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Institutionalizing Free Inquiry in Universities during Regime Transitions: The South African Case

FOR SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION AND INSTITUTIONALIZED research, the transition to a democratic “new South Africa” in the 1990s opened the way to different kinds of fundamental change. The transition also brought new risks and more insidious threats to free inquiry. Taken together these make for a complex and confusing overall picture that can be read in opposite ways. Some changes, especially those that signal the achievement of long social and political struggles, take center stage as dramatic manifestations of a new order of free inquiry. Other changes, especially those brought about by the unanticipated impact of global trends on the restructuring of South African higher education, were only remarked in retrospect. Perhaps the most difficult to assess are those the transition made conceivable, but in the event did not take place. Thus South Africa’s democratic transition suggested that beyond the deracialization of the elite sector, inclusive access to higher education would enable free inquiry to draw on the intellectual resources of society as a whole. Regime change from apartheid to democracy promised the institutionalization of a more robust and flourishing culture of free inquiry fit for a democratic society. (And if this was not realized, how should that lack be identified and assessed?)

The transition from apartheid to democracy manifestly changed the political context for free inquiry. Under apartheid the threats to free inquiry were overt and external, above all from the apartheid state:

- ▶ Some universities, effectively the older, predominantly white teaching institutions, were insulated islands of racial privilege while others, the homeland universities or “Bush Colleges,” were designed as instruments of racial ideology and state policy. The Extension of University Education Act of 1959 formally removed the institutional autonomy of universities in determining student admissions.
- ▶ All inquiry was subject to official “publication control,” including the annual prohibition of thousands of “undesirable publications”; university and research libraries had to apply for permission to hold politically sensitive or ideologically and morally suspect publications under restrictive conditions; security legislation enabled the “banning,” restriction, and prosecution of political activists including academics and researchers.
- ▶ The majority of the population was excluded from access to a racially segregated system of higher education and research: in 1956 as few as 2,300 African students out of a total of some 10 million were enrolled at universities (Malherbe, 1956); while this increased to some 32,700 by 1983, participation rates for Africans by 1990 still stood at less than 9 percent, compared to 60 percent for whites (Bunting and Cloete, 2006).
- ▶ In obvious and less obvious ways, the local academic world in South Africa was isolated from major intellectual trends and institutional developments of higher education abroad (Mouton, 2008).

In contrast, the position of free inquiry appeared quite different in the context of the transition to a new and democratic South Africa. The comprehensive postapartheid restructuring of higher education was premised on democratic principles and objectives:

- ▶ Academic freedom was established as a constitutional right: section 16(1) of the new constitution provides that each citizen has the right to freedom of expression, including academic freedom and freedom of scientific research.
- ▶ Following on from the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) report of 1996 and the Department of Education's white paper of 1997, the Higher Education Act of 1997 established a single integrated higher education system committed to equality of access.
- ▶ The official policy framework as eventually encapsulated in the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) in 2001 rejected direct state control and interference in higher education and instead opted for an approach of "*co-operative governance*" of higher education, thus recognizing the institutional autonomy of universities and limiting the role of the state to "steering" (by such levers as those of systemic planning, funding and quality assurance).

Following the end of apartheid, South African higher education and research rapidly caught up with major international trends, including new forms of university management and increasing demands for public accountability (Bundy, 2006). A recent comprehensive three-year process initiated by the Council on Higher Education (CHE) profiled and endorsed academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and public accountability as core concerns of higher education and research. It found that, although there were some areas of concern, the state's "steering" through planning, funding, and quality assurance did not involve substantial violations of academic freedom (HEIAAF, 2008: 54-55, 61).

Even so, all may not be as well in the "new South Africa" as suggested by this picture of a wholesale vanquishing of prior threats to free inquiry. This may be due to the fact that the threats to free inquiry have not so much been vanquished as changed in their nature and source. Significantly the HEIAAF Task Team Report found that while external threats from state intervention is currently not a major

concern “threats to academic freedom may originate from within higher education institutions as well as from outside them” (HEIAAF 2008: 38, 72). A dramatic illustration (at once exceptional but also telling) is the recent case of Nithaya Chetty, a theoretical physicist and president of the South African Institute of Physics, who was forced to resign in the face of dismissal through a disciplinary inquiry at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) in the latest of a series of litigation by management against staff at one of South Africa’s premier universities. The main offense charged against Chetty was nothing less than attempting to put academic freedom on the agenda of the university senate! This had been part of a concerted effort to reassert the role of the academic sector in relation to executive management in this university. From the perspective of the university executive, this was construed as insubordination of their prerogative to determine what should constitute the “transformation” of higher education and research in postapartheid South Africa.

Indeed, free inquiry in the “new South Africa” is far from flourishing as expected. In different and important ways it is subject to new and more insidious threats that now come from internal as much as external sources; far from taking off in different and exciting new directions, the research culture is battling to survive. No doubt much of this is due to the stubborn legacies of apartheid, but it also speaks to the ongoing challenges, limits and failures of the postapartheid transition itself. This paper cannot provide a comprehensive account of the current state of free inquiry across the full range of disciplinary fields; it can only briefly explore some of the key features complicating the prospects for, and institutionalization of, free inquiry in the context of the South African transition to postapartheid.

“OPENING THE DOORS OF HIGHER LEARNING”: EQUALIZING ACCESS AND THE FAILINGS OF MASSIFICATION

Free inquiry entails more than negative freedom from external intervention and constraints: in order to flourish, the practice of free inquiry

requires effective access to adequate institutional resources and to an inclusive system of higher education as well as to capacity-building and specialized training. The growth of modern science and the rise of the research university has only been possible by drawing on material and social resources across society. In premodern times universities and scientific societies were elitist teaching or research institutions of relatively marginal economic and political significance that could be left to their own devices. In the course of the twentieth century this traditional configuration profoundly changed: the democratization and massification of higher education in the decades following the Second World War opened up access to universities even as university-based “big science” became a central force driving the emergence of new “knowledge societies.” In this regard the South African trajectory during the apartheid period proved highly ambivalent. *Within* the white minority there was broad access to higher education, resulting in high participation rates comparable to other modern societies by the mid-twentieth century, but this was premised on the exclusion of the majority of the population. The exclusive apartheid order was manifestly unjust and oppressive; it also restricted the reach of, and prospects for, the development of inquiry to the human and social resources available within that racial minority while leaving the potential of South African society largely untapped.

Confronted with the profound legacies of apartheid inequality, postapartheid higher educational planners in the 1990s assumed that the massification of higher education would provide the key for the takeoff of a robust culture of inquiry. The basic concern would be to “open the doors of higher learning,” in line also with the thrust of the Freedom Charter. In its 1996 report, the NCHE identified increased participation or massification as one of three main pillars in the transformation process. Indeed, the NCHE’s central proposal was that massification would provide the vehicle for equitable transformation (NCHE, 1996: 94-100). It projected that overall enrolment in higher education could be virtually doubled over the decade from 1995 to 2005 while overall participation rates could be improved from 14 percent to 30 percent,

including an increase of the participation rate for African students from 9 percent to 20 percent (NCHE, 1996: 94, 100). Had these targets actually been achieved over the following decade, then the condition of, and prospects for, free inquiry in postapartheid South Africa would have been put on a profoundly different footing. However, in actuality this process of massification did not quite happen. Not only did the actual growth in overall enrolments and participation rates by the end of the decade fall far short of the projected targets, but the massification of higher education never did become official policy. While at the time the NCHE's other main proposals had been received with general acclaim, its central massification proposal was not accepted by the minister of education. Instead, the Department of Education concluded that massification was not affordable and its 1997 white paper argued for "a planned expansion of higher education" (CHE, 2004: 26). The state's 1997 rejection of massification was so fateful that the question must be raised whether this had been a case of realism, or simply a self-fulfilling prophecy. Consider the counterfactual question: What *would* have been the consequences *if* the state *had* accepted the NCHE's massification proposals at that time? How different might the overall enrolment figures and relevant participation rates have looked, by 2005? These questions require a closer look at the patterns and dynamics of postapartheid restructuring of higher education.

At some levels "opening the doors of higher learning" did transform the old apartheid order of racial exclusion. In short order the new student mobility, coupled with the introduction of a national student bursary scheme, resulted in a massive increase in black student enrolments. This amounted to nothing less than a "revolution" of the general student profile, with the proportion of black students in the universities increasing from 32 percent in 1990 to 60 percent by 2000 (Cooper and Subotzky, 2001). Already in 1994 there were about equal numbers of white and African students in higher education; by 1999 there were almost twice as many African students as whites, and in 2005 the African share of the total enrolment was 62 percent and that of white students 25 percent (Bunting and Cloete, 2006: 5). This is a

remarkable achievement by any standard and may well have been the greatest change in racial and gender composition of a student body anywhere in the world during the same period (Bunting and Cloete, 2006: 30). On closer analysis, though, various qualifications need to be made. First, this process had actually been well under way even prior to the postapartheid transition. The platform for the NCHE's massification proposals and expectations had been provided by a major surge in higher education enrolments during the last decade of apartheid. The NCHE assumed that once the shackles of apartheid were removed even more substantial growth in higher education enrolments would become feasible. However, contrary to these expectations the overall increases in student enrolments actually leveled off during the period between 1995 and 2000. From 1986 to 1994 there had been an annual enrolment growth rate of more than 7 percent but between 1995 and 1999 this slowed to an average annual increase of less than 1 percent. Indeed, the actual headcount numbers and participation rates by 2005 were much closer to the 1995 baselines than to the NCHE's projections (Bunting and Cloete, 2006: 19).

Second, access to higher education is not just a matter of headcount enrolment numbers but also of relative participation rates; that is, the trends in comparative enrolment shares for the various population groups. On this score the position is that by 2005 participation rates for Africans had improved only to 12 percent, while participation rates for whites remained virtually unchanged at 60 percent and overall participation actually only increased to 16 percent—well short of the NCHE's projected 30 percent (Bunting and Cloete, 2006: 6). The impressive increase in headcount numbers of African students, from 287,000 in 1995 to almost 450,000 by 2005, looks more problematic when viewed from this perspective.

Moreover, and in the third place, the influx of substantial numbers of first-generation black students into higher education proved a "skewed revolution" with only a small proportion finding their way to the core disciplines of scientific and critical inquiry. African students tended to complete fewer years of higher education, to enroll in tech-

nikons rather than top universities, and to be under-represented in the more professional courses, such as engineering and accountancy (Cooper and Subotsky, 2001: 18-19). In other words, actual trends have contradicted the official commitment to equity as a basic principle of higher education. After its first decade the higher education system, though deracialized, had actually become more differentiated and unequal (Bunting, 2002: 179). In large part this was a matter of a shift from the apartheid system, in which basic inequities had coincided with racial differences, to a more complex and increasingly class-based system in which inequities were increasingly being reproduced *within* racial categories. The basic problem, though, is that the (African) majority of South African society is not gaining sufficient access. As Bunting and Cloete observe, "the problem is that within a relatively small elite system, almost all the students can be African, and the participation rate will still be under 20 percent" (2006: 31). In short, higher education in postapartheid South Africa remained a small elite sector incapable of sustaining a robust and expanding culture of free inquiry.

INSTITUTIONAL DIFFERENTIATION WITHIN A UNIFIED HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

If apartheid higher education policies represented a classic attempt to institutionalize teaching and research according to state-imposed ideological objectives, they also demonstrated the limits of state direction of, and intervention in, higher education. The apartheid state's attempts to fashion institutions of higher education in its own image met with different kinds of opposition and resistance; it also produced different kinds of unintended consequences. The older liberal universities, which had previously admitted only a bare minimum of black students and employed only a small number of black academic staff, rallied around the principles of academic freedom and institutional autonomy in protest against the enforced segregation of universities. The racially designated institutions that were established from the 1960s as show-pieces of apartheid higher education soon became major centers of

black student protest and the articulation of “black consciousness” as a novel ideology of resistance. By the late 1980s, erstwhile “bush colleges” proudly reconstituted themselves as the “intellectual homes of the left”; increasingly, official policymakers had to accept that they were no longer in control of what had become a *de facto* process of desegregating higher education institutions even before the onset of the transition to democracy.

South Africa’s negotiated transition to democracy in 1994 was conceived as an opportunity to make a new start, in the first instance at the level of national policymaking. Building on policy objectives developed in think-tanks such as the African National Congress (ANC)-oriented National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI), the NCHE produced a comprehensive report in 1996 that was then taken further through the official white paper of 1997 issuing in the Higher Education Act of 1997 and consolidated in the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) of 2001. This concerted effort at national restructuring brought about a unified system of higher education explicitly based on equity and democratic transformation. On closer analysis, though, the national policymaking process itself proved to have unintended consequences. Merely bringing the privileged “historically white institutions” and disadvantaged “historically black institutions” within a single formally integrated system did not overcome the fragmented legacy of apartheid in higher education. Moreover, the new institutional landscape was fashioned as much on the ground by institutional responses as by state planning.

The various institutional sectors not only inherited quite different legacies from the apartheid past, but also approached the democratic transition itself with their own expectations and fears and developed distinct adaptive strategies. In retrospect, analysts have identified a spectrum of such coping and adaptive institutional strategies (for example, Cloete and Fehnel, 2002). Some, in particular the historically white Afrikaans universities and technikons, fearful of the loss of their former privileged status and the possible impact on

them of the impending national transformation of higher education, energetically engaged in opportunistic initiatives of various kinds: they moved to recruit substantial numbers of black students on satellite campuses and in distance teaching programs to expand student enrolments, and they also developed new entrepreneurial ways to secure funding apart from state subsidies. Others, especially the historically black universities, adopted an essentially passive approach in anticipation of the benefits to come their way from the restructuring of the higher education system in terms of the proclaimed official objectives of redress and equality. For their part, some of the historically white English universities, somewhat more confident of their own academic standing and institutional survival chances (while also not looking primarily to the state for redress and support), engaged in more inward-looking processes of managerial modernization, curriculum reform, and research enterprise.

The institutional consequences of these different adaptive strategies were ironic: after the first few years of the postapartheid dispensation it was the Afrikaans universities that, counterintuitively, emerged with significant increases of black student enrolments and financial resources. The historically white Afrikaans-language universities tended to perceive the national agenda of transformation and redress as a potential threat to their institutional survival, but in effect this had energized them to embrace entrepreneurial strategies for exploiting available market opportunities to expand their product range (Cloete and Maassen, 2002: 467). At the same time the consequences proved disastrous, especially for some historically black universities that had staked their strategy on their expectations of redress: in practice a unified system of higher education actually meant that they were brought on to the general SAPSE funding formula and so exposed to the quasi-market principles on which this funding formula operated. As a consequence the level of state funding for these universities actually declined in both absolute and relative terms (CHE, 2004: 27).

What had come to pass was a new (formally) deracialized dispensation in which the historically white and historically black universities had been transformed into “historically advantaged institutions” (or HAIs) and “historically disadvantaged institutions” (or HDIs), but not to the advantage of the latter. Between 1995 and 1999 the HDIs lost 28,000 students from their rolls, or 25 percent of their total enrolment, to the HAIs. Several HDIs were pushed to the brink. Cloete and Maassen concluded that “it was the institutions, more than the central government, that shaped the new institutional landscape that materialized in the post-1994 period” (2002: 471, 478).

By 2000 the Department of Education (DoE), headed by a new and more energetic Minister, Kader Asmal, concluded that the “unintended and unanticipated consequences” occasioned by the institutional initiatives in some sectors of the higher education system were a problem to which the state would have to provide the answer by more firmly taking charge of the restructuring process. This took the form of another round of consultations, though of a more directive and less inclusive nature than the NCHE had been (Cloete, 2002: 424-5). The newly established CHE appointed a task team that produced a report in 2000 commonly known as the “Size and Shape” report. In general the task team assumed that “a far more interventionist attitude by the Ministry is needed because institutional voluntarism has failed to achieve transformation” (Hall et al., 2004: 34, 36). The main recommendations of the report were for a differentiated higher education system based on distinct institutional mandates and types. More specifically, the task team report proposed a differentiation between different types of higher education institutions—that is, “bedrock institutions” largely limited to undergraduate teaching and effectively amounting to community colleges, and two types of universities with respectively more selective and a more comprehensive research focus (CHE, 2000: 43). Implicitly these proposals, more especially those for scaled-down “bedrock institutions,” addressed the crisis of survival in which the historically black universities had come to find themselves.

Politically, though, such proposals were highly contentious, and were vigorously resisted, not just by the representatives of these institutions who insisted on full university status, but also by key ANC leaders and others who had been educated at Fort Hare and other historically black universities. The “Size and Shape” proposals were perceived as effectively accepting “most of the historically white universities as some type of Ivy League, while the historically disadvantaged and rural universities (the ‘face-bricks’) would be relegated to undergraduate teaching” (Hall et al., 2004: 37). Unsurprisingly, these aspects of the CHE “Size and Shape” report were rejected by the ministry, which instead seized on a different and less prominent recommendation of the report: engaging in restructuring through a process of institutional mergers. This official response was set out in the 2001 NPHE, which was presented at a public meeting where “it was made clear that it was not a document open to negotiation” (Cloete, 2002: 416). The ministry also rejected the CHE’s advice for a consultative approach to the proposed mergers (Hall et al., 2004: 50).

The tenor of the official response to the “Size and Shape” report thus indicated a general shift to a more top-down interventionist approach of implementing official policy objectives. Amendments to the Higher Education Act in 1999 and 2000 gave additional powers to the minister “to determine the scope and range of public and private institutions and to appoint an administrator to manage institutions with serious financial problems and ministerial approvals” (Cloete, 2002: 425). In various ways, it thus became clear that, with the announcement of the institutional merger process, the unprecedented consultation and cooperative governance between the state and universities in the period between 1994 and 1999 had come to an end and had given way to a much more directive and interventionist approach by the state.

The institutional merger process reduced the total number of higher education institutions from 36 to 23. Of necessity a process of mandated institutional mergers involved violations of the affected institutions’ institutional autonomy. The implementation of the insti-

tutional mergers was met by fierce resistance from some universities. However, these confrontations subsided and the process of institutional mergers proceeded with little further public contestation. Did this mean that the universities had acquiesced in the state's assault on their institutional autonomy through the process of mandated institutional mergers? At least on the surface that seemed to be the case. But this begs the question that, on that level, *any* restructuring of the higher education system, except that undertaken by institutions themselves on a purely voluntary basis, must involve some violation of institutional autonomy. If it is accepted that some kind of restructuring of the South African higher education system was indeed needed, then the relevant question must be how the option of mandated institutional mergers compared to alternative proposals. The main alternative under discussion at the time was the CHE task team's "Size and Shape" proposal for a differentiated three-tier system of higher education institutions that would undoubtedly also have involved substantial violations of institutional autonomy, be it through a different process than that of the mandated institutional mergers. The question was how the state should, and could, respond to the historically black universities' crises of survival.

Accepting the CHE task team's proposal that these historically black institutions were not viable as fully fledged universities but should be scaled down to "bedrock institutions" or community colleges largely limited to undergraduate teaching, would effectively have amounted to a judgment that they could not meet the conditions for full university status. It was this implication that was fiercely resisted by the representatives of the historically black institutions, their social constituencies and political allies. The alternative of the merger process provided a political face-saving exercise, though one that resulted in considerable dilution and confusion of distinctive institutional missions. Bringing together former technikons with teaching universities under the umbrella of "comprehensive universities" and merging some unviable HDIs with incipient research universities while allowing other HAIs to

continue unaffected on their own trajectories hardly amounted to principled restructuring (HEIAAF, 2008: 51).

Meanwhile, with regard to the route actually taken, that of mandated institutional mergers, the question remains just what this says about the relation of the state to higher education institutions. As far as the state is concerned, it must be said that, contrary to the often-repeated alarms about the increasingly interventionist approach of the state to the restructuring of higher education, opting for the route of institutional mergers actually amounted to a relatively self-limiting strategy. To the extent that the DoE had arrogated to itself the role of being the main driver of restructuring higher education, delegating responsibility for institutional mergers to the level of the institutions themselves might even be considered as a form of buck-passing. Rather than having to confront particular institutions head-on, as would have been required had the alternative of “differentiation through distinct institutional types” been chosen, with the prospect of having to persuade or force some historically black universities to become “bedrock institutions,” the DoE could limit itself to overseeing the merger process while leaving the messy details to other agencies on the ground. Conversely, from the perspective of the institutions concerned, the fact remains that responsibility for merging also brings with it a level of agency at least in the local context. This may account for the way in which the affected institutions, despite their initial protestations, have by and large in practice gone along with the process of institutional mergers.

The institutional merging process also had other indirect and unintended consequences. On the face of it the postmerger institutional landscape of higher education is less characterized by the previous stark polarization between the historically white institutions and the historically black institutions. Some of the merged institutions now comprise complex admixtures of components drawn from both sides of this historical divide. To some extent this may result in an internalization of the tensions which had obtained *between* different institu-

tional sectors *within* the confines of the new merged institutions—and it may be no accident that some of the merged institutions like the University of KwaZulu/Natal has become characterized by serious internal conflicts of different kinds. Not unrelated to this is the fact that the mergers also served, over the longer term, to strengthen the hold of university management on the academic sector within these institutions. The imperatives of the merging process required exceptional powers to be vested in the central university executive in command of a hierarchical bureaucracy. Merging institutions were allowed by the Standard Institutional Statute set by the minister to override some of the hallowed prerogatives of the academic senate and faculty boards according to collegial traditions of university governance (HEIAAF, 2008: 51). Such provisions were meant to be temporary measures only, but inevitably in practice acquired vested interests and a momentum of their own.

Once the merging process was completed and the new funding formula was in place, central policy has been reoriented toward a more differentiated steering, allowing for consultation and specified institutional contracts (Bunting and Cloete, 2006: 11, 29). As a modified version of cooperative governance in higher education, this approach in principle recognizes the institutional autonomy of universities, though not in an unqualified sense, and limits the role of the state to steering by such levers as those of 1) systemic planning, 2) funding, and 3) quality assurance. The HEIAAF task team found that in practice some instances of systemic planning such as that the DoE's "programme and qualifications mix" (PQM) exercise in 2002 "provided a most unsatisfactory example of steering using the planning lever" (HEIAAF, 2008: 52-53). In relation to public funding, state steering primarily involved the development and implementation of a new funding framework which from 2004 replaced the previous SAPSE funding system, which had remained in force between 1994 and 2003. This new funding framework had the intention of moving the institutions' development trajectory more within the ambit of national imperatives as defined by the state. At the

same time the overall level of government subsidies was significantly reduced, forcing institutions to rely more on increased tuition fees and on “third-stream” sources such as contract research. The HEIAAF task team found this to have problematic implications for academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and accountability (HEIAAF, 2008: 56). Finally, state steering through the lever of quality assurance involved the functioning of the Higher Education Quality Commission (HEQC) established as a division of the CHE in 2001 as well as of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), which implements the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and oversees the development of a coordinated external quality assurance system of higher education. Among others this involves the accreditation of formal learning qualifications as well as a process of external audits of higher education institutions and degree programmes. The HEIAAF task team found that the current official quality assurance regime involved a reasonably “benign” type of steering, taking care to be consultative but which “could turn malign under certain conditions” (HEIAAF, 2008: 59). However, the threats to scholarly freedom and academic rule from regimes of “objective” quality assurance do not derive only from outside the academic community but increasingly operate within university governance itself along with the rise of “managerialism.”

THE EROSION OF SCHOLARLY FREEDOM AND ACADEMIC RULE BY THE RISE OF MANAGERIALISM IN THE UNIVERSITIES

South African intellectual and research culture does not have deep historical roots; it is also small in scope and unevenly developed. The first knowledge-based institutions developed in the Cape Colony from the mid-nineteenth century around the South African Library and Museum and general literary periodicals such as the *South African Journal* and the *Cape Monthly Magazine* (Dubow, 2006, chaps. 1, 2). Such scholarly research as there was during the nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries—from Herschell to Bleek or Theal—was not university-based;

instead it was an enterprise of missionary or other independent scholars. Likewise, the first generation of South African public intellectuals, including Olive Schreiner, Eugène Marais, Gandhi, and Jan Smuts, typically were amateurs and generalists without strong connections to the universities or to professional scientific associations. The professionalization of research and scholarship may be dated from the founding of the South African Association for the Advancement of Science in 1903, but it never became a concerted movement as in the United States, nor was there any South African equivalent of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). Still, the early decades of the twentieth century saw the professionalization of a range of scholarly disciplines (Mouton, 2008). By the mid-twentieth century, academic scholarship had become largely university-based even if universities long remained little more than undergraduate teaching institutions and the notion of a research university was not seriously contemplated until some decades later.

True to its colonial legacy, the South African university system derives from the Anglo-Saxon tradition rather than the continental-European or American academic cultures. The institutional structure of especially the older South African universities broadly follows the British model, in some cases more specifically the Scottish version, with similar functions for the vice chancellor, academic senate and university council, faculty boards, and academic departments. South African universities never knew the full German institution of the professorial chair, except in the attenuated guise of permanent professorial heads of departments, nor did they develop a strong and professionalized system of academic tenure on the American model. Though the academic tenure system remained weak and ineffective, the older universities adopted some basic elements of internal “academic rule” (Moodie, 1996): professors as heads of academic departments, elected deans of faculty boards and an academic senate with authority for academic affairs. These structures provided the basic internal space for some growth of collegial traditions and practices of scholarly freedom.

Of course, this applied primarily to the older white universities (or HAIs) and cannot be generalized to other higher education institutions of the apartheid era. As against this the apartheid universities originally designed to serve the various “bantustans” and ethnic groups (or HDIs) were burdened by the legacy of a distinctive bureaucratic academic culture: “The HDIs . . . were creatures of apartheid and were tightly controlled by apartheid managers. Academics on these campuses did not exercise the same degree of power as those in the HAIs” (Webster and Mosoetsa, 2002: 67).

At these institutions the conditions for the development of collegial traditions and practices of scholarly freedom did not exist. More generally, under apartheid the development of scholarly freedom and academic rule as dimensions of free inquiry were largely confined to the privileged sector of the historically white universities (HAIs).

From the perspective of free inquiry, the postapartheid restructuring of higher education should ideally have brought an extension of the limited forms of internal academic rule and scholarly freedom from this “privileged” sector to the whole of the higher education system. Instead the opposite has happened: the existing structures of academic rule and practices of scholarly freedom at the formerly “privileged” institutions have been significantly eroded. At both the liberal universities and the Afrikaans HAIs, extensive processes of managerial modernization took place: with few exceptions departmental chairs made way for rotating headships and interdisciplinary “schools,” elected deans as representatives of faculties were replaced by appointed executive deans functioning as “line-managers” in elaborated management systems, and academic senates were reconstituted, losing much of their power and authority to executive management while councils assumed more directive powers and authority. Increasingly, these universities came to be run on business principles by managers claiming professional expertise rather than academic authority. More generally, academic teaching and research became subject to new regimes of performance management, quality assurance, and external accountability. However,

this “managerialist revolution” did not primarily come about through external or political interference from the new democratic state under ANC rule. Rather it happened as part and parcel of a global shift in higher education governance from traditional forms of academic rule. Not only in Thatcherite Britain but in Australasia, North America, and some parts of Europe the closing decades of the twentieth century saw the rise of what has been termed the “enterprise university” (Marginson and Considine, 1993). On the “enterprise vision” of the university, the traditional forms of academic rule in the internal governance structures of the university appeared as outmoded obstacles to efficient executive management (Olsen, 2005: 12-13). Ironically the intellectual isolation of the apartheid years had delayed the impact of these global trends so that “the shift towards academic managerialism [began] in South Africa a decade later than the developed world” (Webster and Mosoetsa, 2002: 67). By the 1990s, though, the managerial revolution was under way within South African universities as well. A new generation of university leaders saw their task as that of reconfiguring the university “to become more competitive and market oriented through the vigorous adaptation of corporate management principles and techniques to the higher education setting” (Kulati and Moja, 2002: 245).

It is important to note that in South Africa, as elsewhere, the “managerial revolution” was not forced upon these universities by external parties. If it constituted major departures from traditional practices of university governance at least in the “privileged” sector of the HAIs, this was not imposed on them by state directives or through externally based takeovers. Instead, the main thrust of the managerial revolution, in its various forms and guises, has emerged from within these universities themselves and represents their institutional response to perceived changes in, and the challenges of, the external economic and social context in which they find themselves. By and large this has been the response of the top leadership and executive management of these universities, and it has increasingly pitted them against the academic faculty, effectively inverting the tradition that (former) academics

should take up the key leadership positions to ensure the interests of academic rule within the university. Significantly, the HEIAAF task team found that in current practice threats to academic freedom now originate as much from inside the institutions as from outside them (HEIAAF, 2008: 3, 30, 38, 72).

It also needs to be noted that “managerialism” comes in a variety of shapes and guises. Analysts have identified and characterized different versions of managerialism in South African higher education (which have some relation to, but do not always coincide with, the historical divisions between Afrikaans and English HAIs and/or HDIs, even less so following the mergers). Thus Kulati and Moja, following Trow (1994), make an analytical distinction between “*soft managerialism*” and “*hard managerialism*.” The former is broadly business-oriented but within an overall academic context. The latter, hard managerialism, subordinates the academic enterprise to business principles: “the higher education institution is seen as being a business, as opposed to being run like a business” (Kulati and Moja 2002: 247-8). A third variant is that of “*transformative managerialism*,” which is primarily concerned to strengthen the university executive by expanding the top leadership group (including executive deans) in order to drive transformation more effectively from the centre. In practice such transformative managerialism has been characteristic of merged institutions incorporating components of former HAIs along with components of former HDIs. In principle such “transformative leadership” could be compatible with soft managerialism; it could also be consistent with the defense of academic rule in the internal governance structures of the university. In that case, which may apply to some of the English HAIs though not to all, the internal threat of managerialism to academic rule and scholarly freedom may be more muted.

This “collegialist” defense of academic rule and concern with consolidating the traditionally core academic business of the university may well come into conflict with a national agenda of political transformation. The more authoritarian approach of transformative

managerialism, though, can effectively lend itself either to a political agenda of transformation or to an entrepreneurial response to market opportunities. The fault line does not so much run between the higher education institutions and the state but rather between the collegialists and the (soft or hard) managerialists within the higher education community itself, with executive management pitted against academic faculty.

For individual academics the managerial revolution, of whatever persuasion, meant substantial increases of administrative burdens and significant reductions in time and space for initiatives of their own. Overall the cumulative erosions of scholarly freedom and of academic rule make teaching and research less and less attractive as a professional and career prospect. At the outset of the twenty-first century, the local academic profession thus faces a peculiar combination of increased exposure to global trends along with the continuing burdens of local traditions, a certain loss of former social standing but also the challenge of an incomplete process of professionalisation. Far from flourishing, free inquiry may be facing a crisis of reproduction.

AN EMERGING CRISIS IN THE REPRODUCTION OF FREE INQUIRY?

More than a decade after the onset of the transition from apartheid to a new democratic South Africa, it should be possible to make some assessment of the ways in which the institutionalization of free inquiry has progressed, or not. By this time the systemic and institutional restructuring of higher education (including the various institutional mergers) has had ample time to take effect, while the first generation of university entrants produced by Curriculum 2005, the ambitious and controversial refashioning of primary and secondary education in terms of “outcomes-based education” (OBE), is in place. However persistent the legacies of apartheid culture and education, a time must come when it should be possible to move on from a consideration of plans and objectives to an assessment of actual results, intended as well as unintended.

The first fruits of a possible cultural and intellectual renaissance may appear at different levels. Thus the immediate aftermath of decolonization in Africa from the 1960s saw the rise of significant and prominent new university-based developments in historiography and political economy represented respectively by the Ibadan, Dakar, and Dar es Salaam schools and the establishment in 1973 of the Council for the Development of Social Science Research (CODESRIA) as a Pan-African research organization for the social sciences. To date there have been no comparable major university-based initiatives arising from the post-apartheid restructuring of South African higher education. The presidency of Thabo Mbeki was closely associated with a high-profile official project promoting the "African Renaissance" (Makgoba, 1999), but while this found some enthusiasm and support from African intellectuals, it generated little in the way of original research and theoretical development. It bore even less relation to contemporary South African debates about the implications of new modes of knowledge production for the creation of a possible "knowledge society" (Kraak, 2000). In this regard the NACI/CREST survey of the available statistical indicators for the production of national knowledge bases across the full range of different fields of knowledge may provide a more realistic base-line for possible extrapolations and interpretations. Drawing on the available data sources for the publication of peer-reviewed journal articles, scientific books and reports as well as completed doctoral dissertations across all main fields of scholarly research, the NACI/CREST survey provides an overview of identifiable trends for the period from 1990 to 2004. Of course, a basic statistical survey of this kind must eventually be complemented by more qualitative assessments of the substantive research and scholarship within each of these fields, but in their absence this will for the time being have to serve as a proxy.

Key indicators increasingly point to serious structural limits of South African higher education in general, and to an emerging crisis in the reproduction of free inquiry in particular. The main findings of the NACI/CREST survey are summarized as follows: over the period from

1990 to 2004, the total annual production of peer-reviewed scientific journal articles remained stable with little to no significant growth. For most fields annual average increases in the total number of published scientific articles was less than 1 percent while in some fields (agricultural sciences, law, humanities and arts) these actually declined. The total annual production of scientific books and articles declined steadily since the mid-1990s. However, the total annual production of doctoral dissertations grew steadily but slowly at an average annual rate of almost 4 percent, even if this still compares very unfavorably with international norms (NACI/CREST, 2008: 1). In field-specific terms South African science—measured by weighted article output—has some strength in fields associated with its biodiversity as well as the health and social sciences. But the visibility and impact of South African science compared to a range of benchmarking countries is confined to a small number of fields: mostly in health sciences, life sciences, veterinary sciences, and also in the field of food sciences and technology. A handful of South African universities and research institutions have achieved strong international visibility (including UCT, Witwatersrand University, UKZN, and Stellenbosch) but no South African institution presents an internationally competitive profile in such fields as biochemistry, molecular and cell biology, dairy and animal sciences, information technology, plant sciences, and zoology (NACI/CREST, 2008: 2). Overall, the NACI/CREST survey comes to the following conclusion: “The national knowledge-base is not in a healthy state. It is not vigorously growing or expanding, its international visibility and impact (even compared to similar sized science systems) is confined to traditional niche areas with little evidence of new, emerging fields of science, participation in knowledge production is still confined to a relatively small core of active scientists and our reproductive capacity and output remains very limited. In short: We have to accept that, despite recent efforts to invigorate and revitalize the knowledge-base, it is not a robust system. It remains fragile and urgently requires more intensive and extensive interventions” (NACI/CREST, 2008: 3).

Table 1. Race and Age of Published Scientists in South Africa, 2004

	Percentage Black	Percentage Over 50
Biological Sciences	8.3	41
Chemical Sciences	16.1	46.5
Mathematical Sciences	9.1	43.3
Economics and Management:	11.4	35.9
Sociology	12	37.8
Law	8.7	37.8

Source: (NACI/CREST 2008: 44-66).

This bald summary does not yet bring out some of the most worrying tendencies at work as a closer look at some of the generational and demographic dimensions reveal. Not only is the research community not growing as planned, it is rapidly aging: in almost half of the main research areas the majority of research publications are now produced by authors older than 50. The key issue here must be the extent to which new generations of black, and more especially of African teachers, researchers, and scholars are being produced. This has been a main objective of official “affirmative action” and “employment equity” policies in higher education and research institutions. These policies and measures have had some effect especially with regard to gender representation: thus the NACI/CREST survey finds that the proportion of female research authorship of scientific articles has significantly improved across the vast majority of scientific fields. But the same cannot be said of research scholarship by Africans, which is, after all, the majority of the population. The survey attempts to put a somewhat positive gloss on this: “Black representation in scientific authorship has also improved across most fields of sciences with significant proportions in the Social Sciences and especially Education” (NACI/CREST, 2008: 1). However, in various ways this is problematic and possibly misleading. First, the category of “Black” here includes not only Africans but also other demographic minorities (that is, except

for whites). Second, the “improvement” in black scientific authorship is calculated in relation to the extremely low base lines of 1990. If the proportion of black authors in various scientific fields increased from around 5 percent or less in 1990-1992 to more than 10 percent by 2002-2004 (NACI/CREST 2008: 33), then this might correctly be represented as a doubling of their proportional contribution—except that almost 90 percent of scientific authorship still comes from the white minority.

An even starker picture is presented by a parallel analysis of indicators for the human capital and knowledge base of the main scientific fields. This is based, *inter alia*, on the number of publishing scientists and doctoral graduates in each field in terms of their gender and race representation and age profile. It is particularly instructive to compare the demographic and generational variables of the human capital base in the various scientific fields. Table 1 shows in a number of selected fields the proportion of publishing scientists in 2004 who are black and those who are older than 50.

These proportions do not differ significantly from those in other scientific fields. A more positive trend appears with regard to the comparative output of new doctoral graduates in these fields, at least when the demographic ratios for 2004 are compared with those of 1990 (NACI/CREST, 2008: 44-66). The crucial question for the reproduction of free inquiry is how the demographic improvements in doctoral output, both in overall numbers and in relative proportions, relate to that part of the human capital base in these scientific fields that is nearing retirement age and can be expected to become inactive in the near future. Moreover, it can by no means be assumed that all, or even a significant proportion, of the new black doctoral graduates are being retained at academic or research institutions in these various scientific fields. On the contrary, perhaps the majority of these black doctoral graduates tend to move on quite rapidly to more attractive career opportunities in the public and private sectors and relatively few are committed to scholarly careers in the universities or research institutions. (More specific data for these trends are not readily available, in part due to the fact that the “African” academic staff components of South African

universities and research institutions also include significant numbers of expatriate academics from other African countries so that any simple correlation with the doctoral outputs of South African universities would be misleading.) The core problem is evident enough, however, and that is the failure to attract and nurture new generations of African teachers, researchers, and scholars. It has the makings of nothing less than an emergent crisis for the reproduction of free inquiry.

The potential crisis in the reproduction of free inquiry due to the failure to attract and nurture new generations of African teachers, researchers, and scholars within higher education needs to be viewed in context. In other sectors of South African society significant transformation toward greater demographic representation is well under way: in postapartheid South Africa the black political elite has a prominent place in the public service and even in professional sectors such as the judiciary; in the business world a new black middle class (assisted by policies such as "Black Economic Empowerment") is emerging. Little of this has happened in the academic world. On the whole the new generations of African graduates are finding career opportunities in the private and public sectors to be more attractive than that of teaching and research. Of course, the problem is compounded by the fact that in a knowledge society higher education institutions need to produce a sufficient number of graduates both to be able to reproduce their own staff complements and to service the needs of other sectors of society as well. If they fail on the former score, they will in the longer run inevitably fail on the latter score as well.

In other words, if the South African academic world cannot attract a sufficient number of African teachers, researchers, and scholars among the new generations now coming through, then it will in the longer run not be able to provide for the further growth of an African middle class, public service, and professional class. With this we come back to the critical issue of the massification of South African higher education first raised by the NCHE proposals in 1996. Indeed, it should be clear that in the South African context the massification

of higher education and the reproduction of free inquiry are intrinsically connected: the emergent crisis in the reproduction of free inquiry may be traced back to the DoE's rejection of the NCHE's massification proposals in the late 1990s. If the NCHE's projected targets for the massification of higher education by 2005 had been realized, then any crisis for the reproduction of free inquiry would also have become highly unlikely. Of course, this begs the question of the "realism" of the NCHE's massification proposals: if, counterfactually, the Department of Education had accepted these proposals at the time there is no guarantee that the NCHE's projected targets over the first decade of post-apartheid higher education would have been met. Indeed, it is likely that on that scenario the actual outcomes by 2005 would not have been much different.

Counterfactual speculations of this kind about the road not taken cannot be confined to the higher education system only. Higher education is by no means a self-contained universe but depends on a range of external factors, including, crucially, the levels of public (and private) funding as well as the throughput from the secondary education system. On both counts major constraints need to be noted in the South African case. First, as far as funding is concerned, there are definite limits to potential increases of national spending on higher education in particular. As a spending priority education must perforce compete with those of health, social welfare, and defense. Moreover, within the education sector, spending on higher education has to compete with the needs of areas such as primary and secondary education and technical education. Postapartheid funding patterns indicate that while education is recognized as a general priority, higher education has not been regarded as a special priority. While the share of South Africa's overall expenditure on education as a fraction of its national budget compares well with international norms, its spending on higher education in particular falls below those standards (Steyn and de Villiers, 2006: 14-16, 87-92, 162ff). Accepting the NCHE's 1996 proposals for the massification of higher education would have required both a rela-

tive increase in overall education spending—at the expense of budget items like health, social welfare, and defense—as well as a substantial increase in expenditures on higher education in particular (that is, if a drastic deterioration of resources and standards was to be avoided). It was probably on such financial grounds that the DoE at the time rejected the NCHE's massification proposals.

Second, perhaps the single most important determinant of new developments in higher education has been the effective blockage in the entrance pool on which it must draw. In 1996, when Curriculum 2005 was only just being put into place, the NCHE could anticipate that the movement of the first cohorts of the postapartheid generation through the restructured primary and secondary education system would in due course substantially strengthen the higher education applicant pool. It was in this context that the NCHE could conceive of the prospects for a possible massified system of higher education by 2005. Today, however, the picture looks entirely different. Figures provided by the South African Institute of Race Relations summarize the secondary schooling system's wholesale failure to produce anything like an improved applicant pool of university entrants. Between 1994 and 2006 the overall number of secondary school leavers potentially qualifying for university entry remained static (around 80,000 per year including 50,000 Africans) (Kane-Berman, 2007). The fact of the matter is that, more than a decade into our postapartheid democracy, the secondary schooling system still produces only a small elite core prepared for effective entry into higher education. This essentially reflects a systemic crisis of disfunction at the level of secondary schools (where effective levels of literacy and numeracy have significantly dropped compared to other African countries). Without a substantial increase in the order of magnitude of the pool of potential university entrants produced by the secondary schooling system, the option of massifying higher education must be regarded as unrealistic and theoretical only. There is, of course, the alternative of proceeding with the massification of higher education, even if the secondary system fails to supply

an expanded applicant pool. This may be what Bunting and Cloete had in mind when they concluded their discussion of the Department of Education's 1997 rejection of massification by observing that "it could be argued that government succeeded, by these means, in preventing a fairly common phenomenon in Africa. This is the phenomenon of elite systems not massifying but becoming overloaded by uncontrolled increases in numbers of students, leading to a serious deterioration in quality" (Bunting and Cloete, 2006: 30). Until this basic crisis in the larger education system is resolved, the prospects for the development of higher education in general, and for the reproduction of free inquiry in particular, must remain grim.

The latest set of secondary school-leaving results released at the end of 2008 proved highly pertinent in this regard. In terms of the overall restructuring of postapartheid education these results reflected a historical watershed in that they pertained to the first cohort of learners produced in terms of the new Curriculum 2005 and "outcomes-based education" (OBE). As they had to qualify for the new National Senior Certificate, overall comparisons of success rates with previous years are difficult and controversial. Nevertheless, media reports of the initial results appeared to indicate a significant expansion of the pool of those qualifying for university entrance by a magnitude of some 30,000. If so, this could represent a historic breakthrough of the fateful blockage in the output of the secondary school system which has so far precluded serious efforts to massify the higher education system. However, it is far from clear whether this interpretation can be substantiated. The crucial components of the 2008 school-leaving results are those relating to the core areas of mathematics and numerical literacy, and these are highly controversial. Indeed, some commentators are claiming that the dramatic increases in these results actually reflect significant lapses in examining standards rather than improved performance by students (Ramphela, 2009). In that case the universities will in the next few years face even harder challenges to create the conditions in which free inquiry can be reproduced.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AAUP	American Association of University Professors
ANC	African National Congress
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CODESRIA	Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa
CREST	Centre for Research on Science and Technology
DoE	Department of Education (national)
HAIs	“Historically advantaged institutions”
HDIIs	“Historically disadvantaged institutions”
HEIAAF	Higher Education, Institutional Autonomy and Academic Freedom
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Commission
NACI	National Advisory Council on Innovation
NCHE	National Commission on Higher Education
NEPI	National Education Policy Investigation
NPHE	National Plan for Higher Education
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OBE	“Outcomes-based education”
SAPSE	South African Post-Secondary Education (management information)
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
UCT	University of Cape Town
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal

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