



Transforming Transformation

in

Research and Teaching at
South African Universities

EDITORS

Rob Pattman
Ronelle Carolissen



SUN PRESS

Transforming Transformation in Research and Teaching at South African Universities

Published by AFRICAN SUN MeDIA under the SUN PReSS imprint

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First edition 2018

ISBN 978-1-928480-06-8

ISBN 978-1-928480-07-5 (e-book)

<https://doi.org/10.18820/9781928480075>

Set in Merriweather 9/14

Cover design, typesetting and production by AFRICAN SUN MeDIA

Cover image: © Lineo Makhurane

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Acknowledgements

The process of producing a book constitutes a fundamental knowledge-making process from which we have learnt collaboratively. By doing this book, we are delighted to have held together a process where we could provide a platform for a really talented set of students and established academics to collaborate as contributors. This book comes at a time when many students, globally, are involved in collective struggles to insert their voices into debates that frame access, success, and equity in higher education. In a global political context that encourages post-truths and anti-intellectualism, this book furthermore indicates how student struggles can be framed as deeply intellectual, yet be born from experience and activism to engage and enhance the democratic potential of higher education institutions. We hope that this book enables debate and active work towards solutions that centres the humanity of all of us who traverse and live our passion in higher education.

We are deeply grateful to the many people who have made this book possible. In particular we would like to thank the authors who persisted with us when both of us, as editors, experienced significant bouts of ill health during the book making process. We thank you for your commitment and creativity, for thinking outside the box and addressing complex issues in engaging and accessible ways. Your patience and enthusiasm during the book's lengthy but fruitful gestation, made the process worthwhile for us, too.

This book would not have been possible without students and others whose experiences, and understandings of these, feature in this book. We very much appreciate your willingness to talk about these, even if, in cases, this may have incurred pain. We argue and try to illustrate in the book that transformation needs to be informed by participatory research with students where, at times, students themselves are the authors of their own work.

Lineo Makhurane heeded our call for a book cover illustration and produced this powerful and beautiful book cover image which she painted during her post-matric vacation of 2017. We hope that, more than receiving a small prize winner's award, having your name attached to this cover will help you to access places of opportunity that you so richly deserve.

Book production is seldom possible without funding. For this, we would like to thank the Mellon Foundation, Indexing Transformation project based in the

Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, and the Faculty of Education, both at Stellenbosch University, for contributing so generously to some of the publication costs.

Wikus van Zyl and Emily Vosloo at AFRICAN SUN MeDIA have, furthermore, been superb in their support, encouragement and advice. It really does make a huge difference to have responsive and encouraging publishers.

And finally, thanks so much, Crain Soudien, for agreeing to write the foreword in spite of your busy schedule. This work is built on an important and significant inquiry into Higher Education which you led a decade ago.

A special note from Rob

I would like to give special thanks to the following:

Ronelle. With your knowledge, critical and empathetic insights, social conscience, and down-to-earth sense of humour, working with you has not only been a very enriching intellectual experience but great fun too.

Genay Dhelminie, Nwabisa Madikane and Marinice Walters-Kemp (the three administration officers in the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology). Your friendly, thoughtful and helpful manner plays a key part in making the department open and accessible to everyone.

The students I teach for teaching me. Thanks for the animated conversations, in the lecture theatre and in smaller groups, about gender, sexuality, race and class and for laughing at some of my jokes.

The Critical Academic Practitioners (CRAP) postgraduate support for turning research into a social activity and sharing research insights, innovative methods, anxieties and pleasures in a friendly pedagogic space. Some of the participants contributed chapters to this book.

My academic colleagues in the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology at Stellenbosch for your ethic of care and support, your interest in transformation, and for lively conversations often laced with humour, in seminars, corridors and staff meetings.

The Student-Staff Alliance, a support group comprising student protesters at Stellenbosch and sympathetic administration and academic staff. It was a privilege participating in this collective.

A special note from Ronelle

Thanks so much, Rob, for asking me to work on this book with you at a time when we, along with our students and colleagues, were going through yet another challenging period that questioned transformation in South African universities. It was a privilege to work through these chapters with you and feel excitement about the future of South African and African academia.

My family lives through the gestation period of every book. Thanks so much, John, for your consistent support and love. My daughters, Lauren and Melissa, some of these chapters connect deeply with experiences that you too have had, and will have, as students in higher education. I learn from you every day.

To all my students who, with me, have traversed some of these complex waters of thinking about race, gender and their intersectionalities in educational contexts over the last few years. It is sometimes difficult for all of us to read and talk about deeply emotive topics which shape our divided pasts. The pain, fun, joy and, at times, deep recognition for one another that I experience amongst us, give me hope for our joint South African futures.

I am most deeply grateful for consistent, supportive colleagues who are always willing to read my work. Thanks so much, Vivienne Bozalek, Michalinos Zembylas, Chris Sonn and Aslam Fataar. More than this, Vivienne, you have always generously invited and involved me in your research communities which I experience as a significant place of growth which energises me to produce the work I do.

Foreword

Towards a New Sociology of Higher Education: South African offerings

Crain Soudien

South Africa, after 1994 when it became a democracy, was one of those places to which you came if you were interested in the big global questions of social justice, social togetherness and social renewal. It had the iconic figures of Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu – living examples of the promise of a new age of inclusion. Amongst the many attractions which drew people were its universities. To them came, some again and again when the academic boycott was lifted in 1991, the world's leading intellectuals. From the lecture podiums of the country's universities, they would make some of their most important statements about the human condition, about knowledge production, about freedom and about the role of the modern university. In this company were scholars such as Ariel Dorfman, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Francis Fukuyama, Amartya Sen, Judith Butler, Wendy Brown, Jacques Derrida, Gayatri Spivak, Manuel Castells, Wole Soyinka, Ali Mazrui, Immanuel Wallerstein, Angela Davis, Benedict Anderson, Noam Chomsky and Edward Said. They came to look, discuss and even pronounce.

As might be expected, these scholars were also interested in what their South African counterparts were saying. Who were the interlocutors of this fabled place? Their assessments were mixed. Michael Burawoy (2010), one of the world's leading Marxist scholars and long-time visitor to the country, described the South African higher education system as the 'jewel of Africa'. He expressed a sense of amazement at the vitality of the system, remarking that the South African higher

education system's preoccupation with the questions of equality and of the future of humanity made it distinctive in global terms. At about the same time Sir Peter Scott, editor of the *Times Higher Education Supplement*, after reading the work done in the Centre for Higher Education Transformation (CHET) at the University of the Western Cape, observed that:

[p]erhaps we assume too readily that the development of higher education systems, and the internationalization of the academy, will be decisively shaped by the market agendas that dominate policy making in the old hegemonic 'core'. But the work of HERANA (a research project of CHET), suggests that it is to the global 'periphery' that we should turn to anticipate the future of higher education in all its frailty and potential. (Cloete, 2013:13)

Other assessments were less complimentary. Castells, another of the world's most important social theorists and who was drafted into President Thabo Mbeki's Think Tank called the Presidential International Advisory Council on Information Society and Development, was not impressed by what he saw. He was to make the comment, reported Cloete (2013:8-9), that "South Africans use the term transformation when they stop thinking and start making social conversation". Important Irish philosopher Helena Sheehan (2008), after extended and prolonged study of the approach to transformation in South Africa's universities, concluded unhappily that she could not "avoid a sense of massive disappointment and defeat after reading extensively and visiting many campuses across the country". She asked, "What had happened to the whole atmosphere of being challenged to re-conceptualize the world and change it. Where had it gone?"

Had it gone?

We ourselves, inside the country, have subjected ourselves to repeated scrutiny. We have looked at ourselves from the micro levels of our classrooms to the macro-character of our system. We have, since 1994, produced more than twenty national reports on our size, shape, admissions profiles, capacity to provide accommodation, leadership and governance, funding, research priorities, teaching and learning priorities, transformation and the broad mission we want to see the system adopting. Every single institution in the system has been examined, for various reasons, multiple times.

After all this, finding ourselves looked upon from afar and our own repeated attempts at introspection, we should know a great deal about ourselves and the system in which we work. Against this, it is important to ask: What can we say about ourselves? What do we think we have learnt? How do we describe what we are? How do we situate ourselves in relation to our peers elsewhere in

the world? Critically, what assessment can we make of ourselves in relation to that other world we ostensibly have left behind – the world of colonialism and apartheid? How have we come to wear our new post-apartheid clothes? What, even more urgently, does post-apartheid mean for us? And, what, the hubris of it notwithstanding, might we say to the rest of the world about universities, about knowledge systems, knowledge traditions and practices, and the role we as universities play in contemporary social environments which have become so incredibly complex?

The answer, frankly speaking, is that we have not said enough. We have not produced either in straight volume measures, but this must not worry us a great deal, or in impact terms the kind of work which is worthy of the privilege we enjoy of finding ourselves in one of the prime global spots of human possibility. There is not yet in our work the conceptual breakthroughs that one should expect of an intellectual community which is surrounded by human challenges that encompass, on the one hand, the vexing universals of poverty, inequality, racism, sexism, venality and self-interest, and, on the other, the multiple and localised specificities of difference which in their intersectionality produce daily anxieties about inclusion and exclusion. That we live in an incredible human laboratory has not yet become evident in the scholarship of South Africa. Our social sciences and humanities are largely derivative. We have not yet been able to offer our larger scholarly community the provocations, faddish as these sometimes are, that we have seen from visitors to our shores such as Said's monumental *Orientalism* thesis, Fukuyama's *End of History* announcement, Lewis Gordon's *Disciplinary Decadence* evaluation, Connell's *Southern Theory*, or Ngugi's *Decolonisation* idea. Instead, our work has manoeuvred in the shadows of all these contributions. We have, a few times in the last fifty years, given the world glimpses of what might be possible. These glimpses include the extraordinary foresight of Olive Schreiner throwing shards of brilliance, almost unparalleled in the world at the time, into the discussion of patriarchy, and little-known Cape Town scholar-activist Ben Kies introducing to the world the idea of non-racialism, the nonsense of race as a concept (see Stanley & Salter, 2014, and Soudien, in press). Neither of these two moments is able to disturb hegemonic thinking. Both are ridiculed, portrayed as pitiful curiosities. Even in the communities out of which they come, the question is posed of them – 'what planet are you from?' But, and here is the possibility for all of us, they emerge out of the fecund generativity of the time and space in which they find themselves. They both have blind-spots. Elements of the complexity elude them. They are, however, precocious individuals. They see and attempt to make sense of the complexity of the world in which they are located. How oppression works is what they set out to explain. The explanation moves from

the ostensive to the deeply analytic. They are in this sense Fanonian in their vision. Like Fanon, they read widely and took in what they needed to know, looked around themselves and pondered on their own experiences, and then, critically, ventured into theorising the world in which they lived. The analyses went beyond their own narratives. They began from where they were. In the belly of the beast. They ended up explaining modern contradiction in its wondrous complexity.

This collection of writing Pattman and Carolissen have assembled here offers us the opportunity of moving towards fulfilling our responsibility. Stimulated by the recent student rebellion in our universities, it is an attempt to describe, analyse and look forward with respect to the higher education context in which we find ourselves. The collection has transformation as its focus. This focus is organised around a number of key themes: the interrogation of the meaning of transformation, institutional characteristics of institutions, institutional cultures, access and inclusion, the curriculum, language and the relationship between the university and its wider educational environment. The contributions under these themes provide us with thick description. We have in them a powerful ethnography of the contemporary elite university in South Africa. This ethnography itself is an important contribution towards the task of fulfilling our responsibility. We have in it grounded descriptions of the subjects of the university. There are close descriptions and analyses of how subjectivity is developed within the spatial and symbolic order of a number of campuses. This subjectivity, the contributions show, is nuanced. It is both deliberative and performative. Students react to structures which steer them in particular ways, they take the initiative against and independently of the structures and social relationships around them. They are *of* the university and, always, able to 'do' themselves in their own ways and manners. 'Belonging' is seldom *not* a bitter-sweet experience. Feelings of alienation and othering are pervasive. But students are constantly thinking. 'Doing' themselves is a deliberative task they take on for themselves. They do so in constant encounters with formal curricula which both support and disaffirm them. In these encounters they use innovative new technologies to both speak back to power and create new discursive trajectories within the academy. Polyvocality is the order of the day. Voices are asymmetric, but the presence of alternative explanation is critical for sense-making. This alternative provides what one might think of as transitioning modalities for young people entering the *largeness* of the university from and with personal histories of material disadvantage.

The ethnographic value of the text is critical. This ethnography is underpinned by key conceptual ideas such as *power*, *social justice*, *inclusion* and *exclusion*.

These concepts are approached, moreover, in deliberately anti-essentialist ways. Power, social justice and inclusion and exclusion are presented and interpreted as socially constructed and not natural phenomena. The people inhabiting the spaces are engaged with in their full social complexity – their identities are never singular. They are caught in discriminatory locations where their ‘race’, gender, class and sexuality are often what activate their difficulties, but their interpreters, the contributors to this volume, insistently attempt to locate what is going on in its intersectional complexity. This is the power of the ethnography.

Needed now and building on this ethnography is a new theory or a new sociology of the university. We, fortunately, do not begin on an empty slate. We have access to Martin Trow’s (2007) useful sociological theory of higher education. This theory is constructed around eight sociological features which distinguish the modern university. These are *attitudes to access, functions of higher education, the curriculum, institutional characteristics, locus of power and decision-making, academic standards, access and selection and internal governance*. With these, Trow was able to develop a typology of the university. He identified three kinds of universities – elite, mass and universal. While his main objective was to describe institutions in their larger systemic ecology, he made available for our analysis a framework which allowed us to make sense of the university as a distinct organisational structure – distinct from its correlate structures in society, such as schools, religious institutions and families. In focusing on its functional purpose, he was able to locate it in relation to the wider society in which it found itself. The identification of curriculum, governance and access allowed one to see how they managed inclusion and exclusion.

What now needs to be done in a systematic way is to take the Trow model and to ask, firstly, how these ethnographic riches we have in Pattman and Carolissen’s work can be explored. This will allow us to locate our institutions in a comparative frame in which we can see them from a larger viewpoint. How are they similar or different to institutions elsewhere in the world? But there is an even greater opportunity here. What does the ethnographic record we have available here tell us beyond Trow? What, specifically, are Trow’s eight framing lenses on the sociology of the university obscuring from our sight? What does Trow not see? What is there in the distinctive experience of what we as South Africans have gone through in our universities over the last twenty-five years which might require a new way of getting at the distinctive sociologies of the universities? Are there dynamics which the Trow model does not cater for? It is with this that we begin to move towards a new sociology of the modern university.

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Chapter 1

Transforming Transformation in Research and Teaching at South African Universities: An introduction

Rob Pattman and Ronelle Carolissen

Transformation: A post-apartheid concept

Transformation is probably one of the most commonly used terms in the post-apartheid context. It is a concept that refers broadly, to ways in which unjust and discriminatory institutional structures and practices engineered to privilege dominant cultures during apartheid South Africa, had to be reshaped for a just and equitable society. Transformation therefore inherently assumes cornerstones of social justice. Concepts such as redistribution, equity, recognition, power, representation and voice are central to the idea of ‘transformation’.

Transformation of higher education institutions (HEIs), in practice, required multiple policy frameworks and legislation across sectors in South African society. Badat (2010) succinctly outlines the major policy instruments, supported by a democratic national constitution, that were to pave the path for institutional and structural change in South African higher education (HE). It is clear, for example, in the *Education White Paper 3* of 1997 that discrimination on the basis of “race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth” is considered to violate the constitution (DoE [Department of Education], 1997). Policy guidelines are usually broad and