

Rethinking Transformation and Its Knowledge(s): The Case of South African Higher Education

Lis Lange¹

Abstract

The article argues that since the early days of the democratic transition in South Africa 'transformation' as a concept has lost its intellectual, political and moral content through becoming institutionalised. In order to undo the institutionalisation of transformation, it is necessary to explore its relationship to two types of knowledge: knowledge *for* transformation and knowledge *of* transformation. The paper argues that transformation at higher education institutions needs to be seen in the interface between knowledge for and knowledge of transformation.

Keywords: higher education; institutionalisation; knowledge; South Africa; transformation.

Introduction: Talking Transformation

Transformation must be the most used word in South African political discourse since the 1990s to this day. The inclusion of transformation in the recently published *New South African Keywords* (Shepherd and Robins, 2008) confirms the importance of this word in South Africa's political vocabulary and its vitality, as undoubtedly the meaning of 'transformation' shapes and is shaped by contemporary South African politics.² It may be possible, and it is certainly necessary, to write a history of the uses and meanings of transformation from the early 1990s to today. Accepting that the use of the word transformation became current at some point in the heady days of the negotiations between the banned ANC and the National Party it is possible to propose a very tentative periodisation

¹ Corresponding author: LangeML@ufs.ac.za

² Unfortunately the chapter dedicated to transformation in this book does not focus on a theorisation of transformation as a keyword and its analysis of transformation in higher education operates only at a descriptive level of what I call in this article the institutionalisation of transformation.

based on what was written about politics and policy in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Wolpe, 1991). It has to be said, however, that the different meanings and uses of transformation often overlap. This is a sign of both contestation between different sectors and political groupings within government and civil society about the meaning and uses of transformation, and different paces in policy making across sectors. From the unbanning of the ANC up to the regime change of 1994 the discourse on transformation centred on the conceptualisation of its meaning and on establishing transformation's conceptual and practical distance or nearness to revolution and compromise (Motala, 2005; Singh, 1992). This has been followed by what can be called an institutionalisation of transformation that started under the Mandela presidency and the first Mbeki presidency.

This process unfolded in a variety of ways and manifested itself differently in different areas of policy making: one was the necessary conversion of commissions' reports and green and white papers into policies and regulations that now needed to be concerned with the functioning of the state. The conceptual framework provided by these documents shows an attempt at specifying notions and practices of transformation in different areas. By necessity the legislation that followed as well as the implementation plans that gave expression to both legislation and policy frameworks, were concerned with the establishment of priorities, objectives, targets and timeframes for the achievement of discrete goals and objectives. A much studied example of the difficulties of the translation of transformation in the process of policy implementation in the area of higher education is the period that goes from the production of the National Commission on Higher Education's Report (1996), *A Framework for Transformation*, to the launch of the National Plan for Higher Education in 2001 (Badat, 2009; Cloete et al, 2005; Cloete and Moya, 2005; Jansen, 2001; Seehoole, 2005). The debate about whether and to what extent policy implementation betrayed crucial aspects of transformation is proof of the conceptual and political complexity of the notion of transformation itself.

Another form of the institutionalisation of transformation was the tacit acceptance of a 'common sense' notion of transformation that played an ideological role separating progressive from non-progressive people, and, more narrowly, ANC supporters from those who were not. Common sense transformation also provided a shorthand ideological definition for a variety of political *aggiornamento* that was embraced by public and private institutions and their leaders, who washed in the river of transformation their Apartheid sins. Yet another aspect of the institutionalisation of transformation was its becoming a market

gimmick; the magic word that, added to the title of conferences and university curricula, was meant to attract greater numbers of attendees and enrolments and with them greater revenue. The pinnacle of the institutionalisation of transformation as a common sense notion was its functioning as a kind of state ideology that guarantees that all actions of a government voted on a 'transformative ticket' are in themselves transformative.

The final phase in the institutionalisation of transformation was its entrance 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. From this perspective transformation needs to be measured, benchmarked, multiplied, squared, divided, exhibited in graphs and pie charts, monitored and reported on quarterly and annually, and has to be re-evaluated and meta-evaluated each decade. Thus, transformation has, contradictorily, become simultaneously the leitmotif of the latest version of the master narrative of the South African struggle for liberation and codified information in a more postmodern conception of knowledge that reminds one of Lyotard's (1984) report on knowledge.

I would like to argue that in the process of translating evolving political arguments into policy making, the intellectual, political and moral elements that seem to have shaped the conceptualisation of transformation in the early 1990s were reduced and oversimplified. Crucial aspects of this reduction were the elimination of paradox and contradiction in the concept and the establishment of one accepted register of what transformation was. This was accompanied by the development of notions of transformation that were sector-based and whose conceptualisation did not take into account the broader social constraints within which sector-specific transformation took place. The latter meant that the transformation of South Africa was narrowed down in the policy texts and in the corresponding implementation strategies to the transformation of higher education, the schools system, the judiciary, the media, etc., without keeping an eye on the structural conditions that might accelerate, slow down, halt or make impossible social transformation of any depth (for an example of the opposite see Unterhalter et al., 1991). Put differently, the sector-specific notion of transformation has delayed (or postponed indefinitely) political analysis of the obstacles that exist 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 how the interdependence between these operates.³

The intellectual, political and moral reduction of transformation was further aided by the need for accountability. Because government and social institutions are, rightly, accountable for their promises, transformation had to be measured and demonstrated. In this context, although not devoid of substance in its origins, 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, professions, positions, education, etc. Very few, if any, other variables like class, sexual orientation, and disability made it into the statistical cut, and the overall orientation of institutions and policies tends to fall under the radar of a more nuanced sense of transformation.⁴ This is partially due to the fact that quantitative evidence is comparatively easy to handle, it is homogenous, it is amenable to becoming part of system-level data sets that provide comparative measurements and help to set time-bound performance targets for individual departments, institutions etc. In this process, unsurprisingly given South Africa's colonial and Apartheid past, transformation seems to have been reduced to equity. One problem with this approach is that, although demographic quantification has an important role to play in serious attempts to understand societal change, it is often the case that even when numbers denounce existing outrageous inequalities, taken by themselves they hide institutions' inability to interrogate transformation itself.

Transformation is something that different social and state institutions need to do and demonstrate and the rush of the performance becomes an obstacle for any attempt at testing whether the notions underpinning proposed indicators can resist closer intellectual, political and moral examination. This becomes particularly true when the focus is turned to the transformation of institutions and organisations. Performance-oriented transformation does not deal well with the complexities of social, organisational or personal change. Quantitative evidence is a necessary point of entry for an interrogation of what constitutes transformation; what its intellectual, political and moral bases are in different institutional contexts. Yet, if

³ 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 rather a consequence of the conditions of the political settlement of 1994. See Mamdani, 2013.

⁴ An inevitable contemporary reference to this is the debate generated by the transformation index proposed by the Transformation Oversight Committee appointed by the Minister of Higher Education and Training. See Govinder and Makgoba, 2013; Govinder et al., 2013, and the responses by Cloete, 2014; Dunne, 2014; Moutrie and Dorrington, 2014.

Rethinking Transformation and Its Knowledge(s)

the analysis remains on the surface of the quantitative evidence, effecting change becomes difficult and perfunctory.

With this as a backdrop this paper proposes to open up the notion of transformation to scrutiny from the perspective of knowledge. I would like to argue that transformation, whatever social sector is examined, implies and derives a variety of knowledge(s) which usually are neither explicit nor systematically examined institutionally. In this regard, I contend that there is knowledge *for* transformation (the knowledge that needs to be produced in order to make change possible), and that there is knowledge *of* transformation (which is the knowledge we generate about transformation itself). The absence of a systematic examination of this knowledge(s) has four important consequences for the theorisation and implementation of transformation: a) as already mentioned, it reduces transformation to quantifiable evidence; b) it creates the possibility of accepted orthodoxies of what is the 'right' transformation that functions in relation to some generic performance indicators disregarding history and context; c) it eschews politics in the life of institutions and people in the sense that it prevents engagement and deliberation as to what constitutes transformation, when and why, and what constitutes consensus for action with a view to its implementation; and d) it isolates South Africa from broader debates about knowledge and social justice that operate against the grain of accepted orthodoxies.

Finally, I would argue that knowledge for and of transformation in a reciprocal relationship in which the one cannot exist without the other if the objective is to effect change. This relationship, as well as the kind of skills and dispositions that the production of these knowledge(s) requires, needs to be examined if we are to understand better the tensions, contradictions and risks (and probably limits) of institutional and organisational transformation. In this paper I analyse the knowledge(s) for and of transformation and the relation between them, focusing on South African public universities, but I believe that a similar analysis could be attempted in other social sectors and institutions, and, possibly, in other contexts, since the problem of change and social justice implicit in 'our' notion of transformation is far from being only a South African problem.

Defining Transformation

Since it is not possible here to enter into a full discussion of the different meanings of transformation, I am proposing one understanding of transformation on which I will base the

rest of my analysis. I take the debate in the early 1990s as can be read in the issues of the South African journal *Transformations*, and in particular Singh's (1992) contribution to the debate, as my point of departure because at that particular moment 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. This was especially important after the unbanning of political parties and the release of Nelson Mandela on 2 February 1990. The notion that the democratic movement had 'moved from the politics of protest to the politics of transformation' (Singh, 1992: note 2, 58) not only underscored a sense of nearness to democratic elections and a freely elected government, but underscored the idea that an eventual ANC government had to make a break with the colonial and Apartheid legacy, then still actively present, by changing the social relations that determined people's place in society and their access to resources in the broadest sense.

What was clear at that time was that in most areas of social, political and economic life, transformation in South Africa meant a change in the nature of society that clearly marked a break with the Apartheid past. Important for today's discussion of transformation is the realisation that what needs to be transformed and the direction of that transformation are not static: they are both contextual and dynamic, thus transformation needs to be redefined historically in each case. Put more starkly, transformation in higher education does not mean the same in 2014 that it meant in 1992. The actual achievement of, for example, access and redress, at least in relation to some aspects of higher education, mean that transformation in 2014 needs to be redefined in terms of ever more conceptually sophisticated and politically radical goals.⁵ Transformation today has to be thought in terms of, for example, equity in student success and outcomes and the inclusivity of socio-cultural and pedagogic institutional spaces. This means that, as Singh (1992: 49) suggested, the very notion of transformation in South Africa entails keeping on asking about the subject, the object, the means and the motives of transformation in each area of society where it is proclaimed or sought.

This open definition allows two important theoretical and political manoeuvres: first, it makes possible to say that twenty years later the subject and the object of transformation are in many respects different from those that constituted the centre-piece of the debate

⁵ As a matter of fact a careful analysis of policy development and implementation in higher education between 1995 and 2010 shows that policy proceeded in an aggregative manner, with increasing layers of complexity and demand being added to the already defined parameters of transformation. See Lange, 2012b.

before the new government took office. Today the country is dealing with societal ills and problems that are either a consequence of a lack of structural transformation in areas that were clearly seen two decades ago, or are totally new problems brought about by changes in the economy and society that were not envisioned in the early 1990s. Secondly, we can argue that no sector of the state, education included, can be seen in isolation from the broader transformation of society, the means used to achieve it, and the motives to pursue transformation.

With the ground cleared in terms of contextualisation and definitions, I proceed to develop the main argument of this paper in two sections. I will first explore what knowledge for transformation entails, what its components are and how they relate to each other. In the second section I will take a similar approach to deal with the knowledge of transformation and its relationship with knowledge of transformation and the implications that this has for staff, students, management and leadership at universities. Finally, in the conclusion I will pose some questions about the meaning of the knowledge(s) of transformation for the manner in which universities deal with accountability and reporting matters to government.

Knowledge(s) for Transformation

What are the knowledge(s) for transformation? I would like to argue that there are three types of knowledge that are the bases for transformation at universities: knowledge of the self; knowledge of knowledge; and knowledge of the other. Each of these knowledge(s) has a history in the sense that they have been developed through decades and often centuries; they have rules of formation and possibility that determine what can be thought and done by whom and what cannot be thought and done. These rules are sometimes tacit, as is the case with traditions and institutional cultures that need to be explored to gain knowledge of the institutional self. Sometimes these rules are explicit and enforced through visible authorities. This is the case with disciplinary knowledge that is subject to the authority of peer review and a variety of forms of approval and endorsement. This said, it is important to remember that neither type of knowledge is totally tacit or totally public. Thus there are forms of codification of institutional culture and tradition and there are tacit rules about knowledge formation in the disciplines. As we will see in the relevant section, knowledge of the other also operates between codification and unexamined tacit assumptions.

I contend that in order to get out of the four unfortunate consequences of the adoption of a performative view of transformation, mentioned above, we need to undertake a historical- sociological analysis of these three types of knowledge that will provide contextual depth and historical perspective to develop a richer notion of transformation. The importance of the three types of knowledge of transformation and the urgency to examine them in the light of the call made in the White Paper 3 that ‘(...) all existing practices, institutions and values are viewed anew and rethought in terms of their fitness for the new era’ (DoE, 1997: 1.1), has been 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 (hereafter Soudien Report). Each type of knowledge identified here could be the focus of an individual paper. In this paper I am not attempting to provide a comprehensive perspective of each of them, but to sketch out what they entail and how it is possible to think about them.

Knowledge of the Self

What I call knowledge of the self is the knowledge of each one of the public universities in South Africa and the manner in which these institutions understood their identity as universities. The implications of this statement are multiple. All South African universities have, as universities do, a history, a series of institutional memories, accepted behaviours, ways of thinking that are as old as the institutions themselves. They are manifested not only in the public presentation of universities to society, but in the inner workings of governance structures, student residences, language policies, support services, alumni associations, etc. This knowledge is usually tacit; it is transmitted from generation to generation in tea rooms, staff meetings, senate and committee meetings, Student Representative Council elections, institutional symbols and rituals. Tradition and institutional culture are the ethnographic language that encapsulates subtle but important variations in the manner in which history, memory, behaviour and thinking combine and manifest themselves at different levels and structures within one university, with important variations from institution to institution.

In many respects organisations are living organisms whose personalities, traumas, pathologies and neurosis can be identified. Yet this knowledge, this sedimentation of the institutional being in 100, fifty, thirty years of history, is seldom examined. It is important to indicate that this analysis of the institutional self cannot be based on a notion of the university

as monolithic. On the contrary, internal contradictions, variations and layered interpretations of the same events are pervasive at all institutions. There have been in South Africa a number of interesting attempts at grappling with aspects of this complexity that have explored cultural, political and intellectual dissonance at different universities, for example, Jansen, 2009a; Lalu and Murray, 2012; and Steyn and 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 there is a mixture of historical continuity and discontinuity in the discourse about the institutional self that operates vociferously or silently, depending on the case. The very rewriting of missions and visions of universities from 1990s onwards is an interesting indicator of the manner in which these continuities and discontinuities operate and deserves some attention in the menu of research projects on South African higher education.

What is examined and what is not examined when dealing with the historical development of a university is no less interesting and important than the examination of the construction of memory at societal level. The classification of South African universities initiated with colonialism, ‘perfected’ under Apartheid and redeployed under democratic rule not only oversimplifies the complexity of each university but brushes over the historical importance of institutional self-definition, political positioning, participation in and constitution of networks, and access to human resources. To put current practices in far too stark terms, either the past goes unexamined in the avoidance of confronting thinking and practices that might indicate institutional support for today’s unacceptable behaviour and ideas (historically Afrikaans universities), or the past goes unexamined in the glorification of the opposition to racism or in the direct support of the struggle against Apartheid (historically English and historically black universities respectively). Yet, if something came out of the Soudien Report it is how every university in South Africa is part of and complicit with some form of unacceptable behaviour supported by tradition, culture and politics whether tacit or spelt out, whether conscious or unconscious. The lack of a systematic exploration of this knowledge of the self results in the creation of classificatory categories that allow for simplistic moral and political judgements and that stifle self-examination and change. We have historically black and historically white institutions, historically liberal, historically Afrikaans institutions and more recently ‘transformed institutions’ to which judgements of right or wrong, good or bad, are easily attached, based on uni-dimensional conceptions of the institutional self.

I contend that complex, critical and analytical excavation of the multiple layers of and perspectives on the knowledge of the institutional self is a necessary condition to start thinking about transformation. This, however, cannot be reduced to a public confession of past sins in order to attain the absolution of transformation. What I am arguing for is more akin to psychoanalysis than to Catholic confession. A knowledge of the self reduced to the surfacing of the past is not useful for transformation purposes. The past matters not only as a memory of what was, but matters in its connection to the present, in what it does to the possibility of being today and tomorrow. In this sense the past needs to be deconstructed in its actuality. This entails exploring the extent to which traditions, institutional cultures, and different sense of self(s) constitute obstacles to inclusivity and democracy. This necessitates the development of methodologies of social research to identify, examine and probe collectively the various images and representations of the institutional self and the manifestation of institutional cultures in traditions and ingrained behaviours. A final aspect of the surfacing of this knowledge is the ability of the researcher and the 'researched' institution to make self-examination a way of being. The combination of research and self-examination needs to address the notion that no university in South Africa was neutral under Apartheid. On the contrary, colonial and Apartheid universities had different set purposes and different relationships to the state, society and Apartheid's political project. All of this aided the constitution of institutional cultures, social and intellectual orientations, and the development of relationships between internal constituencies in the past and in the present. The next step in a conscious and purposeful process of change and self-examination is to determine the relationship between historical choices and the future of the universities. 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 groundbreaking 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).

The serendipity of the skull discovery at the University of Stellenbosch was only possible because already under way was a systematic investigation focused on the history of the department of anthropology at the institution. The possibility of exploring racism in science at this university, and imperial colonialism (racism) in science at others, has a transformative import if the research is able to find the consequences that this conceptualisation of knowledge had for daily life in tea rooms, senates, residences and dining halls and how it affected staff and students over time. The example of *volkekunde* at the University of Stellenbosch introduces the importance of intellectual history and the sociology of knowledge in the examination of transformation at our universities.⁶ It is to this that the next section of this paper now turns.

Knowledge of Knowledge

Knowledge of knowledge is probably the more obvious type of knowledge one expects to find at universities. It is possible to argue that in the last three decades most universities in the world have examined the knowledge they teach and produce in the context of greater demands for accountability from government and society and in terms of universities’ responsiveness to the knowledge economy. Concepts of graduateness, work-readiness, innovation, etc. have permeated institutional strategies and action plans. Yet, this is not the knowledge that the notion of ‘knowledge of knowledge’ refers to. Knowledge of knowledge refers to the epistemological foundations of the disciplines and professions which are represented at different universities (Foucault, 1980, 2000 and 2011; Messer-Davidow et al., 1993).

Knowledge of knowledge entails the critical examination of the core functions of the university: teaching and learning and research. In the area of teaching and learning the focus of this critical exploration has to be the curriculum and the manner in which it reflects the current state of the disciplinary and professional knowledge that students need to have. Yet,

⁶ On this particular theme see Jansen’s (2009b) analysis of curriculum at the University of Pretoria.

curricular reflection has to go further than this. It has to investigate whether and how the knowledge and thinking invested in professional or general formative courses serve to maintain disciplinary/professional and social status quos. Curriculum review has to look at whether and how the vocabulary and the content of what is being taught is imbued with racist, colonial, sexist accounts of the social and natural worlds that go unexamined. The critique of the curriculum should also turn the lens on the contribution that teaching and learning makes to the tangible and intangible goals of South Africa's democracy. The same type of issues needs to be investigated in relation to the research enterprise. Producing knowledge of knowledge in relation to the research core function requires the critical examination of research agendas, the manner of postgraduate education; the relationship between researchers and 'researched communities', and of course the examination of the paradigms and epistemologies defining the very issues to be researched. The examination of knowledge of knowledge should allow South African universities to understand whether they are conserving inherited patterns of thinking that maintain privilege in and outside academia, or if on the contrary they are producing graduates who will make a contribution to the possibility of social justice in the country (Leibowitz, 2012a).

These kinds of issues cannot be tackled through the production of demographic profiles of academic staff only. While no transformation can take place without changing the demographic status quo at each university, this is not a sufficient condition for knowledge renewal. It does not matter how many black and women professors an institution can produce for statistical purposes if the knowledge they create and transmit is not challenged in terms of its social epistemology, in terms of 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 and Lucas, 2008; Giroux, 2013; Odora Hoppers and Richards, 2011) this intellectual disposition needs to be modeled 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 legitimation to unexamined, self-satisfied and essentialised knowledge, whether Eurocentric-, post-colonial- or Indigenous Knowledge Systems-framed. In this regard it seems important to challenge the very boundaries of the disciplinary knowledge we are dealing with. The epistemological expansion and exploration of gaps and bridges in the conceptualisation of the natural and social world proposed by the European Science Foundation in its report on the future of knowledge seems an interesting place to look at. From a different perspective it might also be useful to explore the extent to

which South Africa's post-colonial condition and location is taken seriously when it comes to the design of curriculum and the setting of research agendas.

In relation to knowledge of knowledge, the institutionalisation of transformation presents universities with the highest risk for their dynamic development: the risk of seeing transformation as a place of arrival that, therefore, requires the suspension of critique, offering instead a new orthodoxy, the price of which is the depoliticisation of knowledge, and the death of the university as a place of contestation and public debate.

The depoliticisation of knowledge has two dimensions: one arises from the demobilisation of debate and enquiry brought about by canonical notions of transformed knowledge or of right knowledge. In this context, doubt, disagreement and argument are seen as morally wrong and anti-transformation (Giroux, 2007; Said, 1993). The other dimension of the depoliticisation is the disengagement of knowledge from its potential capacity to transform the world and the role of individuals in this transformation (Arendt, 2006; Disch, 1994; Lange, 2012a).

Knowledge of the Other

It is impossible to deal in this section with the full philosophical, sociological and pedagogical complexities of the notion of 'the other' and knowledge of the other. There is a wealth of local and international literature that deals with this from the point of view of education, which is the focus of this paper. Leibowitz (2012) has recently provided an interesting and comprehensive conceptual map of the different component elements of the issue of self, identity and the other in higher education as well as of the literature that supports different interpretations of the issue.

The point of departure of 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 had in the constitution of the individual identities of students and staff at different 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 also has contributed to the development of frozen notions of individual identity and of the identity of the other. The massive expansion of higher education since the 1990s together with the dismantling of

Apartheid legislation resulted in changes in the social, linguistic, and cultural make up of all universities in a variety of ways. These changes affect students as well as staff.

Although there is wide variation in the details of the student and staff profiles at South African universities, what is true is that the overall look and feel of most universities has changed dramatically in the last twenty years. In the face of this there have been a variety of responses. Some universities have developed laudable programmes and approaches to deal with the need to learn ‘to be and live with others’. Yet, as the Soudien Report indicates, ‘every single institution in the country is experiencing difficulties and facing challenges in being both transformative and successful’ (2008:116).

At the root of these challenges and difficulties are issues of identity of the self and knowledge of the other. Here the self has two manifestations. One manifestation is the individual, the self of academics, support and administrative staff, and the self of individual students at universities. The other is institutional and refers to the identities that operate at different levels of the university (department, faculty, etc).

A study commissioned by the Higher Education Quality Committee, based on the information gathered through institutional audits, showed how inaccurate and unexamined conceptualisations and perceptions of students jeopardise effective teaching and learning. These same conceptualisations create communication gaps and prevent the possibility of students being ‘at home’ at their universities. Lack of hospitality and a sense of being 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 with the institutional self, however defined.

Institutions are still struggling with ‘established knowledge’ of the other that is not only an impediment to institutional change but which also jeopardises the possibility of new pedagogies and different results of education as much as different institutional cultures. It is important to note that, the mere fact that we can say that ‘established knowledge’ is a problem, implies that there is also a shift that allows institutions and their members to confront their knowledge of themselves and the other. The important research coming out of the Universities of the Western Cape and Stellenbosch (Leibowitz et al., 2012) suggests that it is possible to confront frozen knowledge about the other as a pedagogical approach that focuses on students’ relationships with each other and staff’s relationships with students and among themselves.

Knowledge of the other is a necessary component in changing teaching practice not only in the sense of improving the effectiveness of teaching and learning and responding to the current problems about student success (Scott, et al., 2007). Knowledge of the other has a role to play in higher education fulfilling its responsibility in relation to the construction of a democratic society and the development of critical citizenship. Its opposite, ignorance of the other, has two particularly pernicious consequences: one is personal distance; this is not the physical and personal distance derived from teaching large classes, but the distance that arises from one's inability to find empathy, to imagine the position of the other and through it, as Arendt (2005) would have it, to understand and act accordingly. The second lamentable consequence is the ineffectiveness of the teaching that takes place when the assumptions about the other are wrong. This happens either because academics misjudge and undervalue the possibility of learning that students have, in which case mediocrity becomes the new name of discrimination, or because academics cannot challenge their own conceptualisation 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 holds on to the blunt and anaesthetic value of success rates. In turn this closes off the examination of knowledge of the other as well as knowledge of knowledge and how students and academics are placed in relation to them both.

There are a number of expressions of knowledge of the other that need examination. Among this, the examination of the inherited knowledge of the other takes pride of place because it manifests itself daily in the cultural, social and linguistic interactions that take place in different institutional spaces from the administration to the classroom; from the tearoom to the senate; from the sports fields to the residences. We require a profound examination of knowledge of the other to develop pedagogies ready to disrupt images of the student and the lecturer as well as established notions of cultural capital and its value. Only if these kinds of engagements take place would it be possible to operationalise notions of access, equity and redress that go beyond demographic replacement.

Knowledge of Transformation

The knowledge of transformation refers to the knowledge of the process of transformation at institutional level and as such raises a number of questions about the nature and function of this knowledge. How does the university know about itself? Who initiates and who

documents the historic-sociological exploration of the three knowledge domains discussed above? Who brings together the relationship between these three knowledge(s)? Who acts on the knowledge of transformation?

The generation of knowledge about the university is a management decision. The need to generate knowledge of transformation stems from a leadership decision to effect and monitor change. Yet, for this to be of any use, it has to be accompanied by a shared understanding of its strategic, pedagogic and political importance. As a management responsibility the generation of knowledge of transformation falls with the office responsible for institutional research. The role of this office is to generate or collate knowledge for transformation in order to produce knowledge of transformation and, in this sense, to present the university with a mirror in which to look at itself. Thus both looking at how the knowledge(s) for transformation are deployed into change at each university and pointing out and initiating the production of knowledge for transformation should be part of the role of institutional research offices.

This said, it is important to note that institutional research 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, as quality assurance before it, are the offspring of the progressive bureaucratisation of higher education which 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) has observed that two of the consequences of the rise of the evaluative state were (i) the introduction of routinised evaluation focused on outcomes as part of the regular reporting of universities to the state and (ii) the creation of a variety of specialised bodies with functions in relation to the development of policy frameworks, the implementation of policy, and the interpretation and verification of information. This was reproduced at the level of the institutions themselves. In South Africa, as elsewhere, institutional research or management information offices mushroomed at most universities as a consequence of the state's, or state agencies', drive for policy implementation. More interesting, this process marked the rise of a new type of knowledge in higher education: institutional knowledge, and a new class of professional managers (Rhoades and Maldonado, 2007) who have as their responsibility the gathering, interpretation and dissemination of knowledge about the university to be used for reporting purposes, but also as part of the performance management of academics and as steering mechanisms in the implementation of universities' strategic plans.

There is a difference between the institutional knowledge to which Rhoades and Maldonado refer and the knowledge of transformation being argued for in this paper. The difference is in the conceptualisation of the knowledge itself, in its purpose, in the manner of its utilisation and in the actors involved in its production and use. Put differently, not all institutional knowledge is knowledge of transformation and not all knowledge attributed a transformational dimension in its name is capable of producing insight about transformation.

The knowledge of transformation is, like the conceptualisation of transformation adopted in this paper, contextual, contradictory and changeable. It is supported by the notion that change in the knowledge(s) for transformation is a slow and difficult process that addresses structural issues that do not only belong to higher education but that reflect the broader state of the society. The purpose of the knowledge of transformation is both to understand and to bring about change and, in this sense, it does not always result in (right) decision making or serve to measure individual performance. On the contrary, knowledge of transformation is often 'measuring' incommensurable educational and institutional processes, and as such cannot be but tentative. Knowledge of transformation consists of the aggregation and combination of the knowledge for transformation and its re-interpretation. In this sense, knowledge of transformation operates across a variety of disciplinary fields and is not independent from disciplinary theoretical and methodological debates. This means that institutional offices cannot produce knowledge of transformation based on narrow statistical parameters but have to be conversant with the relevant disciplines that permit an understanding of 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. These tools have an important and necessary role to play in the accountability chain of which universities are rightly part. However, 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. Even if institutional research offices produce 10-year trends in a variety of data points, transformation cannot be frozen in numbers. Under these trends there are individual and institutional stories that are messy, contradictory and paradoxical.

The knowledge of transformation can help institutions to keep open the dialogue about transformation. The knowledge of transformation and its open, passionate, difficult, unruly discussion is what keeps transformation from depoliticisation. It is what allows

universities to find new avenues and strategies for change as well as new areas to change. Knowledge of transformation to be effective requires a devolved leadership that is capable of operating within the risks of democratic deliberation. In this sense, institutional research offices need to consider the importance of establishing productive relationships and partnerships with staff and students (Lange, 2014). This might mean relinquishing the control in the production of knowledge of transformation both at the level of conceptualisation and execution and in terms of its dissemination, interrogation and utilisation.

Knowledge of transformation has as a necessary but not sufficient condition knowledge for transformation, yet both of them would not be able to ‘deliver’ transformation at higher education institutions unless they are shared, discussed, confronted, acknowledged 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, top management, policies, transformation committees, quality assurance regimes, etc, can have at the coalface, whether this is student residences, departmental meetings, lecture halls or social media. Distributed leadership is probably what is needed given the demand to manage simultaneously staff, students, systems, external pressure, internal conflict and power relations, not to mention scarce resources and competition over them. It remains a question with multiple answers: how to balance central and distributed leadership in an institutional process and what kind of leadership at both these levels is necessary to galvanise people into knowing, understanding and acting. It is also important to note that institutional transformation is often resisted, opposed and boycotted in a variety of strategic institutional points (departments, faculties, senates). In this case, devolved leadership becomes all the more important in order to identify change agents away from the managerial centre.

Finally, it is important to understand that institutional transformation has as its structural limit the depth and direction of the transformation of society. This should not be taken as an excuse to stop change or to absolve universities for not pushing further; it is simply a reminder that in the big scheme of social change and social justice universities are but one part.

Conclusion

In this paper I have situated the discussion about higher education transformation in the broader context of the history of transformation as a political concept in South Africa since the early 1990s. I have proposed that to analyse institutional transformation in higher education it is necessary to examine two types of knowledge: knowledge for transformation and knowledge of transformation. In doing this, I have counterposed the notion of transformation as performance with a complex notion of change that involves a critical investigation of knowledge of the self, knowledge of knowledge and knowledge of the other. I have argued further that it is the task of universities themselves and, in particular, of their institutional research offices, to bring these three knowledge(s) together in order to produce knowledge of transformation. A knowledge of transformation produced collectively can then act as a logbook and compass for the management of change. I have suggested that given the complexity of organisational change and of the knowledge(s) for and of transformation, a sophisticated and deeply democratic balance between central and distributed leadership might be necessary conditions for both the production of this knowledge and bringing about transformation.

If this is what needs to happen at universities and is what some institutions are in fact concerned with currently, how should this way of thinking impact on the exercise of accountability between higher education institutions and the national government?

The last two years have been marked by a rather acrimonious process of confrontation between institutions and the Department of Higher Education and Training apropos of new reporting regulations for universities. Perhaps the question that the higher education sector has failed to ask is to what extent do the new reporting regulations with their performance-driven approach advance change in higher education and support transformation. This lack of questioning might be a consequence of two complementary problems: government's authoritarian embrace of common sense transformation and its ability to enforce it, and institutions' inability to critically confront their lack of transformation in the complex sense proposed here.

It seems to me that the overly managerialist orientation of the new reporting system runs the risk of encouraging ever more compliance oriented approaches to transformation and constitute a serious obstacle for the possibility, even remote, of government adopting a form of distributed leadership in relation to the higher education sector.

Bionote

Lis Lange is the Director of Institutional Research and Academic Planning at the University of the Free State. Prior to that she was involved in quality assurance for higher education institutions at the Council on Higher Education at the national level. Her research interests include quality assurance and academic planning, as well as critical pedagogy, sustainability in higher education and the philosophy of education.

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Lange

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