Transformation Revisited: Twenty Years of Higher Education Policy in South Africa

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1 Introduction: Talking Transformation

First heard in the 1990s, the term ‘transformation’ must now be the most-used word in South African political discourse. Its inclusion in *New South African Keywords* (Shepherd and Robins, 2008) confirms its importance and vitality in the country’s political vocabulary. Undoubtedly transformation shapes and is shaped by contemporary South African politics.¹ A history could be written of the word’s uses and meanings from the early 1990s to today. With hindsight, one could elaborate theoretically and methodologically on how transformation relates to the concept of decolonisation that emerged during the student protests at South African public universities from mid-2015. That, however, would require a fuller investigation. Short of attempting that, I refer to decolonisation where it is especially relevant, but without deviating from the chapter’s original purpose of analysing the meaning of transformation.

Accepting that the word ‘transformation’ became current in the heady days of negotiations between the banned African National Congress (ANC) and the National Party, I propose a very tentative periodisation based on the literature of politics and policy from the late 1980s and early 1990s (Wolpe, 1991). In doing so, I take into account variations in the meanings and uses of the word, which probably indicate contestation between different sectors and political groupings within government and civil society. From the unbanning of the on 2 February 1990 until the regime change in 1994, the discourse on transformation centred on defining its meaning and establishing how it relates conceptually and practically to the notions of ‘revolution’ and ‘compromise’ (Motala, 2005; Singh, 1992). Then came the institutionalisation of transformation that started under the Mandela presidency and the first Mbeki presidency (1994–2004). The process can be seen unfolding in the conversion of commissions’ reports and Green and White papers into policies and regulations. The conceptual framework of these documents attempted to define notions and practices of transformation, while the legislation and implementation plans that followed set out priorities, targets and objectives, and timeframes for achieving the

objectives. The five-year period between the National Commission on Higher Education report: *A Framework for Transformation* (NCHE, 1996), and the National Plan for Higher Education (DoE, 2001) is a much-studied example of the difficulties of translating plans into practice in terms of implementing transformation policy for higher education (Badat, 2009; Cloete et al., 2005; Cloete & Moja, 2005; Jansen, 2001; Sehoole, 2005).

Another aspect of this institutionalisation was the tacit acceptance of a 'common sense' notion of transformation that played an ideological role, separating progressives from non-progressives and, more narrowly, ANC supporters from non-supporters. Common sense transformation was a kind of political *aggiornamento*. It was embraced by public and private institutions and their leaders, eager to wash away their apartheid sins in the river of transformation. It also became a market gimmick: the magic word that, added to the title of conferences and university curricula, would attract more delegates and more enrolments – and with them, more revenue. The apotheosis of the institutionalisation of transformation as a common sense notion was when it became a kind of state ideology, guaranteeing that all actions of a government elected on a 'transformative ticket' would in themselves be transformative.

The final period in the institutionalisation of transformation began around 2009, when it entered into the administrative logic of the state bureaucracy, becoming a key performance indicator for ministers, government officials, vice-chancellors and universities, CEOs of public enterprises, the professions, the church, and business. According to this logic, transformation needs to be measured, benchmarked, multiplied, squared, divided, exhibited in graphs and pie charts, monitored and reported on quarterly and annually, and re-evaluated and meta-evaluated every ten years. Thus, over the years, transformation has become simultaneously the leitmotif of the latest version of the master narrative of South Africa's struggle for liberation, as well as codified information in a postmodern conception reminiscent of Lyotard's (1984) *Report on Knowledge*.

In the process of translating evolving political arguments into policy making, I would argue, the intellectual, political and moral elements that shaped the concept of transformation in the early 1990s were perforce reduced and oversimplified. In this reduction, paradox and contradiction were eliminated and a single, accepted understanding of transformation was established. The concept became sector-specific (or socially blind), which meant that South Africa's transformation was narrowed down in the policy texts and implementation strategies to the transformation of sectors – such as higher education, the schools system, the judiciary, the media – while a blind eye was turned to structural conditions in the country that might accelerate, slow down, halt or

make impossible social transformation to any depth (Unterhalter et al., 1991). Put differently, the sector-specific notion of transformation has delayed (or postponed indefinitely) political analysis of the obstacles in the South African economic model and political settlement, that impede transformation in different areas of the social and economic life of the country – and of the interdependence between these areas.²

The intellectual, political and moral reduction of transformation was also driven by the need for accountability. Because government and social institutions are, rightly, accountable for their promises, transformation had to be demonstrated and measured. Thus, although not originally devoid of substance, the practice of transformation has been reduced to the numbers, percentages and ratios of black and white people – and, to a lesser extent, men and women – involved in or accepted into institutions and professions, given positions, accessing education, and so on. Very few, if any, other variables, such as class, sexual orientation or disability, are included in statistical analyses, and the overall orientation of institutions and policies continues to hinder a more nuanced sense of transformation.³ This is partly because quantitative evidence is comparatively easy to handle, homogeneous, and amenable to insertion in system-level databases that provide comparative measurements and help to set time-bound performance targets for institutions and departments. In this process, unsurprisingly given South Africa's colonial and apartheid past, transformation seems to have been reduced to 'equity'.

Although demographic quantification is necessary for serious attempts to understand transformation, one fundamental problem with this approach is that even when numbers denounce outrageous inequalities, they may at the same time cover up an institution's inability to think about what transformation means, and conceal its intellectual, political and moral bases. Social and state institutions have to demonstrate transformation, and the rush to do so prevents them from testing whether the notions underpinning their proposed indicators will stand up to closer intellectual, political and moral examination. Performance-oriented transformation does not deal very well with the complexities of social, institutional or personal change. And, if the analysis remains excessively attached to quantitative evidence, change becomes perfunctory.

Against this backdrop, I open up the notion of transformation to scrutiny from the perspective of *knowledge*. I argue that transformation – whatever social sector is examined – implies and is derived from various kinds of knowledge, which we may call 'knowledges'. These are usually neither explicit nor systematically examined by institutions. I distinguish two kinds of knowledges: knowledge *for* transformation (the kind that must be produced in order to make change possible) and knowledge *of* transformation (the kind

we generate about transformation itself). Failure to examine these kinds of knowledge systematically has four unfortunate consequences for theorising and implementing transformation: it reduces transformation to the manipulation of quantifiable evidence; it disregards history and context, and creates orthodox versions of the 'right' kind of transformation based on generic performance indicators; it keeps politics out of the life of people and institutions by preventing engagement and deliberation over what constitutes transformation, and consensus for action and implementation; and it isolates South Africa from broader debates about knowledge and social justice that challenge accepted orthodoxies. Finally, I argue that the knowledges *for* and *of* transformation operate in a dialectical relationship that itself needs to be examined if we are to improve our understanding of the tensions, contradictions and risks (and probably limits) of institutional transformation.

In this chapter I analyse these two kinds of knowledge and the relation between them, focusing on South African public universities. A similar analysis could be attempted in other social sectors and institutions – and, possibly, in other contexts – since the problems of change and social justice implicit in our notion of transformation are far from being restricted to South Africa alone.

2 Defining Transformation

Here I propose one of the many understandings of transformation, and base the rest of my analysis upon it. I take as my point of departure the debate in the early 1990s, as can be read in the issues of the South African journal *Transformation*, and in particular Singh's (1992) contribution. At that time there was an intense open discussion about whether transformation implied a radical change that would eventually lead to socialism, or whether it was merely downgraded reformist politics led by the political settlement towards which the country was working, especially after the unbanning of political parties and the release of Nelson Mandela on 2 February 1990. The notion that the democratic movement had shifted "from the politics of protest to the politics of transformation" (Singh, 1992: 58, note 2), underscored not only the imminence of democratic elections and an ANC government, but also the new government's need to make a clear break with the colonial and apartheid past – which was, at that time, still active – by changing the social, political and economic relations that determined people's place in society and their access to resources in the broadest sense.

An important point to note here is that what needs to be transformed and the direction of that transformation are not static: both aspects are contextual and dynamic – thus transformation needs to be redefined historically in each particular sector. Today, after two decades of democracy, transformation in higher education does not entail what it did in 1992. I argue that the progressive achievement between the 1990s and 2004 of goals such as access and redress, brought to the fore other issues: poor retention of black students, discrepancies in performance between black and white students, inequitable distribution by race across different fields of study, and so on. Arguably also, between 1995 and 2010, policy development in higher education proceeded in an aggregative manner, with increasing layers of complexity and demand being added to the already defined parameters of transformation. This contextual and dynamic character of transformation was even more starkly evident in 2015 and 2016, in the demands made by the new student movement and progressive academic staff, not to mention workers' demands for insourcing.

We have thus seen the goal of access and redress change into the goal of free higher education for all; and the goal of reconstruction and development through higher education into the goal of 'decolonising' universities and the country (Booyesen, 2016; Nyamnjoh, 2016). The very fact that the #MustFall generation has dismissed 'transformation' as a failed political project invites reflection on what universities, and government, mean when they talk about transformation today.

The implication of my brief historical account above is that, as Singh argues (1992: 49), the very notion of transformation in South Africa entails *keeping on asking* about the topic, the goal, the means and the motives of transformation in each area of society where it is proclaimed or sought. This open definition allows for two theoretical and political arguments. First, we can say that twenty years after the advent of democracy, the topic and goal of transformation are in many respects different from those that were central to the debate before the ANC took office. Today, the country is dealing with societal ills and problems that stem either from a lack of structural transformation in areas where it was clearly needed two decades ago – such as the rural economy and the mining industry – or are totally new, and brought about by changes in the economy and society that were not envisaged in the early 1990s – such as the AIDS pandemic and the energy and climate crises. And second, we can argue that no sector of the state, education included, should be viewed in isolation from the broader transformation of society, the means used to achieve transformation, the motives for pursuing transformation, or the ultimate goal of transformation.

Having defined and contextualised my subject, I now develop my main argument in two main sections, first exploring what knowledge *for* transformation entails, what its components are and how they relate to each other, and then knowledge *of* transformation, its relationship to knowledge for transformation, and the implications for staff, students, management and leadership at universities. In conclusion, I pose some questions about what the knowledges of transformation imply for the way universities deal with accountability and report to government.

3 Knowledge *for* Transformation

To explain knowledge *for* transformation I distinguish three types. These are the basis for transformation at universities: *knowledge of the self*, *knowledge of knowledge*, and *knowledge of the 'other'*. Each type has a history in the sense that it has been developed over decades, and often centuries. It has rules of formation and possibility that determine what can be thought and done, and by whom – and what cannot be thought and done. Sometimes the rules are tacit, as is the case with institutional traditions and cultures that need to be explored to gain knowledge of the institutional self; sometimes they are explicit and enforced by visible authorities, as is the case with disciplinary knowledge that is subject to peer review and other forms of approval and endorsement. But of course, types of knowledge are neither totally tacit, nor totally explicit: there are some explicit rules for institutional traditions and culture, and there are some tacit rules for institutional knowledge formation.

I contend that in order to avoid the four unfortunate consequences mentioned above, of adopting a performative view of transformation, we need to undertake a historical-sociological analysis of these three types of knowledge. That will give us the contextual depth and historical perspective to develop a richer notion of transformation. The urgent need to examine the three types of knowledge is a partial response to the call made in the White Paper 3, to view “all existing practices, institutions and values” anew and rethink them in terms of “their fitness for the new era” (DoE, 1997: 1.1). This call was strengthened by the findings of the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions, appointed by Education Minister Naledi Pandor in 2008 (DoE, 2008) – hereafter referred to as the *Soudien Report*, after the chairperson of the Ministerial Committee, Professor Crain Soudien. Each of the three types of knowledge I have identified here could be the topic of a whole paper. In this chapter I merely sketch what they entail and how we can think about them.

4 Knowledge of the Self

By *knowledge of the self* I mean each South African public university's knowledge of itself and how it understands and relates to the concept of a 'university'. This kind of knowledge has multiple implications. All South African universities have, as universities do, a history: a series of institutional memories, accepted behaviours and ways of thinking that are as old as the institutions themselves. These are manifested not only in the way a university presents itself to the public, but in the inner workings of governance structures, student residences, language policies, support services, alumni associations, and so on. This knowledge is usually tacit, transmitted from generation to generation in tea rooms, staff meetings, senate and committee meetings, Student Representative Council elections, and institutional symbols and rituals. A university's traditions and culture are the ethnographic language that encapsulates subtle but important variations in its history, memory, behaviour and thinking – and the way these combine and manifest themselves at different levels and in different structures. Each university has its own 'language'.

In many respects, universities are living organisms whose personalities, traumas, pathologies and neuroses can be identified. Yet this knowledge – a sedimentation of the institutional self through a hundred, fifty or thirty years of history – is seldom examined. South Africa has seen interesting attempts to grapple with aspects of this complexity at various universities. Some scholars have explored cultural, political and intellectual dissonance (Jansen, 2009a; Lalu & Murray, 2012; Steyn & Van Zyl, 2001). Others, like Higgins (2013), have worked directly with the notion of institutional culture itself, providing an interesting theoretical point of departure for further work. At most universities we see a mix of historical continuity and discontinuity in the discourse about the institutional self that operates vociferously or silently, depending on the case. The rewriting of university missions and visions from the 1990s onwards is an interesting indicator of the way these continuities and discontinuities operate, and deserves some attention in the menu of research projects within South African higher education.

When we examine the historical development of a university, we are in effect examining the construction of a society's memories. Classifying South African universities according to who and what they taught – a classification initiated under colonialism, perfected under apartheid and redeployed under democratic rule – oversimplifies each university's complexity and brushes aside its historical importance. Such an approach ignores its institutional self-definition, political positioning, participation in and constitution of networks, and access to human resources. Put crudely, our universities fail to examine

the past – either because they want to avoid focusing on thinking and practices that might indicate support for ideas and behaviour that are unacceptable today; or because they want to signal their opposition to racism; or because they want to glorify their support for the struggle against apartheid. Those are the positions, respectively, of our historically Afrikaans, historically English and historically black universities. Yet, if anything has come out of the Soudien Report (DoE, 2008), it is the illumination that every university in South Africa is part of, and complicit in some form of unacceptable behaviour supported by tradition, culture and politics – whether tacit or spelt out, whether conscious or unconscious. This realisation points to a system-wide lack of knowledge of the self. Failure to explore the institutional self-results in the creation of categories that allow for simplistic moral and political judgements, and stifle change. We have historically black and historically white institutions, historically liberal and historically conservative institutions and, more recently, ‘transformed institutions’. Judgements of right or wrong, good or bad, are easily attached to these categories, based on uni-dimensional conceptions of the institutional self.

I contend that complex, critical and analytical knowledge of the institutional self is a necessary condition to start thinking about transformation. But this cannot be attained merely by a public confession of past sins – a knowledge of the self that consists merely of bemoaning the past will not aid transformation. The value of the past lies in its connection to the present, in how it affects what a university could be today and tomorrow. The past thus needs to be deconstructed in its actuality. A university needs to ask itself to what extent its traditions, culture and sense of self obstruct inclusivity and democracy. As the Soudien Report shows, well before 2015 all higher education institutions in South Africa espoused practices that impeded democracy and inclusion. In some cases, such as initiation ceremonies, the problems were clearly visible; in others, such as classroom methods, they were less easy to detect. The need now is to find the most appropriate way to probe institutional culture from within. Ministerial task teams certainly have a role to play, but once their findings and recommendations are published, the onus is on institutions themselves to find ways to bring about change. I believe we must find ways for institutions to make continuous self-examination a way of being.

I contend that this is not impossible. ‘Safe spaces’ need to be created for staff and students to work through these issues together, not just as a one-off exercise, but as a purposeful and systematic programme of transformation. Such a programme must acknowledge that transformation is simultaneously an individual, personal and emotional matter – an institutional issue to be confronted, and a political goal to be achieved. The kind of university that each South African public university set out to be when it was founded has had an

undeniable impact on its current institutional culture and sense of its institutional self. During the colonial and apartheid eras, none of these universities were neutral in their pursuit of knowledge, or in the relations they established with government, the private sector, the broad society, or the mass democratic movement. Over the years, these relationships determined the size of endowments, who sits in councils, who influences decision-making, and also, who is awarded contracts and jobs.

What should the relationship be between these historical choices and the future of the universities, from a critical perspective? The following extract from the web-based publication *University World News* highlights the importance of excavating the institutional self as part of a transformative process:

The discovery of a mysterious human skull in an obsolete department at the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa has exposed links to Nazi Germany and led to a ground-breaking new 'racism in science' research project by the faculty of arts and social sciences. The unexpected find of the skull and two hair and eye-colour charts among the remnants of the closed-down department of anthropology (*volkekunde*), was made by a postgraduate student in the department of sociology and social anthropology while she was researching the former department's history. ... Now the research team's aim is to explore the role of science in the race-based policies of South Africa's history and, specifically, to what extent 'racism in science' influenced the wider intellectual and pedagogical environment of Stellenbosch University in the past. (Lee, 2013, n.p.)

The skull was discovered only because a systematic investigation of the history of the university's Department of Anthropology was already under way. The possibility of exploring racism in science at this university, and colonialism in science at others, has a transformative import if research can reveal the consequences this conceptualisation of knowledge has had for daily life in tea rooms, senates, residences and dining halls, and how it affected staff and students over time. The example of the *volkekunde* at the University of Stellenbosch shows the importance of intellectual history and the sociology of knowledge in the examination of transformation at our universities.⁴ The notion of *knowledge of knowledge* is explored in the next section.

5 Knowledge of Knowledge

Knowledge of knowledge is probably the most obvious type of knowledge one expects to find in universities. Over the past three decades, most universities

in the world have examined the knowledge they teach and produce in order to satisfy increasing demands for accountability from government and society, and to demonstrate their responsiveness to the knowledge economy. Concepts of 'graduateness', work-readiness, innovation, and so on, have permeated strategies and action plans. Yet this is not what 'knowledge of knowledge' means. 'Knowledge of knowledge' refers to the epistemological foundations of the disciplines and professions that are represented at different universities (Foucault, 1980, 2000, 2011; Messer-Davidow et al., 1993).

The aim of the concept of knowledge of knowledge is to examine how far the curriculum – in both formative and professional degrees – is set up to reproduce the societal status quo. For example, in South Africa many degrees offered by universities, from engineering to sociology, implicitly accept the necessity for, and inevitability of a fossil-fuel based economy. Looking at curriculum from a transformative perspective would imply, minimally, providing alternative perspectives on this and other issues such as climate change and the labour market economy and preferably designing a purposeful curriculum that would teach students how to take care of the world for future generations. Most of the degrees offered at South African universities are constructed around the notion of the centrality, superiority and universality of Western knowledge. Africa is viewed as merely a particular case of universal stages of development determined by the history of Western Europe. This inevitably perpetuates perceptions of black people as being inferior and incapable of producing knowledge.

In examining the knowledge that universities produce and disseminate, we need to question the contribution that this knowledge makes to society and to the tangible and intangible goals of South Africa's democracy. We need to rethink narrow notions of labour market responsiveness, and reconceptualise responsiveness around a knowledge project that is epistemologically inclusive and socially conscious. Put differently, we need to examine existing curricula to identify aspects of the content or the pedagogy that prevent so many graduate teachers from teaching in their mother tongue; prevent architects and engineers from building to support a green economy; allow social workers to continue pathologising their clients; and so on. We need to ask at the institutional level whether universities in South Africa are conserving inherited patterns of thinking that uphold privilege inside and outside academia. What kind of curriculum can we develop that will educate students in social justice within their disciplines or professions? (Leibowitz, 2012a).

Questions like these cannot be answered simply by producing demographic profiles of academic staff. Certainly no transformation can take place without changing the demographic status quo at each university, but such change is

not a sufficient condition for knowledge renewal. It does not matter how many black and women professors an institution can report for statistical purposes, if the knowledge they create and transmit is not challenged in terms of its social epistemology and its potential to transform social practices.

If one of the fundamental roles of university education is to prepare students to ask questions (Barnett, 1997; Boulton & Lucas, 2008; Giroux, 2013; Odora Hoppers & Richards, 2011), then this intellectual disposition needs to be modelled and cultivated in the curriculum offered and in the research produced at the university. A simplistic version of transformation in relation to knowledge runs the risk of providing new legitimisation for unexamined, self-satisfied and essentialised knowledge, whether framed as Western, post-colonial, or based on indigenous knowledge systems. Mapping out the curricular knowledge offered at South African universities might be a useful starting point for finding the gaps and building bridges in the way we currently conceptualise the natural and social worlds. It might well be that a more rounded education would produce graduates who are more attuned to the post-colonial condition of South Africa and the need to transform relationships inherited from the colonial experience.

When it comes to knowledge of knowledge, the institutionalisation of transformation presents universities with the biggest threat to their dynamic development: the notion of transformation as a place of arrival, where criticism must be suspended and a new orthodoxy accepted – the price of such lethargy is the de-politicisation of knowledge, and the death of the university as a place of contestation and public debate. The de-politicisation of knowledge takes two forms. One is the demobilisation of debate and enquiry by canonical notions of knowledge that see doubt, disagreement and argument as morally wrong and anti-transformation (Giroux, 2013; Said, 1994a). The other is the disengagement of knowledge from its capacity to transform the world and the barring of individuals from taking part in this transformation (Arendt, 2006; Disch, 1994).

6 Knowledge of the 'Other'

It is impossible to deal here with the full philosophical, sociological and pedagogical complexities of the notion of the 'other'. A wealth of local and international literature deals with this from the point of view of education. Leibowitz (2012b) provides a comprehensive conceptual map of the elements of self, identity and the 'other' in higher education, and of various interpretations thereof in the literature.

In using the term 'knowledge of the other' I acknowledge cultural and anthropological criticism that has been made of the very notion of the 'other' in the writings of Said (1979 and 1994b) among others. I also acknowledge arguments for a political and moral position in which the 'other' ceases to be so (Critchley, 2007). Such views, of course, express hope and a commitment to change, rather than describing a reality. The purpose of transformation in higher education institutions is precisely to displace the notion of the 'other'. To do this, we first need to understand why, and to what extent pedagogic relationships keep on singling out black people in particular, as an (inferior) other.

The point of departure for any analysis of knowledge of the other in South African higher education has to be the ethnographic description of the consequences that linguistic, ethnic, racial and geographical segregation have had for the individual identities of students and staff at South African universities. But this is not all: the identities essentialised and reproduced by apartheid's classification of universities were often compounded by what Jansen (2009a) calls 'indirect knowledge'; that is, knowledge transmitted by older generations about the order of society and its history, which has tended to freeze notions of individual identity and the identity of the 'other'. The massive expansion of higher education since the 1990s, together with the dismantling of apartheid legislation, has brought changes in the social, linguistic, and cultural make-up of all universities, affecting staff as well as students.

Although student and staff profiles at South African universities vary widely, overall the look and feel of most universities has changed dramatically in the past twenty years. There have been a variety of responses in the face of this metamorphosis, and while laudable programmes and approaches have been developed at some universities to deal with the need to learn 'to be and live with others', as the Soudien Report says, "every single institution in the country is experiencing difficulties and facing challenges in being both transformative and successful" (DoE, 2008: 116).

At the heart of these difficulties and challenges are issues of the identity of the self, and knowledge of the other. A study commissioned by the Higher Education Quality Committee (Boughey, 2009), based on information gathered through institutional audits, shows how inaccurate and unexamined conceptualisations and perceptions of students not only jeopardise effective teaching and learning, but also create communication gaps and prevent students being 'at home' in their universities. A feeling of being unwelcome and regarded as 'other' is not confined to students; it is also felt by staff whose looks, language, gender, race, attitudes, sexual orientation and religious views do not fit the image of the institutional self, however defined.

South African institutions are still struggling with the ‘established knowledge’ of the ‘other’ that not only impedes institutional change, but also jeopardises the possibility of new pedagogies, new outcomes of education, and new institutional cultures. But the mere fact that this can be regarded as a problem implies that a shift is occurring, allowing institutions to begin confronting their knowledge of themselves and the other. Research produced by the universities of the Western Cape and Stellenbosch (Leibowitz et al., 2012) suggests that it is possible to use confrontation of frozen knowledge about the other as a pedagogical approach in transforming relationships between students, between staff members, and between students and staff.

We need knowledge of the other not only to improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning and respond to the current concern about student failure and dropout (Scott et al., 2007), but also to fulfil higher education’s responsibility for improving social cohesion and developing critical citizenship. Its opposite – namely ignorance of the other – has two particularly pernicious consequences. One is personal distance: not the distance that is inevitable when teaching large classes, but the distance that results from the inability to empathise, to imagine, and thus to understand the position of the other. The placards students made at UCT during the 2015 #RhodesMustFall movement, saying “Look at me, I am here” are a painful illustration of this problem. The second pernicious consequence is the ineffectiveness of teaching, when assumptions about the other are wrong. Academics may misjudge and undervalue students’ ability to learn – in which case mediocrity becomes the new name for discrimination – or they may fail to challenge their own ideas of what is fit to be taught. Transformational performativity here eschews all questions about education as a political act and the interrogation of pedagogy. It clings to the blunt value of success rates and precludes examination of knowledge of the other, or of knowledge of knowledge, and how students and academics are placed in relation to both these notions.

How are we to undo inherited knowledge of the other? As my argument should have made clear by now, none of the knowledge types for transformation operates in isolation from the others. In other words, transformation in each of these areas cannot be achieved within a silo approach. Institutional culture – that is, *knowledge of the self* – plays a strong role in reinforcing individual ‘frozen knowledge’. Thus *knowledge of the other* requires personal examination of the assumptions that staff and students make about each other. Multiple issues spring from the intersection of class, gender and race definitions – from white students refusing to be taught by black academics, to white academics maintaining that black people cannot do mathematics – and, more

recently, black students questioning the right of white academics to teach certain topics. By the same token, these issues are also inseparable from the very conception of knowledge itself: who knows, who the knower is, and what constitutes valuable knowledge. To investigate the layering of the relationship between *knowledge of knowledge* and *knowledge of the other*, we may need to challenge the notion of cultural capital as exclusively white, male, and middle class; and the notion that progress and modernity are universally desirable values. This conceptual shift – which is also an emotional one – can open the doors to a more democratic type of learning, which may also be more effective.

7 Knowledge of Transformation

A number of questions need to be asked regarding what higher education institutions know about the process of transformation. How does the university know how to go about this process? Who initiates and who documents the historical and sociological exploration of the three knowledge types discussed above? Who brings these three knowledge types together, who examines their impact, where and how is this done, and who decides what to do with this knowledge? Who acts on the knowledge of transformation?

The generation of knowledge about how the university is transforming is the task of the office responsible for institutional research. Its task is to show the university a reflection of itself. It must point out and initiate the production of the three kinds of knowledge for transformation and show how they can be deployed to bring about change. That said, it is important to note that institutional research – as a management function in universities – did not emerge in the context of, and with the purpose of transformation, or under the banner of progressive democratic thinking. Quite the contrary: institutional research, in the form of quality assurance, is the offspring of the progressive bureaucratisation of higher education that came hand-in-hand with the rise of the evaluative state and the introduction of the principles of new public management in European higher education systems in the 1980s.

Guy Neave (1998) points out two consequences of the rise of the evaluative state: the introduction of routinised evaluation – focused on outcomes – as part of regular reporting by universities to the state; and the creation of a variety of specialised bodies to develop policy frameworks, implement policy, and interpret and verify information. This approach has been reproduced in institutions themselves: in South Africa, as elsewhere, institutional research or management information offices mushroomed at most universities as a consequence of the drive for policy implementation by the state, or agencies of the state. More interestingly, this process marked the rise of a new type of

knowledge in higher education – institutional knowledge – and a class of professional managers (Rhoades & Maldonado, 2007) responsible for gathering, interpreting and disseminating knowledge about the university to be used for reporting purposes – but also to manage the performance of academics and to steer the implementation of universities' strategic plans.

Is there a difference between the institutional knowledge referred to by Rhoades and Maldonado (2007) and the knowledge of transformation I am arguing for in this chapter? I contend that there is a difference in the conceptualisation of the knowledge itself – in its purpose, in the manner it is utilised, and in the actors involved in its production and use. Put differently, not all institutional knowledge constitutes knowledge of transformation, and not all knowledge described as transformational is capable of producing insight about transformation.

The knowledge of transformation, as conceptualised in this section, is contextual, contradictory and changeable. Change in the knowledges involved in transformation is a slow and difficult process that addresses structural issues that are not specific to higher education, but reflect also the broader state of society. The purpose of the knowledge of transformation is both to understand transformation and to bring about change; and it does not always result in (correct) decision making, or serve to measure individual performance. On the contrary, knowledge of transformation often involves 'measuring' educational and institutional processes that are essentially unmeasurable, and thus the 'measurements' can be only tentative. Knowledge of transformation requires the aggregation and combination of the knowledges for transformation and their re-interpretation. It thus operates across a variety of disciplines and is not independent from theoretical and methodological debates in those disciplines. Therefore, institutional offices cannot produce knowledge of transformation on the basis of narrow statistical parameters, but must be conversant with the relevant disciplines that make it possible to understand the notion of transformation and its different manifestations.

This does not mean that institutional research offices should throw out monitoring systems, indicators and enrolment planning, and concentrate on the meaning of transformation as knowledge production. Those tools are important and necessary in the accountability chain which universities are rightly part of, but they are an incomplete reflection of the process of change in the three areas of knowledge examined above. Knowledge of transformation can remind institutions of the complexity of transformation as process and project. Institutional research offices may produce 10-year trends reports and a variety of other data, but they need to realise that transformation cannot be frozen in numbers. Buried beneath these trends are individual and institutional stories that are messy, contradictory and paradoxical.

Knowledge of transformation can help institutions to keep the dialogue about transformation open. Open, passionate, difficult and unruly discussion about the knowledge of transformation is what keeps transformation from becoming depoliticised. It is what allows universities to find new avenues and strategies for change, as well as new areas to change. Knowledge of transformation thus requires a devolved leadership willing to face the risks of democratic deliberation. Institutional research offices need to establish productive relationships and partnerships with staff and students. This might mean relinquishing some of their control of the production of knowledge of transformation – in its conception, execution, dissemination, interrogation and utilisation, and finding new ways of working with staff and students. Knowledge *of* transformation has as a necessary, but not sufficient condition knowledge *for* transformation; yet neither of these can ‘deliver’ transformation at higher education institutions unless the knowledge is shared, discussed and confronted, and strategies for change are identified and implemented collectively.

Given the complexity of universities as organisations, it is important to take a sober view of the power that centrally driven transformation initiatives, top management, policies, transformation committees, quality assurance regimes and so on, can wield at the coalface – whether this involves student residences, departmental meetings, lecture halls or social media. Distributed leadership is probably what is required, given the need to simultaneously manage staff, students, systems, external pressure, internal conflict and power relations, not to mention scarce resources and competition over them. By ‘distributed leadership’ I mean a way of managing change that will devolve to units away from the centre of the university the responsibility for grappling with problems and proposing solutions within an agreed-upon direction. The question of how to balance central and distributed leadership and what kind of leaders will be needed to galvanise people into knowing, understanding and acting is one to which there will be many different answers.

Finally, it is important to understand that the transformation of a university is limited by the depth and direction of the transformation of society. This should not be taken as an excuse to stop change or to absolve universities from pushing further; it is simply a reminder that in the big scheme of social change and social justice, universities are but a very small part.

8 Conclusion

In this chapter I have situated the discussion about higher education transformation in the broader context of transformation as a political concept in

South Africa since the early 1990s. I proposed that to analyse institutional transformation in higher education, we need to examine two types of knowledge: knowledge *for* transformation and knowledge *of* transformation. In doing this, I have counterpoised the simple notion of transformation as performance, with a complex notion of change that involves a critical investigation of three types of knowledge *for* transformation: *knowledge of the self*, *knowledge of knowledge* and *knowledge of the other*. I argued further that it is the task of the university itself, and in particular its institutional research office, to bring these three knowledges together. A knowledge *of* transformation produced collectively can then act as a logbook and compass for the navigation of change. I have suggested that, given the complexity of institutional change and of the knowledges *for* and *of* transformation, a democratic balance between central and distributed leadership may be necessary – both for producing this knowledge and bringing about transformation.

If this is what needs to happen at universities – and indeed is what some institutions are in fact currently concerned with, how should this way of thinking affect accountability between higher education institutions and the government? The years 2013 and 2014 were marked by acrimonious confrontation between institutions and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) apropos new reporting regulations for universities. Perhaps the question the higher education sector has failed to ask is: How do the new performance-driven reporting regulations advance change in higher education and support transformation? Unlike policy interventions (such as the Teaching Development Grant), no amount of reporting to the DHET and its predecessor department has prevented institutional crises or accelerated or changed the focus of transformation at a given institution or at the system level.

Most of the arguments against the new reporting regulations were about institutional autonomy, appropriateness and practicability. The failure of institutions to question the purpose of the regulations more deeply may be a consequence of two related problems: the government's authoritarian embrace of 'common sense' transformation and its actual ability to enforce it, and the inability of institutions to critically confront their lack of transformation. Considering the government approach, we see very little, if anything, in the new reporting obligations for institutions that goes beyond providing data on quantitative performance indicators in the core functions, with a particular emphasis on enrolment data and staff and student demographics. The concerns raised by students in 2008, and again in 2015 and 2016, encompassed far more than merely the shortage of black academics: they pointed to the institutional obstacles black people still face at historically white institutions, even if the demographics in those institutions have changed radically. And the

surprise and annoyance with which most academics and management teams received the Soudien Report in 2008, and witnessed the student protests in 2015 and 2016, says something about the universities' lack of self-awareness and inability to accept criticism or criticise themselves. While some institutions attempted to address the issues raised by students, interventions are still under way and the situation is too volatile to allow me to draw conclusions about how these interventions relate to knowledge of the self or broader knowledge for transformation.

In the face of the difficulties that university management teams and government alike are experiencing in their efforts to resolve the crisis caused by the recent student protests, it now seems more important than ever to rethink the current understanding of how to manage and lead transformation in South Africa's higher education sector.

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Notes

- 1 Unfortunately, the chapter dedicated to transformation in Shepherd and Robins (2008) does not attempt to theorise transformation as a keyword, and its analysis of the institutionalisation of transformation in higher education operates only at a descriptive level.
- 2 It is also possible that what is lacking is not better policy analysis, but better politics – and that the simplification of the mass democratic movement's notion of transformation is a consequence of the conditions of the political settlement of 1994. See Mamdani (2013).
- 3 A prime illustration of this is the transformation index proposed by the Transformation Oversight Committee appointed by the Minister of Higher Education and Training. See Govinder and Makgoba (2013) and Govinder et al. (2013), and the responses by Cloete (2014), Dunne (2014), and Moultrie and Dorrington (2014).
- 4 For more on this theme, see Jansen's (2009b) analysis of curriculum at the University of Pretoria.

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