Higher Education Change in Post-1994 South Africa: The Dynamics of Change and Questions and Issues in Search of Sociological Inquiry

Saleem Badat[1]

Swedish International Development Agency/SAREC Studies

Stockholm, Sweden

14 May 2007

[1] Saleem Badat is Vice-Chancellor, Rhodes University. He was previously Chief Executive Officer of the Council on Higher Education, the statutory body that advises the South African Minister of Education on higher education matters and is also responsible for quality assurance in higher education. He can be contacted at vc@ru.ac.za

Introduction

Having inherited a higher education 'system' profoundly shaped by social, political and economic inequalities of a class, race, gender, institutional and spatial nature, South Africa's new democratic government committed itself to 'transforming' higher education as well as the inherited apartheid social structure and institutionalising a new social order.

Indeed, over the past ten years virtually no domain of higher education has escaped scrutiny and has been left untouched, and there have been a wide array of 'transformation'[2] oriented initiatives. These have included the definition of the purposes and goals of higher education; extensive policy research; policy formulation, adoption, and implementation in the areas of governance, funding, academic structure and programmes, and quality assurance; the enactment of new laws and regulations; and major restructuring and reconfiguration of the institutional landscape and of institutions.

The aim of this paper is to highlight a number of important questions and issues related to South African higher education that are in search of sociological inquiry. Behind this aim is the unashamed purpose of stimulating critical historical sociological scholarship on higher education and higher education change.

To this end, the paper first sketches the internal and external context of higher education change. Thereafter, it sets out the values and principles that are intended to inform higher education 'transformation' and the purposes and goals that have been defined for higher education. Third, the paper analyses key policy initiatives and their products and outcomes between 1990 and 2006. On these foundations, it finally raises a select number of questions and issues that are in search of sociological inquiry.

1. The Context of Higher Education Change

Eric Hobsbawm writes that

> Political pressures on history…are greater than ever before…More history than ever is today being revised or invented by people who do not want the real past, but only a past that suits their purpose. The defence of history by its professionals is today more urgent than ever (Times Higher Education Supplement, 12 July 2002, p 18-19).

In South Africa, where the 'real past' is in danger in the face of either amnesia or the tendency to invent institutional histories in the service of institutional advantage, it is important to restate the 'real past'.

1. First, the inherited higher education 'system' was designed, in the main, to reproduce, through teaching and research, white and male privilege and black and female subordination in all spheres of society. All higher institutions were, in differing ways and to differing extents, deeply implicated in this.

   The higher education 'system' was uncoordinated and fragmented and institutions were differentiated along the lines of 'race' and ethnicity. This was accompanied by 'historically white institutions' being advantaged and the disadvantage of 'historically black

[2] I use the term 'transformation' since this is how government and a wide range of higher education actors describe the nature of change that is being attempted.

institutions', in terms of the financial resources that were made available and the social and academic roles that were respectively allocated to each.

Van Onselen has contended that:

> In broad terms, white tertiary education has emerged at the behest of the social, economic and political demands of an enfranchised section of the community and has therefore tended to follow the 'natural' contours of economy and society. Black tertiary education, by contrast, has been the historic by-product of racially motivated planning inflicted on a disenfranchised section of the community, and, as such, has not been primarily designed to accommodate the profile or patterns of civil society or - until recently - the economy (Van Onselen, 1991:1).

However, this notion of a 'complex dual legacy', which treats historically white institutions as being the 'organic outgrowth of an undemocratic political system' and the historically black institutions as the 'artificial outgrowth of racially motivated planning' is highly flawed. As Ridge has commented, in van Onselen's argument 'an opposition is set up between "natural factors" and "planning" factors, with the effect of leaving only the black institutions scarred by apartheid' (1991:1).

In contrast Ridge argues that as far as the historically white institutions are concerned

> their conscious policies were also deeply influenced by central planning. The phenomenal growth in Afrikaans university graduate programmes in this period....and the growth of the white universities to accommodate the burgeoning numbers of white matriculants...testify to this. There has also been a profound unconscious influence of central planning priorities on the white universities...While it is true that white tertiary education has been freer to respond gradually and less traumatically to complex pressures in the environment, we should not lose sight of the fact that the environment has itself been radically changed by interventionist and central planning. In one sense white universities have been better positioned to respond to the demands of the economy; in another they have 'naturally' served the interests of the apartheid planners, strengthening the white hold on privilege (Ridge, 1991:1-2).

The thrust of Ridge's argument is that both historically white and historically black institutions were profoundly shaped by apartheid planning and by the respective functions assigned to them in relation to the reproduction of the apartheid social order. It was the fundamental differences in allocated roles that, whatever the differences among the historically white institutions and however diverse the origins and development of the historically black institutions, distinguished these two sets of institutions and constituted the key differentiation and the principal basis of inequalities between them.

The patterns of advantage and disadvantage, however, are not merely historical. They are also related to the current differential capacities of institutions to pursue excellence, to provide high quality learning and research experiences and outcomes, and to contribute to economic and social reconstruction and development.

The apartheid legacy in higher education has also had numerous other effects on contemporary South Africa. For one, it has contributed to the serious contemporary

under-representation of black and women South Africans in particular disciplines and fields and at postgraduate level. Further, it has ensured the domination of the academic labour force and of knowledge production by white and male South Africans. Finally, it has also resulted in the domination of high level occupations and professions by particular social groups.

Thus, one key policy imperative and challenge is to transform higher education so that it becomes more socially equitable internally, and also promotes social equity more generally by providing opportunity for social advancement through equity of access and opportunity.

2. Previously, research and teaching were extensively shaped by the socio-economic and political priorities of the apartheid separate development programme. Instead, higher education is now called upon to address and respond to the development needs of a democratic South Africa. These needs are crystallised in the *Reconstruction and Development Programme* of 1994 as a fourfold commitment. First is 'meeting basic needs of people'. Second is 'developing our human resources'. Third is 'building the economy' and, finally, there is the task of 'democratising the state and society'.

3. Third, South Africa's transition occurs in a context of globalisation and a global economy in which economic growth is increasingly dependent on knowledge and information.

   The challenge for higher education is to produce, through research and teaching and learning programmes, the knowledge and graduates that will enable South Africa to engage proactively, critically, and creatively with globalisation and to participate in a highly competitive global economy. Higher education has to contribute to South Africa achieving 'political democratisation, economic reconstruction and development, and redistributive social policies aimed at equity' (*Education White Paper 3*, 1997).

The attempt to transform higher education occurs within the context of an overall challenge for South Africa that is well captured by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC):

> Environmentally sustainable growth with equity, in a democracy, is not only desirable but possible. Indeed, just as social equity cannot be attained in the absence of strong, sustained growth, such growth likewise calls for a reasonable degree of social and political stability, and this in turn means meeting certain minimum requisites of equity. It is clear from this interdependence between growth and equity that it is necessary to advance towards these two objectives simultaneously rather than sequentially, and this represents an unprecedented challenge (1992:1).

The *Education White Paper 3* of 1997, *A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education*, captures two of the challenges confronting South Africa well:

> (T)he 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 (emphasis added).

In the case of South Africa, however, the already 'unprecedented challenge' to which ECLAC refers is further intensified. Growth and equity must not only be pursued simultaneously, but they must also be advanced within a democratic framework and as part of the consolidation of a fledgling democracy - a triple challenge!

For good political and social reasons, then, it is not desirable to postpone one or other elements of the triple challenge or to tackle them in sequence. They have to be confronted, by and large, simultaneously.

2. 'Transforming' South African Higher Education: Principles, Purposes and Key Goals

The *White Paper* of 1997 specifically identifies the various, and indeed diverse, social purposes that higher education must serve. These are:

- Attention to the pressing local, regional and national needs of the South African society and to the problems and challenges of the broader African context

- The mobilisation of human talent and potential through lifelong learning to contribute to the social, economic, cultural and intellectual life of a rapidly changing society

- Laying the foundations of a critical civil society, with a culture of public debate and tolerance which accommodates differences and competing interests

- The training and provision of people to strengthen South Africa's enterprises, services and infrastructure. This requires the development of professionals and knowledge workers with globally equivalent skills, but who are socially responsible and conscious of their role in contributing to the national development effort and social transformation

- The production, acquisition and application of new knowledge: …a well-organised, vibrant research and development system which integrates the research and training capacity of higher education with the needs of industry and of social reconstruction

In giving effect to the defined social purposes, the *White Paper* is clear and explicit about the *principles* and *values* that must characterise higher education and that higher education should promote. These are: equity and redress; quality; development; democratisation; academic freedom; institutional autonomy; effectiveness and efficiency, and public accountability.

The *White Paper* also sets various objectives for the higher education system and for institutions. These include:

1. Increased and broadened participation within higher education to meet personpower needs and to advance social equity – which are crucial given the history of disadvantage of black and women South Africans, especially of working class and rural poor origins

2. The establishment of a national, integrated, co-ordinated and differentiated higher education system and extensive academic and other collaboration, especially between

institutions in close geographical proximity. These are vital if the inherited racially structured higher education landscape is to be transcended

3. Improved national steering and institutional planning and management, including the development of three-year institutional plans

4. Promotion of quality and quality assurance through the accreditation of programmes, institutional audits, and quality promotion by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council on Higher Education (CHE)

5. A new framework for the funding of public higher education that is directed towards the achievement of the new policy goals and objectives

6. Good governance and effective management and administration of higher education through co-operative governance of the system and institutions, partnerships, and capacity building initiatives

7. A new academic policy framework for the offering of qualifications and programmes, including their incorporation within a National Qualifications Framework designed to promote articulation, mobility and transferability

8. Curriculum innovation, renewal and restructuring, and knowledge production that is responsive to societal interests and needs

The overall goal is the development of a higher education system that is characterised by quality and excellence, equity, responsiveness, and effective and efficient provision, governance and management.

Many of the goals and initiatives that are advanced are not unique to South African higher education. However, taken together, and the fact that they are components of a societal reconstruction and development programme to which higher education is required to make a significant contribution, means that the higher education transformation agenda is both comprehensive and fundamental in nature.

Of course, such a higher education transformation agenda has major financial and human implications. These must unavoidably shape the trajectory, dynamism and pace of transformation and change and the achievement of policy goals and objectives.

3. Key Policy Initiatives, Products and Outcomes, 1990 - 2006

The key policy initiatives and processes, policy events, activities, and products and their outcomes, during the period 1990 – 2006 are illustrated in Appendix One.

It is clear that over the past fifteen years there has been intense activity over a wide front, as is to be expected of a government that has established a comprehensive agenda of higher education transformation and seeks to transform higher education to serve new social goals and imperatives. Policy activity has covered

- The generation of values and principles to serve as criteria for policy formulation and adoption, and the production of a democratic consensus on these

- The development and adoption of frameworks in the forms of legislation, regulations based on legislation and various policy texts

- The formulation and adoption of policies of different kinds – symbolic, substantive, procedural, material, etc. – that have sought to address different objects (institutional structure, access and opportunity, governance, financing, learning and teaching, etc.)

- The establishment of governmental and non-governmental infrastructure for policy implementation and further policy planning and development

- The planning and the implementation of policies

- The evaluation and review of policy.

Three periods of policy activity can be roughly identified on the basis of the nature of policymaking, the principal policy actors and the outcomes of policy activity.

The first is the 1990-1994 period. This can be characterised as a period in which the predominant concerns were the questions of principles, values and vision and goals, relatively unconstrained by issues of the availability of finances and human expertise, and policy planning and implementation to effect the transformation of the inherited system. There was also considerable attention focused on the role of the state in higher education transformation, the relationship between the state and civil society in transformation, and high degrees of participation by mass movements and civil society in general in policy debate and policymaking. This was congruent with the general high levels of political mobilisation of mass movements and civil society formations in the context of political and constitutional negotiations. The outcomes of the policy activity of this period were a general agreement on the values and principles that should guide policymaking, should serve as criteria for policy formulation and adoption, and the formation of policies of an essentially symbolic nature.

A second period began in 1995 and lasted until 1998. The African National Congress (ANC) as the new government began to come to the fore in policy-making. From the National Commission on Higher Education through to the development of the *Education White Paper 3*, and to the passing of the *Higher Education Act* of 1997, the concern now became elaborating in greater detail an overall policy framework for higher education transformation. Concomitant with this was the more extensive and sharper definition of goals, and the strategies, structures and instruments for the pursuit of these goals. Attention also began to be focused on marrying values, principles, and goals and strategies in concrete domains such as governance, financing and funding, the shape and size of higher education, and learning and teaching.

Whereas in the previous period much policymaking was essentially concerned with defining a higher education transformation agenda, and with values, principles and symbolic goals, policymaking of a substantive nature began to emerge and decisions began to be made around key policy choices. Closer attention now began to be paid to certain matters that had tended to be subordinate concerns in the previous period, such as the availability of finances and human expertise to effect transformation and the tensions between certain principles and goals. While participation in policy making on the part of mass organisations continued to be relatively high, this was no longer at the levels that existed in the previous period. This paralleled developments in other areas of society and can be related to the changing nature of policymaking - from symbolic policy signalling on the part of civil society to more substantive

policy choices on the part of government. The principal outcome of this period was a legislative and policy framework, the formulation and adoption of a number of substantive policies and the establishment of an embryonic governmental infrastructure for policy implementation and further policy planning and policy development.

A new period began in 1999 that continues today. This has been characterised by the determination of the Education Ministry to make decisive choices and to take decisions on a number of crucial areas around which there had hitherto not been much progress. This was so either because of a relatively hands-off approach or inadequate steering by government or/and an approach of waiting for higher education institutions to take the lead. The most crucial of these issues is that of creating a national, integrated and co-ordinated, yet differentiated, higher education system that transcends the apartheid legacy. Simultaneously, areas such as governance and the National Qualification Framework in higher education have undergone review in the light of various problems. Since particularistic stakeholder interests have generally tended to make difficult any substantive consensus on crucial issues that require tough choices and decisions, the role of the Ministry in policymaking has begun to predominate with a trend towards lower levels of substantive involvement by various stakeholders. Concomitantly, there has been an accelerated shift towards further substantive policymaking and also policymaking of a distributive, redistributive and material nature.

4. Questions and Issues in Search of Sociological Inquiry

There are a large number of issues and questions related to South African higher education that are in search of sociological inquiry. It is, however, not possible to address all of these in this paper.

Instead, in the remainder of this paper I wish to highlight a select number of issues and questions that I believe are worth pursuing both because they are important, interesting and deserving of rigorous sociological scholarship in their own right, and also because they can contribute knowledge for higher education policy making.

1. The context of higher education change

Context, the late Philip Abrams writes

> is not a matter of noting the way in which the past provides a background to the present; it is a matter of treating what people do in the present as a struggle to create a future *out* of the past, of seeing that the past is not just the womb of the present but the only raw material out of which the present can be constructed (Abrams, 1982:8).

Necessarily, the efforts to change higher education have been conditioned by the nature of the higher education terrain, as well as by changing national economic and social policies and conditions, by global conditions and developments, and by the paradoxes, ambiguities, contradictions, possibilities and constraints of these conditions.

The first vital issue in search of sociological inquiry is therefore the ***context*** *of higher education change.*

There is, of course, as there must be, much debate and contestation on the pace and nature of change since 1994. On the one hand, some social actors are disappointed with the nature and pace of change over the past ten years and argue that government thinking in South Africa is

characterised by a conservative 'neo-liberalism' and that government policies are essentially 'neo-liberal'. On the other hand, there are views that government political and economic thinking continues to be characterised essentially by unwavering adherence to the radical goals of the Freedom Charter and of the 1994 reconstruction and development programme.

In my view, the current situation is characterised by neither an entirely neo-liberal inspired reform process and pervasive and hegemonic neo-liberalism, nor a wholly revolutionary sweeping displacement of old social structures and arrangements and dawn of an entirely new social order. Instead, there is a varied and fluid situation characterised by contesting social forces with competing goals, strategies and policy agendas, by attempts to resolve profound economic and social paradoxes in differing ways, by continuities, discontinuities and ambiguities in policy and practice, and by differing trajectories and trends. The post-apartheid South African social order is not yet indelibly defined and continues to be uncertain. However, the trajectory, nature and pace of change in the political economy, of course, have major implications for higher education institutions and the higher education transformation agenda

Two lines of inquiry seem to be important. First, is a description and analysis of the structural and conjunctural conditions within South Africa over the past decade. This would enable the analysis of a number of important questions. These include the relationship between structure and conjuncture and changes in higher education; how have changes in the political economy conditioned changes in higher education; and what have been the implications of the changing social structure, a particular form of state, and of political relations for higher education change? Furthermore, what have been the implications of specific macro-economic policy frameworks for higher education change?

A second line of inquiry stems from my concern that in the formulation and implementation of higher education policy, and in the strategizing of higher education change at national and institutional levels, we are disadvantaged, sometimes perhaps severely, by the absence of detailed and rigorous historical sociological scholarship on South African higher education pre-1990.

There is no dearth of issues to which such historical sociological scholarship could valuably turn its attention. These include the origins and development of higher education during the periods of segregation and apartheid; the origins and development of particular categories of institutions (historically white, historically black, historically Afrikaans-medium, historically English-medium, universities, technikons, and colleges), and the trajectories and dynamics of individual higher education institutions. They also include the relationships between higher education and society and the state under segregation and apartheid.

Such inquiries could be of great importance in providing a more comprehensive knowledge base for informing policy development. In addition, they could be important antidotes to the selective re-presentations of history for political gain in current higher education policy struggles, to institutional histories and biographies that are dangerous caricatures of the 'real past', and to the increasing signs of amnesia around our 'real past'. Of course, historical sociological scholarship on South African higher education 'whose sole object is to re-create a particular conjuncture in the past remains valid and important in its own right' (Tosh, 1984:128).

2. The Nature of Change

A second important task for sociological inquiry is to describe and analyse the trajectory, dynamics and nature of higher education change post 1990. Such analysis could periodise change in relation to changing social and political conditions, and also usefully pose the question of the determinants – ideological, economic, political and social, and local and global – of such change.

Such research could demonstrate that an enabling higher education policy framework, while hugely important for the successful transformation of higher education and higher education institutions is on its own not a sufficient condition of change. That higher education transformation has other necessary conditions, which include simultaneous supportive changes outside of higher education, in the economic and social arenas. And that inadequately supportive macro-economic policies and fiscal environments and financial constraints will necessarily undermine higher education change, and particularly the commitments to social equity as the weights of social class origins, cultural capital and schooling exercise an impact on higher education access and opportunity, and outcomes.

3. Theorising higher education change

An exciting related challenge is to develop imaginative conceptual frameworks or 'problematics' for analysing and theorising change.

Elements of such a framework would include issues of social structure and higher education structure and agency, of continuities and discontinuities in the character of post-1994 structure and agency, and the periodisation of the post 1994 political economy.

Beyond this, it would be important to rigorously interrogate often employed terms such as 'change', 'development', 'reconstruction, 'transformation', 'reform' and 'improvement' and to explicitly and clearly define these concepts. It would also be valuable to exemplify the pitfalls of the obfuscation and conflation of these related, yet distinct, concepts.

For example, it is sometimes held that that the reconstruction or reform of institutions is necessarily an element of their transformation. Now Abrams makes the important point that 'what we choose to do and what we have to do are shaped by the historically given possibilities among which we find ourselves' (1982:3). And already a century ago, Luxemburg posed the question: 'Can the social democracy be against reforms? Can we counterpose the social revolution, the transformation of the existing order, our final goal, to social reform' (1970:8). The answer was an unambiguous 'Certainly not'; that 'the daily struggle for reforms…within the framework of the existing social order' is a means of working towards the 'final goal'. 'Between social reforms and revolution there exists for the social democracy an indissoluble tie. The struggle for reforms is the means; the social revolution, its aim' (Luxemburg, 1970: 8).

Thus actors pursuing programmes of social and higher education transformation under hostile or difficult political and social conditions would, of course, be infantile not to struggle for reforms. Yet it is not axiomatic that the reform of institutions will necessarily result in their transformation. It, of course, depends on many other issues and conditions. Similarly, it is not clear or self-evident that all instances of what is called 'transformation' in society and higher education is necessary the 'development' of society and higher education.

4. Reproduction, contradiction and transformation

There are discourses that conceive of the role of higher education as purely or essentially an instrument and mechanism of social reproduction and the conservation and maintenance of social relations, institutions and practices. Equally, there are discourses that accord higher education an almost determining and autonomous role in social change and conceive of it a powerful instrument of social change.

A contribution by higher education to social transformation is, however, not a matter purely of political commitment and will. Higher education operates 'within the framework of possibilities and constraints presented (to it) by the institutions of our complex societies' (Keane and Mier, 1989:4) and will be conditioned by 'the contradictions, possibilities and constraints of the conjunctural and structural conditions' it may seek to overcome (Wolpe, 1991:1).

Higher education and its institutions exist at the intersection of state, market and civil society, each with its specific, varied and different expectations and demands. A common experience of all institutions, therefore, is an exceptional 'demand overload'. By this I mean that institutions must cope with a vast array of varied and differing national goals and imperatives, policy initiatives, market pressures, public expectations and institutional stakeholder demands. They must increasingly do so with difficulty in securing and retaining specialist personpower, which is increasingly attracted to the public and private sectors. Concomitantly, higher education must remain faithful to the 'public good' ideals of national policy and the social purposes that define an institution as a *higher education* institution, and must do so without any significant increase in public finance, with limited scope for increased finance from student income, and with various difficulties raised by income from other sources.

Since it tends to be accorded numerous and often diverse social purposes and by virtue of its core functions, higher education could, and indeed is highly likely to, play a highly contradictory role. It could contribute in ways that are simultaneously transformative, reformist and conservative. That is, it could, simultaneously, reproduce, maintain and conserve, undermine and erode change, and transform social relations, institutions, policies and practices or aspects of these.

For example, under certain circumstances higher education may play an important role in the erosion of racism, racialism and racial prejudice and in the dissemination of anti-racist ideas and thinking and the building of a non-racial culture. Concomitantly, it could play no or little role in the undermining of patriarchy, sexism and sexist practices. Indeed, it may even contribute to reinforcing patriarchy, sexism and sexist practices through its own institutional culture and practices.

Manuel Castells has noted that universities perform four major functions (2001: 206-212): Historically, they have played a major role as ideological apparatuses. As such, they are subject to 'the conflicts and contradictions of society and therefore they will tend to express – and even to amplify – the ideological struggles present in all societies'. Second, universities have always been mechanisms to select dominant elites. Third, universities play a role in the generation of new knowledge. Castells notes, however, that this 'remains a statistical exception among universities, even in the United States where only about 200 of the 3500 universities and colleges can be considered as knowledge producers at various levels'. Finally, the professional university focuses on training the bureaucracy.

Castells argues that the balance between these functions changes. Because 'universities are social systems and historically produced institutions, all their functions take place simultaneously within the same structure, although with different emphases. It is not possible to have a pure or quasi-pure model of universities' (2001: 211). His conclusion is that 'the real issue is …… to create institutions solid enough and dynamic enough to stand the tensions that will necessarily trigger the simultaneous performance of somewhat contradictory functions' (2001: 212).

It would be important to analyse South African higher education post-1994 from the perspectives of reproduction, contradiction and transformation and of Castells' delineation of the functions of higher education. Equally, what conditions (internal and external to higher education, and at the interface of higher education and other social domains) have shaped the role and contribution of higher education?

5. Higher education and the economy

A much expressed and emphasised goal is making higher education institutions more responsive to the needs of the economy. Government, the public service and the private sector increasingly question the contribution of higher education institutions to economic development and complain about the quality of graduates, and the nature and appropriateness of their qualifications and training.

There should no dispute that in many cases there is urgent need for extensive innovation and restructuring of qualifications and programmes to make curricula more congruent with the knowledge and skills needs of a changing economy and society. However, it must be posed whether this means higher education qualifications and programmes must become entirely vocational and focused on a narrow skilling.

Mala Singh rightly argues that great care must be taken that institutions and academics do not allow the demand for 'responsiveness' to be 'thinned' down to purely market and economic responsiveness (Singh, 2001). She notes that, today, 'the traditional knowledge responsibilities of universities (research as the production of new knowledge, teaching as the dissemination of knowledge, and community service as the applied use of knowledge for social development) are increasingly being located within the demands of economic productivity' (ibid.). The danger, of course, is that the 'the notion of responsiveness (could become) emptied of most of its content except for that which advances individual, organisational or national economic competitiveness' (ibid.)

Can it be blithely assumed that if a country produces high quality graduates, especially, in the natural science, technology, engineering and other key fields, that this will kick-start and have a profound effect on the economy? Is the formation of personpower through higher education a *sufficient condition fo*r economic growth and development, and global competitiveness and innovation, rather than only a *necessary condition*? Is the production and contribution of graduates not also dependent on whether there is a receptive institutional economic environment outside of higher education - in particular, investment capital, venture capital and the openness and receptivity of the business sector and enterprises?

There should also be no pretence that, in terms of a higher education response to labour market needs, it is a simple matter to establish what are the knowledge, skills, competencies, and attitudes required by the economy and society generally and by its different constituent parts specifically.

In the face of this, is it not imperative to advance, especially in developing countries where higher education change may be part of a larger process of democratic reconstruction and development, a more extensive, 'thick', complex and multi-faceted notion of higher education responsiveness that incorporates its wider social purposes? In this regard, should a key goal not be to develop the high level and varied intellectual and conceptual knowledge, abilities and skills to meet the requirements of both the economy and a developing democracy?

6. Agency and actors

A wide array of agents and social actors – government and the state, business, higher education institutions, academics, students and other constituencies and the organisations that represent such constituencies – are involved in higher education change. In as much as there has been consensus on some issues there has also been much contestation and conflict between the different actors.

The key actors differ in their nature, in their particular interests and roles, in their relation to the state, political parties and other important constituencies, and in strengths and weaknesses. They employ particular strategies and tactics of mobilisation and engagement. They differ in the nature of their involvement in the different domains of change and different phases of the change process – agenda setting, policy development and formulation, and policy implementation. The actors have particular histories, different preoccupations, and have differential access to resources, whether knowledge, information, financial or human, or power and influence.

It seems to me that here too is a rich arena in need of incisive sociological analysis.

7. Paradoxes and intractable tensions

South African society and higher education are characterised by paradoxes and intractable tensions between dearly held values and goals and also policies and strategies in so far as government or institutions are for good political or social reasons obliged to pursue them simultaneously. This establishes difficult political and social dilemmas and choices and decisions and raises the question of trade-offs between principles, goals and strategies.

One example is the attempt to pursue both social equity and redress and quality in higher education simultaneously. Under certain conditions, an exclusive concentration on social equity can lead to the privileging of equity/redress at the expense of quality. This could result in the goal of producing high quality graduates with the requisite knowledge, competencies and skills being compromised. Conversely, an exclusive focus on quality and 'standards' can result in social equity being retarded or delayed and therefore no or limited erosion of the inequitable character of the high-level occupational structure or of the social structure.

To take another example: if the policy goals and challenges are formulated as both global competitiveness and redistributive national reconstruction and development, a crucial question is posed for higher education. How does higher education orient itself towards both these imperatives? How are the differing needs of both these two poles to be satisfied simultaneously? More specifically, what does this mean for individual higher education institutions? Are all higher education institutions to be oriented towards both poles or is there to be a functional differentiation with respect to the two poles? Are these to be choices that are to be left to higher education institutions themselves or is the government to actively steer in this regard?

8. The social purposes of higher education

Finally, in the seductive excitement and practice of higher education change, there is the danger of losing sight of the fundamental *social purposes* of higher education. In this regard it is important to pose a number of critical questions. What is the nature of the purposes that have been defined for South African higher education? Are they are indeed the 'real' social purposes of higher education? Do the defined purposes undermine or enrich the idea or meaning of higher education and a university? Do they intersect with the specificities of our historical and social context? How are the social purposes conceived - in terms of the public good, purely in terms of private benefits, or both? If there is a wide diversity of defined social purposes, can all be achieved? What would be required to achieve the diversity of purposes? What are the necessary conditions, within and outside higher education, for institutions and higher education to fulfil these social purposes? Do policies and practice advance or erode and undermine the social purposes of higher education?

It is important to analyse how, in what ways and to what extent government and other actors have addressed the difficult political and social dilemmas that confront them with respect to the simultaneous pursuit of principles, goals and strategies. What choices and decisions have they made? What trade-offs have they made, and have these made consciously and transparently? Finally, what are consequences of these choices, decisions and trade-offs and do they advance a social transformation agenda?

9. Freedom and responsibility

C Wright Mills (1959) captures an especially significant challenge when he writes in his classic, *The Sociological Imagination*

> Freedom is not merely the chance to do as one pleases; neither is it merely the opportunity to choose between set alternatives. Freedom is, first of all, the chance to formulate the available choices, to argue over them - and then, the opportunity to choose. That is why freedom cannot exist without an enlarged role of human reason in human affairs. …(T)he social task of reason is to formulate choices, to enlarge the scope of human decisions in the making of history. The future of human affairs is not merely some set of variables to be predicted. The future is what is to be decided - within the limits, to be sure, of historical possibility. But this possibility is not fixed, in our time the limits seem very broad indeed.
>
> Beyond this, the problem of freedom is …how decisions about the future of human affairs are to be made and who is to make them. Organisationally, it is the problem of a just machinery of decision. Morally, it is the problem of political responsibility. Intellectually, it is the problem of what are now the possible futures of human affairs (1959:174)

Mill's statement provides a rich menu of issues for sociological inquiry. It would be invaluable to research how 'the available choices' have been formulated; to analyse how they have been argued and struggled over, and how, in what ways and to what extent have we indeed innovated the 'just machinery' that provides 'opportunity to choose' and to make decisions. Have we succeeded in building institutional cultures and configuring internal governance in ways that hold fast to the principles of institutional autonomy, academic freedom, academic self-rule and democracy, but concomitantly also address the requirements for public accountability, efficiency and effectiveness? Has the ideology and culture of 'managerialism'

triumphed or is there still scope to innovate the 'just machinery' that provides 'opportunity to choose' and to make decisions?

10. Academic workforce and labour

There are numerous important questions that can be posed related to the nature of the academic workforce, beyond its well-known social composition.

Louis Althusser (1971) has argued that every society, at the same time that it produces, must reproduce the conditions of its own existence. The same applies to higher education institutions, which must, amongst other things, reproduce the next generation of scholars and researchers (if, in our context, they must also ensure that there is a transformation of the social composition of this next generation. Is this indeed occurring? What are the constraints? What could be the impact on higher education and on society of a failure to adequately nurture and reproduce a next generation? What are the implications for democracy and civil society of a failure to reproduce especially critical scholars – the historians, sociologists, philosophers, educators and other scientists - that are passionately committed to both social justice, and critical and independent scholarship? Unless we reproduce critical scholars we will, of course, not have the intellectual enquiries that 'produce knowledge for politics', but without cutting themselves off from 'the objective and scientific investigation of the world' (Buci-Gluckman, 1980:15).

However, there are also other issues in need of investigation. What are the implications of what appears to be a growing 'casualisation' of the academic workforce, which seems to be phenomenon of especially the urban metropolitan institutions? What is the impact of the 'demand' overload' that I referred to earlier on the academic workforce on teaching and research? What is the consequence for the autonomy of intellectual work of contract research and income? What is happening to incomes of academics as opposed to incomes of administrators and especially senior managers and the consequences of possibly rapidly growing income differentials?

Further, what accounts for the weakness and almost demise of academic unions and the limited influence of academics as an organised movement on higher education policy making?

11. Scholarship, policy and change

Finally, there is the interesting issue of knowledge production and dissemination related to higher education.

In the past fifteen years, a number of scholars have to greater or lesser extent undertaken research and writing on higher education. What has been the nature of scholarly research and writing? What has been the relationship between *analysis for policy* that is explicitly intended to inform higher education policy making and the autonomy of intellectual work? How and in what ways, if at all, have scholars mediated various critical issues and challenges that confront scholars undertaking *analysis for policy*: How have they addressed the political and social dilemmas that arise when there is incongruence between their values, principles and goals and those of particular policy actors? Is it only *analysis for policy* that has a high degree of policy relatedness and relevance, or can basic scholarly research and writing also have policy relatedness and policy relevance?

References

Abrams, P. (1982) *Historical Sociology*. New York: Cornell University Press

Althusser, L. (1971) *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. London: New Left Books

Badat, S. (2004) 'Transforming South African higher education, 1990 - 2003: Goals, policy initiatives and critical challenges and issues' in Cloete, N., Pillay, P, Badat, S, and Moja, T. (2004) *National Policy and a Regional Response in South African Higher Education*. Oxford/Cape Town: James Currey/David Philip

Badat, S. (2004) 'Strategising higher education transformation: 19 propositions suggested by the South African higher education change process, 1994 – 2004'. Unpublished manuscript, June 2004

Badat, S. (2005) 'From innocence to critical reflexivity and praxis: Critical researchers, research and writing, and higher education policy making'. Chapter in forthcoming UNESCO book

Buci-Glucksmann, C. (1980) *Gramsci and the State*. London: Lawrence and Wishart

Castells, M. (2001). 'Universities as dynamic systems of contradictory functions", in Müller, J., Cloete, N, & Badat, S. (eds) - *Challenges of Globalisation: South African Debates with Manuel Castells*. Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman.

Department of Education (1997) *Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education*. Pretoria

Economic Commission for Latin American and the Caribbean (1992) *Social Equity and Changing Production Patterns: An Integrated Approach.* Santiago: ECLAC

Higher Education Act of the Republic of South Africa, No. 101 of 1997

Hobsbawm, E. (2002) 'We are needed', *Times Higher Education Supplement,* 12 July 2002, p 18 - 19

Luxemburg, R. (1970) *Reform and Revolution*. New York: Pathfinder Press

Keane, J. and Mier, P. (1989) 'Preface' in Melucci, A. *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press

Ridge, S. (1991) Standards and university education. Draft discussion paper, University of Western Cape Education Seminar, 3 September

Singh, M. (2001) Reinserting the public good in higher education transformation. *Kagisano*, CHE Higher Education Discussion Series, No. 1, November

Tosh, J. (1984) *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History*. London: Longman

Van Onselen, C. (1991) Tertiary education in a democratic South Africa, unpublished mimeo

White Paper on Reconstruction and Development, 23 November 1994, Government Gazette, Vol. 353, No. 16085

Wolpe, H. (1991) Education and social transformation: Problems and dilemmas, in Unterhalter, E. et al (eds.) *Education in a Future South Africa: Policy Issues for Transformation*. Oxford: Heinemann.

Wolpe, H. and Unterhalter, E. (1991) Introduction: Reproduction, reform and transformation: Approaches to the analysis of education in South Africa in Unterhalter, E. et al (eds.) *Apartheid Education and Popular Struggles*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press

Wright Mills, C. (1959) *The Sociological Imagination*. London: Oxford University Press

Appendix 1

Initiatives and Process	Events, Activities and Products	Outcome/S
African National Congress (ANC) aligned mass movement, the National Education Co-ordinating Committee initiates development of policy proposals	*Establishment of a 'civil society' initiative – the National Education Policy Investigation (1990 - 1992).* Publication of a Framework and Post-Secondary Education report	Feeds into ANC policy initiatives and policy statements
Policy development by the ANC and ANC supporting formations	Policy proposals developed by the Union of Democratic University Staff Associations, Education Policy Unit (University of Western Cape) and other formations ANC 1994 policy statement on higher education	Feed into ANC policy development Establishes principles and values for further policy development
Establishment in 1995 of National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) to investigate all aspects of HE and make policy recommendations	Publication in 1996 of report, '*A Framework for Transformation'*	NCHE report feeds into Ministry of Education policy and legislative development processes
Ministry initiatives in 1997 to develop *Green Paper* on HE, *White Paper* on HE and legislation	Release of *Green Paper* Release and adoption of *Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation Of Higher Education'* Release of a *Bill* on Higher Education and eventual adoption of the *Higher Education Act*, No. 101 of 1997	*Green Paper* feeds into *White Paper* *White Paper* feeds into the *Higher Education Act* New legal framework for HE and *Act* shapes Ministry regulations
Public call for nominations to the Council on Higher Education (CHE) (1998)	Establishment of the CHE to advise (on request and proactively) the Minister on all matters related to HE, to undertake quality assurance activities through the HEQC, to report regularly on the state of HE, to monitor achievement of policy goals, to convene an annual consultative conference of national stakeholders and to contribute to HE development	CHE undertakes an expanding range of activities related to its mandate through a Secretariat of 50 persons
National and institutional initiatives around planning (1998 onwards)	Development by Ministry of institutional planning guidelines	Development by institutions of strategic and three-year institutional plans
Ministry initiative to develop new goal-oriented funding policy framework (1998 onwards)	Development by Ministry of draft funding policy framework documents Publication by Ministry in 2001 of Discussion Document, *Funding of Public Higher Education: A New Framework* Ministry seeks advice from CHE on equalisation of C values in subsidy formula	Public responses and work towards a final funding policy CHE advises to equalise and Ministry accepts advice

Requirement for HE qualifications to be registered on National Qualifications Framework (NQF), and for programmes to be restructured in outcomes based format (1997 onwards)	Extensive curriculum and programme restructuring	All HE qualifications interim registered on NQF and developed in outcomes based format
Ministry initiatives around private higher education (1998 onwards)	Development of guidelines and manuals for registration of private HE providers Amendment in 2000 and 2001 to the *Higher Education Act* Development of draft regulations for registration of private HE providers	Registration of all private providers of HE New regulatory framework for private HE through regulations of April 2003
Requirement that all new HE programmes be accredited as condition of provision and public funding support (1998 onwards)	Development of interim frameworks, processes, criteria and structures for the accreditation of programmes	Processing of and decision making on new programmes by HEQC; Processing of and decision making on re-accreditation of conditionally registered programmes of private HE institutions
Initiative to institute national quality assurance (1999 onwards)	Work towards establishment of infrastructure for HEQC and the launch of HEQC Development of policy framework for quality assurance in HE Work towards new system, criteria, processes, guidelines and manuals for programme accreditation in consultation with stakeholders Work to establish system of self-evaluations and institutional audits in consultation with stakeholders Initiation of quality promotion and capacity building initiatives and move to	HEQC formally launched in 2000 Release of draft and final policy *Founding Document* on quality assurance Release of *Accreditation Framework Discussion Document* and thereafter finalisation of a new accreditation system for implementation in 2005 Release of *Institutional Audit Framework Discussion Document* & thereafter criteria for Institutional Audits Institution of pilot audits of two public and one private institution in late 2003 with audits beginning in late 2004 One day visits by HEQC to all public HE institutions and a sample of private institutions around work of the HEQC and internal quality management systems of institutions Formation of national HEQC Quality Assurance Managers

	establish a Quality Assurance Innovation and Development Fund Initiative to develop processes and criteria for reviewing and re-accrediting all Master of Business Administration (MBA) programmes in consultation with MBA providers Project on quality assurance of research	Forum Establishment of a Teaching and Learning project to promote quality through developing good practice guides on a range of issues Training of audit chairs and panel members, of programme evaluators and HEQC staff Undertaking of re-accreditation of MBA programmes at all institutions using panels of specialist local and international evaluators Development of frameworks and criteria for quality assurance of research
Initiative in 1998 to consolidate and extend student financial aid to needy students	Passing of the *National Students Financial Aid Scheme Act* of 1999	Creation of a body to implement support for needy students Funds enlarged annually and support about 200 000 needy undergraduate students
Initiative in 1999 to develop new academic policy for the structure, duration and nomenclature of qualifications and programmes	Production in 2001 by CHE of *A New Academic Policy for Programmes and Qualifications in Higher Education* Discussion Document	Public comment and steps towards finalisation by the Ministry of New Academic Policy in 2003
Initiatives to bring colleges (education, agricultural and nursing) into the national higher education system (1998 onwards)	Task Team to effect incorporation of all education colleges into universities and technikons Task Teams to examine agricultural and nursing colleges	No more independent colleges of education - incorporated into universities and technikons Reports produced - no final decisions on future
Initiatives on restructuring the HE institutional landscape (1999 onwards)	Ministry request to CHE to provide advice on restructuring the HE institutional landscape Release of CHE report: *Towards a New Higher Education Landscape: Meeting the Equity, Quality and Social Development Imperatives of South Africa in the 21st Century (2000)*	Extensive debate generated around proposals and restructuring Ministry response to CHE through its *National Plan for Higher Education* (2001): • Initiates mergers of some institutions • Establishes a National Working Group (NWG) to investigate and advise on appropriate arrangements to consolidate the provision of higher education on a regional basis through establishing

	Bill to amend *Higher Education Act* in 2001 to give the Minister power to set scope of provision by public and private institutions NWG releases its report (2002) *The Restructuring of the Higher Education System in South Africa* - proposes to reduce current 36 institutions to 21 through mergers, though with no loss of sites of provision Ministry considers public submissions and CHE advice and submits proposals on institutional restructuring for Cabinet approval Ministry creates a Merger Unit and releases 'Guidelines' for merging institutions (early 2003) Ministry requests institutions to submit their proposed programme and qualification mixes and niche areas	new institutional and organisational forms, including the feasibility of reducing a number of higher education institutions. Amendment approved by Parliament Ministry releases its own slightly modified proposals on institutional restructuring and requests advice from CHE and public comments Government approves in late 2002 Ministry proposals to reduce the 36 public institutions to 21 through mergers and incorporations. New 'comprehensive' institution created through the mergers of a university and technikons Ministry processes submissions, releases for comment, and finalises qualification and programme mixes and niche areas for institutions
Initiative in 2000 around language policy for HE with request from Ministry for CHE advice	CHE produces policy advice report for Minister in 2001 Minister appoints a group to report specifically on the Afrikaans language in higher education	Ministry releases Language Policy for Higher Education in late 2002, based essentially on the CHE advice
Initiative around reviewing the NQF in HE (2001)	Ministry's of Education and Labour establish a Study Team to review the NQF in education CHE and various HE actors motivate for major changes in the implementation of the NQF in HE Study Team releases report on NQF, proposing certain major changes Ministry's of Education and Labour release consultative document on NQF establish a Study Team to review the NQF in education	Ministry's decisions awaited on NQF, and especially proposals for a 10 level NQF and for standards generation setting to be transferred from SAQA to the CHE

	CHE and various HE actors respond to consultative document	
Initiative to review co-operative governance in HE (2001)	CHE Task Team conducts investigation in light of various problems at numerous institutions CHE releases Research Report and Policy Report with some 20 recommendations for comment	Amendment to *Higher Education Act* in 2002 to reduce the size of Council's of institutions CHE advice to the Ministry in mid-2003, the bulk of which accepted by the Ministry
Ministry request to CHE for advice on various aspects of the provision of distance education in HE	CHE establishes a Task Team comprising national and international specialists which conducts investigations on a range of issues and calls for representations from all stakeholders	CHE advice to the Ministry in late 2003
Ministry request to CHE for advice on the nomenclature of proposed comprehensive institutions Ministry request to CHE for advice on the criteria and conditions for institutions to use the terms 'university', 'technikon', 'college' and to offer/award degrees and postgraduate qualifications	CHE advises Minister on the nomenclature of proposed comprehensive institutions CHE undertakes investigation and advises Minister in late 2003	Ministry accepts advice that all comprehensive institutions should provisionally be called universities and that final decisions should await the results of its investigation Ministry decides that previous technikons are to be renamed 'universities of technology'
CHE project to advise Minister on the General Agreement on Trade and Services and HE and claims made on South Africa by four countries	CHE initiates debate through its journal, *Kagisano*, and commissions work	CHE advice to the Ministry in preparation
Ministry proposes new goal-directed funding framework (2004)	Consultations with key stakeholders and advice by CHE	Ministry introduces new goal-directed funding framework with a migration plan over 3 years
Ministry releases discussion document on Higher Education Qualifications Framework (2004)	Consultations with key stakeholders and advice by CHE	Ministry decision pending
Ministry proposes new policy on admissions to higher education through the Further Education and Training Certificate (2005)	Consultations with key stakeholders and advice by CHE	Ministry introduces new National General Certificate
Ministry proposes enrolment planning for higher education institutions	Consultations with key stakeholders on proposed new funding framework; advice by CHE on proposed new funding framework	Ministry engagement with institutions