steeped, they ended by defending an ingrained prejudice with a studied conviction. The irony is that the white intelligentsia came to be a greater, became a more willing, prisoner of apartheid thought than its black counterpart. (1999:131)

CONSULTATIVE PROCESSES

Second, post-1994 developments and policies are a result of an extensive 'consultative process', which Bundy elsewhere acknowledges. In his words, the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE, 1996), whose recommendations informed the developments referred to above, 'in its sheer scale, its formal remit by a new government, its *modus operandi* and its impact on subsequent policy deliberations – was unmistakably a milestone … the process was exhaustive, highly consultative, and fed by a huge flow of data and analysis'. The NCHE Report was hailed domestically

as ‘a massive participatory drive towards policy formulation’ and internationally as ‘one of the best tertiary education policy documents ever written’.

The National Qualifications Framework arose out of these consultations. It was adopted as a means of dealing with the fragmentation that characterised the system. This observation is not meant to suggest that the origin of the NQF is South African but rather to make the point that the adoption of the NQF model was considered appropriate to addressing the transformation agenda of the higher education system. The transformative aspects of the NQF are evident from its objectives, some of which include

- creating an integrated national framework for learning achievements;
- facilitating access to and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths;
- enhancing the quality of education and training;
- accelerating the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities; and
- contributing to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large.

ENCROACHING AUDIT CULTURE

Bundy expresses a certain disquiet about the culture of audit. This gives an impression of state interference in the affairs of institution. However, there is another way to approach the audit and accreditation exercise. Through this exercise the system is able to ascertain the quality of experience that students receive from the educational programmes offered. Far from undermining or interfering with institutional autonomy, the accreditation exercise is meant to deliver outcomes that justify public confidence and demonstrate accountability for the effective use of public and private funds (see DoE, 1997: 2.56 and Higher Education Act 53, (b), (ii)). It provides external validation by setting minimum standards to ensure the integrity of registered programmes.

An audit seeks to analyse the quality of programmes from the point of view of their curriculum design, their ability to meet the NQF level descriptors, their articulation with other levels in the NQF, and the preparedness of their academic and support staff to deliver them. It also looks at institutions’ management systems in relation to quality assurance. The criteria used were the result of a consultative process among stakeholders and affected institutions. They were agreed upon following open, informed

and critical debate. The Council on Higher Education understood the challenge of creating an environment that neither stifles sustainable educational programmes nor encourages the flourishing of poor and unsustainable fly-by-night operators.

POLICY CONTESTATION

Third, the post-1994 policies are a product, and arena, of continued contestation. They are part and parcel of efforts aimed at reconfiguring the system from what is fashionably referred to as the 'geo-political imagination of apartheid planning' to the system that is consistent with the values underpinning the new political dispensation – a point that Bundy himself acknowledges, saying that South Africa provides an extraordinary discursive space, 'one shared by academic theorists, university administrators, students, those responsible for making policy and those charged with implementing policy. The opportunities provided for collective reflection by this mix are rare, anywhere, and possibly unique. South Africans involved in higher education should cherish them'.

POST-1994 POLICY FAILURE

The above notwithstanding, Bundy's contribution will probably be remembered for its brutal assessment of post-1994 South Africa's policy objectives. According to this assessment, the central pillars of a 'transformed unitary higher education system – increased higher education participation, greater responsiveness and increased cooperation and partnerships' have proved to be elusive if not illusionary. For instance, the notable proportional increase in the number of black students in higher education has come about as the result of a decrease in the number of white students. At the same time, African students are 'disproportionately enrolled in distance education programmes, in the humanities as opposed to science, technology and business degrees'. Equally, the gains in enrolment have been offset by a high failure rate.

Performance with regard to responsiveness also leaves much to be desired. Most institutions adopted at best a minimalist approach. Historically white institutions reinvented themselves by introducing market-oriented courses. They recruited large number of students but housed them in satellite campuses. Bundy notes that, far from being vehicles of social redress, improving success rates and adopting market based strategies to enable graduates to be economically competitive, 'deregulation of the system and the promotion of market relations brought about a "new, differentiated, but demonstrably more unequal new landscape'.

The third pillar of a transformed unitary higher education system – cooperative governance and partnership – proved nothing short of an illusion. Despite the creation of statutory bodies such as institutional forums, institutions have not become any more democratic. Crass managerialism reigns supreme in most universities. Intra-institutional cooperation and collaboration aimed at bridging inherited identities have not materialised; they have since been overtaken by institutional mergers which appear to be driven more by political considerations than policy goals of equity, efficiency and effectiveness. The coercive nature of institutional mergers underscores the shift from steering at a distance to a robustly interventionist form of governance.

Consistent with his thrust, Bundy comes back to what he considers to be a tension between local agency and the global imperative. In this regard he is not alone; after all the 1997 White Paper 3 makes the same point:

> The South African economy is confronted with the formidable challenge of integrating itself into the competitive arena of international production and finance … Simultaneously, the nation is confronted with the challenge of reconstructing domestic social and economic relations to eradicate and redress the inequitable patterns of ownership, wealth and social and economic practices that were shaped by segregation and apartheid. (DoE, 1997)

Yet this dichotomy is false. Aside from being morally corrupt, and political reprehensible, apartheid was economically unsustainable precisely because it excluded a majority from contributing to the economic development of the country. Redress and inclusion of the majority within the economic arena is a precondition for global competitiveness. Seen from this perspective, the so-called tension is artificial and imaginary.

SERIOUS SHORTCOMINGS

Except for the usual one or two black scholars, there is a glaring omission of works by African scholars in Bundy's paper. Nor is an attempt made to reflect on universities in the continent. This omission derives from the tendency to treat South Africa as if it were not part of the African continent. This has proved to be a major blind spot of white scholarship in South Africa. If Bundy took African scholarship seriously, he would have hesitated before suggesting that there is 'currently little reflection in South Africa on the overall direction being taken by the sector, on the resemblances between local developments and those studied in detail elsewhere, or

on the reasons for this isomorphism'. If anything, most African scholars have been concerned about the exclusion of African input and have challenged the tendency to mimic Eurocentric models.

CONCLUSION

How does Bundy reconcile this description of failure with the fact that post-1994 policies were informed by the NCHE Report that was hailed domestically as 'a massive participatory drive towards policy formulation' and internationally as 'one of the best tertiary education policy documents ever written' (Cloete et al., 1996:87)?

Bundy provides part of the answer by invoking Jonathan Jansen's suggestion that post-apartheid policy amounted to no more than 'political symbolism' in which the state was preoccupied with 'settling policy struggles in the political domain rather than in the realm of practice' and a 'fascination with new policy statements, rather than their implementation, may continue to constitute the dominant mode of policy engagement with education' (Jansen, 2001).

Indeed, many black scholars, clearly unknown to Bundy, have made the same argument – a warning unheeded much earlier in the process. Their protest against a stage-managed process of consultation fell on deaf ears. Had they been taken seriously, some of the concerns Bundy raises would have been avoided.

Faced with this marginalisation, a number of black scholars convened a response to the NCHE in May 1996 at the University of Venda under the conference theme *Black perspectives on institutional transformation.* The conference was a response to 'a frustration with the continued marginalisation of Africans in strategic areas of policy formulation, and the almost vulgar reliance of the present dispensation on "experts", a euphemistic way of referring to white intellectuals. Whereas the initial focus of the conference was narrower; to address the directions, prospects and limitations of transformation of higher education, the discussions were broadened to include many substantive issues regarding education in general and the role of the black intellectual in the new dispensation' (Seepe, 1998).

Much of what Bundy argues is missing has been reflected upon. Bundy must avail himself of the abundance of black scholarship beyond the few works that he has become familiar with. It is a pity that he fails to incorporate experiences from the rest of the continent. A simple visit to the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) website would have provided him a wealth of information.

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BUNDY BLUES: CONTRADICTIONS AND CHOICES IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Mala Singh*

INTRODUCTION

Colin Bundy raises the fundamental problem of whether the unholy trinity of massification, marketisation and managerialism which underpins global discourses of higher education reform and which is reflected in South Africa's policies for the restructuring of higher education is now compromising those very policies 'designed to transform and reconstruct higher provision and outcomes…' (Bundy, 2005:1). In his analysis, Bundy ranges over numerous dimensions of higher education. My paper focuses on the specific concerns he has raised in connection with quality assurance as part of a 'reform package' in South African higher education. I identify the key propositions in Bundy's assessment and then seek to locate quality assurance in South Africa within a more complex frame of reference than the one suggested by Bundy. One could argue that Bundy's paper moves between a gloomy prognosis about the already overdetermined impact of neo-liberal reform strategies on South African higher education and some recognition that contradicting or at least mediating 'global habits' may be possible for key actors who 'inhabit the local contradictions' (Bundy, 2005:18). I locate my paper within the latter position and its spectrum of possibilities.

BUNDY'S PROPOSITIONS

Bundy points to the similarity of change strategies in reform trajectories in higher education systems in different parts of the world, especially since the 1980s. His discussion echoes what is now a familiar part of the critical literature on globalisation and higher education – a discourse of concern about marketisation, managerialism and 'performativity' in higher education, and about the loss of autonomy, collegiality and academic identity. He is especially critical of the Thatcherite legacy of managerialism and an 'audit culture' in British higher education. These trends have undermined collegial governance systems, changed power relations between the state and higher education institutions, reduced institutional autonomy, corroded academic status, increased external surveillance, and introduced market principles of privatisation, competition, entrepreneurialism and performance-related funding into higher education.

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Bundy's point of departure in assessing the reform trajectory in South African higher education is to use the 'comparative lens' (Bundy, 2005:9) outlined above. His thesis is that the isolationism of the late apartheid years helped to 'insulate' the higher education system from the influence of global trends in the period between the 1980s and 1994. In his view, the post-1994 period saw a rapid shift towards imitating global reform trends, for example, in respect of the submission of institutional strategic plans to government, the introduction of quality assurance and a national qualifications framework, outcomes-related funding, monitoring of equity and other targets, the growth of a private higher education sector and so on. For Bundy, there is an absence of reflexivity about the 'imported' nature of these reform elements and their possible dangers, as local actors seek to use these elements to engage with pressing domestic imperatives of 'transformation, redress, the crisis in some HDIs, "size and shape", and mergers' (Bundy, 2005:9).

Bundy seeks to evaluate the extent to which the three key goals of a transformed South African higher education system as set out in the policy proposals of the National Commission on Higher Education (1996) have been met – increased participation, greater societal responsiveness and increased cooperation and partnerships. Bundy points to the ambivalence of 'progress' in all three areas. With regard to increased participation, for example, he cites the entry of large numbers of African students into higher education, accompanied by appalling retention and drop-out rates, and skewed enrolment patterns of African students in relation to faculty, mode of provision and level of study. His conclusions are sombre. Expanding access has not led to greater equity, entrepreneurial success for the historically advantaged institutions has deepened the differentiation and inequality of the higher education landscape, managerialism has taken firm root within institutions, and the government has become 'increasingly interventionist'. Hopefully, the occasional tendency to sweeping judgements in Bundy's analysis is not part of a claim to describe the full reality of a complex and still evolving higher education landscape but is only a provocative position adopted in order to make a necessary point about the grave dangers confronting key decision makers and role players in some of the policy choices which are being implemented in the restructuring!

Bundy acknowledges that the conflicting demands of 'equity and development' had been 'recognised and theorised' in the country even before 1994, and the position taken that policy had to locate itself between different 'sets of tensions and contradictions.' His overall judgement is that recognition of the tensions has not necessarily led to their resolution: 'the dilemma of competing imperatives continued to be addressed rhetorically while in reality the scales tilted increasingly towards the global and away from the local field of force' (Bundy, 2005:14). Despite making many firm conclusion-like judgements in the earlier sections of his paper, Bundy ends with questions 'instead

of conclusions' about the likely impacts of global reform packages on 'emerging economies'; about increasing differentiation and declining equity in a context where class is becoming more 'salient'; about the negative implications of an 'audit culture' embedded in a national qualifications framework, a quality assurance system, and a monitoring and evaluation system; and about the negative impacts on the reproduction and transformation of academics and intellectuals. Bundy ends on this questioning note, encouraged by ongoing critical engagements between 'policy-makers and policy critics' in South Africa, and leaves somewhat open to speculation the possibility that key role players can 'contradict global habit'.

Bundy indicates that his paper does not present original research and draws on other studies of British and South African higher education and on his own university experiences in these two societies. For that reason perhaps the evidence for his arguments is more suggestive than substantial as he sketches out in large brush strokes the trends and dangers in contemporary higher education reform policy and practice in South Africa. He does not engage with the contextual complexities and specificities and the determining detail that must inform any in-depth evaluation which leads to such firm judgements as he makes about what the reform agenda in South Africa is yielding. He prefers instead to raise a series of sharp and crucial questions to which his own answers are mostly pessimistic. There are also some problematic assumptions in his position that pertain, for example, to whether such large and stubborn contradictions as the one between equity and development in South Africa can be satisfactorily resolved at any one given point rather than constituting an ongoing tension whose 'resolution' has to be constantly revisited and evaluated on the basis of its efficacy and fairness. There are also no pointers to what Bundy's 'state of grace' may resemble by way of a desired and feasible policy approach which could avoid the troubling neo-liberal trajectory that he describes in South African higher education.

Despite some of the above kinds of sticking points in his analysis, anyone in South Africa who is involved in the work of developing and implementing higher education reform policy, and who presumes that they are still seeking to give effect to a progressive vision of change underpinned strongly by social justice concerns, may find it necessary to engage with Bundy's prognosis, even if only to give renewed attention (in the midst of the overwhelming busy-ness of their implementation schedules) to the contradictions to which he points and the choices and options which they are pursuing in the face of those contradictions. Contrary to the national 'forgetfulness' that Bundy presumes to exist in key role players, there are many concerns (and not only among critical researchers) about the kinds of issues he raises, a more than passing acquaintance with the literature on globalisation and neo-liberalism in higher education, and disquiet about the negative

consequences of local versions of global trends in higher education. One may very well arrive at similar dispiriting conclusions when a fuller range of reform policy impacts becomes more demonstrably evident.

Without a fuller and more rigorous evaluation of such impacts, it is difficult to determine that that point has already been reached. However, Bundy's perceptions are important in so far as they help to push for greater understanding of the complex dimensions of the conflicting imperatives, the nature of their interactions as they contend with and mediate each other in this implementation phase, and whether the chosen trade-offs are appropriate and inevitable. There is no doubt that in the current environment there has been an acceleration of 'pragmatism' in the face of pressing moral and political challenges and an increase in efficiency discourses, though not all of it necessarily driven by neo-liberal or anti-equity considerations. Efficiency can also be part of the armoury of strategies invoked to enhance equity and redress gains. What is clear, however, is that it is necessary for those who remain as actors within the education reform project to consciously and continuously struggle, in the spaces that they inhabit, to make the social justice issues which are at the heart of many of our founding policy documents 'trump' other more ideologically powerful countervailing factors.

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION: STEERING TOWARDS WHAT?

Before 1995, different sectors of higher education in the country had different types and levels of quality assurance, spanning a mix of obligatory and voluntary arrangements and of unevenly rigorous internal and external systems. The formal development of a new national system began with the recommendations of the National Commission on Higher Education in 1996. The Commission identified the establishment of a single coordinated system of higher education as the 'first and fundamental task given the almost complete absence of policies, plans and structures to coordinate higher education' (NCHE, 1996:103). The development of 'an effective regulatory environment' and of appropriate 'steering mechanisms' is seen as being critical to the emergence of a more coherent system. A quality assurance system is among the 'key mechanisms' identified by the NCHE, together with a national qualifications framework, new research funding, national provision of distance education and resource-based learning programmes, systematic planning processes, and improving the capacity and infrastructure of all higher education institutions. The Higher Education Act of 1997 made provision for a single national quality assurance dispensation as part of a new set of governance arrangements for a restructured higher education system.

The introduction of quality assurance as a steering mechanism (together with planning and funding) to move towards a new higher education landscape is accompanied by a discourse that is familiar from higher education reform discourses in many other countries – quality assurance as part of forging a new set of governance relations between government and academia, the need for higher education to meet social and economic priorities, competitiveness in a global marketplace, education and training for new skills and competencies, greater responsiveness to the world of work, and the development of stronger accountabilities and efficiencies in higher education. A macro-economic framework which stresses economic growth more than redistribution has also created ambivalence in the implementation environment. Bundy is right in this respect. However, the NCHE proposals frame higher education within the 'political, economic and cultural reconstruction and development of South Africa' (NCHE, 1996:1), a country needing to grapple with a historical legacy of inequity, exclusion, intolerance, lack of democratic participation, and the absence of a sense of common citizenship. The NCHE document and the Education White Paper 3 (DoE, 1997) do not simply trade off the moral and political requirements of the reconstruction for economic reasons. They are policy documents which, as enabling frameworks, have an amalgam of competing priorities and nuances which mirrors the complex realities inhabited by interpreters and implementers as well as by critics.

The White Paper sets out a number of purposes for higher education that range over individual self-fulfilment, societal development, economic growth, intellectual enquiry and reflective citizenship. These purposes are certainly related, as stated in the White Paper. However, it is the nature of the relationships between and among the purposes (which do not remain static in any case) and the resulting trade-offs chosen or accepted by key role-players that determine the extent to which social justice issues are adequately and appropriately served. Both these source policy documents provide the ethical, political and intellectual framework to conceptualise and design implementation content and strategies that can within limits be nuanced and tilted in particular directions. Bundy is right in being critical of some of those tilts but less justified in representing most or all of them as sliding inevitably towards the service of neo-liberal imperatives. Interpretations of macro policy and next level policy choices are decisive in shaping the actions of implementation agencies and agents. This is premised on the view that policy implementation is not a technical translation of policy into a series of self-evident action steps but a hermeneutical (interpretative) task with its own complex politics and outcomes shaped by the choices, understandings, values and skills of policy implementers at different levels and the policy cooperation, capacity or resistance of policy beneficiaries.

The framing policy architecture in the country, imbued as it was with the overall transformative imperative, made it possible to think of the quality assurance system in ways that were intended not to lose sight of the equity and development nexus in higher education. This approach was not without severe challenges. Those tasked with developing the foundations of a new quality assurance system were familiar with the literature on quality assurance technologies in use in other countries but also with the critical literature about the 'evaluative state' and 'audit culture', the Thatcherite origins of accountability and efficiency discourses (of which quality assurance was a part) in the New Public Management philosophy, and the increase in managerialism, bureaucratisation and intrusiveness associated with quality assurance in higher education. They were also directed by the specifications of the Higher Education Act to use the standard instruments and methodologies of quality assurance, e.g. institutional audits and programme accreditation. Further, quality assurance systems did not traditionally include issues of social transformation e.g. the achievement of race and gender equity. Morley, who is cited by Bundy in support of his disquiet about quality assurance, argues that 'quality could provide new governance frameworks through which issues of equity could be mobilised. However, equity is frequently absent as a category of analysis in organisational arrangements for quality assurance' (Morley, 2003:146). In addition, the discourse of quality and standards in South Africa was closely associated with privilege and historical advantage, reinforced by stereotypes about all good quality at historically advantaged institutions and all poor quality at historically disadvantaged ones. Huge differentials in the enabling conditions for quality and excellence, and racial and financial constraints on who had access to their benefits were certainly constituent elements of the apartheid landscape. Also, the development of a common conception of quality and its insertion into higher education in a public sector that was fragmented and differently capacitated, and a burgeoning private sector that was just beginning to grapple with external regulation, was going to be no small task.

The challenge was to develop a quality assurance system which was 'fit for purpose' in accommodating a range of imperatives that included historical needs and social justice objectives as much as new accountability requirements and funding and capacity pressures – a system that sought to go beyond being a slightly modified clone of some global market-friendly model of quality assurance. Taking up the challenge was motivated by a commitment to making the issue of improved quality for all an essential component of a restructured and transformed higher education system, and quality assurance an arena of action for achieving such a goal. In taking up the challenge, the premise was that the domestic quality assurance system could take on a distinctive and strategically chosen identity even though it was using quite standard models and methodologies.

Brennan has provided a useful analytical frame to indicate how such identities are shaped by intersecting issues of 'contexts, purposes and choices' (Brennan, 2001:1). The context was one of radical restructuring to produce a politically and intellectually more credible system. The purposes of quality assurance had to be linked with the new and multiple purposes set for a reconfigured higher education system. The strategic choices had to with interpreting, modifying and using the standard methodologies in ways that took contextual legacies and challenges into account, especially the issue of access to good quality education for all as a transformative goal.

This is not the place to provide an account of the systems details of the HEQC's work in its different mandate areas in order to establish the distinctive features of the quality assurance dispensation in this country. I will, instead, draw attention to some examples of the choices made in the quality assurance system in order to keep the quality assurance work rooted in the progressive objectives of the restructuring.

- The HEQC chose to have a common set of quality requirements for all the different sectors of higher education, prioritising teaching and learning in order to focus on an under-addressed issue in the restructuring, accompanied by additional criteria for differentiated missions: research universities, distance education provision, work-based learning, and so on. This made it possible to transcend special claims about quality depending on sectoral type or historical legacy, and put the emphasis on a new system to which all institutions were equally subject and which could serve the aspiration and right of all students to equitable access to good quality education, irrespective of which part of the higher education system they were in. Such an approach meant that claims and concerns about quality could be tested against a common benchmark which applied to public and private institutions, historically advantaged and disadvantaged institutions, universities and technikons, and local and foreign providers. The long-term view was to forge a common set of reference points for quality even as institutional missions grew more distinctive, in this way supporting the striving for a more enabling and more evenly capacitated national system of higher education. Bringing in local and foreign private higher education provision under these common requirements has led to the development of a strong regulatory environment which may afford protection against some of the dangers of GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services) as well as ensuring that entrepreneurialist expansion in higher education is tempered by quality provision as the bottom line – an important consideration for thousands of students (often African and poor) signing up in some private and public institutions which are less than scrupulous about balancing expansion with quality.

- It was not difficult to predict that invoking a common quality standard in a context of great quality unevenness and volatility in higher education could, in the short and even medium term, produce a new quality divide. It is becoming clear that the capacity to prepare successfully for the quality requirements of the HEQC remains largely concentrated in historically advantaged institutions which are not faced with merger or other restructuring challenges. Hence, the decision by the HEQC to embark on a comprehensive capacity development programme, a strategic choice linked explicitly to equity and development objectives in higher education. The programme targets individuals, institutions and institutional sectors, seeking to equip them with increasing ability to meet quality requirements; to build a new peer review community that is more diverse in terms of race, gender and sector; to encourage academics to exchange information about good practices in teaching and learning; to encourage students to become more knowledgeable about and involved in quality debates and arrangements; and to support institutions to negotiate their difficult way through quality issues in the context of mergers and other mission shifts. Although it is rolling out an ambitious capacity development programme, the HEQC is keenly aware that to achieve a system that is characterised by more evenly distributed levels of quality is a long and hard struggle, depending also on the choices and actions of other role players, including the government and institutional leadership. However, the HEQC has signalled clearly what options it has chosen in the matter.

- The HEQC has explicitly included transformation issues in its quality assurance system. Most systems operate on a 'fitness for purpose' premise, evaluating quality arrangements on the basis of whether they support and give effect to self-defined institutional missions and goals. The HEQC includes a 'fitness of purpose' dimension as well, seeking to link quality issues to national transformation objectives which have to do with equitable access with success; responsiveness in relation to programmes, research directions and community engagement; enabling institutional cultures to support the work of staff and students, and so on. Unfair access to good quality education was one of the characteristics of the previous dispensation, not just as an incidental or purely academic issue but as a clearly politically determined one. The HEQC's decision to include transformation issues in quality assurance was a way of locating the quality issue in the social and political purposes of the restructuring. Constructing an internally self-referential 'technology' for quality in the face of a large-scale restructuring with specified social justice objectives would not

have served well those most disadvantaged by the former dispensation. The HEQC's definition of quality includes standard elements familiar from other higher education systems but also elements specific to our own contextual priorities and purposes: fitness for and fitness of purpose, value for money, and individual and social transformation. The 'value for money' aspect is currently not a high focus area in the evaluation processes, quite contrary to the economic rationalism drive usually ascribed to quality assurance. Neither is a single-minded focus on 'outcomes'. HEQC peer review panels are directed to focus on institutional initiatives and resourcing for quality development and improvement as much as for quality assurance, paying attention to the 'inputs' and processes for intended quality 'outcomes' instead of looking only at the 'outcomes' and 'outputs'. This is done on the premise that a narrow focus on 'outcomes' and 'outputs' where the field is not at all level will continue to reproduce the worst of the inequity and disadvantage.

- The HEQC has extended its system to include quality issues in all three core functions in higher education – teaching and learning, research and community engagement. I have already indicated earlier that the transformation focus in the HEQC system has targeted quality issues in relation to the different forms of social responsiveness of higher education, and in relation to new programmes, new research themes and many new initiatives aimed at responding to the changed social and political context and its imperatives. However, the inclusion of community engagement in the quality assurance frame of reference has already begun to play a strong signalling role, leading some institutions to begin to develop more coherent policy, planning and resourcing frameworks for their existing and new interactions with various community-related constituencies, and to think of quality issues as not unrelated to their evolving identities as socially engaged institutions. Here again, the HEQC has opted to conceptualise quality as part of a larger social project to re-imagine and reconfigure higher education in order to achieve the progressive purposes which are stipulated in many policy documents.

- The HEQC is located in an independent statutory body which also advises the Minister of Education, monitors developments in relation to higher education policy goals and is required to contribute to the development of higher education. As more system-level information emerges from its quality assurance and quality development work, it is envisaged that the combined work of the HEQC and the Monitoring and Evaluation directorate will enable the CHE to base some of its advice on system-level trends, in relation both to quality objectives and to the overall trajectory of the restructuring.

This could serve the purposes of both 'upward' and 'downward' accountability (Jansen, 2005), pointing to gaps and contradictions not only in institutional policy and practice but also in that of the state, and the constraining implications of both for the achievement of progressive policy goals – all this based on solid information from the CHE's quality assurance and monitoring processes.

CONCLUSION

The above are some examples of approaches to and understandings of quality and quality assurance in the HEQC system. At the level of policy intent, there is a strong orientation towards achieving social justice goals as part of the broader framework of reconstruction. This, however, has not remained only at the level of 'symbolic' policy but is embedded in implementation frameworks and processes as well. Such an approach does not imply an automatic suspicion of efficiency and accountability discourses, since greater levels of efficiency could very well be invoked (in combination with other factors) to arrest the huge attrition rates to which Bundy himself points, and transformative accountability is as much something to give serious content to as managerialist accountability is to caution against. Neither is there a politically correct willingness to tolerate poor quality indefinitely when justified on the basis of historical disadvantage, or ostensible enhancement of access without any substantial sign of improvement efforts, including investment in quality improvement.

The implementation phase of the quality assurance system is still fairly recent. It is difficult to pronounce with certainty on the full range of impacts, negative or positive or indifferent, of the system at work, especially since such impacts are shaped by other necessary and sufficient policy conditionalities. It is also the case that quality cannot be ordered through the delivery of quality assurance. The achievement of quality is a configuration of capacity, enabling but rigorous systems, committed hard work, a passion for teaching and learning, and an ongoing dialogue about quality and how it can be built, improved and sustained. The active role of academics, researchers and students in engaging with quality issues as something that is valuable for the academic enterprise and for their own academic and career goals is critical to preventing a total lapse into quality compliance. The mediating role of what Becher describes as 'street level bureaucrats' – those within institutions who shape the implementation and achievement of policy goals according to their 'coping strategies' for their own contextual constraints – can also help to advance or deflect quality objectives, especially if they try to give effect to political and academic imperatives through management strategies alone.

There are a host of reasons as to why a quality assurance system may not advance stated progressive agendas in South Africa. But they are more complex and messy than Bundy's quick and easy link of quality assurance to the descent into neo-liberalism in the restructuring agenda. There is no doubt that the reporting requirements of quality assurance are onerous but there are many transparency gains which are useful, especially for students. In South Africa, quality assurance has already helped to draw institutional attention to the many quality compromises involved in the entrepreneurial drive to enrol more students or in the pressure to increase access – fudging on entrance requirements, non-existent or inadequate bridging programmes, poor staff–student ratios, no strategies to identify and support at-risk students, no holding people to account for large drop-out rates and poor throughputs. Bundy is silent in his paper as to whether existing or new forms of collegial self-regulation could address the vast quality challenges in South African higher education, thus avoiding the managerialist dangers posed by external regulation while safeguarding and building quality in all the different places where this is required. The evidence emerging in many institutional contexts is more of frequent failures of internal academic self-regulatory systems in the face of entrepreneurial responsiveness and expansion. The HEQC has itself signalled its commitment in the long term to a strong and demonstrable self-regulation arrangement but one whose parameters are more clearly and consensually defined.

Barnett points to the 'pernicious potential' (Barnett, 2003:96) of quality in higher education. There is no doubt that that potential is dangerous to transformation imperatives in higher education. The challenge for those tasked with implementing quality assurance in South African higher education is to be vigilant in avoiding the traps of 'pernicious' quality assurance undermining transformation and to engage continuously and creatively with all the inevitable contradictions of the social order in order to advance the struggle for progressive transformation in higher education. This may mean transforming quality assurance in South Africa into an arena of progressive struggle rather than ceding it to neo-liberal managerialism as Bundy appears to have done, given the importance of quality access and social engagement in the social justice agenda.

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NOTES

COLIN BUNDY

[1] A revised and shortened version is being prepared for publication in *Perspectives in Education.*

[2] Saleem Badat, 'Transforming South African Higher Education 1990–2003' in N. Cloete, P. Pillay, S. Badat & T. Moja, *National Policy and Regional Response in South African Higher Education* (James Currey, London, 2004), 1.

[3] Martin Trow, 'Managerialism and the Academic Profession: The Case of England', *Higher Education Policy* 7, 2 (1994), 11–18, p. 11.

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[1] The bulk of this paper will address the question of the university's identity but I remain cognisant of the pressing question of designation and focus that exists in the creation of comprehensives and universities of technology. It is hoped that the question of the university will go some little way towards shedding a different light on these nomenclatures.

[2] Barnett (1990), drawing on Newman, argues that the aim of all higher education is emancipatory in so far as graduates are freed and empowered via the acquisition of knowledge. For a refutation of Barnett's view, see White (1997).

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[4] The difficulty of proposing a stable identity for the contemporary university is necessarily exacerbated when one attempts to define what is meant by an African university. See in this regard Holiday (2002).

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[1] To name only three authors who discuss post-industrial capitalism from different perspectives, see Harvey (1990), Castells (1999) and Touraine, (2000).

[2] Of course the actual political process imposed limits and modified the extent and the manner in which this project could unfold.