

**Contradictory transformations: observations on the intellectual dynamics of  
South African universities**

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## **ABSTRACT**

What sort of expectations of transformation of higher education have been aroused by liberation movements? Has the new South Africa fulfilled such expectations? This paper explores the promises and processes that have enveloped South African universities in recent decades. It focuses on the underlying assumptions shaping academic disciplines in the humanities, the debates contesting them and the social-political-economic movements encompassing them. It traces the impact of marxism, africanism, postmodernism and neoliberalism on the production of knowledge. It concludes that South African universities are caught up in a complex field forces where they are subject to conflicting pressures. The result is a state of contradictory transformations – one stemming from the politics of liberation and the other from the demands of the global market.

It was the hope stirred by the prospect of significant social transformation that lured me to South Africa. The release of prisoners, the first democratic elections and the inauguration of a new president received massive international attention. Then it was supposed to be happily ever after and the world's media rushed off to other parts of the world. I wanted to know what happened next. What did the new South Africa mean in terms of the long march through all the institutions of society? How was everyday life different? How were health care, housing, education, media, literature different? How was higher education, the sector in which I worked myself, being transformed? What did the project of academic transformation mean for disciplines such as philosophy, sociology, history and interdisciplinary areas such as African studies, cultural studies, gender studies, subaltern studies? I decided to use my coming sabbatical to investigate.

The new South Africa came into the world bearing so much hope. Not only the hopes of millions within for houses, for health, for human life on a new level, but hopes of the wider world for something new on the stage of history. That was what I sought from South Africa.

Much anticipation built up in me as I prepared for my first trip there. I had been part of a powerful upsurge of progressive forces, both on the campuses and on the streets, in earlier decades, but could not avoid a sense of massive disappointment and defeat in subsequent decades. I struggled on, but on more difficult terrain. With the erosion of the energetic debates over the big issues of our times that had filled the previous years, with the fading social memory of all the teach-ins, radical caucuses, alternative courses, provocative publications, I asked what had happened to the whole atmosphere of being challenged to reconceptualise the world and to change it. Where had it gone? Would it ever come again?

Waves of change had opened up the world and then seemed to close it down again. Various liberation movements had been either defeated or diverted by victory. The new left was overtaken by the new right. Countervailing centres of power in the world collapsed along with their alternative academic institutions that were much more interesting than the rest of the world imagined. While many cheered the demise of these movements and these flawed experiments in socialism, others felt a profound sense of loss.

In the midst of all this came indications of something going the other way in South Africa, somewhere where our side would win. Prisoners were released, exiles returned, underground organisations came above ground, negotiations commenced and a liberation movement prepared for power. From afar, I watched and had high hopes of a new kind of social transformation, something that came from the movements that reshaped power and knowledge in the last century, but knew now the blind alleys and pitfalls and could stake out new paths. It was apparent that it was a historical compromise, that there would be no expropriation of the expropriators, but it held promise of a massive transformation of the state and many institutions of civil society nevertheless.

For years I had periods of intense interest in Africa: reading African novels, mixing with exiles, stepping up my activity in the anti-apartheid movement, grasping for every scrap of information about southern Africa (in the days when googling was an unimaginable verb). When the academic boycott was lifted and it finally became possible to go to South Africa, I waited until I could go most meaningfully. I took a long time to prepare so that I could make the most of it. I read online SA newspapers, surfed SA university websites, ordered SA books from abroad, sent megabytes of e-mail making contacts. By the time I was ready to go, I knew an almost unnatural amount about some place that I had never been. However, I still had more to discover than I could possibly have realised before I went. I had internalised the ANC-in-exile version of SA history to an extent that I only began to realise with my increasing exposure to other versions, other intellectual and political traditions (including others on the left), other subcultures, other sections of the population.

Arriving was exhilarating. The sheer physical presence of a place that had lived so long in my imagination was invigorating. I could hardly sleep at night in the beginning, so stimulated was I by the people I was meeting, the texts I was reading, the social rhythms I was experiencing. As it unfolded, the reality of South Africa was both delightful and disturbing. There was the lush beauty of the mountains against the sky framing the stark poverty of squalid informal settlements on the cape flats. There was the grandeur of devil's peak as I ascended the campus of University of Cape Town, lifted by the iconography of

transformation, disrupted by the perturbing presiding presence of Cecil John Rhodes honouring the imperial vision of an empire stretching from Cape to Cairo. There were communists in the cabinet, but the society pages showed them wining and dining up at the castle celebrating the knighthood of Anthony O'Reilly. There were faces of many colours and voices in many languages articulating many points of view in the media, but the Independent group dominated the newspaper scene.

The new South Africa was a *mélange* of mixed signals. It was a playground for the world's rich and famous to come and rub shoulders with Mandela and invest their conspicuous consumption with the aura of a liberation movement, while those who were supposed to be liberated still lived in shacks made of rubbish and fainted from hunger.

This cycle of delight and disappointment continued unabated as time went on and one trip followed another. I came to expect it. It wasn't as if I had not experienced it any other place that I had ever been. It wasn't as if I hadn't already seen the contradictions before I ever came. Still I saw everything in such sharp relief. Things that others hardly noticed or let pass without reading much into them seemed extremely significant to me and I couldn't understand why I detected no reaction. Was I the only one to feel a jolt whenever I passed a statute of Rhodes? Even before I came, for example, watching on television the elections and first days of the new South Africa, I felt a profound disappointment when the first words that Nelson Mandela spoke as president of the Republic of South Africa were 'Your royal highnesses...' Nevertheless, when I read John Pilger's "A revolution betrayed" (1998) and John Saul's "Cry for the beloved country" (2001), I resisted their conclusions. I wanted to believe the best of the ANC. I had been loyal to it for so long. Others had given so much, their very lives, under its banner.

I was zeroing in on academe, but always trying to see it in socio-historical context. I spoke to many academics and read many academic texts, but I also read newspapers and novels and autobiographies, listened to talk radio, watched news, current affairs and tv drama, visited museums, attended parliament and theatre, participated in meetings and demonstrations, shopped in markets and malls, had meaning-of-life and state-of-the-world talks with professors and politicians as well as expelled students, civil servants, trade union leaders, township activists, cleaning women. I grabbed at everything that might be a piece of the puzzle. In piecing together a picture of the present, I was constantly pushed back to the past, the past of the academy as well as the past of the society in which it was imbedded, often far further back into the past than I intended.

Radical historiography within the academy had played into the struggle for liberation and early transformation. The master narrative of apartheid had been overthrown and a new narrative was under construction, although it was far from agreed that there could be an agreed narrative. How could a way back be found to a truth of the past through so much repression, murder, brokenness, silence, deceit? How could a unified story come from such disparate points of view as African or Afrikaner nationalism, liberalism, marxism, feminism, postmodernism? This was a society actively reconstructing its past right the way back to the earliest time that could be reconstructed and doing so with every conceivable complexity of the contemporary conjuncture.

Events long past made their presence felt in the present with compelling force. South Africa was still, or perhaps only just, coming to terms with the absence-presence in the contemporary landscape of those who had originally occupied this land. The fateful encounter of the Khoisan with European merchants arriving on their shores had devastating consequences for these hunter-gatherers and herders. The belated encounter of the present with the past made museums and curricula sites of query and struggle. There was destabilisation of the display of Khoisan and Bantu peoples with the animals in the natural history museum while the cultural history museum assumed that culture and history began with the arrival of Europeans. The disputed diorama of a Khoisan camp in the Karoo disappeared. Other displays of Khoisan, Xhosa, Sotho, Zulu in primitive state were problematised with provocative questions and contemporary images.

Creole Cape Town was a revelation to me. I discovered that the various populations of assorted Europeans who came as conquerors or working immigrants, Asians who were imported as slaves, indigenous Bantu and Khoisan had mixed in a way that I had not known. The complexity of origin of cape coloureds, their hard labour, forced removals, apartheid alliances, cultural expressions and political movements came into my revision of history with every encounter with their legacies. I discovered that I was sleeping on top of a burial ground for slaves.

The iconic significance of two Khoisan women in the present conjuncture was fascinating. Krotoa-Eva, mediator-interpreter, mother of miscegenation, icon of fertile and tragic multiculturalism, inebriated outcast, was wrested from obscure references in the records of the Dutch East India Company to become a central figure in a new narrative of the nation. Sara Baartman, her original name nullified, abducted from Africa, exhibited in Europe, the Hottentot Venus, incarnation of commodification, who died prostituted and alone, her

genitalia displayed in a distant museum, was repatriated and buried in a national ritual of restoring respect to the disrespected.

Afrikaners too wanted a new representation of their past in the present as dramatised by the hit song/ video *De la Rey* with its diverse resonances and interpretations. Africans sang liberation songs in scenarios threatening those who came to power through their own liberation movement as the strains of *Umshini wami* reverberated around the courts.

With such prominence of the past in the present, with such ruptures in a narration of a nation and resurgence of repressed storylines, historians thought that their day had come. Not only historians, but all whose work addressed what was at stake in the transformation underway, saw themselves at the threshold of an era in which their endeavours could truly thrive.

The promise of people's education had been an integral part of the liberation movement. The freedom charter declared that 'the doors of learning and culture shall be opened'. Youth in many townships rose up against bantu education. Students and activists sought forbidden books that were precious and moved through underground circuits. In the trade unions and community organisations the role of political education and theoretical publications was considered crucial. Staff and students made universities sites of struggle, not only demanding access for the majority population, but challenging the curriculum and juxtaposing the dominant narrative of the nation with the counter-narratives of the subaltern.

The landscape of higher education was one 'largely dictated by the geo-political imagination of apartheid planners' (Asmal 1999) and had to be re-imagined. The three types of universities positioned themselves differently in term of political power and intellectual traditions. Each was rooted in specifically South African populations and traditions while intersecting with divergent international currents.

The Afrikaans universities – Stellenbosch, Pretoria, Rand Afrikaans, Free State, Potchefstroom - were fashioned in the mould of the volks university and functioned as bastions of intellectual justification of apartheid. Although an authoritarian atmosphere prevailed, and even rote learning practiced, there were also pockets of Socratic pedagogy, critical thinking and solid disciplinary traditions. Although Stellenbosch was the intellectual centre of Afrikaner nationalism, it also gave rise to intellectuals who questioned it as well as providing students with a solid grounding in the history of philosophy. The Afrikaans universities were inclined to the intellectual traditions of continental Europe, particularly Germany and Holland, whereas the English universities were grounded in Anglo-Saxon traditions. These universities – the Universities of Cape Town, the Witwatersrand, Rhodes

and Natal - saw themselves as Oxbridge in Africa and related more to British academic traditions than European continental ones. The intellectual orientation of English universities was to liberalism, empiricism, individualism, pluralism, secularism, whereas that of Afrikaans universities was more to conservatism, communitarianism, idealism, rationalism, romanticism, phenomenology. These universities were for whites, although some blacks and coloureds did get into the liberal ones, where there was some liberal resistance to apartheid.

For blacks and coloureds there were other universities, sometimes called 'bush colleges'. For blacks, there were the Universities of Zululand, Vista, Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda, the North and Fort Hare. For coloureds, there were the Universities of the Western Cape and Durban-Westville. Many of the teaching staff at these were educated at the Afrikaans universities but failed to achieve academic positions there. The intellectual agenda was an adaptation of that of Afrikaans universities, designed to educate these sections of the population for their prescribed role in the apartheid system, ie, to be bantustan administrators or teachers or doctors for their own people.

However, these universities did not play the role set out for them. They became hotbeds of resistance, particularly under the influence of the black consciousness movement. This brought the intellectual thrust of African traditions, particularly africanism, into a critique of both Afrikaner nationalism and English liberalism. It bore the marks of the emphasis on phenomenology and collectivity and consciousness in the Afrikaans and African universities, but connected these with influences of pan-africanism, negritude, post-colonialism and black power. Black consciousness, black pride, black power were substantively different rallying points from those of white liberalism, grounded in demands for individual human rights.

The ripples from this movement were felt throughout the university system and beyond. Black students broke from NUSAS (National Union of South African Students) to form SASO (South African Students' Organisation). It called into question the role and relevance of white liberals and radicals in the struggle against apartheid. Some such as the philosopher Richard Turner actively engaged with the movement and argued that it would be a serious mistake to accept that whites should simply shut up and leave the struggle to blacks. NUSAS, in response to the black consciousness movement, adopted an africanisation policy, inciting white students to move from a world view imported from Europe and to identify with Africa, to break from egoistic individualism and to see their future contributing to the social transformation of South Africa. The state moved to repress this movement, most dramatically

with the banning, arrest and death in custody of Steve Biko, but its persuasive power persisted.

There was also the influence of marxism across the university sector as well as in trade unions and mass movements. It had a long presence in South Africa through communist and trotskyist movements. Soviet-aligned marxism prevailed in the congress tradition, as the SACP was a powerful force within the ANC. Trotskyism was strongest among cape coloured intellectuals and artisans. Marxism had come under increasing pressure under apartheid, particularly the Suppression of Communism Act 1950 and the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, with the banning of the political organisations embracing marxism as well as individual academics who pursued their teaching and research within a marxist framework.

At UCT in the 1960s, the government issued a banning order against Jack Simons, which meant that he could not teach, publish or even be quoted in the publications of others, and attempted to block the appointment of Archie Mafeje, who was not only left but black. Both were in the area of African studies and both ended up pursuing their subsequent careers abroad. Not that Jack Simons' stint teaching marxism in the MK **what is this?** camp in Angola could be considered much of a career move. He was also professor and head of the sociology department at University of Zambia. Mafeje had an illustrious career in various European and African universities. Both returned to South Africa in the 1990s and have died since.

Students at both UCT and Wits demonstrated in the case of Mafeje in 1968. A few years later, one of them, Jeremy Cronin, was a marxist lecturer in philosophy at UCT while participating in an underground unit distributing anti-apartheid pamphlets. He was arrested and imprisoned in 1976 for 7 years. The imprisonment of Cronin as well as Raymond Suttner, a law lecturer at UND, was meant to be a warning to other radical intellectuals. Herbert Vilikazi was deported specifically for teaching marxism at University of Transkei. Not that marxist intellectuals were safe abroad either. Ruth First was blown to bits while teaching in Mozambique. Richard Turner and David Webster were assassinated in South Africa.

Despite formidable obstacles – surveillance, seizure of research materials, banning orders, exile, imprisonment and even assassination – there was nevertheless a flourishing of marxism in the universities in the 1970s and 1980s. The difficulty of even acquiring texts gave the quest extra edge. Jeremy Cronin has sketched the difficulties of pursuing political philosophy at UCT:



I was becoming more interested in political and social thought. It was very difficult to get anything in South Africa at the time. I remember battling for a year to get Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* ... or to get some Sartre, for instance, let alone other marxist texts ... It was very difficult to pursue things. If you read Sartre and he would refer to the *18<sup>th</sup> Brumiere*, then you couldn't get hold of the *18<sup>th</sup> Brumiere*. So a lot of our energies and resources and skills were in that early period devoted to hunting down texts ... You'd hear of someone, an older comrade who escaped the net of arrest, who had a small library somewhere. We would hatch complicated plots to track the person down and to win their confidence, so that we could get access to some key texts. (Cronin 2001)

Isolated as South Africa was, there was still a strong sense of a global surge of the left and having as much, if not more, reason than most to be part of it. It was particularly marked in certain disciplines. Teaching and research in areas such as history, sociology, philosophy, politics and literature underwent a massive transformation.

Historiography was a crucial field of play. Edward Webster has characterised his course of study for a BA in history at Rhodes University in the early 1960s:

Firstly, it was entirely about the thoughts and activities of Europeans, and the English in particular. Africans, we were told, did not have a history because they had no written language and, as a result, there were no documents to examine. QED ... Secondly, the approach was entirely voluntarist. It was about great (white) men shaping national and world events. Marxism, I was told, was determinist and teleological and did not allow for individual choice.

Then in the course of preparing an honours essay on 18<sup>th</sup> century England, at Rhodes called 'the Age of Anne', he read a book by marxist historian Christopher Hill, where the endless tales of kings and queens being randomly beheaded was replaced by a transition from feudalism to capitalism:

The scales fell from my eyes; here for the first time was a pattern that made sense of what had previously seemed to be haphazard events. (Webster 2005: 100)

He was not the only one. It was happening on campuses all over the world, although in South Africa many of the key texts had to circulate clandestinely.

A key text, published as a Penguin paperback in 1969, was banned not only for distribution but even for possession in South Africa. *Class and Colour in South Africa* by Jack Simons and Ray Alexander. Another was Edward Roux's *Time Longer than Rope* in 1964, the first major history of African nationalism in South Africa. This too was banned, as its author,

a professor of botany at Wits, was prohibited from teaching, publishing, attending gatherings, being quoted or leaving Johannesburg.

The radical historiography taking hold meant not only a rejection of eurocentrism and voluntarism, but a reconceptualisation of the relation of class and race that broke from both liberalism and earlier marxism. The positions in the field were not only Afrikaner nationalism and eurocentric liberalism, but an emerging africanist liberalism influenced by African decolonisation and the American civil rights movement and motivated by opposition to apartheid. Their conviction that African societies did have a history that could and should be studied and that there was a history of inter-racial interaction as well as conflict before the apartheid regime led to such works as *The Oxford History of South Africa* in 2 volumes in 1969 and 1971. (Wilson and Thompson 1969-71) This galvanised a group of British-based historians of South Africa - Shula Marks, Stanley Trapido, Harold Wolpe, Martin Legassick, Colin Bundy – to go further. The marxist challenge defined itself in relation to these other positions, particularly to the liberal africanist one with whom they shared most. They approved of the shift of attention to Africa, but criticised liberals for their emphasis on race at the expense of class, on the political dimension to the neglect of the economic, on empiricism inadequately informed by theory. The relation between capitalism and apartheid was the most contested question. Whereas liberals saw apartheid as an aberration, even an obstacle to the development of capitalism, marxists argued that white supremacy facilitated exploitation of black labour and enhanced the growth of industrial capital. (Saunders 1988, 1999)

Marxists also put considerable emphasis on history from below and reached out beyond the universities into the townships, trade unions and mass movements. The Wits history workshop, influenced by the British history workshops, founded in 1977 and still going, was committed not only to the history of ordinary people in South African communities, but to involving them in the construction and dissemination of that history. A popular history from below to come out of this was Luli Callinicos's 3 volume *A People's History of South Africa* (1980, 1987, 1993)

As time went on, the counter-narratives opened up to considerations of gender, culture, ethnicity and identity as well as continuing to focus on class and race. Feminism was particularly important in connecting global structures of power to the textures of everyday life. (Bozzoli 1983, Cock 1990)

The discipline of archeology also played into the emerging counter-narratives of the nation, pushing narrativisation further back in time. Both the conservative and liberal versions had buttressed the apartheid narrative. By the 1970s, however, empirical methods had yielded

overwhelming evidence that black settlement preceded white colonial settlement by more than a thousand years, undermining the story told in school textbooks in which black and white settlers came to an empty land at much the same time and had equal claim to it. However, taking a positivist position on the separation of academe and politics, it did not articulate the implications of its findings in a way that challenged the apartheid regime. Although their subject matter was the past lives of black Africans, archeologists were white and tended not to engage with the contemporary lives or political struggles of black Africans. Their disavowal of politics and the issue of the relation of archeology and apartheid split the international archeological profession. As archeology developed, it experienced the turmoil in its theoretical foundations that was gripping other disciplines. There were not only conservative versus liberal versions, but positivist, structuralist, phenomenological, postmodernist, critical materialist positions. Through it all, it contributed to the excavation of hidden transcripts and subaltern voices that would undermine the old order and define an alternative one. (Hall 1999, 2000, Shepherd 2003)

The field of anthropology under apartheid was split between Afrikaans-speaking volkskunde, rooted in German idealism and ethnic conservatism, which held sway at both white Afrikaans and black and coloured universities, and English-speaking social anthropology, derived from British empiricism and liberalism, at the open universities. The one view stressed the particularity of various cultures in a way that legitimated the ideology of separate development underlying apartheid, whereas the other was inclined to a supposedly value-neutral search for universal patterns. There were separate professional associations corresponding to these different traditions.

Both of these came under challenge from marxist, feminist and africanist approaches. In the wake of decolonisation in Africa, anthropology became contested as an apologia of colonialism with its fixation on primordialism, its exoticisation of the African as other and the European as normal, its lack of historical, political, economic context. Archie Mafeje, with degrees in anthropology from Cape Town and Cambridge, decided that it was dispensable and that whatever was of value was social history. Others persisted and strove to reconstruct anthropology to come to terms with the contemporary critiques. There were calls for a liberation sociology based on the view from below, on activist participation, on attention to historical, political and economic context. One such anthropologist, David Webster, was assassinated in 1989. (Ellis 1999, Humphreys 1999, Lawuyi, 1999, Mafeje 1998a, 1998b, 2001, Nkwi 2006)

Sociology felt the stresses particularly strongly. The first professor of sociology, appointed at Stellenbosch in 1932, was Hendrik Verwoerd, renowned as the architect of apartheid. By the 1960s there were two separate knowledge systems shaping the discipline, the one based in the Afrikaans and African universities and the more oppositional sociology based in the more liberal universities:

The subjects studied by these two groups, the theoretical frameworks within which the discipline was taught, and the methodological approaches employed, were all subject to this political dividing line. The separation extended as far as two separate sociological associations, separate sociological congresses, separate languages, and even different academic journals in which sociologists could publish their research. (Van der Merwe 1995, cited in Webster et al 2000)

Challenging both volkekunde and structural functionalism, marxism came to dominate the field. The Association for Sociology in Southern Africa became in the 1980s a forum for a vibrant interaction between professional sociologists with organic intellectuals of the rising social movements. This engagement was marked by a cross-disciplinary approach in which social problems were primary and all relevant disciplines were brought to bear, including philosophy, politics, economics, history. (Webster et al 2000)

Psychology too came under critical scrutiny. Mainstream psychology in SA as elsewhere positioned itself vis a vis capitalism, neo-colonialism, racism and patriarchy behind a wall of narrow empiricism, scientific neutrality and individualism. Excavating its ideological architecture, critical psychology emerged to interrogate the role of psychology as a product of and justification for a political system into which inequality was structurally inscribed. It raised questions of class, race, gender and other structural factors, thus reconceptualising a discipline fixated on notions of an isolated, self-transparent subjectivity. Historical materialism was seen as a powerful force in reinscribing the psyche in socio-historical context. Connecting individualist subjectivity and psychological analysis to the emergence of capitalism:

Capitalism ... provided the socio-economic conditions for the emergence of the individual subject, a historically contingent form of personality organization dictated by capital's need for a population of relatively free producers and consumers whose activities and consciousness were no longer determined by the institutions of feudal authority. Psychology, the scientific study of the individual agent, was thus called into being by the capitalist mode of production. (Ivey 1986: 16)

*Psychology in Society*, the journal in which this was published, was a key vehicle for the theoretical and geopolitical realignment of psychology in South Africa, giving voice to various critiques of what psychology was and visions of what it might be. Alongside marxism as an intellectual influence, there were the currents of black consciousness, feminism and post-colonialism. There was also an attempt to forge links between this critical theory and the professional work of psychologists, social workers and health workers. (Painter, Terre Blanche and Henderson 2007)

This pattern, with all sorts of interesting details and variations, played out in a number of other disciplines too, particularly in economics, or political economy as the left preferred to call it, but also in many other areas, such as literature, cultural studies, education studies.

Political economy played a foundational role in the reconstruction of other disciplines. Serious debates ensued on the relation of class and race, pre-capitalist and capitalist modes of production, state and capital, accumulation and regulation, modernisation, fractions of capital. (Bond 2007)

Philosophy was a pivotal presence on the intellectual landscape where these tensions were being played out both internationally and nationally. In much of the world by the 1960s, there was a tension between analytic philosophy, dominant in the Anglo-American world, founded on classical empiricism, developing through logical positivism, linguistic analysis, various forms of neo-positivism, and continental philosophy, flowing from classical rationalism, through romanticism, existentialism and phenomenology.

In South Africa, the Afrikaner universities were centres of continental philosophy and the English-speaking university were inclined to analytic philosophy. Capturing the atmosphere at UCT in the late 60s and early 70s, Jeremy Cronin recalled:

In my years that I spent there, and particularly when I came back as a lecturer, Anglo-Saxon philosophy was becoming increasingly dominant. The narrowing of subjects into smaller areas and technical topics, that was starting to become the future ... The lectures were much more interesting down at the alternative university, because the students occupying the Bremner building then invited interesting lecturers to come, who were on the margins of things ... Rick Turner ...was interested in ... a kind of French existential marxism. (Cronin 2001)

Later he began attending a fortnightly seminar at Stellenbosch:

Rick Turner by this stage was lecturing at Stellenbosch University. He had come back from France and was battling to get work as an academic and, quite interestingly, it was the Afrikaans-speaking and very conservative Stellenbosch University which

offered him some temporary work. That reflected something that was happening there ... There was a different tradition, a continental tradition, sometimes of the neo-fascist kind, but sometimes with a more left wing spin to it .. The notion of life world was a very important concept ... The idea was to develop phenomenology beyond individual subjective phenomenology toward group phenomenology. ... That clearly had ... an apartheid version: there was a black life world and an Afrikaans life world and an English-speaking white life world and you shouldn't try to mix these things up ...but also ...there was a more left wing approach to it: the ability to understand groups, therefore classes, national aspirations and so forth, which ... liberal intellectual traditions ... didn't ... Their rejection of apartheid was: there are some very talented young black people who have been squashed by apartheid, that kind of liberal individualist version, rather than a much more structured understanding of the realities. (Cronin 2001)

Although these positions tended to co-exist, looking aside only to caricature the other, there were some serious critiques of rival intellectual traditions. In a society where intellectual curiosity and political struggle were on the rise, analytical philosophy seemed oddly disengaged from the temper of the times. Philosophical traditions alive to world historical dimensions were far more engaging to those seeking meaning for their lives and grounding for their politics.

Giving the Richard Turner memorial lecture at UND in 1988, Michael Nupen asked what was the distinctive role of philosophy. The diagnoses made by the social sciences might seem to be comprehensive. While philosophy could not proceed independently of such input, he asked if it could claim to add anything to the picture produced by the empirical sciences. He saw its role as critique, as developing knowledge that uncovers the distortions, the coercive ideological illusions, that are systematically produced by socio-historical forces. (Nupen 1988)

The name of Richard Turner constantly arises in any investigation of the various disciplines that were redefining themselves, personifying a certain relation of philosophy to other disciplines as well as intellectual inquiry brought to bear on the social ferment of the times. He was a charismatic presence, who made an enduring mark on a generation of intellectuals who became caught up in the torrents of their times. As a student at UCT in the early 1960s, he studied philosophy and became radicalised intellectually and politically. He went to France, where he did his PhD on sartrean marxism. He was active in the student movement and the resurgent trade unions and engaged actively with the black consciousness movement, particularly in dialogue with the other most charismatic figure of the time, Steve Biko. He taught philosophy at University of Natal until he was banned in 1973 and continued

his writing and whatever other activities were possible until he was assassinated in Durban in 1978. His primary text was *The Eye of the Needle*. Spanning history, philosophy, psychology, sociology, political, he located racism within capitalism and connected forms of social relations to relations of production. Seeing politics as the realisation of identity and identity as the realisation of ethical choice, he argued for the necessity of utopian thinking. He stressed agency, authenticity, ethical commitment as opening the path to a society of participatory democracy and socialist humanism. (Turner 1972)

This was the time of a new left version of marxism, defining itself over against old left versions. Turner typified this emphasis on consciousness and culture and moral commitment, on the dynamic nature of the historical process, on the connection between the personal and the political that characterised this global mood as it manifested itself in South Africa. As Andrew Nash defined it, this version of marxism

sought to overcome the dogma and reductionism of Stalinism and Trotskyism, to engage with history as a living process rather than a mechanical formula, to found a historical consciousness linking local struggles to global processes, and implant itself in a working-class movement which sought to control its own destiny, openly and democratically, rather than submitting to the authority of nationalism or pseudo-science.

Beginning with a few dozen intellectuals and activists in the 1960s, this generation came to maturity in the late 1970s, and were a powerful presence in South African political and intellectual life throughout the 1980s. Their ideas and analyses had reshaped social and political studies at South African universities, established themselves at the heart of the curriculum of many academic departments, and given impetus to conferences, journals and other publications. They had played a crucial role in guiding student, women's and civic organisations, and above all the trade union movement which they had helped to build ... (Nash 1999a)

Marxism was a pivotal presence in the universities. It set the terms of analysis and debate across a wide range of studies, particularly history, politics, economics, sociology, anthropology, education, literature, cultural studies and African studies (no longer called native administration). Even those who never became marxists, such as Andre DuToit or Christopher Saunders, interacted constructively with it and conceded much to it. (DuToit 2001, Saunders, 2005) There was an atmosphere of big questions and contending paradigms. There were debates, not only between marxism and other points of view, but also between different trends within marxism. There were many points of tension, but the divergences

between old and new left, between workerist and populist currents, between structuralist and historicist tendencies were the primary flash points.

The marxist theory seminar at the University of the Western Cape was a forum for such debates. UWC, set up to be an apartheid university for coloureds, became a site of struggle against apartheid to the point where its rector Jakes Gerwel declared it to be the 'intellectual home of the left'. The series of weekly lunchtime seminars ran for 8 years and were ordinarily attended by 100-150 and occasionally by 400-500. It also sponsored a national conference on marxism in South Africa: past, present and future in 1991. (Nash 1993, 1999b)

The rhythm of these debates in academe vibrated with the rhythms of movements outside academe. By the 1980s, there was mass insurgency, led by the United Democratic Front, a coalition of trade union, women, student, civic and church organisations, that organised consumer boycotts, school and university protests, labour stay-aways. There were uprisings in townships and schools and alternative centres of power in street committees, peoples courts, peoples education. Seeing the country becoming ungovernable, the state declared states of emergency, but despite many arrests and multiple forms of repression, the mass mobilisation moved forward and brought on the dénouement of the system. Many activists, particularly blacks, were introduced to marxism and the debates surrounding it primarily through these struggles rather than the universities, as previous waves had in the many forms of political education of the liberation movement, including Robben Island, MK camps and the Lenin School in Moscow. A left discourse in universities thrived as these movements thrived.

Once the tide turned, left intellectuals found themselves on new terrain. After so much struggle against such a repressive regime, they could be forgiven for thinking that it would be onward and upward as power began to shift to their side. However the transition from resistance to reconstruction was not so straightforward. The negotiated nature of the transition, the considerable class compromise involved, the demobilisation of the mass movement and preoccupation with preparing for power brought various degrees of disorientation.

Early disquiet was registered at UWC in 1993 in an debate between Andrew Nash, philosopher and convenor of MTS, and Jakes Gerwel on what Nash saw as a disintegration of political life at UWC and a retreat from marxism in SA, as academics positioned themselves for governance or consultancy and narrowed their focus to a policy discourse among the



emerging new elite as opposed to engaging with broader questions and a broader audience. The controversy which followed seemed to deepen the disintegration. (Nash 1993)

Such fault lines intensified. The ANC went into a government of national reconciliation. Quite a few government ministers were marxists, although it was not always easy to see how this impacted on their governance. Some had let their membership of the SACP lapse in 1990, but others stayed. One way or another, the continuity between their past beliefs and present positions became more and more elusive. It was much the same in other institutions, including universities.

It was not only the compromises dictated by national reconciliation, whereby the oppressors of yesterday became the partners of today, allowed to keep their ill-gotten wealth. It was also the re-integration into the global system, with its imperatives of neoliberalisation, ie, hegemony of the market logic, privatisation of the public sphere and commodification of knowledge, culture and nature. Those who were called terrorists were now wined and dined in global capitols, where it was explained to them that there was no alternative. This has brought bitter disappointment and disaffection, not only from the left intelligentsia, but from masses of rural and township poor, many still living in squalid shacks without electricity, running water or basic health care.

Nevertheless, much changed. A new flag flew over the land. New faces populated the parliament. New voices spoke on airwaves. New names appeared on the buildings and roads. Despite layers of deceit, disclaimers of responsibility and destruction of files, many secrets were laid bare and there were new truths in the public domain. It seemed incredible, but it was impossible almost overnight to find anyone to defend apartheid. Still there was some sincere self-scrutiny and genuine reconciliation.

Universities grappled with what the new order meant for academe. The universities had been sites of struggle and sources of ideas about liberation. Now it was time to pass from a liberation movement to liberation. However, anticipation did not yield so easily to realisation. Quoting Colin Bundy, who became vice-chancellor of Wits, quoting Kader Asmal, who became minister of education, quoting Bertolt Brecht from *Songs of the Soldier of Revolution*:

When the difficulty  
Of the mountains is once behind  
That's when you'll see  
The difficulty of the plains will start. (Bundy 2003)

The difficulties of the plains were many. Both Asmal and Bundy found themselves at odds with others who were pressing for transformation.

There was a preoccupation with reconfiguration of the institutional landscape and with implementation of equity, access and redress. Debates centred on access, admission standards, size and shape, funding formulae, academic freedom v nation building, excellence v equity, academic disciplines v interdisciplinary programmes, eurocentrism v afrocentrism. The transformation forum on each campus was one of many forums in which these issues were aired.

A walk across any campus of the historically white universities revealed immediately the scale of the dramatic demographic shift that had taken place, at least in the composition of the student body. However, there were many problems under the visible surface. I was assuming that the problem of access was well on its way to solution. My focus was on what such access – the opening of the doors of higher knowledge to those who had previously been excluded – meant in terms of knowledge itself. My larger project was called: the rise of the repressed in the history of knowledge. It was about the exclusions of class, race and gender in the history of knowledge and key episodes in history where inclusion of the excluded had impacted on the production of knowledge itself. I wanted to see how this was playing out on the campuses of the new SA.

However, I found that I was constantly being thrown back to the prior matter of inclusion of the excluded, which posed itself as more problematic than I had anticipated. At the beginning of the academic year, when I was watching the tv news, there were stories of students demonstrating on various campuses against financial exclusion. One morning at UCT, as I settled into my research, I picked up the strains of *Senzeni Na*, a familiar song of the liberation movement, and I saw students toyi-toyi-ing through the campus. I went from building to building, watching cleaning women join with students in the singing and toyi-toyi-ing, and then listened to the speeches outside the Bremner building and spoke to students involved. They said that, even if they did somehow manage to rise above the continuing legacy of bantu education, they could not pay their fees and they were therefore being excluded. Moreover, they explained that felt alienated from the whole culture of UCT, with accusations ranging from racism on the part of lecturers and administrators to eurocentrism in the curriculum to neoliberalism in government education policy.

It was a different picture that I got days before on the plaza during orientation week where there were stalls for banks, sports, religious groups, investment clubs, but not much in the way of politics. A magazine published by a christian organisation reassured incoming

students that UCT may once have been called ‘Moscow on the hill’ and still have a few pinko profs around, but it was different now. Another year I saw a young black female student giving the freshers their campus tour, stopping at the statue of Rhodes to explain that ‘we honour him for giving us all this’.

UCT was a *mélange* of mixed signals, of unreflective and unresolved contradictions, of ragbag eclecticism as well as considered syntheses. The names of buildings honour oppressors and oppressed alike. You can walk from the Steve Biko building across the Cissie Gool Plaza to the Oppenheimer library to the Otto Beit building. You can see a mural celebrating education for women in Africa and a series of paintings depicting UCT in struggle. You can attend a lecture on poverty in the Nedbank room and study environmental science in the Shell building. A graduate in social sciences recently awarded a Mandela Rhodes scholarship to study for an MPhil in intercultural and diversity studies, was reported as saying that he believed that the scheme was “designed for individuals who have in them a little Mandela and a little Rhodes”. (Zuma 2006: 3)

It was not only UCT. The very existence of the Mandela Rhodes Foundation symbolised the glossing over of glaring contradictions. In Mandela’s own words:

The bringing together of these two names represents a symbolic movement in the closing of the historic circle; drawing together the legacy of reconciliation and leadership and that of entrepreneurship and education. (Mandela 2006)

What about the legacy of subjugation, of silence, of theft, of poverty, of murder? What about the legacy of struggle, of longing for liberation, of striving for justice, of demanding redistribution of wealth? Mandela Rhodes Place in the centre of Cape Town is the site of luxury apartments with 5 star amenities, including a wellness centre. Current residents of Gugulethu need not apply.

On one occasion, having travelled by car between Rondebosch and Stellenbosch via Khayelitsha for a philosophy conference, I could not help asking what chance did some little girl running around those shacks that morning have to be a philosopher some day as opposed to some boy starting the school day at Newlands. There were so many barriers of class and race and gender still.

This was the new South Africa. All of this made UCT what it was. It was contested terrain – among the students as well as staff – and in the society as a whole (now called stakeholders). UCT was at the apex of both the old and new systems. The English speaking liberal universities were the universities of choice for the best students across racial

categories. The sons and daughters of the emerging black bourgeoisie, the black diamonds, were much in evidence, although those from poorer backgrounds still struggled. There were high dropout rates for black students. It was the case in other universities as well. When policy shifted from an emphasis on levelling the playing field to engineering an even more differentiated pitch, with new administrative procedures, funding formulae and quasi-market relations, corresponding to the international shift from neo-keynesianism to neo-liberalism and the national shift from RDP to GEAR in macroeconomic policy, they adapted to the neoliberal agenda of winners and losers and were well-positioned to be winners.

The overall reconfiguration of the academic landscape had led to situation where

The outcome was as unanticipated as it was unintended. (Bundy 2006: 13)

The Afrikaans universities shifted from milking the military-industrial-research complex of apartheid to reinventing themselves as entrepreneurial universities and milking the incentive schemes for applied research for the post-apartheid economy. The historically black universities, although expecting redress and renewal, met with further deprivation. Their staff and students voted with their feet to go to the historically white universities, leaving them with depleted departments, scarce resources, low morale, falling enrollments, mounting debts and endemic conflict. This was the supreme irony: despite the aim of creating a more equal landscape, the reconfiguration led to a demonstrably more unequal landscape. (Bundy 2006)

Those who presided over it found their intentions subverted both by larger forces and their own actions:

University CEO's appointed on the basis of their 'struggle' credentials soon discover that their function is to ease the transition from struggle culture to the culture of the market, and the strategy employed to secure this new intellectual economy is simple but effective. At first, struggle idiom is used to legitimise the project and disarm criticism. Then market principles are shrewdly articulated with progressive ideas until they slowly but surely supplant them. 'Transformation' becomes a trojan horse concept, carrying in its belly the whole lexicon of corporate-speak and commoditisation: intellectual capital, strategic planning, mission and goal orientation, customers, benchmarking, best practice, enterprise bargaining, contract employment, and performance rewards. This is our new lingua franca, the 'vice-chancellor speak' that drives change and fixes the boundaries of debate. (Bertelsen 2000)

Transformation had multiple meanings, sometimes elided and confused, but other times differentiated with shattering clarity:

'Transformation', as currently used in university discourse (as in South Africa generally) is something of a conundrum. It is an overworked and malleable term, a classic 'portmanteau', with contradictory meanings packed up into one word ... The first understanding derives from the South African political struggle ... This requires radical change in the makeup of the student body and staff of universities and the reform of curriculum along progressive lines. ... The second version comes from the corporate world ... universities must be transformed into lean-and-mean producers of informational content and profitable skills ... Right now our universities are reeling under these competing pressures, and it is no secret which social interest has gained the upper hand ... It is the market's idea of change that fixes the terms of debate and determines choices, practices and outcomes ... (Bertelsen 2000)

As to what should be done:

What is needed from progressive thinkers is not just the odd 'alternative' policy proposal, but a radical re-figuring of the field: a fundamental struggle over the privileged discourse of the market, the totality of its terms, and the taken-for-granted logic it entails ... (Bertelsen 2000)

The minister seemed to agree, even citing Eve Bertelsen. Speaking to an international conference in Durban, Asmal asserted:

Knowledge that is commodified loses its critical edge. Higher education must not only be acquisitive: it must remain inquisitive and sceptical. Universities must defend a history of intellectual emancipation that spans seven centuries rather than surrender to the exigencies of the market. I am sure that you will also be familiar with attempts in the World Trade Organisation to include 'education as a service'. I strongly believe that such moves should be resisted. (Asmal 2000)

However, whatever ministers and vice-chancellors declared, the nation was inserting itself into a global process where the systemic logic went in the direction of increasing commodification and surrender to the exigencies of the market and against critical thinking and intellectual emancipation.

Universities were caught up in a complex field of forces. The project of academic transformation inspired by ideas of conscientisation, pedagogy of the oppressed, decolonisation of consciousness, history from below, liberation sociology, was swamped by other forces: class compromise, elite-pacting, demobilisation of the liberation movement, priority of market norms, privatisation of public space, competitiveness, reduction of knowledge to immediate and narrow use value in problem-based learning, outcomes-based

curriculum, customer service, research ratings, mode 2 knowledge production. Searching for truth gave way to patenting intellectual property on campuses here as everywhere.

Education became more acquisitive than inquisitive, regardless of whatever the minister said. Numerous educators, such as Jonathan Jansen, saw the changes in higher education as essentially re- alignment with the logic of the market. (Jansen 2000). It was not only in universities. Even in trade union education, Linda Cooper observed a shift from collectivist ideological struggle for knowledge to a technocratic path to individual social mobility. (Cooper 1998) University students, whether coming from the new black bourgeoisie or from still difficult and deprived conditions, did not flock to history, sociology, politics, African studies, as many progressive academics thought that they would. Instead, they chose commerce in large numbers. They did not want to detain themselves with the history from below. They wanted to leap into the future and live from above. They wanted to make money. They wanted to wear designer labels, to drive fast cars, to live in leafy suburbs.

One academic after another told me the same tale: that students were voting with their feet, walking away from the humanities (except media studies) and choosing business, law and computers. Statistics bear this out. At UCT in 2005, of 3500 incoming students, 1600 were doing commerce (with many more applications for every place allocated). (Hall 2005) At UNISA enrollments in history dropped from 10,000 in 1994 to 1500 in 2007. (Carruthers 2007) Much of the interest in African studies came from exchange students from Europe and North America.

In 2001 I was fortunate to be invited to a conference on education where I could listen to many of the nation's leading intellectuals talking to each other. I was struck by all sorts of nuances, for example, by the lingering aura of a liberation movement in the way that academics addressed each other as 'comrades'. I couldn't help wondering if it would still be so in another decade. The session which had greatest impact on me was a panel on history and memory, summed up by its chair, Colin Bundy, as articulating a deep-seated and systemic crisis in historical studies. Luli Callinicos spoke wistfully of how exciting it was to be a historian in the past, of the power of marxist critiques, of the modifying influence of feminism, of adding dimensions of the oral and experiential. Jeff Guy complained of how history was being rubbished in the dominant discourse. Eddy Maloka lamented that SA transformation co-incident with the collapse of the panafrican project, the hegemony of the Washington consensus, the lack of interest in history from students, the celebration of greed, the retreat of the state, the ideological sophistication of contemporary racism and its integration into discourses of geopolitical power. The discussion from the floor raised all sorts

of issues: history as common nationhood v history as contested terrain, white v black histories, africanist v marxist v postmodernist histories, patriarchal v feminist histories, imperialist v subjugated histories. There was also discussion of the need to examine the history of historiography and to ask such questions as whether Shaka Zulu was an imperialist. (Saamtrek 2001)

In 1994 historians thought that their time had come, but soon came up against forces indicating that their time had passed. In the new nation they expected to have a new role to play, not only in such practical tasks as rewriting the school curriculum, devising new university courses, advising on museums and such, but in the larger project of coming to terms with the past in the present. Instead they began to sense a ‘de-commissioning of history’ (Bundy 2007). Curriculum 2005 issued in 1996 gave short shrift to history in favour of the new orthodoxy of outcomes-based education, although some ground was recouped when Kadar Asmal replaced Sibusiso Bengu as minister for education in 1999. Also problematic were the uses of history for nation building or for the heritage industry, which tended to undermine a critical approach to history in favour of a conciliatory and/or commodified packaging of the past. The historian found himself ‘battling with banality’. (Guy 1998) Most worrying was the decline in students opting to study history and the lack of a new generation of younger black historians to replace ageing white historians. As Bundy summed up the situation:

The institutional base of historians was weakened, their professional status and social function questioned, and their epistemological foundations gave way underfoot – these were accurately reported symptoms of decline – but all these insecurities were intensified by a fundamental uncertainty as to their audience, their script or their role in the drama of the post-apartheid 1990s. (Bundy 2007: 94)

Against the regime, they had put forth oppositional narratives of the nation. Indeed history was seen as a ‘master tool of intellectual resistance’. (Etherington 1993) Whether the liberal version prioritising race or the marxist version stressing class, both were history from below and both had played their role in undermining the justificatory narrative of apartheid. Both were part of the project of the decolonisation of history. Suddenly the adversary vanished and its apologetics discredited. Also both liberalism and marxism were being called into question by neoliberalism and postmodernism. Neither posed itself as an alternative narrative on the same terrain, but as a challenge to the very possibility of an alternative narrative. The force of neoliberalism was more away from the question, away from history,

into channelling of attention and resources into the present, the immediate, the commercial. There was an implicit master narrative, one of reintegrating into the global economy and culture. The pull of postmodernism was to undermine the drive to narrative, to question its very possibility and credibility. These currents swept through other disciplines and interdisciplinary studies as well.

Although these were global currents, there were arguments particular to South Africa, because of the degree of fracture in its reassembling reality. Ingrid DeKok warned against the impulse for a grand concluding narrative of a sanitised past to accompany entry into the globalised economy and held that it would be in the multiplicity of partial versions and experiences, composed and recomposed within sight of each other that truth would emerge in asymmetrical rhythms, in turbulence, in fragmentation. (DeKok 1998) Some studies carried out in this spirit have been of value in identifying the asymmetries, the turbulence, the multiplicity, the intricacy, the fragmentation. Some have brought clarity whereas others have fostered evasion and confusion.

Nuttall and Michael claimed that SA cultural studies was characterised by overdetermination of the political, inflation of resistance and fixation on race as master signifier. They argued that such registers of analysis needed to be overturned. By what? Pleasure was put forward as destabilising cultural orthodoxies, as exposing the limits of registers of class, race and resistance. (Nuttall and Michael 2000) Locating pleasure as beyond ideology, Miki Flockemann looked to the study of soap operas as representing a shift from the totalising discourses of the apartheid state to a rediscovery of subjective experience, to renewed validation of the private sphere. (Flockemann 2000) This tendency to put forward pleasure as an alternative to ideology is common in international cultural studies. It is part of a tendency to unravel powerful explanatory concepts, such as ideology, and to replace them with pluralistic dissipation of explanatory energy.

The emphasis on the everyday as opposed to the realm of the political-economic has been a common theme in contemporary SA writing. Oft-quoted were the calls of Albie Sachs for a moratorium on culture as a weapon of struggle and that of Njabulo Ndebele for a return to the ordinary. (Sachs 1989, Ndebele 1998a) All sorts of further inflections have followed and there have been a spectrum of positions on this. Liberals seized on such interventions as justification of autonomy of art and postmodernists as destabilisation of the national liberation narrative. Both positivism and postmodernism severed art from politics, although this was not quite what Sachs or Ndebele intended. Their critiques



in the new dispensation's retelling, have been reduced to mere advocacy of an 'everyday' stripped of political content; de-fanged, their words have been appropriated by the free market, cretin-creature ever on the prowl, to advertise 'new subjectivities for the new nation'... whereas the kind of searching for the 'everyday' that is political, revolutionary, gets sidelined. (Edjabe 2004)

Although it poses as critique, it is interesting to see how the postmodern converges with the commercial. Kelwyn Sole too warned of an emphasis on the ordinary that inclined to the axis of subjective fulfilment that is insufficiently alert to the topography of civil society and effects of the global economy, to the way that the ordinary or everyday is intercut with social conflict and political interest. (Sole 1995, 2001)

Lewis Nkosi has dissented from both the theory and practice of postmodernism, declaring that it has little allure for black writers, who feel an urgent need to document and to bear witness, unlike white writers who have the capacity to go on furlough, to loiter, to experiment, dissenting from others such as Graham Pechey and Andre Brink, who see postmodernism as liberating, as providing a space for critique of domination, as space where marginalities of all kinds are valued. (Nkosi 1998) Coming at it from the direction of political economy, Dirk Kotzé similarly has aligned postmodernism with post-scarcity. (Kotzé 2000) Its privileging of discourse to the neglect of the material conditions of its possibility has given postmodernism less traction in political economy than in literary theory.

Literature and literary theory has been the site of a number of clashes relating to the basic theoretical grounding of contemporary thought. Hitting against the stress on fragmentation and discontinuity, Michael Chapman authored an integrative history of SA literatures, stretching from the songs and stories of bushmen and bantu peoples to the most contemporary writers. (Chapman 1996) Conscious of detail and diversity, he nevertheless insisted that:

In any South African story, then, detail should not be erased; neither, however, should detail be permitted to overwhelm the possibilities of reconstitution, or forsake the desire for trajectory. (Chapman 1998)

This attempt to shape the diverse material into a reconstructive narrative ran contrary to deconstructionist mood. Responding to such criticism in his 2003 preface:

The attempt to present an 'integrative' history, however, did not satisfy those who interpreted the shift from discrete, ethnic stories to a continuous story as the imposition on our many differences of a grand narrative, even a national liberation

narrative. ... I would hope that my literary-historical narrative has not diminished the claims of numerous voices. .. The slide is to tradition, not as history but heritage: parochialism and self-referentiality in the face of larger social forces... the many discrete stories in the postmodern encyclopaedia do not usually lend coherence to one another... To quote Karl Mannheim, a 'class which has already risen in the social scale tends to conceive of history in terms of unrelated, isolated events'. A class that has not yet risen requires a reconstitutive project. The narrative approach that shapes *Southern African Literatures* remains appropriate - it seems to me - to the material conditions of the South. (Chapman 2003)

In defending a project that 'leans toward--rather, yearns after--a theory and practice of reconstruction', he spoke for a striving shared by others, whether implicitly or explicitly.

It is true that all the debates on the national question have produced no national answer (Bundy 2007). Nevertheless, South Africa is living through a story. Of course, there are many stories, but they converge in a time and space and position themselves in relation to a nation reconstructing itself. There may be many voices saying contradictory things and the plot may sometimes seem elusive, but there is a discourse that takes the form of a social narrative that can be conveyed more or less coherently.

In a collection of essays exploring various perspectives on the problems and complexities of narrative, provocatively entitled *Negotiating the Past*, Njabulo Ndebele saw the post-1994 scenario as giving legitimacy and authority to previously silenced voices and taking the first steps in rewriting SA history on the basis of validated mass experience. The previous scenario was an intellectual and moral desert, without coherent philosophical justification. The political accommodation did not create a landscape where intellectual and moral questions had been solved, but through such rituals as the TRC brought a restoration of narrative, an example of a people reinventing themselves through narrative. Only now, he declared, had SA become a true subject of philosophy. (Ndebele 1998) In the following chapters, authors such as André Brink and Ingrid DeKok, also concerned with the nature of narrative, were more inclined to emphasise the difficulties in narration, given the silences, the delusions, the dissonance, the brokenness.

While writers such as Brink and DeKok have cast revelatory light upon the areas of darkness, disruption, deceit and silence, others have become caught up in the postmodernist current in a way that has not been so productive. The stress on fragmentation has often intensified fragmentation. It is true that postmodernism has been a response to the fragmentation of contemporary life, but it has tended to revel in it rather than searching for a pattern in it and pathways through it.

The primary effect of postmodernism has been dissipating and debilitating. A number of intellectuals who once articulated a coherent position as part of a collective struggle have been decentred by postmodernism, overpowered by neoliberalism, demobilised by a movement for liberation transmuting into a party of power.

So where have all the marxists gone? I often asked in my conversations and interviews. To postmodernism, to policy, to administration, to government, to business, I was told. Tales circulated contrasting the past histories and present positions of those were once marxists who had become president, government ministers, members of parliaments, vice-chancellors, deans, professors, policy consultants and businessmen. Some still talked left but walked right. (Bond 2006) Some twisted talking left into talking right with bizarre and convoluted justifications. Some of the most dogmatic on one line simply became the most dogmatic on another line. Some unravelled, but talked on, confused and confusing.

Others, however, persisted. These days marxism is not always signposted, but it still forms the basis of how many academics, politicians, civil servants, trade union officials and others see the world and do their work. Marxists inside and outside the academy have been prominent in struggling to bring coherence and critique into the situation, whether in political tracts (Cronin 2002, 2005) or in poetry (Cronin 1999, 2006), whether in academic books or media debates, particularly in such crucial areas as political economy of the transition (Marais 2001, Bond 2005, 2006), relation of race and class (Alexander 2000), sociology of work (Webster 2005), marketisation of universities (Pithouse et al 2006), chieftaincy and land reform (Ntsebeza. 2006), political philosophy (Nash 2008), nation-building (Alexander 2002) history and historiography of South Africa (Bundy 2007).

However, the drama of conflicting theories has dissipated. Bond observed:

What is most remarkable about this search for theoretical explanation of race and class, of the trajectory of political economy, of macro-micro relations and of gender (O'Meara 1996), among other themes, is that at the point such theory may have become most useful to those engaged in everyday struggle against capitalism during the rise of neoliberalism, in the early 1990s, it *evaporated*. (Bond 2007: 15)

This is not to say that there are not conflicting theories in play. The rise of neoliberalism and the critique of it informs much of the cutting edge engagement in defining and debating the state of the nation.

Another major area of conflict, although the lines cannot be as clearly drawn, involves a cluster of issues arising under the banner of africanisation. In the universities it involved a

shift in the racial profile of student and staff populations, although more difficult to achieve in the case of academic staff. It also meant a re-orientation of the curriculum, which was even more difficult, as the terms of reference for doing so proved to be quite contentious. Many believed that the ascendancy of black academics to top positions in universities was the key to achieving a thoroughgoing africanisation of all aspects of university life, including curriculum. It didn't unfold as envisaged.

A high profile bearer of such hope was Mamphela Ramphele, a doctor, anthropologist and black consciousness activist, who became vice-chancellor of UCT in 1996. She did establish the African Gender Institute and All Africa House (a gift from the Rhodes Foundation), but she pursued a neo-liberal agenda in university restructuring and soon many who hailed her appointment were demonstrating against her administration. Believing that the university overpaid at the bottom and underpaid at the top, she brought World Bank norms into academe before resigning to go to the World Bank. (Grossman 2006)

Jonathan Jansen has suggested that the study of transformation might be better advanced through the study of critical incidents rather than the texts of strategic plans or the statistics of performance outputs. Institutions provoked to crises can serve as unanticipated and uncontrolled flashpoints that reveal more about processes underway than the official indicators do. (Jansen 1998).

The Makgoba affair at Wits might top anyone's list of such critical incidents. It began with the appointment of MW Makgoba, an immunologist, who had been working abroad and had no history of political activism, as deputy-vice-chancellor in 1994. His tenure was stormy. Accusations that he had embellished his cv and was a divisive and incompetent administrator were met with charges of racism and eurocentrism. He put himself forward as a champion of africanism and many who were impatient with the pace of transformation took up his cause.

He has become our OJ, the lightning-rod for all the complex and painful racial politics of our time: black upliftment pitched against reactionary racism on the one hand; maintenance of standards pitched against fraudulent black nationalism on the other. (Gevisser 1995)

The dispute effectively polarised the university along racial lines. While Makgoba decried his detractors as a right-wing cabal who were clinging to power and resisting africanisation, the fact was that some of them had a longer and deeper involvement in the africanisation of the curriculum that he had. The primary protagonist on the other side was

Charles van Onselen, a marxist historian, who had written major works of history from below, particularly a 600 page biography of Kas Maine, an illiterate black sharecropper. (von Onselen 1996)

Makgoba's credentials as a scientist, even allowing for inflation, seemed impressive. However, he began to present himself as an all-round public intellectual. His pronouncements on philosophy, sociology, history and politics, were somewhat less impressive. His dismissal of marxism, for example, was not exactly well-informed or well-argued:

I do not believe Marxist ideas and theory have a place in our society; after all Karl Marx is reputed to have cooked his facts to construct his theories. (Makgoba 1997: 55)

This appeared in his 1997 book-length account of the Wits battle, an egotistical, contradictory and ignorant tract depicting himself as a superhero of transformation and africanisation that did more to muddy the terrain than to clear a path toward such goals. While championing afrocentrism and denouncing eurocentrism, he paraded his Oxford degree, positions he held in Europe and America, photos of himself with the world elite. While characterising himself as a world class medical scientist, he went to traditional healers for muti to scare his enemies. Notwithstanding the contradictions, others colluded in his inflated and distorted sense of the meaning of this episode. The foreword to the book was written by Thabo Mbeki, deputy-president soon to become president of South Africa. Mbeki cast Makgoba as an intellectual giant and those who sought to undermine him as a charlatan as the liberal white establishment resisting transformation. The back of the book carried an endorsement by the minister of education Sibusiso Bengu. Speaking in the National Assembly, Mbeki quoted the US academics Statman and Ansell, in their 1996 address to the Psychological Society of South Africa:

The Makgoba affair presents a brief instance when conflicts otherwise repressed, hidden, disguised, barely recognised or acknowledged suddenly appear, momentarily revealing the terrifying shape of an alien landscape, a discordant parallel epistemological universe that challenges the basic assumptions of the construction of our world. (Statman and Ansell 1996, Mbeki 1998)

If only it had been such a clash of world views, an exploration of alternative epistemologies, it would have been a provocative and productive debate. If only it had illuminated the alternative paths of africanisation, it would have advanced transformation.

The Mbeki presidency went on to advance the process of racialisation of intellectual debate and political conflict, particularly to silence critique by the left. This took a particularly

nasty form in the disciplining of Jeremy Cronin for his controversial interviews with me. (Cronin-Sheehan, 2001, 2002)

The Wits battle ended badly for all concerned. Rather than face an enquiry, Makgoba deserted those who came to his defence and agreed to a settlement where he resigned his administrative position to become a research professor in the medical school. A number of those who acted against him resigned and one committed suicide. Nevertheless the struggle to interpret the meaning of the conflict continued:

The affair captivated, challenged and cracked the sanctity and hallowed portals of the Academy like no other event in the history of this country. (Makgoba and Seepe 2004: 31)

The Magkoba affair was profoundly unsettling in that it revealed and perhaps heightened the terrible racial, political and class fault-lines suddenly found lying so close to the discursive patina of reconciliatory rainbowism. (Statman and Ansell 2000: 280)

Africanisation acquired Englishness as an opposite term, not because of an essential rivalry, but because the Affair helped structure it so. And lucky for capital that it did. (Wilderson 2000: 130)

Makgoba went on to become head of the Medical Research Council, where he opposed Mbeki's aids-denialism. By 2002 he was in the thick of university administration again. He became vice-chancellor of University of Natal and then of the merged University of KwaZulu-Natal, where he has stirred one storm of scandal and dissension after another, racialising intellectual debates and political struggles, excluding left academics and poor students, evicting shack dwellers. As with Ramphele, he harnessed africanism to the tide of neo-liberalism. There was a strike at UKZN in 2006 where people of many colours, ages and genders came out against commercialisation of the university and demanded Makgoba's resignation, although Makgoba said on radio that it was being driven by senior white males who didn't want an African boss. A sign carried by a black woman read "AFRICANISING NEO-LIBERALISM IS AFRICANISING IMPERIALISM".

The Centre for Civil Society at UKZN is a lively centre for social critique with strong ties to social movements, at home and abroad, particularly those in its immediate environs, such as Abahlali baseMjondolo, a shack dwellers movement. When threatened with closure in 2008, the CCS effectively mobilised local, national and international support and had the decision reversed.

Another of the critical incidents often cited was the Mamdani affair at UCT. Mahmood Mamdani, a Ugandan and eminent africanist, was appointed to the AC Jordan Chair of African Studies at UCT in 1996. An exponent of africanisation, he incited universities to

Shed this mimicry of the west that continues to parade as universal excellence and take on the challenge to produce knowledge that takes the African condition as its central problem. (Mamdani 1997: 4)

He was surprised to discover that the Centre for African Studies was entirely extra-curricular and that he had no students. He saw this changing when he was asked to design a foundation course on Africa for all entering social science students. Trouble arose when he clashed with others involved in the course. There were genuine intellectual issues at stake: the weight given to the pre-colonial history of Africa, the inclusion of equatorial Africa, the relationship of pedagogy to content. What ensued clouded these issues somewhat as administrative measures overrode intellectual debate. Also the debate was almost inevitably racially charged. It was characterised as whites being unable to accept black intellectual leadership, as South Africans addicted to South African exceptionalism, an intellectual culture of potted plants in greenhouses, unable to learn from the achievements of post-colonial African academe. (Mamdani 1998, 2006) Mamdani resigned in 1999 and went to Columbia University in the USA. He is currently president of CODESRIA.

Even after all these years, the UCT chair has not been filled, raising many questions. Earlier in the 1990s there was a possibility of it being filled by Archie Mafeje, but he was again blocked from appointment at UCT. (Ntsebeza 2008)

The africanisation debate does need to be seen in terms of arguments and texts beyond critical incidents. There is a whole spectrum of positions from radical afrocentrism to unreconstructed eurocentrism. It is interesting that the critical incidents have tended to be clashes among those engaged in africanisation, while those who preceded as before tended to avoid such debates. Mamdani's conflict was with those who were actively engaged in African studies at UCT and not, for example, with the philosophy department, which continued to be dominated by analytic philosophy and to ignore the complex debate about African philosophy (with the exception of Augustine Schutte, who wrote a book blending aspects of traditional African thought with neo-thomism). (Schutte 1993) . *Social Dynamics* has aired some discussion of the role of philosophy, including a debate on the role of analytic philosophy in the new South Africa. (DuToit 1995, Myerson 1995)

The debate about African philosophy (Appiah 1992, Eze et al 1997, 1998, Coetzee and Roux et al 1998) is an interesting and meaningful one. It raises questions of world views and their socio-historical grounding in a way that analytic philosophy does not. Philosophy, contrary to expectations, is an area where there has been little evidence of transformation in curriculum. Njabulo Ndebele, who became vice-chancellor at UCT in 2000, had declared that:

Only now has South Africa succeeded ... in becoming a true subject of philosophy.  
(Ndebele 1998b)

Yet attending philosophy department seminars and philosophy conferences in South Africa seemed just like doing so in Europe or America in their mode of discourse and terms of reference. Whenever I was asked to present as a visiting academic, I always used the opportunity to raise questions about it, evoking a whole gamut of responses from polite tolerance to intense engagement. (Sheehan 2001, 2002)

The discussion on africanisation of universities has referenced panafricanist traditions developed both on the continent and in the diaspora, particularly afrocentrism. Afrocentrism starts from the premise that European conquest resulted not only in economic expropriation and political domination but in epistemicide. (Lebakeng 2004) It disrupted indigenous knowledge systems and colonisation extended even into consciousness. The antidote is decolonisation of consciousness, beginning with a critique of eurocentrism as an ethnocentric particularity claiming a false universality, as a view of the world from the point of view of the coloniser rather than the colonised. The history of the world then is revised with a strong emphasis on the origins of the human species in Africa, early African civilisations in Nubia and Zimbabwe, the devastation caused to African cultures by the slave trade and colonisation, the promise of liberation movements, the process of decolonisation. Some versions look to ancient Egypt, which they call Kemet, as a black civilisation, which was the source of the culture and philosophy of ancient Greece.

From here it goes in diverse directions. One stream advocates a delinking from European thought and culture and a return to source in African purity and primordality. It sees Africa as the source of a superior human essence. In essentialist terms it sees blacks as warm, holistic, communal, spiritual, cosmological, connected to land and ancestors and whites as cold, fragmented, individualist, empiricist, acquisitive, oppressive. It is striking that females and males and Irish and English have been conceived in parallel terms.

This trend is stronger in the African diaspora than in Africa, but it does have some traction in South Africa. One of the authors most often cited by Makgoba and Seepe is



Molefi Kete Asante of Temple University who embodies a particular brand of afrocentrism. (Asante 2003) I attended an afrocentrist conference in Philadelphia in 2000 where Asante entered wearing a robe of kente cloth and gold crown and sceptre. Born Arthur Lee Smith in Georgia, Professor Asante had himself enstooled as a king in Ghana. The conference opened with a libation ceremony in Twi. Many speakers opened their presentations with incantations invoking the creator (the kemetic god Ra) and the ancestors. Most speakers greeted the audience with 'hotep'. The first speaker, Badara Ndaw, said "we are the descendents of ancient Kemet ... we can be like them ... we are pharaohs ... we are nobles ... we are aristocrats". (Ndaw 2000) Several days later I watched the million family march in Washington, where speakers also took the same line, repeating that they were not the descendants of slaves but of kings and queens. The conference continued in that vein, calling upon divinity, identifying with monarchy, asserting a pure African essence, denouncing the influence of foreign thought systems in Africa. There was also information available on pilgrimages led by Asante to Kemet and Ghana. These returns to source were in jets, air-conditioned buses and 5 star hotels with prices starting at \$3000. The descendants of slaves living in the neighborhoods adjacent to Temple University would not be going.

Afrocentrism as a movement rooted in the push for history from below, as critique of eurocentrism, as corrective to a racist and imperialist view of Africa, has much to offer. There has been a need for a refocusing of perspective and a retelling of the story of the world that most of us learned in school. There has been a need to see the world from Africa and to transform curricula accordingly. However, there is much that is reactionary in this brand of afrocentrism: the preoccupation with pharaohs, pyramids and pageants, the identification with pharaohs rather than their slaves (ie, with the oppressor rather than the oppressed), the appeal to a romanticised primordial past, the static, essentialised, homogenised view of African personality and thought processes, the emphasis on race to the neglect of class and gender, the blindness to economic realities and global structures of power.

However, the agenda of africanisation does not depend on the glorification of African kings (including the ones who live lavishly at public expense in the SA republic), on the romanticisation of primordialism, on a fixation on race at the expense of class and gender, on an essentialised African personality, on a homogenised African world view. Another sort of africanism involves a perspectivism that is compatible with universalism. It claims the right of Africans to actively participate in the construction of the universal. It involves seeing the world from Africa and demanding that SA academics position themselves in Africa, prioritise its problems, subject both exogenous and indigenous knowledge systems to critical scrutiny,

reconceptualise the world by reintegrating its suppressed stories, by reimagining its emergent possibilities. There is still an energy of nation-building, a sense of ubuntu that goes deeper than the marketing of afro-chic or cellphones, that could be harnessed to larger ends. It would be a real African renaissance if it were to gather clarity, mass and velocity.

Did I find what I was seeking? Yes and no. I had to look further into the past to find much of what I sought, but I found in past and present stirrings of the rise of the repressed in the history of knowledge that was my agenda. This ferment has dissipated, but it has not disappeared. Instead of a liberation movement coming to power and bringing this to new heights, it re-integrated into the global order on terms set by the global elite. So I felt the same winds blowing through Africa as I felt in Europe and America, although it seemed so much more poignant after so much struggle. South Africa was becoming after all ‘an ordinary country’ (Alexander 2002) and its universities were becoming ordinary universities. However, there was still simmering below the surface something that was not so ordinary. It was the recent memory of a liberation movement that had not only constructed an alternative vision of the university in the future but gave birth to elements of its anticipated future in that past.

There was an alternative model of the university, however marginal and embattled it may have been. It is no longer a visible presence and many would wish to forget it. But events could still awaken its memory and bring its energies back into play. (Nash 2006:10)

Somewhere in our past  
we believed in the future. (Sole 1998)

In that hope I intend to return again and again, still looking for signs of that future.

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### **Acknowledgements:**

My thanks to all who made my research in South Africa possible. I thank Dublin City University, which facilitated my 5 trips to SA, 2 of which were sabbaticals. I thank University of Cape Town, where I was based for 4 of these trips, and University of the Witwatersrand, where I was based for the other. I received every sort of assistance from academics, administrators, librarians, cleaners. Many academics and others, whether in formal interviews or multiple informal conversations, advised me, hosted me, shared their knowledge and experiences with me in a most generous way and I could not have written this without such generosity. For this I thank Kader Asmal, Martin Hall, Andrew Nash, Colin Bundy, Edward Webster, Jeremy Cronin, Norman Levy, Mala Singh, Andre DuToit, Neville Alexander, John DeGruchy, Wilmot James, Robin Cohen, Paula Ensor, David Benatar, Christopher Saunders, Lungisile Ntsebeza, Kelwyn Sole, Jonathan Grossman, Salma Ismail, Linda Cooper, Nan Yeld, Laura Czerniewicz, Tony Carr, Ian Glenn, John Higgins, Brenda Cooper, Jason Myers, David Cooper, Luli Callinicos, Eve Bertelsen, Patrick Bond, Omano Edigheji, Raymond Suttner, Eddy Maloka, Wilhelm Voerwoerd, Brian Bunting, Robert Davies, Langa Zita, Sheila Barsel, Ed Wethli, Jeff Rudin, Mazibuko Jara, Dale McKinley, Sikelela Mkhabela, Saliem Patel and many others, especially staff, students and ex-students at UCT and residents of All Africa House, my home-away-from-home. I also thank those who taught me to toyi-toyi, who offered to clothe me when my luggage didn't arrive, who called me mama, auntie, sister, comrade, who embodied ubuntu. A final word about my interviews with Jeremy Cronin, which became caught up in a storm of controversy that neither he nor I foresaw, but can be understood only in terms of the larger battle of ideas and struggle for power that they addressed. I confirm that these were meant for publication in the form in which they were published, whatever was said in the media at the time.