

**RETHINKING HIGHER EDUCATION
TRANSFORMATION IN TERMS OF AN
AFRICAN(A) PHILOSOPHY**

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

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ABSTRACT

The central question of this study is whether higher education transformation can occur without taking into consideration an African(a) philosophy of education in South Africa. I hold that higher education policy initiatives as promulgated in the policy documents such as the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) (2001) and Education White Paper 3 (1997) on Higher Education Transformation may not be realised if policy is not embedded in the practices of the South African majority. I explore the negative impact that the marketisation of higher education may have on equitable redress in South Africa. It is my attempt to show that higher education transformation can have a positive effect on change in the country if implemented or framed according to an African(a) philosophy of education. With this study I therefore demonstrate how elements of African(a) philosophies such as culture, storytelling and indigenous languages can be tapped as necessary resources for deep transformation in higher education in South Africa.

My main contention is that the dismissal of African “voices” in higher education discourse would be detrimental to the achievement of deep transformation in higher education. Despite the weakness of African(a) philosophy, I articulate what the NPHE (2001) fails to advocate in relation to what an African(a) philosophy of education could mean.

KEYWORDS: African(a) philosophy, higher education, transformation, marketisation, educational policy, indigenous knowledge and South Africa.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie handel oor die sentrale kwessie of die transformasie van hoër onderwys kan plaasvind sonder om Afrika(na) filosofie in ag te neem. Ek voel dat die inisiatiewe van die hoër onderwysbeleid soos voorgestel in beleidsdokumente, soos die Nasionale Plan vir Hoër Onderwys (2001) en die Wit Skrif 3 (1997) in verband met Transformasie van Hoër Onderwys, nie verweselik sal word as dit nie gewortel is in die praktyke van die meerderheid Suid Afrikaners nie. Ek ondersoek die negatiewe impak wat die bemarking van hoër onderwys op verandering kan uitoefen. Ek poog om te bewys dat die transformasie van onderwys 'n positiewe effek kan hê op verandering in die land as dit beraam en geïmplimenter word volgens 'n Afrika(na) filosofie van die opvoeding. Ek probeer dus demonstree hoe elemente van Afrika(na) filosofie soos kultuur, storievertelling, en inheemse tale gebruik kan word as nodige hulpbronne vir 'n dieper transformasie van hoër onderwys in Suid Afrika.

My hoof argument is dat as Afrika(na) "stemme" in die gesprek van hoër onderwys nie in ag geneem word nie, dit 'n nadelige uitwerking op die transformasie van hoër onderwys sal hê. Ten spyte van die swakhede van Afrika(na) filosofie, pleit ek vir dit wat die Nasionale Plan vir Hoër Onderwys ten opsigte van Afrika(na) filosofie nalaat om te sê.

SLEUTELWOORDE: Afrika(na) filosofie, hoër onderwys, transformasie, bemarking, onderwysbeleid, inheemse kennis en Suid Afrika.

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CHAPTER 1

1 CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

1.1 Introduction and design

Higher education in South Africa has undergone several policy changes since 1994. Many of these changes in education policy occurred as a consequence of South Africa's higher education transformation agenda. There seems to be widespread scepticism about whether higher education transformation will be able to achieve its transformative objectives. On the one hand, transformation seems mostly to embrace the imperatives of globalisation, whereas on the other hand, South Africa's education transformation agenda initially had an equity and redress function. For instance, the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) mentions as one of its sixteen outcomes that higher education should aim at enhancing the cognitive skills of students (learners) by preparing them for a competitive labour market economy (NPHE 2001: 31). Likewise, the goal of higher education transformation is also to achieve equitable redress in terms of students' access to higher education institutions and the fact that the throughput rates of students need to be increased (NPHE 2001: 22). Evidence of the NPHE's equitable redress function is the fact that Black academics need to be trained for senior positions, and mergers have to occur among historically advantaged and disadvantaged institutions to allow for the sharing of resources.

The notion of the transformation of higher education, especially with regard to the Education White Paper 3 (1997), can be compared to Hans Weiler's (2001) thesis, where he addresses two interrelated puzzles in the German context, looking at why education reform in Germany did not happen when it was widely expected, and why it happened when nobody was demanding it (Jansen 2001: 1). Jansen argues that the Weilerian thesis may provide a useful point of entry for an analysis of the National Plan for Higher Education. I draw a comparison between the two situations because, although the German higher education system introduced wide-scale reforms, there remained an enduring

“politics of ambivalence” that Weiler attributes to “the putative political costs of reform” (Jansen 2001: 1).

The reasons why The National Plan of Higher Education (NPHE) was not introduced in 1997 after the Education White Paper 3 were a “lack of capacity to plan, poor quality of available information, and the need for consultation” (Jansen 2001: 1). These three reasons, according to the Ministry of Education, led to the adoption of the incremental approach. The result of the incremental approach was the creation of an “implementation vacuum” that led institutions into competition, growth of private higher education and deepened inequality in higher education. It was this “implementation vacuum” that needed to be addressed by the National Plan, as stated by its authors. The National Plan is to be the “key instrument in moving towards the implementation of the vision and policy framework outlined in the White Paper” (Jansen 2001: 2).

Some of the critical issues outlined in the Education White Paper 3 (1997) of South Africa’s education transformation agenda, which initially had an equity and redress function, are as follows:

The principle of equity requires fair opportunities both to enter higher education programmes and to succeed in them. Applying the principle of equity implies, on the one hand, a critical identification of existing inequalities, which are the product of policies, structures and practices based on racial, gender, disability and other forms of discrimination or disadvantages, and on the other, a programme of transformation with a view to redress. Such transformation involves not only abolishing all existing forms of unjust differentiation but also measures of empowerment, including financial support to bring about equal opportunity for individuals and institutions” (DoE 1997: 11).

Equitable redress for the NPHE included increasing participation rates for the previously marginalised, improvement of staff equity where imbalances are attributed to the low

recruitment of black and women academic staff, and the introduction of new institutional forms through mergers. Statistics have, however, proved that there is an ongoing decline in the number of learners entering and graduating from the public school system (Cloete & Bunting 2000: 8). Fewer learners enrol in Grade 1 due to an increase in child mortality rates and infertility caused by HIV/AIDS (DoE 2000: 45-47). The NPHE continues to be optimistic in its projections on increasing participating rates “based on one single factor: a significant improvement in the throughputs from the school system” (Jansen 2001: 2). There is scepticism as to whether equity and redress will take place when, according to Jansen, there is a mass migration of students to Standard Grade subjects. This results, of course, in fewer students sitting for university admission examinations. The enrolment trend of higher education “has not been borne out in practice”, as can be deduced from projections made that nearly 600 000 learners in 1996 would increase to 1.5 million in 2005; on the contrary, the participation rate decreased from 17% in 1996 to 15% in 2000 (NPHE 2001: 19). There is little mention of how to address the problem of most of the non-model C schools that are still dysfunctional due to limited human and material resources. Higher education can only function effectively if supported by an adequate schooling system and this may prove to be unattainable due to problems in the schooling system.

It is surprising that, without looking at the root causes of the decrease in enrolment or participation rates, the NPHE (2001: 22) is relying on one single factor to increase participation rates, namely, improvement in the throughputs. One may agree with Jansen who asks the following question:

Could it be that this illogical proposal has less to do with serious demographic analyses and much more to do with the political costs of acknowledging that higher education will not be able to deliver on that most cherished goal of our new democracy: to broaden access and participation to those who have been historically marginalised from higher education? (Jansen 2001: 2).

The problem of staff equity is perhaps one of the most intractable facing transformation in higher education. Institutions of higher education have for the past few years failed to visibly increase the number of black staff (Jansen 2001: 3). The strategies or “levers” that the NPHE (2001: 10) has introduced for changing staff equity ratios are once again characterised by the first wave of reforms in the mid-1990s and thus, according to Jansen, seem meaningless and “impotent” (Jansen 2001: 3). It seems as if the recruitment of black academics from elsewhere in Africa could accomplish what South African academics were unable to accomplish in redressing the inequality of the past (Jansen 2001: 4). Jansen argues that it is not a matter of role models from elsewhere, but a political dilemma in the national system due to the undersupply of black and women academics within a highly competitive labour market. This then is nothing else but restating institutional commitments to equity. My concern is that the equitable redress agenda of the Ministry of Education seems to have been minimised or under-emphasised, as is evident from the National Plan for Higher Education.

This brings me to my problem statement.

1.2 Problem statement and focus

In this thesis my concern is that higher education transformation cannot exclusively focus on an equitable redress or globalisation agenda. What is wrong with over-emphasising globalisation only? Firstly, as stated by Elaine Unterhalter in her paper (“South African Education Research and the Contradictions of Globalisation”) there are “globalisation enthusiasts” such as Anthony Giddens who see an immense promise and potential to enhance democratisation and inclusive education in South Africa. In making new education policies the enthusiasts advocate accepting new technologies and incorporating aspects of integration with globalising forces into new curricula (Unterhalter 2000: 3). Globalisation critics rejected certain features of the global political economy and asserted the importance of locating education policy in South African reality. This group, according to Unterhalter, did not fail to observe that globalisation has “simultaneously, increased the wealth of some countries, while dramatically reducing the wealth of the

others” (Unterhalter 2000: 30). Even before the Council of Higher Education’s *Shape and Size Report on Higher Education* was made public in the year 2000, Griesel stressed how the marketisation of higher education tended to widen gaps rather than redress past inequalities. Griesel became aware of the gap between policy development and its implementation, and could see critical tensions developing between national policies framed in global terms and its influence on specific institutional responses.

One may also refer to the recent decline in enrolments in higher education as an example to illustrate the limits of policy in anticipating the multidimensional challenges of the higher education system in transition, and of the role of access in this regard. The sixteen outcomes of the National Plan may just be a clear example of the marketisation of higher education, because it talks about the development of cognitive skills for the competitive labour market and thus tends heavily towards neoliberal ideas, which are driven by market forces. The discourse of the market forces does not originate from within the nation state, because multinational companies such as the International Monetary fund (IMF) and the World Bank influenced it (Young 2001: 30). Globalisation makes it difficult for governments to resist the ideas of neo-liberalism, since these institutions exert pressure on governments to institute neo-liberal policies that are imbedded in discourses such as efficiency, limiting public expenditure, effectiveness and accountability. Young (2001) also state that neo-liberal economic agendas are concerned more with fiscal efficiency than with quality and equity. The influence of globalisation through the afore-mentioned organisations may lead to decreased government spending because governments are reliant on donor funds. The point is that donors stipulate criteria for spending which are steeped in fiscal efficiency rather than sound pedagogical principles. This has the potential to counter the intended ideal of equitable redress in education. My concern in this regard is that the language of the White Paper (1997) seems to be framed in terms of the dictates of equitable redress, whereas, quite paradoxically, the NPHE seems to advocate a language of the market forces.

Looking at the afore-mentioned situation, the NPHE does not seem to address the important issue of knowledge production in the South African context, but rather

knowledge production or construction in response to the neo-liberal economic market, whereby students have to be trained to be competitive. Knowledge as a social construct agreed on by human interest may be deemed not essential by those in control of the economy or those funding education. International agendas influence the trends in higher education by framing the discourse. Michael Young (2001: 30) refers to the introduction of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) as a “massively ambitious project.” In this regard one may ask whether existing higher education institutions possess the necessary strength to enact transformation in our society, especially in the light of globalisation. A contextualised higher education system means that we have to develop systems of education that are embedded in the communities they serve. As long as institutions of higher learning in South Africa avoid dealing with normative issues, and their methods of work, visions and frames of reference ignore the central questions of power and poverty, the political preconditions for development, the relationship between social change and the imperative for renewal and transformation of mindsets, there does not seem to be much hope for transformation.

What seems to be the problem with globalisation and higher education may be the fact that the international organisations funding our education have at the back of their minds an aspect of risk management for developing countries. South Africa’s higher education system does not seem to be embedded in the spirit of *ubuntu*, which involves the cultivation of “virtues such as kindness, compassion, generosity and concern for others” (Higgs 2003: 14), as the NPHE over-emphasises universal values attuned to the language of the market. Of course, the NPHE is not averse to the values of democracy and tolerance, however, such values cannot be detached from the life experiences of people. Values that once rooted community development, such as respect for elders, may have eroded, leading to a simplistic approach that sees higher education only as a panacea for economic performance. Globalisation may lead to higher education creating scholars who will be judged by external trappings rather than inner character. The concern for humanness is substituted by economic imperatives minimising the human as the primary objective. I agree with Giddens that the education policies of the World Bank or bilateral development assistance programmes “have tended not to stress the importance of

education for enlightenment or national identity formation but rather how to enhance earning capacity or how education can limit the fertility capacity of poor woman” (in Unterhalter 2000: 7). “Investment in education by international bodies has long been a feature of a globalised industry of risk management”(Unterhalter 2000: 7).

One may see globalisation as assisting the democratisation of state education, but one should in the meantime guard against obstructing the attempts to achieve equality and creativity. The shortcomings of the NPHE are that the mode of analysis appears to be descriptive, strategic or rhetorical. Possibly the pressing task of transformation has not left time for questions of epistemology and methodology, but the silence signals unexamined theories, including possibly limited views regarding the theorisation of globalisation. The change that is advocated by the sixteen outcomes of the National Plan that seems to tend towards neo-liberalism may end up serving a purpose that is external to itself mainly due to uncritical loyalty to the competitive global market.

Viewed against this background, as well as the realisation that higher education has an important role to play in the formation of a democratic society, I want to consider that African(a) philosophy might be a further step in the reorientation of scholarship in Africa in general, and South Africa in particular. This brings me to my research question: “Can higher education transformation in South Africa occur without taking into consideration an African(a) philosophy of education?”

This thesis provides an opportunity to rekindle the debates around transformation in higher education. It is an attempt to show that higher education transformation can have a positive effect on change in the country if implemented or framed according to an African(a) philosophy of education.

This thesis must be taken as part of a dialogue to legitimise the indigenous philosophies and wisdom within the academy. The study question has to do with how higher education can help us to claim the right for our language (in my case *Oshiwambo*), our style of thinking, speaking and writing and - to use the words of Ivy Goduka: “my culture and

spiritual values which are rooted in my (Ovambo) indigenous episteme to be validated within the academy as legitimate and authentic” (Goduka 2000: 64). It also aims to create space to claim the right to use our African indigenous languages to speak and listen to our *ovakulundu* (elders) in our village in Ukwanyama, Ovamboland, who are the custodians of my spirituality and African wisdom. I want to contend that higher education may transform into a mediator between previously muted or excluded voices in the academy and the previously dominant ones.

1.3 Scope of study

Not much research has been done in the field of higher education transformation in relation to an African(a) philosophy of education. Phillip Higgs’s article “African philosophy and the transformation of educational discourse in South Africa” is one such contribution. He argues that African(a) philosophy “as a system of African knowledge, can provide a useful philosophical framework for the construction of empowering knowledge. This will enable communities in South Africa to participate in their own educational development”(Higgs 2003: 8). This contribution was followed up by Ben Parker’s notion of African philosophy of education as being a “disciplined articulation” that “locates human rights historically and contextually, in the real life experiences of Africans” (Parker 2003: 34). According to Moeketsi Letseka “all people philosophise in so far as they pose fundamental questions and reflect on fundamental aspects of life, human conduct and human relations” (Letseka 2000: 179). There has been quite a wide range of publications on whether an African(a) philosophy exists or not; see, for example, Mbiti (1970); Wiredu (1980, 1996); Hountondji (1983); Gyekye (1987, 1997); Appiah (1992) Masolo (1994). Consequently my thesis shall address some of the gaps related to what higher education transformation ought to be.

1.4 Goals and theoretical points of departure

I am attracted to critical educational theory, since I am interested in empowering myself as well as the communities with whom I work. In the first instance, critical educational

theory is concerned with an understanding of events and how people live and engage with one another. Secondly, critical educational theory has an emancipatory agenda. I am attracted to critical theory because it seems to be based on the premise that all humans should be free from oppression. Critical educational theory and “speech acts” are explained through the work of Jürgen Habermas (1998: 246). According to Habermas, critical theory is associated with that which engenders self reflective inquiry amongst humans, giving rise to a clear articulation of arguments in an atmosphere in which openness prevail (Habermas 1998: 247). He also writes about critical theory as the “organisation of enlightenment”, which I contend links to the “ideal speech situation” where honesty, trust and respect complement openness (Habermas 1998: 248). My understanding of critical theory is that it is geared towards bringing about social change and thus emancipation for transformation. The notion of the ideal speech situation (Habermas 1998) refers to the mutual communicative relationship between teacher and learner. The ability to produce a situation of potential ordinary-language communication is in itself part of the general competence of the ideal speaker (Habermas 1998). This notion of ideal speech, according to Habermas, should be free from “systematic distortion” allowing for “unrestricted discussion”, where it may be possible to reach “unconstrained consensus” (Roderick 1986: 78). Using the notion of ideal speech, higher education transformation can therefore be perceived as a social process for enlightenment and not indoctrination. It should be an ‘unrestricted’ inquiry-based approach, stressing an acquaintance with the principal ways by which the human mind comprehends the world.

1.5 Research Method

My research method entails a conceptual-analytical approach and a literature review. The conceptual-analytical approach concerns itself with questions of a reflective kind, which come to the fore when social processes such as education are under discussion. Conceptual analysis, as posited by Hirst and Peters (1998: 33), clarifies educational concepts by describing the essential or generic meaning of the concept, specifying the different meanings of the concept, describing the appropriate usage of the concept in a variety of instances. My emphasis on different meanings that constitute the concept, say,

of higher education transformation has some bearing on what makes concepts what they are. In other words, I am not suggesting that concepts have only one particular, absolute, universal meaning. Instead, these meanings are determined according to the context in which they unfold. Waghid (2003: 10) views the understanding of a concept not as an observable quality, but as the ability “to have a general principle of the concept”. He implies that one should not only do certain things, but also understand and learn what one is doing. When we do an analysis of concepts, it is important to realise that we do so by looking at how they relate to other words and how they are used in different contexts. Hirst and Peters (1988: 33) argue that concepts can only be understood in relation to other concepts. They further posit that concepts cannot be analysed “just by examining the use of words in a self-contained way”. Understanding concepts does not only come through the study of grammar, but also through understanding the purpose that lies behind the use of the sentences, for instance, the purpose of higher education transformation. Concepts do not operate independently or in isolation, but rather in conjunction with other concepts and that is how they derive their meaning. The historical context in which a concept is embedded and why the word is being used in a particular situation must be looked at. In this regard, Taylor (1989: 35) argues that one would gain more clarity about the use of a particular word if one were familiar with the context in which the word is being used – that is, its history.

My literature review revolves around the NPHE document, the Education White Paper 3 on Education Transformation, and how it may (or may not) enhance higher education transformation. I am reviewing this literature to get a picture of the existing challenges and thus shall attempt to show that the debates surrounding the restructuring of higher education transformation in South Africa have not always been informed by rigorous conceptual analysis, with specific reference to an understanding of the underlying concepts. Conceptual analysis may offer us an opportunity to stand back and reflect on the status and understanding of what constitutes higher education transformation in terms of an African(a) philosophy. In this way I hope to provide more clarity on those concepts that might contribute towards the ongoing discourse about the feasibility of African(a) philosophy for higher education transformation. My design focuses on the use of

concepts and aims to justify the notion that a full understanding of the constitutive elements of these concepts may bring about “true humanism that sees human need, interest and dignity as of fundamental importance” (Letseka 2000: 188).

My method is based on the fact that when pursuing research we cannot ignore the reflective part of our philosophy, which underlies our own investigation. Morris argues that if we ignore this, we cannot claim to be educationalists, but must be contented with being “laboratory technicians and if we are merely technicians, we cannot claim to be able to criticise the educational foundations and implications of our own work” (Morris 1972: 60). The implication is this that we cannot claim to know what we are doing.

How does the above explanation of conceptual analysis with its concomitant link to the philosophy of education connect with an understanding of higher education in terms of an African(a) philosophy as used in this thesis? I use philosophy of education as a tool of reflective inquiry concerned with matters of an educational nature in order to gain clarity about how things are and what to do in this particular realm. I draw on Soltis’s three-dimensional view of philosophy of education as reflective inquiry. He refers to the personal, the public and the professional dimensions of philosophy of education. The personal dimension involves “guiding one’s own individual practice” (Soltis 1998: 197). This, he argues, is to have “a personal philosophy of life and liken it to having a philosophy of education, a set of personal beliefs about what is good, right, and worthwhile to do in education” (Soltis 1998: 196). This is different from viewing the philosophy of education in its public dimension, which is “aimed at guiding and directing the practice of many”, which he also explains as “everybody’s business”(Soltis 1998: 197). Furthermore Soltis explains the professional dimension as including both the personal and public, but it creates a dimension of its own. When philosophy of education performs professionally, “there is less proposing and it tends to concentrate on the analytical side of things such as reflecting, evaluating and seeking of a clearer understanding of educational matters, and emphasising the logical soundness of arguments, explicating the meaning of ideas and justifying value claims” (Soltis 1998: 198).

It is with such an understanding of the philosophy of education that I may claim that my intended use of conceptual analysis is in fact located within an integrated personal, public and professional understanding of the philosophy of education. It is, however, not enough to talk about conceptual analysis as a research method and presuppose that concepts will be thoroughly explained after one has reflected critically on the concepts. The kind of analysis we use is framed within a particular understanding of education. In a different way conceptual analysis is itself a practice guided by a particular understanding of education. Conceptual analysis thus includes:

- 1) Examining the use of concepts in relation to other concepts;
- 2) Establishing constitutive meanings that may make up the use of the concept; and
- 3) Exploring the context from which the concept may derive its meaning.

In essence, conceptual analysis would enable me to examine the underlying meanings of higher education transformation in line with the idea of an African(a) philosophy. In addition, I shall also explore what both an African(a) philosophy and higher education transformation could mean and, in turn, how an African(a) philosophy ought to shape higher education transformation in South Africa.

1.6 Programme of Study

In **Chapter 2** I shall explore the history of higher education transformation in South Africa, paying specific attention to education policy shifts which have given rise to the position of higher education transformation since the early 1990s. I then identify gaps in the higher education transformation discourse.

In **Chapter 3** I conceptually analyse constitutive meanings of an African(a) philosophy of education. In other words, I look at those meanings without which an African(a) philosophy cannot be a philosophy. In doing so, I also produce arguments in defence of an African(a) philosophy of education.

In **Chapter 4** I show what higher education transformation, with reference to teaching learning and research, would look like if one takes into consideration the constitutive meanings of an African(a) philosophy of education. I shall particularly address aspects of the NPHE, which seemingly does not take into account aspects of an African(a) philosophy of education, despite the fact that it claims to be a transformative document.

In **Chapter 5** I trace my intellectual journey through the writing of this thesis, and how I have developed personally in my quest to link higher education transformation to the idea of an African(a) philosophy. I conclude this chapter by offering possibilities that this thesis hold for future research on transformation and an African(a) philosophy of education.

CHAPTER 2

2 Higher Education Policy Discourse in South Africa: A Reflective Overview on Epistemological Issues

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I shall explore the history of higher education transformation in South Africa, paying specific attention to education policy shifts, which have given rise to the status of higher education transformation since the earlier 1990s. I then identify gaps in the higher education transformation discourse by taking a critical look at the policy formulations shaped by global discourse and argue that instrumental-technical policy, aimed at performativity and efficiency, may not always be educationally desirable.

In this global context one can see qualifications and curricular innovations of the new policy being significantly shaped by the idea of the market. Although shaped by the historical legacy of apartheid and possessing the contradictory demands for equity and redress, on the one hand, and economic growth and development, on the other, the South African higher education policy is very much part of the global discourses. One may sense that South African policy-makers have been heavily influenced by Australian, New Zealand and Scottish models of education through utilising their competence and emergent qualifications structures (in South Africa) in order to assess students' competencies. The efficacy of such developments within the current South African climate of social and educational transformation, for me, is questionable.

The evolution of education policy discourse in South Africa has been profoundly shaped by the dramatic contextual developments of the early 1990s, both in South Africa and in the world at large (Kraak 2001: 87). There seem to be gaps in policy implementation emanating from the consensus politics of the 1990s. This is because issues were never resolved during the 1990s, "but rather postponed to reappear in the first years of the new millennium" (Kraak 2001: 85). One may base this development on the consensual

politics of the early 1990s, when the ANC-led government (under the leadership of Nelson Mandela) wanted to bring to an end the on-going cycle of violence between the contending parties in South Africa. The macro-political policy of reconciliation resulted in the Government of National Unity with its consensus approach to solving problems and developing policy. The consensus politics has enabled privileged social groupings to influence policy for the retention of some of the old order. The conclusion drawn was to forge unity and common agreement on what constituted the central tasks of social reconstruction and transformation (Kraak 2001). This “stalemate” could only be maintained temporarily, because a few years down the line “the sense of unity has receded and real differences over policy came to the fore” (Kraak 2001: 85).

I shall now address some of the policy formulations and debates.

2.2 Policy formulations and debates

The discourses that shaped the interplay of policy development in South African higher education can be categorised into five identifiable, although overlapping, phases according to Kraak:

- *The pre-taking of power phase:* The period 1989-1994 during which the popular democratic and economic rationalist discursive tensions began to emerge, but were muted by the consensus-building dictates of the day;
- *The legislative era:* The 1994-1997 period witnessing significant education legislation being enacted;
- *The policy implementation phase:* When the limits of the new state began to surface;
- *A vacillating state, the era of policy doubt and retraction:* The complexities of policy implementation emerge leading to policy doubt, retraction and reversal; and lastly the introduction of
- *The National Plan, February 2001:* State’s reaffirmation of key policy principles and determination to implement them (Kraak 2001: 86).

I shall not address the policy developments chronologically but rather in an integrated way.

Stakeholders during the period of policy formulations have articulated competing views on the reconstitution of higher education transformation in South Africa. One such stakeholder in the policy debates was the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). With the presence of COSATU the political rationales underpinning the policy debates was the dispute around the socialist and capitalist models. As pointed out by Zelda Groener, through COSATU the trade unions expressed a commitment to socialism. Groener highlights the dominance of capitalist discourse amongst members' party to the negotiations on higher education policy, particularly business, and the extent to which this constrained the COSATU representatives (in Morrow *et.al.* 1998: 69). Groener further explains the reason for the weakening of the socialist discourse. She attributes this mainly to contradictions within COSATU's own position (in Morrow *et.al.* 1998: 69). I agree with Kraak (2001) that the contradictions within COSATU that led to the weakening of the socialist discourse may be attributed to the collapse of communist Eastern bloc regimes. According to Kraak, this led to moderation of key propositions of the opposing parties in the South African conflict. "Ideological allegiances and the associated social and economic policy propositions of the national liberation movement shifted dramatically from left-socialist formulations to what at best can be described as social democratic and at worst neo-liberal thinking" (Kraak 2001: 86).

2.3 International discourses shaping policy developments in South Africa

Global events and other international discourses especially by the francophone countries have shaped South Africa's policy formulations. Consequently I shall look at the developments in New Zealand and the influence this had on South African policy development.

In New Zealand during the 1980s and 1990s there were highly-charged controversies surrounding the abandonment of the welfare economy, the acceptance of programmes

funded by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, and the introduction of an articulated structure through which education feeds into employment, the labour market and the economy at a macro-policy level (Donn 1998: 74). Other developments such as the commitment of the United Kingdom to the markets of the European Community, the removal of international trade barriers and the emergence of the global economy all impacted upon education. This resulted in legislation which developed market approaches to schooling (through parental choice) and encouraged competition between schools (Donn 1998: 74). This is the context in which the government of New Zealand recognised that future success and prosperity depend on a high skill / high wage economy. Given these circumstances and the support of the World Bank together with the monitoring of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), “New Zealand fore fronted the importance of human resource development as a strategy for improving competitiveness in the global economy” (Donn 1998: 75). The establishment of the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) was a response to these visions and demands. It was established in 1991 to co-ordinate and integrate the academic, intellectual, manual and vocational skills.

In the light of skills development the separation of the vocational from the academic curriculum qualifications was becoming irrelevant. One could sense a shift from formal academic qualifications to a more vocationally-orientated structure. I concur with Donn (1998: 78) that fundamental to the NQF is the commitment to remove any distinction between “educational credentials” and work-based qualifications, since work-based qualifications are in fact forms of achieving educational competence.

I shall now examine higher education policy changes in relation to the NQF for the reason that policy frameworks reflect the intended changes of policy makers.

2.4 The National Qualification Framework (NQF)

“Education and training are the backbone of any learning society, and President Mandela has defined South Africa as such a society” (Donn 1998: 82). South Africa has

experienced a plethora of official and unofficial commissions. The Report of the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE 1996) and the ensuing Green and White Papers (1995 and 1997) on higher education, along with government policy documents for education (Education Act 1996), further and adult basic education and training (Department of Education 1997) have all supported the development of the NQF with its integrated approach to education and training, under the umbrella of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA).

The NQF emphasises access and mobility within education, training and employment opportunities, the portability of credits between institutions and the recognition of prior learning (Sedibe 1998: 269). The NQF is divided into different levels consisting of the general education and training phase (GET), the adult basic education and training phase (ABET), the education and training certificate (FETC) and lastly education beyond the further education and training (FET) level, notably, post-matriculation certificates, diplomas, degrees and so forth. The NQF, according to Kraak (1999), espouses a philosophy of lifelong learning.

The Minister of Education appointed a National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) to make recommendations on the ways in which the higher education sector can be transformed. The final document on the programme for higher education transformation (DoE 1997) was published, followed by the Higher Education Bill (1997) (Sedibe 1998: 269). The main recommendation of the Education White Paper 3 and Bill is that a Council on Higher Education (CHE) be established to advise the Minister on higher education issues such as the structure of the sector, mechanisms for the allocation of public funds, promotion of student access, quality assurance and accreditation of programmes in line with the NQF. Recommendations in this document were made regarding the governance of public higher education institutions with the following minimum governance requirements: a council, a senate, a student representative council, a principal and other statutory bodies and committees.

Now that I have given a brief account of the NQF, I shall explore in some detail higher education discourse in South Africa.

2.5 Higher Education Policy Discourse

Earlier developments such as the trinary system by the Van Wyk De Vries Commission in 1974 and the stratification system proposed by the De Lange Report in 1981 have shaped the higher education discourse. To clearly understand the higher education transformation discourse, one cannot ignore the earlier developments such as the stratification discourse by the Van Wyk De Vries 1974 Commission. This commission argued for the trinary divide, maintaining that universities should concentrate on the teaching and research of the basic fundamental principles of science and the application of scientific principles to practical problems by technicians. They maintain that colleges should provide vocational training (DoE 1995: 10). De Lange was concerned with the rigid boundaries of the trinary system and proposed the Five-Year College system, which was overlooked due to the reluctance of the apartheid state to support a single non-racial system of education. This idea resurfaced as the Education Renewal Strategy (ERS) in the publication of the Department of National Education in June 1991, proposing a similar innovation vis-à-vis the “Edukon”. Kraak (2001) points out that the Edukons were to offer courses that could ease the burden on universities and technikons. The distinction between science and technology, and therefore between essentialist roles of universities and polytechnics became blurred (Kraak 2001). So blurred, in fact, that in July 1999 to February 2001 the state still did not know which direction to take, vacillating between two diametrically opposed frameworks, namely, a single co-ordinated or a stratified system of higher education and training (Van Wyk De Vries and De Lange resurfacing).

Kraak explained this as the dynamic environment of technology interchange; the distinction between university-based and technikon-based scientists and technologists has become less important. It has consequently become extremely problematic for the Committee on Higher Education (CHE) “to resurrect the idea of rigid structural differentiation” (Kraak 2001: 99). The situation could be explained as follows:

.... Technology transfer looks more like a soccer game in which the university is a member of a team; to score it needs the aid of its team mates. The ball is passed back and forth constantly among the players who may include business people, venture capitalists patent attorneys, production engineers, and many others in addition to the university faculty. This is why it has been suggested that technology interchange is a more appropriate phrase than technology transfer (Gibbons *et. al.* 1994: 87).

The National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) appointed by the Minister had the most profound influence in higher education transformation. The recommendation by the NCHE highlights five key pillars for higher education and training, which was accepted by the government in 1997 as the Higher Education Act (Kraak 2001). Kraak argues that these pillars deal with issues central to high-skills discourse because the NCHE recommended Higher Education and Training (HET) to be more responsive to socio-economic priorities, planning and co-ordination to effectively steer the total system using financial, performance and other incentives in directions consonant with national macro-economic and labour market priorities. Moreover, the NCHE proposed a unified regulatory framework for a single co-ordinated system of HET. The other new HET policy framework is the one of responsiveness, proposing a shift away from academic insularity governed primarily by the norms and procedure of established disciplines towards a more open higher education system that can interact with its environment. This will mean new forms of trans-disciplinary research and knowledge production in the South African higher education system with applied research and consultancy, based on seeking solutions to social and economic problems. Private higher education institutions would be requested to apply for registration with the higher education registrar. These institutions will be required to offer programmes accredited through the South African Qualifications Authority. The other recommendation was that vocational colleges of education, agriculture and nursing, which were previously – and for the interim, continue to be – a provincial responsibility, be transferred to the higher education sector, thus becoming a national competence.

The South African qualifications system has resonance with the systems in Scotland and New Zealand, but South Africa has many elements of exceptionalism, particularly because of the role played by trade union movements and the impact of apartheid in the formulations of educational policies. This is especially important in the context of demands for equitable redress. Yet, Donn (1998) poses the question: how, in South Africa as elsewhere, are demands for education and training policies to respond to the market-driven needs of employment met? Christie holds that “the debate on the integration of education and training are usually accompanied by arguments that new technologies and work patterns require flexibly skilled, versatile workers with problem-solving abilities and a range of competencies” (Christie 1998: 119).

Furthermore, she argues that “this logic is echoed in the WPET’s (White Paper on Education and Training) list of education qualities required by ‘successful, modern economies’ This formulation of an education-economy link bears the hallmarks of human capital theory, which asserts that education brings returns for both individuals and society more broadly, and that education is linked to productivity” (Christie 1998:119).

The question arises: what seems to be the problem with borrowing from the francophone countries?

I am of the opinion that the local addition to the international debates, namely the equity policies to redress the apartheid education legacy, should be linked with human resource development. Christie (1998: 116) is of the opinion that competence discourse supersedes the other discourses and most of the policy statements are just broad statements of intent. Most documents draw heavily on the examples of the New Zealand education system. Such a borrowing to clarify concepts and implications is helpful, but could also bring with it attendant problems. Many of the concepts and examples have been developed over a period of time to suit the New Zealand context. An uncritical application of these to the South African context could be problematic, because for many the concepts of the NQF will remain technically difficult, abstract, alien and mysterious until its implementation.

The difficulty experienced can also be attributed to the absence of representation from the formal education sector, departmental officials, teachers, parents and many others from the consultation process. The ownership of the policy agenda and the gap between policy formulators and conditions on the ground needed to be clarified, because for the policy to succeed depends upon the local action in classrooms and training centres. Christie draws on Taylor and Henry to refer to this as “the vanguard being so far ahead of the troops” (1998: 122). Recognising this, the committee has seen the need to develop user-friendly NQF material and information as well as provincial and other forums for NQF discussions (DoE 2003: 248).

2.6 Some ambiguities in the higher education policy discourse

The South African state’s intention through the policy of co-ordination to strategically “steer” the system via a regulatory framework of financial incentives, reporting and monitoring requirements with regard to performance indicators and a system of programme approval seems to be ambiguous, since it is the state that sets the standards for qualifications, determines the entry into and exit points from the educational institution. These standards are set either in the form of curricular prescriptions, examination requirements, or certification and accreditation. Although not always tangible, standards for educational qualifications are enforced by skill and competence criteria for entry into different parts of the labour market. If one has to keep in mind that these policies were designed to enhance equity by reducing or eliminating whatever disparities exist in terms of resources, then one has to question how these policies have been conceptualised in the first place. If they have been wrongly conceptualised, one might argue that not only could such a conceptualisation contradict other policy goals, but also counteract the possibility of cultivating awareness of democracy and cultural sensitivity. Ironically, attempts to redress past injustices and to achieve greater equity have been the areas in which higher education policy seems to be undermined. There is no evidence that the gap between the formerly privileged and formerly underprivileged higher education institutions has diminished. What is evident, as propounded by Weiler (1989: 34), is the need to increase the effectiveness of the workforce by utilising

economies of scale and allowing greater mobility of “human capital”. One might argue that the agencies of capital accumulation had sufficient involvement in the shaping of policy in higher education.

The assumptions advocated by the NQF that its structure will lead to an increase in skills and productivity, and therefore economic growth, is questionable because learners are required to acquire specific and clearly identifiable competencies or outcomes, which may counter the need for the holistic development of individuals. The danger of neglecting this imperative is that the system will produce people with highly specialised skills that are useful for their jobs, but not easily transferable to other situations, thereby restricting their “humane” mobility. One may become doubtful of higher education transformation if it is perceived only as a panacea for the economic ills of South Africa (Don 1998). One would have to go beyond the structures of accreditation to tackle poor or inefficient educational performance. These co-ordinated unified structures of education is not without merit, but undoubtedly, their rationales have in fact little to do with emancipation and liberation. A strong economy is important but I contend that one should not see qualification frameworks as the remedies for economic ills. “It appears to confirm with worries that highly specialist, discourse-driven and expert-led innovations do little to empower, liberate or emancipate populations” (Donn 1998: 73).

These policies resonated with the political and economical crisis and did not address educational issues as such. The development of NQFs in England, Wales and Scotland are good examples of the way societies turn to highly technical structures in times of socio-political or economic crisis. Designing a coherent administrative framework is necessary, but insufficient if it is not viable for the conditions it needs to serve.

Greenstein (1998: 134) gives direction on the importance of context in policy developments. He is of the opinion that in the South African context it is the majority of the population who have been excluded and this exclusion must therefore be addressed. “One could argue that if different contexts call for different applications of common principles”, as Muller (in Greenstein 1998: 134) rightly asserts, the situation in South

Africa demands a more radical remedy. He continues by asking: “If the values and the contributions of the majority have been marginalised or altogether excluded, does this not imply that a thorough transformation of the system would be achieved by inverting it and shaping it in the majority’s image? Or, put another way, could the cultures, traditions and concerns of the African majority not be used as starting points for a new system, valid not only for Africans but all South Africans as well?” (1998: 134).

The other very profound phenomenon that the state came to realise is its lack of power in the higher educational policy discourse, especially during the implementation phase. I agree with Kraak (2001) that South Africa’s re-entry into the global economy has weakened the new state primarily because of the power of financial markets and what Kraak calls their “susceptibility to subjective manipulation”. Other shifts include the responses of higher education institutions to market forces that are unassisted by government regulation. These shifts do not always take place because of necessary socio-economic priorities, but merely because of opportunistic competition between institutions to capture key market niche areas. The poaching of Black students by historically advantaged universities and technikons from the historically disadvantaged institutions is something that the state is also currently grappling with. International organisations such as the World Bank are also blamed, because at a certain point during policy formulations an amount of \$850 million exchanged hands, with the condition being that government maintain existing monetary policy of inflation reduction, contain government expenditure and not raise taxes (Kraak 2001:105). This and other factors could be perceived as a recipe for policy ambiguity in higher education transformation.

2.7 Linking policy concepts to context

In this section I address the issue of why the causal and technological borrowing of policy from francophone countries (New Zealand, Scotland, Canada, Wales and England) informed by neo-liberal ideas may not be appropriate for higher education in South Africa. I shall argue that higher education discourse should not only be informed by

instrumentalism, but also intrinsic reasons such as those which explain higher education in terms of its intentions to democratise society.

Borrowing higher education policy may not reflect the marketisation of education, but will be understood as a technological process in which, according to Biesta (2004), there exists a clear separation between the means and the ends. His notion of the most effective and efficient means to achieve the ends proves that education policy embedded in the market forces may not be desirable, since marketisation seems to be means driven. For instance, a means-driven education system is one whereby empirical evidence is used to justify, for example, corporal punishment as the most effective way of deterring or controlling disruptive behaviour. However, the practice is nevertheless undesirable because it teaches learners “that it is appropriate to enforce one’s will or way with violence or enforcing violence” (Carr 1992: 249). Likewise, higher education practices driven by means only would also prove to be undesirable.

My argument is that we cannot use or borrow for the sake of it being effective, because in education the means and ends are not linked in a technological or external way, but are related internally or constitutively (Biesta 2004: 10). Education, according to Carr (1992: 248), is at heart a moral practice and should not be treated as a technological enterprise. Policy should be articulated in such a way that it also contributes qualitatively to the character of higher education. The African economic situation may have warranted an interventionist approach to our education, addressing effectiveness and performativity at the expense of other potential educational values. This is obvious in the “what works” approach taken by multinational organisations (based on factual judgement) and not what is educationally desirable (based on a value judgement).

I agree with Biesta when he uses Aristotle’s distinction between ‘*phronesis* and *techne*’ (Aristotle 1980) to illustrate that education is more than “what works” (technological), but is also intrinsically a moral practice (Biesta 2004: 6). *Phronesis* is often neglected in our technological age and refers to moral knowing. This type of knowing as propounded by Aristotle does not refer to the mere application of ready-made formulae to the

dilemmas of living. It is based on the realisation that many of life's problems can only be handled on a case-by-case basis and not through the mechanical application of a universal rule to a particular situation. The choice of action is one that can be deliberated upon and the prudence of the action lies in the fact that it is conducive to the good of all (Biesta 2004: 6).

It would, however, be a mistake to view global influences simply as impositions on local contexts since this would overlook the agency of local actors as well as the different forms that adaptation to local contexts bring. One would not just object to a technological view or borrowing of policy as long as it takes into consideration the unique South African situation. Knowledge acquired by others in other inquiry or research situations should not be used as rules and prescriptions in solving problems in existential conditions but "such hypotheses have to be formed, developed and tested in strict correlation with existential conditions as means" (Biesta 2004: 14). In the inquiry process we should not only accept given problem definitions and given predetermined policy ends, but should construct our own hypotheses that alter understanding as a result of our own enquiry in what Dewey describe as "indeterminate situations" (Biesta 2004: 11). Weiler (1988: 55) argues that taking into consideration that policy fixation, in national as well as international circles, on cognitive achievement as the sole legitimate measure of educational outcomes has some of the same qualities of oversimplification.

In the introduction I discussed the formulation of policies in macro-political conditions that were characterised by the consensus politics of the 1990s. In cases where there is strong consensus about the aims of education, which are not questioned, the role of education becomes a technical one. I contend that this was the situation during policy formulations in the 1990s, because educational practice was seen as the panacea for democratic and economic upliftment. Hence, the heavy reliance on policies from economically well-off francophone countries by most of the higher education stakeholders involved. This situation left a wide array of crucial questions unexplored. One cannot help feeling that the formulators of policy chose not to enter this difficult and problematic area for fear of "alienating certain constituencies, disrupting the co-existence provided by the framework of national unity" (Greenstein 1998: 132). This consensus

stalemate did not last, because during the action phase of policy implementation the consequences of our decisions produced different results. This is evident because under the persuasive call for settlement the new state had in essence signed away the possibility of strong redistributive action to redress the institutional inequalities created by apartheid. “Expressions of equity and redress in the policy legislation were, as a consequence of settlement, merely ameliorative and not substantive” (Kraak 2001: 110). This clearly led to the “equity and redress voices” outside of the official policy arena growing stronger and more strident as a result of disadvantage institutions succumbing to crisis, which one may argue is caused by the absence of any substantive programme of radical redress for these institutions. I concur with Dewey (1925), who refers to the *spectator theory of knowledge* and the *transactional theory of knowing*. Dewey’s practical epistemology may provide us with an interesting alternative, because South Africa has undergone a unique experience and we should change as a result of this (meaning the consequence of our actions warrants change). I would argue that in South Africa policy is expected to be pragmatic, contributing effectively towards the amelioration of the human condition, solving problems arising out of the African situation and also taking a stand on issues of reality as experience (Anyanwu 1989: 127). Transactional theory of knowing as explained by Dewey (1925: 15) may mean that policies are best understood in terms of practices on the ground, rather than in terms of idealist statements of intention or blueprints.

I concur with Biesta (2004: 14), who implies that educational practice is more than the simple application of strategies or techniques to bring about predetermined ends. These strategies and techniques should have a desirable educational value. Systematic processes of reflective problem solving during reflection on our higher education policy process is essential because “a democratic society is one in which the purpose of education is not given but is a constant topic for discussion and deliberation” (Biesta 2004: 14). Donn uses Habermas to explain that in the absence of constant discussion and deliberation that counteracts human emancipation, higher education policy discourse would be impoverished (Donn 1998: 73). For Habermas such emancipation, as a form of practical democracy, is located in the comprehensibility of everyday communication and

interaction. He urges us to see the way in which social institutions, such as those in educational systems, are constructed through highly scientific terms and rationalised by technical experts and, hence, how political problems become converted into manageable technical ones, with technical solutions (Donn 1998: 73). For educators this is particularly worrying, because the qualifications frameworks install highly developed bureaucratic practices, excluding from the discourse those who are not conversant with the reasoning, logic and language surrounding most of the higher education policy formulation. Donn turns to Habermas to argue for intersubjective meanings based on an “ideal speech situation where utterances are true, correct, comprehensible and sincere” (Donn 1998: 73). What I am arguing here is that higher education policy should be designed in such a way that it embeds enlightenment and not indoctrination, with all parties producing and reproducing the rules of the epistemological discourse. I am further arguing is that by using predetermined or ready-made solutions for our problems, we might not really identify our problems or become aware of prevailing or future opportunities. I am of the opinion that equitable redress and equality may not be addressed by the technical neo-liberal approaches of the francophone countries because they may not have experienced the phenomena of apartheid inequality as we had, at the time of our policy formulation and implementation.

How does a technically designed education policy influence higher education transformation? Although thoroughly discussed in the next chapter, I will expound briefly on higher education’s policy gaps, in terms of an African(a) epistemology.

2.8 Policy formulations in the African(a) epistemology

Greenstein’s (1998: 128) notion that economic performance cannot be enhanced outside a given cultural and historical context is based on the fact that policy should play a more useful role such as cultivating respect, tolerance and trust in the citizenry. It also implies that we should not allow ourselves to ignore culture and identity, because they are essential components of higher education transformation. In this section I shall argue for a different epistemology because the economic rationalist discourse has been criticised as

privileging the renewal of a new form of capitalist exploitation (globalisation). However, those such as Wolpe (1994) opposing the high-skills thesis may sound distant without providing an alternative theorisation of the education-economy nexus. I want to consider that African(a) philosophy may be a further step in the reorientation of this debate. I shall argue (in Chapter Four) that the capacity to produce policies that take into account African people as agents of their own humanity is crucial to higher education transformation. This involves bringing into the conversation an African discourse that may revise higher education discourse in South Africa.

The following quote by Mbiti may explain the scenario experienced by many education systems that are influenced by international discourses during policy formulation:

In studying foreign systems of (higher) education we should not forget that the things outside the schools (universities) matter even more than the things inside the schools (universities), and govern and interpret the things inside. We cannot wander at pleasure among the educational systems of the world, like a child strolling through a garden, and pick off a flower from one bush and some leaves from another, and then expect that if we stick what we have gathered into the soil at home, we shall have a living plant. A national system of education is a living thing, the outcome of forgotten struggles and difficulties, and 'of battles long ago'. It has in it some of the secret workings of national life (Mbiti 1970: 49).

African countries have different frames of reference due to the history of colonisation and, in the case of South Africa, apartheid. In formulating policy in higher education, competing priorities seem to get in each other's way. On the one hand, the importance of culturally specific learning environments and learning media such as indigenous languages are recognised. On the other hand, the demands of modern labour markets and communication systems seem to require more generalised and uniform competences, skills and certifications at the national and, indeed, international level. The linkage between culture and learning tends to get replaced by the linkage between learning and technology; "the former tends to require more homogeneity and uniformity as far as the

content of education is concerned” (Nandy 1978: 79). My concern is that the regulative role the state has taken in the higher education policy formulations, especially a preoccupation with centrally controlling the education system through policy frameworks. In the quest and resurgence of cultural regionalism, of local languages, dialects and cultural and folkloric traditions, and of sub-national alternatives to national conceptions of cultural identity have led to more emphasis on the limiting role of centralisation in higher education. These developments have further reinforced the perception that centralised state structures tend to be a greater obstacle to democratic expression and creativity. The instrumental discourse and fixed policy frameworks may inherently and perhaps unintentionally serve as a device to reduce local innovation and change localised phenomena. I agree with Weiler (1989: 34) that policy enforcing standards for educational qualifications through skills and competence criteria may tend to fragment reform movements and deprive the system as a whole of the innovative stimulus of proposals for reform and change.

The expectations about what educational systems should accomplish can make quite a drastic difference, especially in an unequal education system such as the one in South Africa. A multilingual society may want from its higher education system the development of marginalised languages, while groups that are heavily involved in external commerce will consider proficiency in international languages more important than preservation of the country’s cultural traditions and local languages. “Parents of less privileged children will attach greater importance to the system’s ability to foster more equitable learning opportunities for a larger number of people while privileged ones may judge the system more by how well it cultivates outstanding talent and ability” (Weiler 1989: 56). My argument in short, is that when we draw up our higher education policy, we must have Africa as the main focus in all our deliberations, because failing to do this might alienate students from our education system – that is, make it somewhat less relevant.

2.9 Conclusion

When higher education policies are formulated, the discourse of African(a) philosophy of education should be taken into account. African(a) philosophy may make the transformation of educational theory and practice even more possible in our current situation. People cannot be empowered if they do not have access to those indigenous forms of knowledge that provide them with their identity as persons. The call is for an epistemology with multiple sets of conceptual schemes embedded in the reality it needs to serve. This is the position I wish to explore in the next two chapters: How can an African(a) philosophy enhance higher education policy discourse in South Africa?

CHAPTER 3

3 AFRICAN(A) PHILOSOPHY: VIEWS, PERSPECTIVES AND DEBATES

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I traced the historical development of higher education discourse in South Africa with specific reference to transformative issues. I have shown that, although equity and redress seem to be high on the agenda of policy makers, economic rationalism seems to dominate the outcomes of policy decisions in South Africa, as is evident from the Department of Education's National Plan for Higher Education (2001). I agree that higher education transformation would be possible within the current democratic climate. However, my contention is that higher education transformation has a better chance of actuating the ideals of the National Plan for Higher Education (2001), if implemented along the lines of meanings associated with an African(a) philosophy. I say this because context plays an important role in shaping ideas and practices. If South Africa's higher education system is the setting, it makes sense to relate this system to thoughts and a practice involving what is African(a).

Consequently, in this chapter I shall explore the genesis of an African(a) philosophy, firstly, in relation to the thoughts of Outlaw, Du Bois, Parker and Sengor. Secondly, I shall trace the political views of prominent African leaders over the past few decades on what constitutes an African(a) philosophy. Thirdly, I shall examine some of the most pertinent debates on what constitutes an African(a) philosophy with reference to the thoughts of Ngugi wa Thiongo, Paulin Hountondji, Kwame Gyekye and Kwase Wiredu. To my mind these scholars' views are crucial to understanding any conception of an African(a) philosophy.

3.2 Outlaw, Du Bois, Parker and Sengor: towards an African(a) philosophy

To begin, in order to get to know how higher education transformation occurs, it is important to understand that the concept Africa as understood today may not sustain the claim that it is an indigene of the geographic region known as Africa – not everything that happens in Africa can be considered as work about Africa. It is thus important to determine what constitutes the notion “African”. In this thesis I shall address the idea of what is “Africa” with reference to Lucius Outlaw’s ideas on what constitutes an “African(a) philosophy”. He uses “African(a) philosophy” as a “gathering” notion, which embeds the articulations and cultural traditions of Africans and peoples of African descent, collectively. He further explains this by adding that African(a) philosophy includes the work of those persons who are neither of African descent but who recognise the legitimacy and importance of the issues and endeavours that make up the disciplinary activities of African or African-American philosophy and their contributions – persons whose work justifies their being called “Africanists” (Outlaw 2000: 23). The primary goal of African(a) philosophy, according to Outlaw, is “to catalog and study the many creations of African peoples, which contribute to the treasure houses of human civilization” (Outlaw 1992: 88).

Du Bois begins his African philosophy with the concept “race” and the “giving of gifts”. In his writing Du Bois says that there is a tendency to deprecate and minimise race distinctions. He cautions that the reality of race must be acknowledged, because it is so important that it “forms an epoch in the history of mankind” (Du Bois 1995: 30). He contends that a proper theoretical treatment of race is an essential part of successful strategies for the upliftment of a race. Put differently, the chances for empowerment and emancipation are slim if the disadvantaged race cannot be identified at all. In his identification of race he also contends that “no mere physical distinctions would really define the deeper differences” between race. He argues that what counts more than hair, blood and bone from the perspective of the historian, “are common history, similar habits of thought and conscious striving together for certain ideals of life” (Du Bois 1995: 31). The process that has differentiated races, according to him, is the growth of spiritual and

mental differences between the races of humankind. In his conception of race Du Bois emphasises the growth of spiritual and mental capacities as opposed to physical differences. I tend to agree with Du Bois when he argues for an identification of a race (in this case the marginalised race in Africa), before tackling its course towards empowerment. This I do, not because I want to endorse Du Bois's interpretation, but rather because the perception has been created that race only relates to physical appearance and colour. I thus agree with Du Bois that the African has a distinct contribution to make to humanity and should thus not be castigated by others. I also contend with him that the stumbling blocks put on the path of the "African" are morally degrading.

Leopold Senghor (1997), on the other hand, advocated the idea of the "Civilisation of the universal"; he argues that there should be a triple dialogue of continents with white Africa united with Arab-Berbers of Africa with the aim to assure peace and to put together the "Civilisation of the Universal". He sees all races as different parts that should not be set against each other, but if they are set against each other, this must be done so as to unite them firmly in a dynamic symbiosis of complementary parts.

Parker (2003: 31) claims that African(a) philosophy has become a movement that embraces the African continent and the African Diaspora and draws on a long tradition of African(a) philosophy that foregrounds the everyday life experiences of Africans as slaves, colonised subjects, poor and oppressed peoples. He states, "African philosophy draws on oral traditions, early writings and cultural artefacts such as music as well as the rigorous techniques of reason and analytic philosophy to construct African philosophy as a distinct discourse". He notes that what makes African(a) philosophy African is not "methodological differences with other philosophies, but rather the object of concern, which is the African lived experience". In his words, "(t)he philosophy of Africa is concerned with everyday lived experiences that are characterised by suffering, poverty and the lack of dignity that goes with having only negative identities imposed by oppressive others" (Parker 2003: 27).

Parker (2003: 31), suggests two responses to such an understanding, those being, particularism as a negation of universalism (meaning the African as the opposite of the European), and Africanism grounded in resistance (meaning contestation). In this sense Parker contends that Africanism should rather be “grounded in resistances that are not negations but contestations”. African philosophy thus should contest Eurocentric philosophy by engaging with it and even using its own methodological tools, which may include rigorous rational analysis and reasoned argumentation to challenge its dominance, which as I earlier argued, are negative perceptions of Africans to the supposedly superior world of others.

Particularism and universalism have been debated by scholars such as Gyekye, in *Tradition and Modernity* (1997) and Wiredu (1996) in *Cultural Universals and Particulars*, where the latter argues for moderate cultural universalism. Trying to reach a middle ground between these two concepts, Gyekye argues, “African philosophy, like the philosophies produced by other cultures, will have characteristics of both universality and particularity ... (because) it will be concerned with ultimate goals that can be said to be shared by all human beings irrespective of their cultures and nationalities. Such goals may include friendship, knowledge, happiness, respect for life and the avoidance of pain, but they can also be shaped by social and cultural experiences and problems some of which may in some sense, be said to be peculiar to the African people” (Gyekye 1997: 32).

What we have, according to Gyekye, is a common humanity that will underpin universalities, but there will be some distinctiveness of some of the problems that will underpin the particularity of some of their philosophical ideas, arguments or proposals. In other words, although the stated goals can overlap cultures (in a universalist sense), they can in a sense also be peculiar to a particular culture (particularism). In this way one can argue for a distinct African(a) philosophy. He elucidates on this notion by adding that the mode of development of colonised people will most definitely differ from that of the colonisers. He also takes into consideration that “straightforward adoption of the

institutions of a developed nation may not be adequate in solving the problems of a developing nation”(Gyekye 1997: 32).

In African(a) philosophy I suggest that we stop looking for essences and also not assume that words point to a single meaning in all the diversity of their uses. Particularism is, however, very important to African(a) philosophy, because it is particularism “above all which challenged the alleged universalism of the Western particular” (Mbiti 2001: 92). I agree with Mbiti, but add that African(a) philosophy should move beyond particularism and universalism towards what can be referred to as pluralism. By pluralism I mean a freedom to draw from Africa’s own varied traditions and from whatever other philosophical traditions may prove useful in championing the African cause. In drawing from various traditions I do not propose mimicking the ideas of, for example, Kant, Heidegger or Habermas but in the basic sense rather attending to the existential situations in which African communities find themselves. For African(a) philosophy to be loyal to itself, it needs not to conform to Western norms in order to gain respectability, neither does it need to go out of its way to be different or to be a wholly other. What we should do is to learn from the mistakes of others, taking into consideration contemporary discussions even amongst Western philosophers. We need to prevent the perception that philosophy has become irrelevant to the general society and also overcome the dilemma that it seems as if philosophers can only talk to each other (Mbiti 2001: 92). This is especially important when one looks at the post-industrial or advanced industrial societies where the intelligentsia is increasingly associated with the exercise of power.

Chomsky has argued that the above is not “a criticism of professionalism, technology or science, but rather the subversion of intellectual values as part of a new coercive ideology that seeks to remove decision-making even further from popular control by exploiting the aura of science and technology, pretending that social planning is much too complex for the common man” (Chomsky 2003: 176). It is in the understanding of the common person and his/her needs that higher education may be able to emancipate or uplift the race, as argued by Du Bios (1995).

3.3 The African “lived experience” and higher education

For higher education to empower communities through transformation in terms of an African(a) philosophy, the human condition as a consequence of colonialism and exploitation should first be addressed. The content and context confronting the higher education discourse is the African human condition. Ngugi Wa Thiongo (2003: 8) uses Hegel to identify this human condition of the colonised in his book *Phenomenology of the Spirit and the Science of Logic*, in which Hegel distinguishes “Being in Itself, and Being for Itself”. Being in itself is mere existence, while being for itself is being aware, not only of its existence but existence for a purpose, that being an ethical purpose. In this context, to use the Heideggerian phrase as interpreted by Wa Thiongo (2003: 8), “the colonised can easily be guided by another to wherever the guide wants to take him, even to his own extinction”. This, I argue, may occur in those colonised because, if they cannot relate their existence to an ethical purpose, they might be vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation. Higher education transformation may thus be dealing with a person who has lost land, who feels the pangs of hunger and who fails to see in history any positive lessons for his/her dealings with the present. The human condition at hand for higher education (to deal with) is of a person that has been drained of his/her historical memory of a different world, with reference to the period prior to colonisation. Higher education, therefore, has a responsibility that may be beyond its capacity if the previous argument is not taken into serious consideration. Higher education transformation should as a premise consider the condition of its African students, with their lack of self-pride, as a result of the experience of oppression.

When Steve Bantu Biko started the Black Consciousness movement, it was for people to develop new images of themselves, which negate and transcend those images that had been drawn by those who would weaken them in their fight for, and assertion of, their humanity. Biko’s book (1978) entitled *I Write What I Like* is a clear indication of himself expressing him as he saw fit and not through the colour-tinted spectacles of others. Consciousness about oneself, according to Wa Thiongo, resides in one’s memory. He posits that “even at the very simple level of our daily experience we get excited when we

visit, say, the place where we were born, and recall the various landmarks of our childhood” (Wa Thiongo 2003: 10). Higher education is thus dealing with a person who feels a sense of loss when he/she finds that the place (education) no longer holds any traces of what the “place” once meant to him or her. A loss of memory is a real loss of those traces that enable individuals to make sense of what is happening to them. Memory as the site of dreams and desire is thus crucial to the construction of our being. It is the loss of such memory that would enable the “guide” to “lead the colonised to wherever he/she wants to take him/her, even to extinction”.

Educational transformation may thus include much more than the effectiveness and efficient discourse in the NPHE (2001). It should include our memories and other sites that shape our being. Hence the question by Wa Thiongo: “...if memory is the site of dreams, desire, image, consciousness, where is the location of memory itself? What is the site of memory?” (Wa Thiongo 2003: 11). He answers these questions himself and says that memory resides in language and then adds:

... Imperialist West also went about subjecting the rest of the world to its memory through a vast naming system. It planted its memory on our landscape (education) (Wa Thiongo 2003: 11).

He also has this to say on a visit to the Eastern Cape:

I was very excited about the visit to the region that has produced some of the greatest names in Africa’s intellectual and political history. It was the region of Tiyo Soga, William Gqoba, ... Sobukwe, Biko, Mbeki, Mandela to mention only a few. But these were not the names that we found pointing to the identity of the landscape. Instead we encountered King Williams Town, Queenstown, Port Elizabeth, East London, Berlin, Hamburg, Frankfurt, Stutterheim, Ginsberg, a clear case of the conqueror writing his own memory on our resistance memory. They even planted their memories on our bodies. Ngugi becomes James. Noliwe becomes Margaret (Wa Thiongo 2003: 12).

Situations such as these lead to a lack of self-pride, a condition which could possibly transform the previously oppressed into not seeing themselves as African. This status quo (of an identity crisis) may still prevail as stated by Ramose (2003: 139), who posits that there is only a shift in paradigm and not a change in paradigm. It is such an interpretation, which, I argue, is a major challenge for higher education. On a more practical level, it is interesting to note that the Khoisan group in South Africa and Namibia could identify very closely with nature and the environment. These people were mostly named after events, *Xamarin* (animals) such as the *xaib* (koedoe), *xam* (lion), */gaib* (oryx) and happenings, and thus have meaning to the bearer of such a name.

The question one may now reasonably pose is: how does the above situation influence higher education transformation in South Africa? If we take the Khoisan (Nama) people as an example, the way in which the higher education system currently operates, and especially its relationship with the surroundings (environment), it seems unlikely that it will create space for transforming the reality it needs to serve. It seems as if lip service is being paid to relevance and adaptability, whilst focusing instead on more easily evaluated cognitive achievements, as stated in the NPHE (2001). To teach and prepare the Khoisan (Nama) student to accept fully his own identity, cosmology and indigenous forms of knowledge as part of a universal heritage and universal resource, would go some distance towards transforming higher education. I thus contend that ascribing to one's own cosmology and indigenous forms of knowledge as part of a universal heritage can make a major contribution in the formation of the whole human being. This means that, to use the argument of Wa Thiongo (2003), those writers, musicians and especially the intellectuals who are the keepers of the memory of a community, have been subjected to the West's linguistic means of production and storage of memory (namely in English, German, French and Portuguese), and cannot materialise. It is my contention that, unless higher education develops the capacity to overcome, or at the very least address, these issues, transformation might remain a fancy word.

The implication for higher education is that, if it is not embedded in *khoekhoeghowab*, (the people's language) it may lack moral commitment, because morality (as argued by Chomsky (2003: 166) "springs solely and immediately from the inner life of the soul and can only be stimulated in human nature, and never produced by external and artificial contrivance". He also rightly points out that whatever does not spring from a person's free choice, or is only the result of instruction and guidance, does not enter into his/her very being, but remains alien to his/her true nature, he/she does not perform it with truly human energies, but merely with mechanical exactness (Chomsky 2003: 166). One may thus contend that, if such an individual is the product of our higher education system, we may admire what he/she does, but despise what he/she is.

The consequence of this (the West's linguistic means of memory production and storage), is that approximately ninety percent of intellectual production in Africa is stored in European languages, which Wa Thiongo sees as a continuation of the colonial project where not even a single treaty between Europe and Africa exists in an African language. He further claims that if you look for Africa in an African language, you will not find her (Wa Thiongo 2003: 12). When one considers that we have our African languages, but the keepers of our memory feel that knowledge, emotions and intellect cannot be stored in our African languages, then clearly something is not right. If such a condition prevails in higher education, then it is losing out on the extremely significant innate component of the development of the human being. This is especially vital, since it is precisely those characteristics of language that make it an effective instrument for free thought and expression that seem to have their origins in this innately determined structure.

Consequently one may ask whether transformation can take place when we are working outside our own linguistic memory. Wa Thiongo uses Diop (1996) to explain what the African will never be able to express, until he/she abandons the use of foreign languages, and uses the peculiar genius of his/her own languages. I thus concur with Diop that for real transformation to take place home-grown practices, including the development of our language, is a prerequisite for real transformation. Wa Thiongo

(2003) acknowledges, and rightly so, the brilliance of what has already been produced by African writers in acquired European tongues and then adds:

But we writers cannot speak of taking up the challenge of a new century for African literature unless writing in African languages becomes the major component of the continent's literature. Without this one cannot speak of an African literature (Gordimer 1992).

It appears that the higher education sector sometimes goes about its business as if African languages do not exist. One may argue that for African languages to be developed does not mean the eradication of other languages. By translating from European and Asian languages into our own, we make sure that we do not isolate ourselves from mainstream progressive human thought in the languages and cultures of the globe. In searching for our language development we should also not fail to appreciate those African writers that have contributed to Africa and the world by using other languages.

3.4 The National Plan and the ambiguities

The NPHE (2001) may well represent those thoughtful Africans who do not see modernisation as a foreign invasion. I am contesting whether there was a clear differentiation between the concepts: development and modernisation. I am of the opinion that modernisation has been privileged more above development. Modernisation according to Wiredu (1998: 195) "is the application of the results of modern science for the improvement of the conditions of human life". He further argues, "modernisation is the side that is more immediately associated with the use of advanced technology and novel techniques in various areas of life such as health or education"(Wiredu 1998: 195). Modernisation, however, "is not the whole of development, because there is a need to view it in a wider human perspective" (Wiredu 1998: 195). Wiredu contends that man/woman should link the modernisation of his conditions of life with all aspects of his/her thinking. He warns that the African leaders and rulers (policy developers) have tended to think of development in terms of visible aspects of modernisation – in terms of

large buildings and complex machines, to the relative neglect of the more intellectual foundations of modernity. He further cautions that it was the failure to do this that is responsible for the more unlovable features of life in the West. The funding of higher education that is based more on graduate outputs of the NPHE (2001) may also serve as a clear indication to spend huge amounts of money on institutional education. Education conversely ought to lead to the fostering of a rational outlook on the world on the part of the educated and, through them, in the traditional folk at large.

The National Plan for Higher Education (2001) represents a substantive improvement on the higher education landscape of the past, with the proposed plan on equitable redress for South Africans. It may, however, also serve as an impediment to higher education transformation, because it seems not to be vested with the credentials and values that make it truly educational. I am saying this because one cannot compare the development of peoples in absolute terms. We are looking at the Western world as developed, but this “world” itself developed only relatively. Wiredu states, “Technological sophistication is only an aspect, and not the core of development” (Wiredu 1998: 195). He posits that the conquest of the religious, moral and political spheres, by the spirit of rational inquiry remains (as noted earlier) a thing for the future, even in the West.

One of the impediments to higher education transformation can be that policies in the education legislature may serve as prisons for real transformation in the absence of home-grown practices of the majority of South Africans. It is doubtful that the largely rural population of South Africa can identify closely with educational institutions addressing pedagogical relevance, given the fact that the institutions are largely unrelated to indigenous structures. What the NPHE (2001) envisaged may be hampered by what Ramose (2003: 139) terms “reformation where there is a paradigm shift and not a change of paradigm”. He argues that we have a process of carefully controlled multiple movements designed to integrate previously excluded elements, but without any alteration to the substance of the existing dominant epistemological paradigm. One may add to this concern that higher education still depends on a reality that will not alter, no

matter how greatly we increase enrolments and the participation of black professionals as envisaged by the NPHE (2001).

Higher education transformation as envisaged by the NPHE (2001) seems not to be mapped onto a social reality because there is a lack of reference to the people and their histories. The other question, however, is: how do we protect or help the broader society from the “robust conversations of the academy”? Especially since the university only wants to account to those who share in their vocation and those who are immediately affected by it, which according to Allen and Allen may not really create learning communities of those going through the process of education but may rather create disciples for whom a “special asylum gilded exile-has been created” (Allen & Allen 2003: 10). This is especially so, since, as Allan and Allen argue, the defence of tenure on the basis of academic freedom fails to hit the mark. In this we may only be able to secure a desirable remoteness and stable community of those that can take part in the “robust” discourse in the academy, excluding the most vulnerable in the society (2003: 11).

To help the broader society to be part of this “robust conversation” of the academy, and not its victims, higher education has to make it possible for people to feel at home within it by allowing the conversations to spill from the classroom into the “living room” (Allen & Allen, 2003: 12). The higher education classroom thus may obstruct conversation rather than nurture it, if it lies outside the matrix of people’s understanding. By bringing it to the people I contend we need to re-look policy implementation from a more indigenous perspective; this means opening it up so that the previously disadvantaged and marginalised voices can not only be heard, but also have some influence on outcomes.

Can one blame the NPHE for the vagueness in the development of home-grown practices in the higher education sector such as folklore, storytelling, scientific and technological growth of indigenous languages, as stated in the outcomes of the NPHE (2001)? The academy is reluctant to be held accountable for this. Or should the blame be put squarely on the shoulders of the academy’s failure to take the leading role in designing curricula to reflect the practices of the South Africans? If the academy fails to create its own

framework and measurement systems, then higher education is susceptible to the involvement of legislators, politicians, trustees and others who will not hesitate to impose on higher education what they think is effective and efficient, which in the South African situation may not always be desirable. The general public and the various constituencies will continue to demand accountability from the higher education sector. In situations such as this the defence of tenure on the basis of academic freedom, as I argued earlier, fails to hit the mark.

3.5 The challenges facing higher education transformation regarding an African(a) philosophy

It is essential to observe that the expansion of ideas is not a process that is without challenges. The challenges facing African(a) philosophy are indicators of its coming of age. African(a) philosophy might never arrive at an absolute truth and I contend that the search for truth should be an endless exercise in which ideas are stated and refuted, where evidence is subjected to different validating categories in which a new truth is always arrived at. The search for truth in African(a) philosophy may thus become an immeasurable exercise, an open-ended process.

African(a) philosophy and education have reciprocal functions in affecting cultural transformation in higher education. As mentioned earlier, African(a) philosophy has the people's predicament at heart and its ideals serve as the ground plans for action, namely the refocusing of traditions in the current situation through interpretive selection; it may provide guidelines for reshaping previously conditioned dispositions in higher education. Holding on to inclinations as opposed to cultivating specific, new and intrinsic excellences may hamper transformation in the higher education system. Old practices are not always clarified, questioned or justified by those who practice them and this is definitely not because of a lack of conflicting evidence. In other words, we make judgements rather mindlessly in conformity to prevailing ideology. I do not deny that it requires effort to come up with other alternatives, but doing this enable us to reorder and

unblock habitual energies to make practices in higher education relevant to all communities.

African(a) philosophy may seem imperfect in its claim that there are phenomena that appear to lie beyond the scientific intellect. For these beliefs to be accepted they must be put under scrutiny through questioning, debate and participation of all involved. It is, however, important that we turn the world of settled truths that have been dominating our higher education system into a problem first. It is exactly for the same reasons that African experience should be prepared to be confronted everywhere, all the time, by everyone, or everything. If an African wants to keep us in touch with the idea that there are forces (Ancestors, *Kalunga* for my tribe and *Quamata* for others) at work in our lives beyond the world of “reason” and “intellect” which might have been useful to us as Africans, we must be willing to be confronted by it. Confronted, however, does not mean to be judged only by the standards or practices of others, but by people who understand our cultural surroundings, both past and present. In African(a) philosophy our foreign well-wishers should refrain from serving up the usual congeries of uninterrogated conceptions about gods, ghosts, and witches in the name of African(a) philosophy. Wiredu teaches us to undermine all backward customs (there are plenty) and suppositious belief-foundations by fostering in the people – at all events in the new generation of educated Africans – the spirit of rational inquiry in all spheres of thought and belief.

My reading of the contributions made by African philosophers is that African(a) philosophy by itself is not perfect by any stretch of the imagination, but if understood correctly, it may be rich in possibilities, although not always faultless. There is widespread lack of consensus among several African scholars on the imperfections of African philosophy – for example, Hountondji’s (2002) critique on ethnophilosophy. He questions ethnophilosophy’s non-consonance with “strict science” because it is based on oral traditions and narratives. I am of the opinion that Hountondji seems to present African(a) philosophy as history and not as a system. Treating African(a) philosophy like anthropology restricts it to the unchanging elements of a system. Philosophy, I would

argue, devotes itself to understanding the dynamics of a system and recitation of new truths.

It is important that we submit imperfections in some of the constitutive elements of African(a) philosophy such as ethnophilosophy to investigation; that we direct a magnifier and telescope onto them and confront them head on. Becoming emotive does not provide answers, but putting them under scrutiny, through debates and questioning does. My understanding of Houtondji is that the African intellectual or student should be given the opportunity to think honestly and clearly, dealing with problems in an intelligent and responsible way without resorting to unquestioned ideologies or prejudices. This may be more ideal because it may cultivate practical reasoning and thinking skills, which are vital for the deliberation needed in cultivating a democratic society.

In African(a) philosophy we have experience and have learned from others that potential solutions to problems in higher education are of limited interest when they merely appear in technical monographs. It is vital for us in Africa to distinguish meaningfully between educational and the industrial endeavours. The application of modern technology to enhance human development of the broader South African society is vital, since technology may also lead to an improvement in living standards. Higher education should also be aware of the dangers that lie in an education system that uses people as tools of production in the industrial process.

The humane use of resources and technology may provide a possibility of freeing people from the above and not turn them into imbeciles through the burden of specialised labour. We might be equipped to understand modern science, but might not be clear enough on human growth, because it is something that is difficult to measure and can (most of the time) only be dimly apprehended by imagination. It is my contention that the potentially trickiest part of education in South African society is perhaps how little we know about the purpose and aims of human life. We can only speculate by using what we have

experienced, to create hypotheses and theories. In theorising about the purpose and aims of human life we should operate in a dialogue suitable for all to follow.

Hence my fascination with the work of the late Odera Oruka, who went to the villages to find the sages who were “not professionals” and suggests that African(a) philosophy should keep this spirit alive by combining the academy with the village. There is a common critique in the West that the academy has lost touch with the village (Mbiti 2001: 92). His advice is for African(a) philosophy not to make the same mistake, the mistake of a philosophy caught up in an abstract discourse, where philosophers argue in circles among themselves. Higher education in South Africa should thus be ingrained in the consciousness of those implementing it and also those who live under the conditions that higher education bring into existence.

3.6 Conclusion

Now that I have examined some of the most salient features of an African(a) philosophy, my next move will be to investigate how an African(a) philosophy could guide higher education transformation in South Africa.

CHAPTER 4

4 HIGHER EDUCATION TRANSFORMATION EMBEDDED IN AFRICAN(A) PHILOSOPHY

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I examined some of the salient features of an African(a) philosophy and shall now investigate how an African(a) philosophy could guide the transformation of higher education in South Africa.

The purpose of this section is to consider the crucial role that higher education research should play in the project of repositioning the African scholar in world affairs. I will be arguing that the prospects for success in the project of repositioning the African student can only be achieved if appropriate elements of the African context are taken into account in curriculum reconstruction and development by showing what higher education transformation, with reference to teaching, learning and research, would look like if one takes into consideration constitutive meanings of an African(a) philosophy of education. I shall particularly address aspects of the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE), which seemingly does not take into account aspects of an African(a) philosophy of education, despite the fact that it claims to be a transformative document. I shall also look at higher education institutions and the influence of globalisation.

In the first chapter I attempted to explain that the equitable redress function of higher education transformation seems to be embraced by the imperative of globalisation. This seems evident in the NPHE, where one of the sixteen outcomes is enhancing the cognitive skills of students by preparing them for a competitive labour market economy. The marketisation of higher education tends to widen gaps rather than redress past inequalities. Griesel (2000: 90) became aware of this gap during policy implementation and could see a critical tension evolving between national policies framed in global terms and specific institutional responses. He also makes us aware that globalisation is not a

neutral process in which South Africa and the United States (for example) are participating equally. My concern in this regard is that the language of the White Paper (1997) seems to be framed according to the dictates of equitable redress, whereas, quite paradoxically, the NPHE seems to advocate a language of the market forces which I think is not always in the interest of the local populace.

I have raised this concern in Chapter One by stating that the NPHE does not seem to address the important issue of knowledge production in the South African context, but rather knowledge production or construction in response to the neo-liberal economic market. My question thus was whether existing higher education institutions possess the necessary resolve to enact transformation (in our society) especially in the light of globalisation; also, whether their practices are embedded in the spirit of *ubuntu*, which involves the cultivation of “virtues such as kindness, compassion, generosity and concern for others” (Higgs 2003: 14). I have argued that these values cannot be disembodied from the life experiences of the South African people, since these values are rooted in the community. An instance of these values is respecting and looking after our *ovakulundu* (elders), cannot be eroded by a simplistic approach that sees education only as a panacea for economic performance.

I have on a practical level used the example of the Khoisan (Nama) people of Namibia and South Africa, who identify very closely with nature and the environment. These people were mostly named after events such as the full moon, or animals (*Xamarin*) such as the *xaib* (koedoe), */gaeb* (oryx), and other happenings. These phenomena have meaning to the bearer of such a name. My reason for including this is that for the Khoisan student or learner to accept fully his/her own identity, cosmology and indigenous forms of knowledge as part of a universal heritage and universal resource would go some distance in transforming higher education. It is my considered view that the National Plan seems to focus more on the easily evaluated cognitive achievements, as stated in the NPHE (2001). I am of the opinion that adhering to one’s own cosmology and imparting indigenous forms of knowledge in higher education as part of our universal heritage can make a major contribution to the formation of the human being.

Higher education transformation policy may lack a moral commitment because morality, as I have argued by using Chomsky (2003: 166), springs solely and immediately from the inner life of the soul, and can only be stimulated in human nature and never be produced by external or artificial contrivance. Chomsky also teaches us that whatever does not spring from free choice, or is only the result of instruction and guidance, does not enter into a person's very being, but remains alien to his or her true nature. Such a person will perform any assigned task merely with mechanical exactness. I have expounded on this topic in Chapter Three and would now concentrate on the reconstruction prospects in higher education transformation in South Africa.

4.2 The educational researcher and African(a) philosophy

How does the NPHE shape the self-understanding of those in higher education research to make sense of what they are doing in terms of cultural identities and in an honest academic way legitimise their social role in the emancipation of the African student? My main concern is the roles played by higher education researchers and educationists and whether they can and do adapt, each role involving quite different intellectual commitments and demands, and each implying a different stance towards existing educational arrangements and prevailing educational creeds.

What is different in the academic realm? Is there a difference in teaching before and after the introduction of the National Plan? Another concern is whether the higher education institutions are adequately addressing educational transformation in the design and delivery of curricula. This should be understood in terms of dealing with or interrogating colonised knowledge, changed pedagogy and also how these institutions recognise and affirm indigenous knowledge. These are pertinent questions, given the fact that most of our philosophers, educators and researchers have been trained in the Western tradition, influenced by their colonial history and, in the South African context, by the influence of apartheid. Therefore to use the words of Wiredu, "their thinking, therefore, is unlikely to hold many peculiarly African novelties for anyone knowledgeable in the Western philosophy" (Wiredu 1998: 197). Hence, the disappointment of many international

scholars (Western, Afro-American and others from the East) in discovering the sort of syllabus that is taught in our contemporary South African departments of philosophy. These syllabi are identical to those developed in the West. These scholars (as mentioned earlier) question why our higher education institutions are so engrossed with the philosophy of our erstwhile colonial oppressors.

One needs a certain level-headedness as an African educationist and philosopher, because one cannot deny the fact that our ancestors left us no heritage of philosophical writings and we thus have little choice but to conduct philosophical exploration in relation to the philosophical writings of other people. Coming from a very strong community background, I would argue, however, that writing cannot be a precondition for philosophical thinking, for one must think before one writes. Thus we should not be castigated for talking/writing about the philosophies of our traditional communities. These sentiments are strongly echoed by Wiredu, who states that the African philosopher cannot:

... [r]estrict himself/herself to the philosophical works of his particular former colonial oppressors, but he/she must of necessity study the written philosophies of other lands, because it would be extremely injudicious for him to try to philosophise in self-imposed isolation from all modern currents of thought ... In the ideal he must acquaint himself with the philosophies of all the peoples of the world, compare, contrast, critically assess them and make use of whatever of value he may find in them (Wiredu 2000: 198).

Wiredu does not deny the fact that it is the philosophy of the West that will occupy us the most, because it is in this part of the world that the development of human knowledge in the written form has gone the farthest and where, consequently, philosophy is in closest touch with the conditions of modernity. This written philosophy, however, should not be the only principle guiding our educational endeavours because there are misinterpretations and errors within this philosophy. In much the same way there are

superstitious-/non-superstitious-based conceptions from which the modern Westerner may learn from us (Africans), and I believe this is what some visiting scholars would love to experience. This I believe can happen when we facilitate a broad exchange of educational and cultural values between African and other (Western/Eastern) cultures.

Consequently my argument for African researchers and scholars is that they include in the academy those contingent aspects of African culture which give us our self-identity, but in the meantime “avail themselves to the opportunities offered by advances made in other cultures, education, especially philosophy and science, which have a bearing on questions of either human well-being or truth and falsehood” (Oladipo 1995: 4). This is one way of ensuring that our intellectual future is no longer exclusively decided by the fact of the economic and technological superiority of others. The NPHE already seems to envisage giving prominence to the hegemonic cultures as one of its outcomes. To utilise the notion of “level-headedness” of Wiredu, I would argue that he cautions us not to look at the problems of Africa in the contemporary world only from a cultural/traditionalist sense, but also to subject them to critical and reconstructive self-evaluation. Self-evaluation, according to Oladipo, means to “enable Africans to develop a modern identity which guarantees their cultural autonomy without setting them apart from others in their quest for freedom and development” (Oladipo 1995: 4). Wiredu (as quoted by Anyanwu) concludes that:

We (Africans) will only solve our problems if we see them as human problems arising out of a specific situation ... we shall not solve them if we see them as African problems, generated by our being somehow unlike others (Anyanwu 1989: 127).

This may imply that there is no place for “self-adulation and uncritical self-appreciation in the search for development and prosperity” (Oladipo 1995: 5). To ensure a transformed higher education system we need to have a critical appreciation of our culture and openness towards positive and beneficial developments within other cultures.

In the next section I shall be looking at the constraints of and possibilities for transforming higher education experienced by the majority of South African students.

4.3 Transforming higher education in South Africa: constraints and possibilities

What aspects in higher education serve as impediments to the transformation and development of the African student? What makes the African student unable to transform meaningfully?

4.3.1 Culture

Firstly, the culture of the African as a potential contributor to science is constantly undermined or alienated as a fundamental point of departure, because it is perceived as static (Jugessur 1998: 1). It is my considered view that it is not static; however, people tend to concentrate on the negative aspects such as believing in unfounded claims of superstition and witchcraft. In this regard Jugessur claims that “African culture is not devoid of science; indeed it has positive aspects that can be identified and used in developing a science culture which is congruent with African culture and which can inspire sustained interest to the greatest number and promote innovation for development purposes” (Jugessur 1998: 1). One would not deny that if African practices such as mysticism, ancestorship, and supernaturalism are beyond questioning and debate, then transformation would be seriously undermined. If not reconceptualised or adjusted in order to be understood, ancestorship and supernaturalism may remain illegitimate and vague discourses, which will not contribute anything to higher education transformation. By this I mean that the concepts of ancestorship and supernaturalism should be open to critical analysis and questioning in order to bring a better understanding to the fore.

In African culture there seems to be an integral form of critical pedagogy that could potentially be developed by those science teachers with an ardent African development orientation. It is an enthusiastic science teacher that will explain to his/her students why the San hunter prays for the soul and flesh of the animal to be returned to nature after he had killed it (for food). A lesson on decomposition or disintegration for the survival of

other earthly creatures would make more sense to the students than such behaviour being perceived to be only superstition. An example such as this lies within the matrix of understanding of the African child and will address the crucial issue of identity, which may lead to a new pathway of discovery. In the absence of such approaches to African learners, especially the rural learner, they have to unlearn much of what they know to succeed in the current educational system. This is especially true since we came to realise that rational knowledge is not the preserve of the modern West nor is superstition a peculiarity of the African people. There are irrational and superstitious elements in African traditional thought, but there are also rational elements, in much the same way that we find both in Western thought. There is a wealth of concepts, idioms and other elements in our language that have a definite philosophical and scientific import (Sertima 1984; Emeagwali 1989; Seepe 2000).

4.3.2 Language

Parallel to the aspect of primacy of culture for improvement of the competitiveness of the African student, is language. I have expounded on the importance of language in Chapter Three because it is within language that we dream, desire, have a consciousness and where images are located. Chumbow (1998: 52) observes that language is the means by which cognition is developed and expressed; the means by which all knowledge is acquired and expressed. Nkomo concurs with this by arguing “When children in the developed world start school they are taught in the medium of their mother tongue (English, French, Japanese, etc.) and proceed to learn and acquire scientific concepts in their own language. There is no dissonance or cognitive difficulty encountered, thus making acquisition more effective and efficient” (Nkomo 2000: 51). I agree with Nkomo that the opposite is true for the African child, because most of them have to learn a foreign language from as early as the ages of 5 or 6, while at the same time trying to grasp scientific knowledge. This I have experienced and have concluded that it hampers the academic progression of the majority of African learners. The reasons given as to why African students avoid science and mathematics or fail these subjects were their

inclination to superstition and witchcraft. Such an argument, in my view, is erroneous and invalid.

I am arguing for this view because research by many scholars such as Chumbow (1990), Afolayan (1976), Tadadjeu (1990) and Chomsky (1968) demonstrates the efficacy of the approach whereby children who have been taught in their mother tongue with a foreign language being introduced progressively perform better than learners who are taught exclusively in a foreign language. The Japanese example is a resounding instance of the success of the latter approach. I want to caution on the language issue by quoting Cele, who posits that, “as good as the political rationale of the current language policy is, it cannot justify the negative repercussions emanating from its flippant and exaggerated political correctness” (Cele 2001: 186). This legislation (with reference to the language policy), which was incorporated into the education policy, states that any of the eleven official languages can be adopted as a medium of instruction in any province or region, provided the majority of stakeholders in a particular institution agree to this. As much as we want our indigenous languages to come to the fore in teaching, it is my view that English should (in the case of a bilingual approach) become the compulsory medium and the dominant regional language the second choice. In spite of its dubious political history, English has provided us with sound alternatives for the demands and realities of the present-day situation in higher education. Transformation does not occur automatically with a change of government, hence my concurrence with Cele, who urges us to celebrate the universal unifying status of English within the country, “no matter how unofficial it may be” (Cele 2001: 185).

It is quite interesting to note that the majority of the African presidents of all times were very fluent in the languages of power (such as English) or the language of their colonial masters. In saying this I do not want to imply that it is the way to go, but rather to account for the reason that these presidents and leaders could better communicate the wishes and aspirations of their people to the sovereign powers. People like Leopold Senghor come to mind; he was the president of Senegal, whose command of the French language was widely respected in France. Also Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, who had complete

command of the English language. Others include Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Robert Mugabe and lately Thabo Mbeki and Koffi Annan. What all these people have in common is that they are highly articulate in their respective indigenous languages but also in the respective languages of power.

Seepe reinforces the importance of language when he posits that, since it is in culture and language that students find an intellectual home, a combination of utilisation of indigenous technologies and African knowledge systems might be the key to unlocking the door that has prevented the masses from accessing (for example) mathematics, science and engineering (2000: 134).

4.3.3 Storytelling /narratives of students in higher education

I take my cue from Iris Marion Young's (1996) notion of storytelling to illustrate how the African student who is coming from a rich background of storytelling can be accommodated in the higher education system, because his/her narratives may reveal his particular experiences of his social locations, experiences that are difficult to share with those situated differently or elsewhere – experiences that they must understand to do justice to others. Unlike the disadvantages that are sometimes coupled to deliberation, such as the deliberators not being equal in some way, narratives reduce some disadvantages inherent in deliberation. An inherent problem in deliberation is the fact that “deliberation can privilege the dispassionate, the educated, or those who feel they have a right to assert. Because everyone has stories to tell, with different styles and meanings, and because each can tell her story with equal authority, the stories have equal value in the communicative situation” (Young 1996: 131). On a practical level I shall use the example of the presidential *imbizo*¹. In these meetings communities narrate their experiences and problems to the president and his ministers. It was good to see the president and his minister listening to the people. One could sense that people felt good to know that they are being listened to and not vice versa. Their narratives could enhance

¹ President Thabo Mbeki and his Cabinet ministers going around the provinces and towns to hear and experience the conditions of the people. I had the privilege of attending such an *imbizo* in Cape Town.

the president's understanding of their problems and also what some symbols and places mean to them.

Storytelling seems to be a good means of helping the African student to contribute to learning, but drawbacks such as the non-discursive nature of some of the folklore can serve as an obstacle to higher education transformation. For folk thought (narratives/storytelling) to be meaningful to higher education transformation it should not merely consist of bold assertions without argumentative justification. I concur with Wiredu when he posits that, without argumentation and clarification "there is, strictly, no philosophy" (Wiredu 2000: 197). I support this argument, because a Western scholar tries to argue for his work, clarifying meaning and answering questions regarding his work, whereas the African scholar may just say: "This is what our ancestors said" (Wiredu 2000: 197). This situation does not help the cause of transformation in higher education in any way and can only serve as an outright impediment to transformation.

I identify very closely with storytelling as proposed by Iris Young, because it is a childhood custom that is still practised by the elders in Ovamboland at the *olupale*² (fire herd) at night. These stories have contributed to the development of a critical mind, because I still find myself using some of the "wisdom" I picked up at the *olupale*. It is in these narratives that I first encountered the problem-solving method that engendered problem-solving abilities, creativity and tolerance (of, for example, the jackal). All these stories at the *olupale* consist mostly of the problems one would encounter throughout the journey of life. I believe this might be true for my sisters at the *epata*³. Consequently the transformation of higher education can best be achieved, I believe, through engagement with narratives, treating each other's histories with respect and dignity by willingly showing solidarity and collective action determined by the desire to serve the larger community.

² Reception area and gathering place where Owambo elders (in Namibia), especially men, tell stories to young men and boys.

³ Place where the Owambo women narrate their stories to younger women and girls. It also serves as a place for cooking.

I do not agree with the values of dignity and solidarity if we don't undermine those aspects of traditional culture – for example, the references to supernaturalism, gods and all sorts of traditional spirits, which are no longer existentially rewarding. By “undermine” I do not mean condemnation of the beliefs, but making those narrating these stories accountable to argue for the beliefs expounded in the stories. Higher education transformation, in the sense of storytelling and narratives, requires us to cultivate those aspects of storytelling/narratives which contain the humanistic orientation of traditional ethical thinking and the wisdom of the community, which inform traditional forms of social relations that are advantageous to the flourishing of the human condition.

Correlatively, narratives require us to develop new habits - of exactness, rigor in thinking and a pursuit of systematic coherence and the experimental approach – so characteristic of the scientific world. I am referring to science because the glorification of cultural renewal without the development of science and technology may not lead to a significant improvement in the social transformation of South Africa in particular, and Africa in general. I contend that it is possible for a society, as in the case of Japan, to achieve significant scientific and technological development without compromising its cultural identity (Oladipo 1995: 5). In my view, higher education transformation lies in the fact that the acquisition of science and technology is favourable to advancing human well-being, given that it will be used sensibly.

I am using this experience to show how higher education can use the narratives of students to contribute towards deep transformation. I am referring to deep transformation in a sense that transformation in my mind can also be only structural. By this I mean that all the structures, which might drive transformation, are in place, but the practices might still be framed within the terms of reference of the system prior to transformation. I need to give an example to explicate this interpretation. The South African soccer team needs to reflect the demographics of the country. The administrators of soccer therefore selects a few white players in order to create the impression that transformation has occurred, while in reality it is business as usual. The perception for those who watch soccer is that transformation has occurred, but in real terms the black soccer bosses still run the show.

This to me is not deep transformation; on the contrary, it is shallow transformation. Deep transformation has a better chance because there is considerable evidence that cultures value modes of manipulating knowledge and displaying understanding. Cultural specificity and the narratives of those students who have been socialised in other cultures may bring into the classroom different but equally implicit assumptions about the nature of academic expertise and display of knowledge. Hence my reference to a deeper transformation assuming that higher education might show compassion to the powerful ethic in many cultures that emphasises the collective and one's relationship with others during storytelling. The supposed worth of the above argument lies in efforts in African(a) philosophy to study and conceptualise traditional African phenomena to determine their appropriateness for modern higher education.

The introduction of narratives in higher education is vital as one may assume from Waghid (2004) in his paper "African philosophy of education: implications for teaching and learning", where he argues that students should abandon the expectation that prescribed texts and course readings are the master texts. Agreeing with Burbules (1997: 73), Waghid posits that educators should accept as a condition of exploration and discovery the occasional state of being lost, confused and unsettled (2004: 5). In this regard Biesta (2004: 4) advises us to sometimes let go of our epistemological and metaphysical certainties. The narratives of the students may consequently pilot the way ahead in knowledge creation. This eradicates the perception that knowledge is stocked in the library. Readings concurs by questioning whether knowledge can only be reproduced from the warehouse, or should knowledge be produced during the teaching process. Readings' argument for such a situation to prevail is to allow for "reputation", which is easily measurable by senior university officials and CEOs of major corporations (Readings 1999: 26).

In this regard I want to agree with Waghid who teaches us not to "feel threatened by occasions in which we sometimes need to admit that we do not know or understand everything" (Waghid 2004: 6). The higher education system in South Africa is "new" (as opposed to the old system prior to policies guiding transformation) and it is because of

this that I concur with him that “teaching itself is a form of learning anew with others (students)” (Waghid 2004: 6). This is the situation Biesta (2004: 1) would refer to as “the community in which we are all strangers to each other”. This may imply that we do not force learners to speak as “rational agents” or as representatives of a “common discourse”, but also to speak outside the confines of the “rational community” (Biesta 2004: 4). I have argued for the narratives and stories of students to be told, because we only learn from others if we allow them to share with us what they know and believe in. We might have missed out on the narratives of those whose voices were previously muted, narratives that might have made the world a better place. As far as teaching/learning is concerned, Waghid thus argues that we discover and encounter new knowledge if we don’t have preconceived or predetermined ends in mind. Only then will our students not be hesitant to make mistakes or offer reasons, which might at times appear muddled or confusing. In learning “anew” we will definitely encounter differences which are “unavoidable but which need our protection and cultivation because they are good and precious” (Biesta 2004: 6).

In summary, several points emerge from my discussion above. Firstly, African culture is not devoid of science and it can be fully incorporated into the system of higher education. Secondly, it can be an arduous task for an African student to acquire the level of scientific proficiency to compete on an equal footing with native speakers who are proficient in the language of “power”, for example, English. This problem might occur if the scientific foundations have not been established in the mother tongue. Thirdly, the stories and narratives of students may help higher education to transform to a new, rather than maintain the present, body of preconceived knowledge.

It is with this background that one may ask whether the NPHE (2001) creates a conducive environment to cultivate in students and educators “intellectual virtues” such as creativity and problem solving when they have been socialised in their own cultures. Does the NPHE effectively address issues original to the South African context such as *ubuntu*, involving traditional ethical thinking which entails the cultivation of virtues such

as kindness, generosity and scientific development that is conducive for human advancement? It is my aim to respond on this question in the next section.

4.4 The National Plan for Higher Education and Tertiary Institutions

The NPHE addresses five key policy goals and strategic objectives, which in the Ministry's view are central to delivering on the transformation of higher education:

- 1) To provide increased access to higher education to all, irrespective of race, gender, age creed, class or disability and to produce graduates with skills and competence to meet the human resource need of the country;
- 2) To promote equity of access and to redress past inequalities through ensuring that the staff and student profiles in higher education progressively reflect the demographic realities of South African society;
- 3) To ensure diversity in the organisational form and institutional landscape of the higher education system through mission and programme differentiation thus enabling the addressing of original and national needs in social and economic development;
- 4) To build high-level research capacity to address the research and knowledge needs of South Africa; and
- 5) To build new institutional and organisational forms and new institutional identities through regional collaboration between institutions (NPHE 2001: 14-15).

In my discussion on the shortcomings of the NPHE I will mostly concentrate on three outcomes. It is noticeable that the Education White Paper (EWP 1997) provides the policy framework for higher education in South Africa. The NPHE focuses on key goals and strategies to be implemented to realise the central policy goals of the EWP (Waghid 2004: 10). With reference to some of the stated outcomes, I shall explore its possibilities and constraints within the South African higher education system.

My main critique of the NPHE is that it seems to favour neo-liberal market policies. The result is that the economic criteria take precedence over other important educational issues. It seemingly reduces professional work to quantitative purposes. Firstly, one of the outcomes, that is, increasing participation rates (NPHE 2001: 22) can also be seen from an economic perspective based on an economic rationale. This outcome may not be realised even in the medium to long term. This implies what Readings refers to as “nothing other than the optimal input/output ratio of a business” (Readings 1999: 39). Hence the discourse of effectiveness and efficiency so predominant in the document which is, in his own words, “a criterion of excellence as a performativity in an expanded market, because there is no cultural content” (Readings 1999: 38). I argue this because, firstly, there seems to be little South African (about these fiscal efficiencies) except insofar as excellence describes a commodity on the global market. Secondly, the outcome on New Institutional and Organisational Forms should also be viewed critically. Insofar as changing the institutional forms, only because of the legacy of apartheid, is also precarious. This may be problematic for higher education transformation. I have argued previously that deep transformation should not only happen structurally, because the need for attitude change underlies much of the needed change in a organisation today, and therefore, if one can change or enhance a person’s understanding or a situation and ensure that the environment supports that change, it is likely that attitude and behaviour change will follow (Von Hirschfeld & Downs 1992: 27). Institutional and organisational reforms should thus not only occur for the mere reason of bureaucratic efficiency, but be suitable for educational needs as well. Readings concurs with this when he argues that the current and sudden redenomination of polytechnics as universities is best understood as an administrative move, which he perceives as the breaking down of barriers to circulation, making these institutions more suitable for market expansion (Readings 1999: 39).

Hofmyer and Buckland sound a word of caution when they state that “education systems do not change because there is a change in government”, but maintain that “an immediate replacement of the existing structures and vested interests, material constraints, the

interplay of competing ideologies and the very process of negotiation will produce compromises between ideals and reality” (Hofmyer & Buckland 1992: 17).

There is a general acknowledgement of the social value and relevance of higher education, but the concern for this is because it is primarily seen in regard to enhancing national competitiveness in a global knowledge-driven economy. This concern that higher education is re-fashioned primarily to serve corporate interests is reflected in the background paper for the Council on Higher Education (CHE 2001). The responsibilities of higher education are increasingly being located within the demands of economic productivity and its requirements for particular kinds of knowledge and skills. In this sense it is fashioned to gratify industry at the expense of the broader social role that needs to underpin higher education. Proponents within the CHE also conclude that “The consequence of such a one-dimensional approach to higher education responsiveness could enormously impoverish the broader social role of higher education” (CHE 2001: 1). I now turn to the issue of funding and its concomitant role in realising transformation in higher education.

4.4.1 Funding

Another factor impacting on higher education transformation is the proposed funding framework. The absence of funding encouraging the development of the broader social developmental needs is a major omission in the policy document, however, there are firm policies that link funding with graduate output. Funding is definitely a steering mechanism for transformation and, in the absence of a firm policy, institutions tend to view community development and social responsibility as not really part of the mainstream academic work (Favish 2003: 29). There is evidence internationally of attempts to link funding mechanisms with support of engagement with issues related to higher education. This is a sentiment propounded by Duderstadt, who argues that the existing funding frameworks for higher education (HE) in many countries tend to reflect a “one-dimensional criterion for academic performance and prestige to the detriment of teaching and service” (Duderstadt 2000: 7). This may lead to the traditional values of

higher education disappearing because (as argued by Duderstadt), unless funding frameworks steer HE in a way that will be rewarded for contributing to the public good, the market forces will continue to dominate and shape HE. Tertiary students should be encouraged through credit incentives to engage in community-based research (Duderstadt 2000: 7).

To start with the reconstruction process in higher education transformation, one may ask what the NPHE (2001) is doing differently from the centuries-old economic exploitation ranging from slavery, to area confinement which siphoned young men and woman in their thousands to labour in the “New World” plantations to serve socio-economic structures of other countries? As much as one would like to see economic prosperity, one would also like to experience the intrinsic value of our education. It is thus with great concern that I am asking myself the above question, because the market-oriented discourse of the NPHE seems not to differ too much from the colonial educational philosophies and curricula that were never intended to produce independent thinkers. What the old system aimed for was rather the production of an administrative corps that would collaborate with the more powerful economies, in this case multinationals such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This was pursued by a few powerful bureaucrats excluding the voice of the masses. The control of the economy has shifted from the local state to the control of transnational entities that transfer capital in search of profit without regard to national boundaries. These entities (World Bank and IMF) determine the creditworthiness of nation-states through pushing their policy onto these states.

The subsequent brain-drain or migration is thus a direct result of these entities, because they are rendering capital that makes the labour force more flexible and adaptable to global market conditions. Migration, especially from South Africa, may be perceived as occurring more for economic reasons than as a result of political phenomena. These new policies are formulated in such a way that, according to Readings (1999: 48), they produce “subjects” who are no longer tied to the nation-state, but who can readily move to meet the demands of the global market.

This brain-drain has its origin within the conception of higher education institutions being managed as corporations whose overall character is corporate rather than cultural. This is perhaps the reason why, according to Readings (1999: 11), “students start thinking of themselves as consumers rather than members of a community” (of intellectuals). I suspect that if we allow higher education to submit to the free play of market forces, we might not be able to emancipate the majority of the South African people. Competitiveness in the market may not be viable or achievable if access to quality education opportunities is limited and discriminatory, advantaging the “highest bidder”. Tertiary institutions that are supported by the public treasury should engage in research that will benefit the public in ways that will elevate the general quality of life. Following this route would ensure that the populace would benefit and thus increase Africa’s competitiveness in the global arena.

4.5 Africanisation of the National Plan for Higher Education

Operating higher education on business principles may undermine new knowledge construction, especially if managed on a standardisation basis. Higher education may not contribute to full human development if we are to draft our policies on the basis of predetermined conditions. Derrida (1992) explains this insight as follows:

When the path is clear and given, when a certain knowledge opens up the way in advance, the decision is already made, it might as well be said that there is none to make; irresponsibly, and in good conscience, one simply applies or implements a program ... It makes of action the applied consequence, the simple application of knowledge or know-how. It makes of ethics and politics a technology. No longer of the order of practical reason or decision, it begins to be irresponsible (Derrida 1992: 41).

This argument supports the idea that education should not be tested against predetermined performance indicators such as those of corporations – in this case,

attempting to rate the departments of universities on, for example, a five-point scale. Treating knowledge like something that can be calculated by looking at the throughput or input/output ratio of students is asking them to do what Biesta refers to as speaking with a “representative voice” and not their own voice (2004).

The implications of the above for higher education transformation in South Africa can be explained in terms of what Biesta perceives as learning. He teaches us not to think of learning as the acquisition of something that already exists, but learning as responding. He further contends that someone has not learned anything when they are able to copy and reproduce what already exists, but rather when they respond to what is “unfamiliar, different, what challenges, irritates or even disturbs” (Biesta 2004: 11). Furthermore, he posits that learning is an “invention or creation, it’s a process of bringing something new into the world through a unique response, one’s own voice” (Biesta 2004: 11). It is only when we allow students to have their voices (narratives) come forward in the teaching process that we may cultivate knowledge. The narratives of those students, who have been socialised in other cultures, may bring into the classroom different, unprecedented but equally implicit knowledge uninfluenced by what Waghid calls “the master text” (Waghid 2004: 6). This knowledge, I argue, may be more helpful in addressing existential problems.

It is with this understanding of higher education transformation that I concur with Du Bois (1995: 31) that the African student has a distinct contribution to make and should not be castigated in finding his own voice. In an African context, one adds to this kind of knowledge construction by doing what Odera Oruka did – visiting the sages who were “not professionals” and in so-doing combine the academy with the village.

My critique of the NPHE is thus directed at its vagueness in addressing the development of home-grown practices in the higher education sector such as folklore, storytelling, scientific and technological growth of indigenous languages as stated in the outcomes of the NPHE (2001: 16). Anything short of this will continue to make our education contextually irrelevant, and culturally and spiritually insensitive, because it is

disconnected from the cultural, social and spiritual as well as economic realities of South Africa. In this regard I have previously argued that the university is reluctant to be held accountable to take a leading role in designing curricula to reflect these practices of South Africans, making them susceptible to the involvement of legislators, politicians and others who will not hesitate to impose on higher education what they may think is “effective” and “efficient”. Transformation in higher education in this regard, one would argue, should be an enacted change that is planned to bring about changes. Waghid makes the claim that any serious attempt to transform higher education depends on the renewal of African moral values, aimed at promoting social responsibility and solidarity, the duty of care, the virtues of sensitivity, selflessness and devotion to duty to uplift the social well-being of the community (Waghid 2004: 9).

In my view, educational change would include a higher education system that remains committed to forms of critical analysis and inquiry which are based on the principles of emancipatory educational values and goals and can be linked with the “ideal speech” situation of Jürgen Habermas, where responsibility goes hand in hand with freedom of thought and action. Transformation cannot be negotiated and re-conceptualised from the perspective of the dominant culture only. Transformation is a form of enacted change that is planned and is intended to bring about significant changes in how an institution is managed.

4.6 Conclusion

I have expressed my concern about the NPHE (2001) and the negative impact that globalisation and the marketisation of higher education would have on equitable redress in South Africa. The transformation discourse in the NPHE (2001) has been overshadowed by policies that embrace the imperatives of globalisation. It is my contention that higher education transformation can be realised if policies are embedded in the practices of those they need to serve – in this case the South African majority – but policies embedded in global development may hamper such transformation.

The conditions essential for higher education transformation in terms of an African(a) philosophy includes the narratives of students, their language, cultures and the higher education funding mechanism. I have argued that the narratives of students, especially those who were muted previously, may lead to a more deepened form of transformation in knowledge production. Conditions associated with African(a) philosophies such as folklore may help bridge the gap between policy and practice by incorporating into policies intellectual human virtues such as tolerance, generosity, responsibility and respect for others. Higher education should involve much more than the economic efficiency and effectiveness philosophies of the market. It should serve as a principal instrument by which a multidimensional development process can be achieved and social transformation effected.

CHAPTER 5

5 A REFLEXIVE SUMMARY

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I trace my intellectual journey through the writing of this thesis, and explore how I have developed personally in my quest to link higher education transformation to the idea of an African(a) philosophy. In my reflection I shall look at the methodological issues, conference presentation and the effect of visiting scholars on my thinking. I conclude this chapter by offering possibilities that this thesis holds for future research on transformation and the development of an African(a) philosophy of education.

5.2 Methodological Issues

In preparing for this thesis I was attracted to critical educational theory, since I am interested in empowering myself as well as the communities with whom I work. Critical educational theory is concerned with an understanding of events and how people live and engage with one another. It also seems to have an emancipatory agenda. My research method entails a conceptual-analytical approach and literature review because it concerns itself with questions of a reflective kind, which come to the fore when issues like education are under discussion. My literature review centres on the National Plan for Higher Education (2001) and also the Education White Paper 3 (1997) and how they may (or may not) enhance higher education transformation. My emphasis was not conceptual clarification as such, but more an exploration of the application of these concepts. I have reflected on the debates on particularism and universalism to show that concepts do not have one particular, absolute and universal meaning. Instead, these meanings are determined according to the context in which they unfold.

During my analysis of higher education transformation in terms of an African(a) philosophy, I could not situate myself outside the realm of the forces of transformation. I have argued that one should not only do certain things, but also understand and learn what one is doing. In my study I drew on a method that is based on the fact that when pursuing research we cannot ignore the reflective part of our philosophy, which underlies our own investigation. Higher education transformation in terms of an African(a) philosophy is discourse that requires one to take a stance and investigate how one's life is influenced by the investigation one is carrying out, which means that one is definitely affected by the phenomena one is trying to describe.

It is important to understand the educational phenomena one is investigating through analytical inquiry, but this can also be problematic, as real situations do not always afford us the time to study them first. I thought at first that I would mostly be involved in document analysis, but the more one becomes involved in the study the more one realises that the reality sometimes needs more than predetermined solutions or blueprints. My research has shifted from document analysis to talking to my supervisor, visiting professors, other students in the department and also engaging critically with my elders.

5.3 Epistemic Reflexivity

In this study I mainly wish to criticise the NPHE (2001), as it seems to embrace the imperatives of globalisation, while the South African transformation agenda initially had an equity and redress function. The National Plan mentions as one of its sixteen outcomes that higher education should aim at enhancing the cognitive skills of students by preparing them for a competitive labour market economy (NPHE 2001: 10). It seems as if the NPHE does not address the important issue of knowledge production in the South African context, but is rather a response to the neo-liberal economic markets. My main concern is that humanness is substituted by economic prosperity, minimising the human as the primary objective. I have argued that higher education should include much more than a mechanism to solve the economic ills of this country. Hence, my disappointment with the effective and efficiency discourse of the policy documents. I have identified the

marketisation of higher education framed in imperatives of globalisation, to be the main source of the brain-drain, or academic capitalism (academic poaching). This situation, I realised, has a negative impact on equity and redress and thus may serve as an impediment to higher education transformation.

Viewed against this background I consider African(a) philosophy to be a further step in the reorientation of scholarship in South Africa. Hence my research question: whether higher education transformation in South Africa can occur without taking into consideration an African(a) philosophy of education.

In response to my question I proposed a moral education embedded in African practices such as *ubuntu*, which involve the cultivation of virtues such as kindness, compassion, generosity and concern for others, as explained by Higgs (2003: 14). My views and perspectives and arguments during debates on what constitute an African(a) philosophy have been shaped by African scholars such as Ngugi Wa Thiongo, Paulin Hountondji, Kwame Gyekye, Kwasi Wiredu (with whom I had the privilege to discuss my ideas in person), Mokubung Nkomo, Ben Parker, WEB Du Bois and Olusegun Oladipo. I have used the work of Ngugi Wa Thiongo extensively to explain how our memories and other sites shape our inner beings and are vital for emancipation. I have used Chomsky to explain the implication of higher education not embedded in practices of the people (Chomsky 2003: 166). He explains why higher education may lack moral commitment. Based on his views, I have argued that higher education transformation as envisaged by the NPHE (2001) is not based on a social reality because there is lack of reference to the people and their histories. I contend that we need to re-examine policy implementation from a more indigenous perspective by opening up so that previously disadvantaged and marginalised voices are not only heard, but can have some influence on outcomes.

By including the voices of the previously marginalised I argued for the inclusion of the narratives of students into the academic realm. In this regard I concur with Du Bois that the African student has a distinct contribution to make and should be allowed to use his own voice and not a “representative voice”, as argued by Biesta (2004). Narratives of

students can contribute to learning as long as we “undermine” those non-discursive natures of folklore that may serve as obstacles to higher education transformation. Secondly, I argued that the culture of the African student is sometimes undermined as potential contributor to science, because it is perceived as static. I argued that certain features of African culture should be reconceptualised or adjusted in order for them to be understood contextually. By this I mean that concepts such as supernaturalism and practices such as ancestor worship should be open to critical analysis and questioning in order to bring a better understanding to the fore. I thus concur that African culture is an integral form of critical pedagogy that could be developed by those science teachers with an ardent African development orientation.

Parallel to the primacy of culture for the emancipation of the African student is language. On the importance of language I argued that it is within language that we dream, desire, have a consciousness, and that language is where images are located. Personally I am very cautious about becoming involved in the language discourse, but maintain that it is a fundamental task of the educationalist to promote multilingualism as one of the set strategies to unify the people of South Africa. Language policy in institutions of higher education should be scrutinised with the utmost care if we are to ensure that language policy is synchronised with other social strategies calculated to promote national unity. English is my third language, but under the circumstances it provides the best alternative because, as I argued, despite its dubious history, it provides the best unifying instrument. I am, however, of the opinion that it is our moral obligation to uplift those indigenous languages that were previously marginalised (and remain so).

It is with the above in mind that I take the NPHE (2001) to task for its vagueness in the development of home-grown practices in the higher education sector such as folklore, storytelling, scientific and technological growth of indigenous languages as stated in the outcomes. My concern in this regard is: who is to be held accountable for this? The academy’s (perhaps?) failure to take the leading role in designing curricula to reflect the practise of the South Africans? I have argued that the general public and their constituencies will demand accountability from the higher education sector, because

higher education is a public good. I argued, using Allen and Allen (2003: 11), that the defence of tenure on the basis of academic freedom fails to hit the mark.

My contention is that higher education stands a better chance of actuating the ideals of the National Plan for Higher Education (2001), if implemented along the lines of meanings associated with an African(a) philosophy. This is so because context plays an important role in shaping ideas and practices.

5.4 Moments in my own praxis (experience)

Writing this thesis was definitely not a pleasant experience, because I could not articulate myself well in English or in Afrikaans, which are the two languages offered in my department. My supervisor made me rewrite my Chapter One four times, not because of a lack of ideas, but rather because of my failure to express myself in a manner that is academically acceptable. Except for a lack of research skills and academic writing skills, my writing was made more difficult by the influence of my native language, which is Oshiwambo. Writing in English while thinking in Oshiwambo led to a very interesting “creativity”, with my supervisor taking me to task to explain some of it. I needed to master academic writing and started reading the literature not only for information, but also to observe the skill involved in writing. Assessing information and separating relevant from irrelevant information also proved to be a difficult task. This led to another conversation with my supervisor. Armed with a lot of information, I indulged in quoting extensive passages of information.

My supervisor clearly stated that he did not merely want information, but was interested in how I used the information to argue my case. Having lived in Namibia as a black person during apartheid, my thinking was/is still under the influence of the political struggle. This, I realised later, has a real influence on my thinking and arguing. My arguments on African(a) philosophy were more of a retaliatory nature or as that of an “activist” (the words of my supervisor). In my deliberations with my supervisor, he provoked me by saying that African(a) philosophy was nothing but witchcraft, mysticism

and ancestorship that will contribute nothing to higher education transformation. For me, at the time, he represented the typical ignorant, naïve and prejudiced society of the West. My retaliation to his accusation seemed not to bother him at all, until one day in our daily deliberations we were engaged in another critical discourse. This was the turning point in my perception of academic thinking. He complimented me for arguing my point and not becoming emotive, but producing rational, coherent and persuasive arguments for my beliefs and practices. There is nothing wrong in being passionate about one's beliefs, but one should be able to articulate them so that others can understand. Since then I have adopted a critical reconstructionist approach to my work.

Parallel to clear argumentation was the issue of finding my own voice. Using your own voice in argumentation forces you to be authentic and original. Hence, the reference to my cultures and spiritual values that are rooted in my Owambo indigenous episteme to be validated within the academy. Another obstacle worth mentioning is the difficulty experienced in the absence of motivation. I find it difficult to be motivated extrinsically. Identifying myself, my community and their practices in comparison with those of others always provided the best motivation in this study. When it becomes impossible for me to situate myself outside the influence of this discourse due to intrinsic attachment, it presents me with the opportunity to find and use my own voice.

5.5 Influence of visiting scholars

I had the privilege of meeting a few reputable scholars and great academics (to my mind) during the period of writing this thesis. Professor Kwasi Wiredu, from the Akan tribe in Ghana, who teaches in the United States of America, had a profound impact on my thinking, especially with reference to his thoughts related to my study. He uses the practices of the Akan tribe to describe his understanding of an educated person. Such a person for him should have acquired the values of honesty, responsibility, faithfulness and empathy for the well-being of others. These issues determining a "person" coincided well with my argument for African(a) philosophy. Only when you have acquired these values can an "Akan" person be perceived as having achieved "personhood". This is a

highly moral discourse and links up with my understanding of morality, as I explained. My arguments also draw on the work of Chomsky. As far as I am concerned, Wiredu has reached personhood which therefore qualifies him to teach me by way of moral discourse.

Nicholas Burbules (2003) has given me a different perspective on conceptual clarification. I missed out on this reputable academic and prolific publisher, because at the time he presented his paper I did not have a sound theoretical background of Philosophy of Education and struggled to follow some of his arguments. It was in Gert Biesta's work that I found a niche area for my research especially, his papers on *Community Without a Community* and *Educational Research, Evidence-Based Practice and Professional Judgement in Education*. His arguments shaped my understanding that the effective and efficient discourse of policy formulations may not always have the desirable educational effects. It is through reading the work of Biesta that I realised that African(a) philosophy does not need to conform to Western norms in order to gain respectability; neither does it need to go out of its way to be different or wholly other. His notion of community without a community links very well with the concept of narratives/storytelling, as I explained in Chapter Four. The notion of storytelling also links up with Iris Marion Young's chapter on *Communication and the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy* (1996), included in the reader of another visiting scholar, Professor Penny Enslin from the University of Witwatersrand.

Another prominent scholar was Margorie O'Loughlin from Australia, who explained what it means to be a citizen, especially in times where concepts such as a global citizen and global village made up most of modern discourse. The idea of citizenship in modern and traditional Africa is an interesting phenomenon worth exploring and she encouraged me to look for an indigenous understanding of citizenship. Her passion for this topic is reflected in her work with the indigenous people (Aborigines) of Australia.

5.6 Conference Presentations

I also had the privilege to present at the 13th and 14th Biennial Conferences of the South African Association for Research and Development (SAARDHE) held at the University of Stellenbosch from 25-27 June 2003 and at the Balmoral Hotel in Durban from the 10th -12th of June 2004. This was quite a challenging experience, for I had to write and submit an abstract for review in order to qualify to participate in the conference. My memory of a fellow doctoral candidate caused me sleepless nights as I worried whether my abstract would be accepted. The fact that I eventually participated means that my work was good enough to present in the public domain. Listening to seasoned academics, especially at my first conference, was a worthwhile experience. It is during deliberations with conference presenters that I learned to substantiate arguments for them to be accepted in the public domain. I have also learned that one should not be “married to one’s work” (to quote my supervisor), but should be open to constructive criticism. Presentation requires one to have strong communicative and analytical skills, vital for clear articulation and argumentation.

5.7 Possible pathways for future research

During the course of this study I realised that the most valuable commodity is knowledge. It is my contention that only those who are the owners of knowledge can change the face of the struggle in Africa by utilising this knowledge to benefit humanity. One may thus refer to it as “academic colonialism”, because those without this knowledge are dependent on those who own it. It is during my dealing with concepts such as globalisation that I came to realise the power of knowledge hidden in these concepts. The latest phenomena – such as the orthodoxies of structural adjustment and the market – have now become far more pernicious than the overt colonialism of the past, meaning that the concentration of knowledge is centred on phenomena that serve the cause of these hidden powers.

In this regard my study falls short, because it does not address the important issue of knowledge construction. I am referring to the pedagogical structures of knowledge construction, as no deep debate on approaches to the study fields has emerged out of this study. This sentiment coincides with the thoughts of Hoppers that the African philosophical and “political schools emerging have favoured the building of the nation-state, or even Pan-African consciousness that is usually devoid of any empirical content either in terms of indigenous philosophy or knowledge systems” (Hoppers 2000: 4). There seems to be a lack of philosophical understanding of knowledge construction and a meta-framework for modifying academic programmes. My concern in this regard is that knowledge construction as a social construct agreed upon by human interest may be deemed not essential by everyone.

It is with this in mind that one may speculate how the African child or learner should be educated. Africana(a) philosophy deconstructed through the work of prominent scholars such as Burbules, Biesta, Wiredu, Kant and Dilthey in regard to knowledge construction and what education entails is a pathway I consider worth investigating. In the discussion on the importance of narratives for the African learner to be part of the academic realm, some scholars argue that a (learner) child is not yet capable of real dialogue and real communication (Biesta 1995: 1). For these scholars the capacity of real communication and dialogue is the very sign of adulthood and therefore it is postulated as the intended outcome of education (Biesta 1995: 1). Wiredu (2004) argues that an educated person is one who has acquired the virtues of honesty, faithfulness, responsibility and concern for others. Education is then seen as a process in which the child is, in a sense, made into a person, and the personhood of the child is simultaneously affirmed and denied. Biesta (1995) posits that education is then presented as a kind of trajectory, which sets out as manipulation and eventually develops into communication. Biesta paraphrases Peters in this argument that in the most formative years of a child’s development he/she is incapable of a communicative or dialogical form of life (1995).

The debate is started with the description of the relationship between the educator and the educated, but first of all the depiction of the educational phenomenon itself. Education,

according to Biesta, is a function of society and can only be realised in a personal relationship between the educator and the educated (Biesta 1995: 2). Biesta draws on Kron to explain the two central characteristics of educational relationship. The first one is characterised by a one-directional or unilateral intentionality, whereby “education is seen as intentional activity but it is only the educator who has the intentions, not the educated” (Biesta 1995: 2). This characteristic depicts a relationship in which the personhood of the immature child is produced by the intentional activities of the mature adult.

The second characteristic replaces the intentionality with the idea of broken intentionality, because the educator may fail in his pedagogic activities because the child is not willing material. This argument one may support by using Kant, who expressed the assumption that man exists as an end in itself; he must at all times be regarded not merely as a means, but always at the same time as an end (Biesta 1995: 2).

How can a better understanding of what education ought to be or how education takes place help in the transformation of the pedagogy in the classroom and lead to the African child taking ownership of knowledge? I suggest a further exploration on the intentionality of education or perhaps the unintentionality of education and hence knowledge construction.

5.8 Summary

I have identified concepts such as real dialogue, real communication, pedagogic manipulation and intentionality, which may help in identifying new pathways that I would like to explore in the deconstruction of African(a) philosophy.

In essence, this thesis is my modest attempt to rethink higher education transformation in South Africa in terms of what constitutes an African(a) philosophy of education. Despite some of the thesis’s weaknesses, I believe that I have succeeded in at least articulating what the NPHE (2001) fails to advocate in relation to what an African(a) philosophy of education could mean. Without linking higher education transformation to an African(a) voice, little would be achieved in the realm of deep educational transformation in South Africa.

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