University on the market: commitments, discourse, values and discontent

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Abstract

This article approaches the language of discourse that emerged from and around the University of KwaZulu-Natal's (UKZN) February 2006 strike and that seems to operate within and through the phenomenology of discontent. This paper challenges the prevalent perception that this discontent is a direct result of purely local causes and instead sees the strike as a consequence of a complex dynamics between global, national and local factors. It is our contention that national realities created the demand for educational reform, while global trends provided the means to attain national objectives, and the local context determined the particular response. A full appreciation and assessment of the situation could only be achieved through an analysis of these factors. In doing so, we will argue that:

1.   The language of discontent is a symptom of a much broader process, namely the global transformation of education under the slogan of democratization, through the adoption of the corporate model and culture;

2.   The corporate model is antithetical to aspirations of democratization;

3.   Corporate discourse transforms our understanding of education, its philosophy and values and has a considerable impact on the structure and function of the university;

4.   The subversive nature of this discourse contributes to the experience of transformation as traumatic and that the impossibility of resolution reinforces discontent and contributes to further malfunctioning of the institution;

5.   The strike was a natural expression of discontent due to the turbulent history of dissent within the constitutive elements of the newly formed UKZN.

The year 2006 at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) was a year of collective unrest and intra-institutional conflict. It started with a seventeen day strike that paralysed the university in February and ended with the Magid

Tribunal.[1] Even a perfunctory analysis of the key events that deeply unsettled the life of the university community suggests that the latter was in the midst of an institutional crisis. The fact that this crisis followed in the footsteps of a 3-year long process of restructuring within the broader educational reform points to at least partial connection between the two and strongly indicates that the answers about its causes could and should be found in the merger of the previously independent institutions, University of Natal (UN) and University of Durban-Westville (UDW),[2] which played a substantial part in the process of educational reform and unsurprisingly was colloquially often cited as the major reason of all the institutional problems.

The chronicles of the crisis have been recorded in a number of different sources.[3] The major one, and also the one that could be seen as having empirical credibility, is the *Report of the Senate Ad Hoc Committee* (consisting of 14 members of top university staff) that looked at the causes of the industrial action of February 2006. The *Report* (based on 600 oral and written submissions that represented the views of all the strata of university employees) proposes the view that "the cause of the strike was due to a confluence of anger from the different constituencies of the university that was able to express itself through the industrial action at that moment" (*Report* 2006, p.5). As other plausible motives, such as salary increase, the disagreement with the agenda for transformation or autocratic style of governance, were not mentioned being at the root of the strike, the findings of the committee subscribed to the notion that "many if not most of the causes of the industrial action are to be found in the fallout from the merger process" (*Report* 2006, p.3). In other words, The *Report* adopted a strictly localized perspective on the explanation of the strike, accepting the merger as the focal point of educational reform that lead to the conflicts between the staff and administration.

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1   The Magid Tribunal, headed by Judge Alan Magid, was established to investigate the irregularities surrounding the Masters of Commerce degree awarded to Prof. Pillay (UKZN chief financial officer); and the subsequent charges of sexual harassment and victimization laid by Prof. Msweli-Mbanga (Dean of Management Studies Faculty), who was instrumental in awarding Pillay's degree, against Prof. Makgoba (UKZN Vice-Chancellor) and Dr Maphai (council chairperson).

2   UN, originally named Natal University College, was founded in Pietermaritzburg, the province's capital, in 1910. By the end of World War I a second site had opened in the coastal town of Durban. UDW was established in the 1960s as the University College for Indians. It was renamed when it moved from its site on Salisbury Island to its current location in Westville, Durban.

3   *Report of the Senate Ad Hoc Committee: Looking at the Causes of the Industrial Action* of February 2006 (23 October 2006), On-line UKZN Change Forum, broad coverage of events in the media.

While this account is by all means legitimate it is questionable whether it is fully adequate. There are several reservations with respect to identifying the merger as the sole cause of the crisis. Firstly, there are compelling indicators that the transformation-related problems in higher education are notably a national issue (Lombaard, 2006) as well as a subject of broader international concerns (Salter and Tapper, 2000; Altbach, 2000; Farnham, 1999; Giroux, 2003). Furthermore, it has been suggested that educational reforms are also "shaped by a complex interaction among local, national, and international factors" (Ginsburg, 1991, p.25). Given this, accounting for the changes in higher education outside the global context of higher education developments is inadequate. If similar patterns of transformation-related problems are traceable in multiple places and locations, then explaining the strike in the light of purely local causes will amount to a reductionism.[4]

The second reservation relates to the notion of anger being placed in the *Report* as the causal epicentre of the strike. This is problematic, for several reasons. Anger is a strong feeling of displeasure and belligerence. It is often irrational in origin, manifesting in spontaneous and uncontrollable violent outbursts. To describe the industrial action as such reduces its relevance, significance and downplays the organized nature of the strike.[5] Furthermore, explaining the February 2006 industrial action as a 'confluence of anger' may explain the emotional state of the staff at the time of the strike, but neglects to identify the root cause(s). Lastly, such a position overlooks the historical fact of the *strike* as a form of collective bargaining for the wage labourers and industrial workers in order to express their grievances to the management and

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    There is ample evidence to the fact that South African higher educational reform is a part of the global process. Clear parallels exist in the process of transformation between UKZN and the broader educational context – in relation to both historical and conceptual frameworks. There is evidence of this in the transformation of the British (Miller and Ginsburg, 1991; Rutherford, 2005; Salter and Tapper, 2000), Australian (Robertson and Woock, 1991; Bostock, 1999; Sanderson and Watters, 2006), New Zealand (Barrington, 1991; Roberts, 1998), and North American higher education systems (Preamble, 2006). Although objectives of access, affordability, quality and accountability are globally shared goals of Higher Education transformation the analysis of South African tertiary education could especially benefit from an analogy or comparison with the British "Saxon" system because "the latter tradition is found to have been transplanted to South Africa" (Du Toit, 2000) with the factor of 'state intervention' and all its implications being one of the key similarities (Salter and Tapper, 2000; Du Toit, 2000; Duncan, 2007).

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    The notion of discontent (rather than of anger) better conceptualises the events leading up to the strike, and has an accepted standing in the current literature on management leadership and workplace relationships (Steinitz, 2006).

defend the interests of the employees against the interests of the employers. It is an alien form of conflict resolution and negotiation within the self-governing structures of the academia and should be seen as symptomatic of significant changes. Considering that historically academia was placed "above the vagaries of employer-employee relations" (FXI Submission to UKZN, 2009), the choice of strike as a form of protest signifies the move from universities having an Administration to having a Management, a mode which sets up the opposing idea of 'the managed' and invites an alternative and contrary interpretation of the social practice that typifies the university (Giddy, 2007).

The third serious reservation pertains to the method of analysis used in the *Report*. The Committee adopted a sociological approach, which utilised interviews as the means of obtaining information. Conclusions about the causes of the strike were reached by collating the data under topics and made on the basis of the most often cited responses. As a result of the chosen methodology, the Committee in effect did not identify the actual causes of the strike but instead ascertained what the university community *thought* were the causes, openly expressing it in the language of discontent. Taking into account that there is a significant difference between analyzing experience and the phenomenology of experience, and that an optimal research model should guard against the potential biases of both (Bound, 1991; Manjer, Merlo and Berglund, 2004), it is necessary to consider the phenomenology of discontent within the broader discourse of transformation and relate the discontent to the actual structural and axiological changes in contemporary tertiary education.

We suggest examining the discourse of transformation on three levels:

a)   rhetoric of reform in tertiary education

b)   actual vocabulary of change, and

c)   language of discontent that became a vivid mark within the individual phenomenology of transformation. Our intuition is that the incompatibility of 'a' and 'b' is the reason for 'c'.

Rationale for reform: South African context

Pre-1990 the South African higher education sector was characterised by considerable inequities in the distribution of resources, with huge disparities between racially demarcated institutions. Segregated by race, ethnicity, class, gender and geography, and divorced from the needs of society, the higher education sector was deemed to be ineffective and inefficient.
Since 1994 the focus of the new government of national unity was to establish a comprehensive agenda of higher education transformation aiming to create a national, integrated and coordinated, yet differentiated higher education system that transcends the apartheid legacy. The fundamental principles guiding the transformation, as espoused in the Education White Paper 3 and the Higher Education Act 1997 include equity and redress, democratization, development, quality, effectiveness and efficiency, academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and public accountability.

The merger of UN and UDW was a part of the national process whereby thirty-six public sector institutes of higher learning were consolidated into twenty-one. The transformation of the higher education sector was aimed at building top-quality institutions with diversity of disciplines, and sufficient capacity to enrol a large student body; eliminating inefficient administration, fragmentation, over-specialisation, and duplication; increasing efficiency and accountability; and implementing different funding strategies in order to bring about a reduction in state funding. Qualifications and programs were reformulated to promote greater mobility and transferability, and curriculum was redesigned to meet societal needs and interests (Education White Paper 3).

The notion of transformation was embraced in the spirit of redress and democratization. A significant change in meaning becomes apparent in the South African National Plan of Education, which "is based on the acceptance that the pressures of globalization require a change in the nature of academic institutions in the drive for global competitiveness" (Duncan, 2007, p.7), i.e. the corporatisation and commercialization of the academia under *state sanctioned managerialism*. Duncan, clarifying the origins of the expression, points out that the Ministry's close intervention into the restructuring of higher education paved the way for a variation on the international corporatised model, labelled as *transformative managerialism*. Duncan adds that driven from the top by strengthened university managers this "brand of 'transformation' involves addressing the legacy of apartheid by creating equity

of access to higher education, while responding to the pressures of globalization to create a high skill/high wage, globally competitive service economy" (*Ibid.,* p.7).

From this, educational reform in South Africa has two divergent commitments and '*transformation'* acquires a multi-focal connotation with historical redress of past inequalities constituting a 'national' element in a much larger 'global' picture. The 'national' commitment of reform can be seen to be part of the struggle for social justice against the legacy of apartheid. However, while the situation of transformation in South Africa has unique features of redress the commitment to state sanctioned managerialism indicates that it is not isolated but accords with broader reforms in the international education arena. This is evidenced by the appearance of the concepts of quality and effectiveness, efficiency and public accountability as part of the new discourse on education and is indicative of the entrenchment of the corporate culture and economic ideology within the education sector, which is now "shaped by the global neo-liberal restructuring of capitalism refracted through the international state system" (Pendlebury, J. and Van der Walt, 2006, p.79). The peculiarity of this situation not only points to the multifaceted teleology of educational reform but also complicates the analysis because of the power of rhetoric to bring under the limelight some aspects of transformation and conceal others.[6]

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[6]   There is a discernible tendency to stress 'transformation' as 'Africanization' and then condemn all dissenting and critical voices as racist. In a recent public exchange on the nature of 'transformation' at UKZN Percy Ngonyama, an MA student at UKZN and a former member of the SRC, challenged those who argue that the transformation agenda of the university reflects "what was envisaged during the liberation struggle. . .[as] the gains won in the past are increasingly being eroded with neo-liberalism induced restructuring vehemently implemented alongside this so called 'transformation'" (Ngonyama, 2008). The problem, according to him, is a consequence of the narrow and elitist understanding of the concept that dichotomises between 'progressive' Africans advancing a 'transformation' agenda and 'white reactionaries' nostalgic for the old order and measures the progress through the number of blacks in senior management positions while disregarding the interests of the previously disadvantaged. The accent on de-racialization obscures other issues and concerns, making them appear irrelevant. This creates an opening for the subversive power of neo-liberalism to take over the worthy projects and use them for its own purposes, so what in reality is achieved is the "Africanization of neo-liberalism in higher education" (Naidoo, 2006).

Rhetoric of reform

The above overview of educational reform reveals the complexity of its nature. On the one hand, *transformation as social redress* in higher education has primarily been driven by the rhetoric of democratization. On the other hand, in order to address the *telos* of globalization South African higher education has borrowed the conceptual framework of global corporate culture that has effectively changed the structures and functions of the university simultaneously bringing it up to the common international standards and decreasing the disparity between the educational system and its social environment, especially the global economy (Pendlebury *et al.,* 2006, p.79). The fact that global capitalism appears to be compatible with economic and political democracy and supportive of democratic ideals of individual autonomy, negotiation, tolerance, compromise, political equality and possibility of social mobility, provided the rationale for adopting the corporate model as a means to attain democratization in education.[7] This entails the application of economic ideology to the education sector in which the maximization of output is sought with reduced input (Robertson and Woock, 1991; Duncan, 2007), the goals being financial accountability and quality assurance. In order to understand the conflicts that have arisen in the higher education sector (both nationally and globally) it is necessary to unpack the respective discourses and examine the ways in which they support and conflict with one another.

The notion of democratization in education is commonly used as an umbrella concept to cover a multiplicity of often diverging processes and aims that for purposes of our argument will be limited to a distinction between democracy as political, social and pedagogical ideals.

The political ideal requires the promotion of democratic values through education and the implementation of democratic values within institutional

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[7] Such compatibility between neo-liberal means and democratic goals in general has been contested by Naomi Klein in *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise Of Disaster Capitalism*. Klein follows the changes in the ANC commitments, from the democratic transformation of the country to adopting a program of "re-distribution through growth". Klein argues that, due to the self-enforcing nature of capitalism, the ANC government has been forced to accept capitalism through what she calls "neo-liberal shock therapy programs." In the process the nature of democracy has been altered. According to Klein, South Africa is a living testament to what happens when economic reform is severed from political transformation (2008, pp.194–217).

governance. Seen as an institution of education for democracy that derives from and is driven by democratic values, a truly democratic university is constituted by a critical assessment (and renovation) of society and its values. Problematically, the political notion of democracy has a plurality of meanings, each of them falling within different discourse domains, and hence the application of each has a significantly different impact on the nature of higher education.[8]

As a social ideal within the South African context the idea of democracy has been applied to problems of equity and redress, in order to rectify previous inequalities. At the level of higher education it is translated into equality of access, equality of educational results and equality of educational effects (Cloete, Pillay, Badat and Moja, 2002).

As a pedagogical ideal it could be firstly seen as an imperative to develop critical, liberal, humanistic education for the creation of active participative citizenship. Secondly, it is concerned with the process of democratizing learning itself. This translates into the notion of student-centred learning. The realization of these ideals through practical activities would constitute an authentic democratic education while academic freedom could be understood as a necessary condition for authentic democratization of education.
The major question that arises is whether the commitment to globalization is compatible with and conducive to the commitment to democratization. A preliminary argument can be made that if academic freedom is a necessary condition for the realization of an authentic democratization of education, and there are serious concerns raised about the state of academic freedom (via the Change Forum), then it is questionable whether the ideals of democratization are being achieved in South African higher education. However, we wish to claim more. It is our contention that the drive of global capitalism is not only incompatible with the ideals of educational democracy but that it is also damaging to the nature of the university and its core values. An examination of corporate discourse, combined with an understanding of the effect this language has on our conception of education in general and the university in particular will enable us to answer this question.

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[8]   Baatjies makes a distinction between an inclusive democracy and an economistic democracy. Within the former, education is perceived as a public good and a public space. Within economistic democracy the emphasis of education is placed on access to the global Market which "redefines citizenship as consumership and where the rights of the consumer replace the rights of the citizen" (Baatjies, 2005, p.3). These discourses are at variance with one another in every way to the point of conflict.

Corporate discourse

The official rhetoric of educational reform in South Africa is replete with corporate jargon, evidenced by terms such as: quality assurance, performativity, productivity, accountability, efficiency, audit, outcomes, etc. It is futile to assume that the import of corporate discourse would leave the nature of higher education intact without introducing a powerful speech-act dimension into its geography. This has a number of effects – firstly, language conditions reality rather than simply reflecting it (Rorty, 1991; Clark, 2004). Secondly, all language is 'performative' (Austin, 1962), it may describe the world and state facts but it also functions to bring about certain effects on the speaker and the listener, i.e. to say something is to perform a certain action. In other words, reality is not reflected by language but is 'produced' by it. Thirdly, the change of language leads to a change of meaning, which alters the identity of the actors and in turn transforms the structural networks and institutions (Svedberg, 2004).

The familiar tropes such as 'knowledge production', 'entrepreneurial university', 'outcomes based education', 'life-long learning', and 'marketable degree', when used in close proximity with or correspondence to the terms that constitute a well established vocabulary of education radically alter the meaning and restructure the whole perception of the university and signify a considerable change in the identity of an academic and student body.[9]

If we understand education as one of the principal means for individuals to achieve independence and personal growth (Dawkins, 1988) and when these are identified solely through economic advancement and economic productivity then the purposes of education are reduced to fostering "well-developed conceptual, analytical and communication skills. . . essential to the building of a flexible, versatile workforce able to cope with rapidly changing technology" (Robertson and Woock, 1991, p.107) which turns students into resources and "makes educational-philosophical and social-political definitions of students obsolete" (Huppauf, 1989, p.110). While students are rendered as active consumers they are transformed into passive learners, and that in turn fundamentally transforms and marginalises pedagogic values and relations.

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    Hayden White (1973) suggested to extend the use of tropes to the general style of discourse and defended the idea that histories are determined by tropes. The same approach can be fruitfully applied to the history of university: Newton's notion of a university as a place of teaching universal knowledge, Oakshot's notion of the university as community, Bell Hooks' idea of the university as a democratic space, each point to a particular concept of the university inclusive of its values, organization, identities and academic – student relations.

The language of the market also considerably changes the identity, status and self-perception of the academic (Giroux, 2006). Academics are increasingly encouraged to act as entrepreneurs but in reality they are becoming more and more proletariatised and their value is increasingly judged by their ability to produce grant money rather than their ability to offer quality education to students.

On the surface the commitment to democratisation appears to be the priority. However, it is our contention that the commitment to globalization adopts the language of democratisation and uses it as a means to its own ends. This has a direct effect on the structure of higher education, as "the politic of governance of higher education. . . [is] now imbedded in a discourse which assumes the external regulation of academic activity to be the natural and acceptable state of affairs" (Salter and Tapper, 2000, p.82). The very nature of the university has been fundamentally transformed through the 'university on the market' trope. And this change transforms everything that 'the university is and stands for' (Higgins, 2007).

In order to appreciate the extent of change and answer the question whether the corporate university is compatible with the commitment to democratization it is imperative to look at the value systems that underlie the idea of the university.

Value systems

If we understand education as a social process, and as such subject to society-education dialectics, it will become clear that a university's ethos is not static but a dynamic one. The very concept of a university as an institution of higher education that we perceive now as 'traditional' is a product of a long history of development.

In order to discern the so-called values of the university we have to go back to its origins and goals. As Jacques Derrida has put it, "to ask whether the university has a reason for being is to wonder why there is a university, but the question 'why' verges on 'with a view to what?" (1992, p.3) Derrida's comment brings into focus a strong teleological correlation between the major constitutive elements behind the 'idea' of the university: goals and objectives determine its function while the latter shapes the values and underlying organizational principles. It is this question of key goals, function, values and principles in conjunction that illuminates what makes the university what it is in a particular society and at a given time in history.

The roots of the contemporary university ethos are liberal, in the sense "that it liberates the mind from the bondage of habit and custom, producing people who can function with sensitivity and alertness as citizens of the whole world. . . aims at the cultivation of the whole human being for the functions of citizenship and life generally" (Nussbaum 1997, p.8–9). This determines three core values of liberal education – critical self-examination, the ideal of the world-citizen, and the development of the narrative imagination. From this perspective universities are not only places where scholarship is cultivated, where evidence and argument are practiced, places of sustained inquiry and higher-level analysis, of freedom to create and invent, but also where purposes of civic agency, citizenship and democratic participation are pursued.
In pursuit of its goals, the liberal university is 'a historically autonomous sector' which is constituted by a community of scholars, which democratically organizes its own affairs, unrestricted by, and unaccountable to, any outside body "since any restriction on academic freedom was deemed to undermine its cultural identity and diminish its central social value as a source of independent authoritative judgment" (Tapper and Salter, 2000, p.68). Primary values are openness to peer criticism, cultivation of academic virtues of honesty, courage and self-criticism, collegial governance, institutional autonomy and academic freedom.

Neo-liberalism, which intertwines economic ideology into higher education, has transformed universities into institutions tasked with maintaining and upgrading the supply of human resources for the betterment of industry. This is achieved through human resource development, training in high level skills and the production of knowledge. This ensures that corporate institutions of learning are fundamentally different from liberal institutions in every conceivable way.

Neo-liberal institutions primarily service the market place by creating a qualified labour force through the production of technical knowledge for mass consumption. This demands that institutions are responsive to the needs of the marketplace, which results in a distinct shift in focus away from the cultivation of critically engaged, socially aware individuals, toward the vocational training of professionals. Institutions of higher education have become the "producers of intellectual commodities" (Pendelbury *et al.*, 2006, p.82), with the campus operating as both the site for the production of its commodity as well as its point of sale.

The shift to neo-liberalism has a significant effect on pedagogy. According to Florence Myrick (2004), a subliminal infiltration of corporate thinking into the university has deeply affected its micro cosmic world. It has insinuated itself upon what academics research and teach and has a pedagogical impact not only of what lecturers and students think but how they think. In other words it has contributed to a significant pedagogical transformation where the values of the corporate world become dominant.

It is evident that liberal and neo-liberal values are at odds with one another. However, we also realise that we cannot see the difference in values as a bipolar opposition that imposes an 'either or choice' onto the institution.[10] Education is a social institution, and inevitably reflects and supports the values of society. Every educational system aims at the production of citizens that will necessarily fit in and support the system. Hence in a consumer oriented society universities are supposed to produce consumers.[11] The question is whether the consumer-oriented university model is reconcilable with the tasks of democratization and social justice in South Africa, considering that in 2005 48 per cent of households lived below R322 (per person per month) poverty line (Appel, 2008), which effectively placed almost half of the population on the margins of South African post-apartheid consumerist economy and outside of the market-driven world of higher education.

The above analysis highlights three significant points. Firstly, implementation of corporate culture fails to achieve democratic values within the institution. Corporatisation of higher education fails to create the "appropriate mechanisms that provide the pedagogical conditions for critical and engaged citizenship" (Giroux, 2006a, p.63). In addition, there is ample evidence pointing to the fact that the corporatisation of higher education constitutes "an

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[10]   Liberal and neo-liberal values are represented in the vision and mission statement of UKZN, as well as the Education White Paper III, forcing these contrary values to co-exist in a state of dynamic tension.

[11]   In "The Last Professors; the Corporate University and the Fate of the Humanities", Frank Donoghue argues that the transformation from a traditional liberal university to a 'for profit' university has a long history, dating back to at least 1891, and challenges the often reiterated idea that higher education is facing a 'crisis'. According to him the new vision is the logical end to a process of innovation based on the ideas of the market place, and suggests that such a change is a necessary, unavoidable and irreversible development to bridge the gap between the deficiencies of the educational system and the needs of the market place (2008).

assault on academic freedom, teacher authority, and critical pedagogy" (Giroux, 2006b, p.30).[12]

Secondly, failure to recognise the actual educational needs of our students, and provide for them means that "although the gloss on the expansion of higher education emphasises equal opportunities and democratization, the increasing importance attached by employers to the direct value of middle class forms of cultural capital, cloaked in the jargon of personal and transferable skills, will ensure that some graduates are more equal than others" (Brown and Scase, 1994, p.30). A study performed by Cloete *et al*. (2002) gives persuasive evidence against the success of 'transformation' to address equity and redress.[13] Local evidence is reinforced by a survey of the worldwide educational reform and its rhetoric, which contends that the goals of improving education's effectiveness, efficiency, and relevance may be contradictory or incompatible and attempts to rearticulate it through the means of corporate discourse may in fact increase or at least reinforce inequalities in education and society (Ginsburg, 1991).

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[12]   Enslin, Pendlebury and Tjiattas point out that although some may argue that bureaucratic control as a part of growing managerialism is necessary for the achievement of social justice in South Africa, the experiences of reform in the United Kingdom and Australia, "suggest that attempts to over-regulate or over-monitor academic work by subjecting it to administrative directives leads to detrimental and counter-productive results," undermining the very practices that constitute academic work (2003, p.75).

[13]   The total enrolment of black students in universities increased from 32 per cent in 1990 to 60 per cent in 2000, and technikons from 32 per cent to 72 per cent over the same period (Cloete, 2002, p.415). The proportion of women enrolling in tertiary institutions increased from 42 per cent in 1990 to 53 per cent in 2000 (p.417). While student composition changed, overall participation did not, and overall retention rates decreased for universities from 17 per cent in 1993 to 16 per cent in 2000 (p.418).

While transformation of the curriculum was intended to increase student portability, evidence indicates that there are greater restrictions placed on students who wish to change their degree programmes (Cloete, 2002, p.288)

While the overall proportion of black staff has increased at universities from 13 per cent in 1993 to 20 per cent in 1998, and at technikons from 12 per cent to 29 per cent over the same period, historically white universities (HWU) are still predominantly white.

Transformation did not benefit historically deprived institutions. An increase in student mobility resulted in student numbers falling at historically black universities (HBU) by 35 600 between 1995 and 2000 and increased at HWU by 54 200 over the same period. This had financial implications which translated into a subsidy decrease of R102 million for HBUs for the 1999–2001 budget cycle, and a subsidy increase of over R230 million for HWU (Cloete, 2002, p.420).

Thirdly, if we conceive of democratized learning as an instrument of freedom and empowerment, with knowledge as an endless process rather than a product, then the massification of education and the commodification of knowledge fail to achieve this as it results in the transformation of universities from places of learning and development into the training grounds of skills. In addition, it is our contention that corporate discourse is at odds with the discourse of democratization. Corporations serve their own interests, as a matter of orientation and legal requirement (Bakan, 2004), and the language that they talk "is not the language of the soul or the language of humanity. . . it is a language of indifference; it's a language of separation, of secrecy, of hierarchy" (p.56). Democracy, on the other hand, serves public interests and aspires for equality, fairness, harmony, freedom. The language of democracy is inherently passive to allow for listening, is tolerant and encourages unity through harmony.

The commitment to globalization fails to meet the commitment to democratization. Implementation of the corporate culture has radically transformed the structure, function and values of the university. Corporate values are incompatible with traditional (liberal) objectives and values of higher education, with the former driven by managerialism and striving for economic growth, while the latter seeks to empower the student as a necessary requirement for effective democracy.

The net result of the contestation and re-evaluation that characterises the contemporary higher education sector has given rise to a considerable divergence of opinions on the nature of change. On one hand there is a sense of optimism about the future of higher education (Owen-Smith, 2006; Clark, 1998; Scott, 2004), while on the other hand there are deep concerns that are having a negative impact on the sense of well-being and satisfaction of university staff.

Phenomenology of discontent

Contemporary academic literature presents a host of voices lamenting the loss/ corruption/compromise/distortion/decline/erosion/deconstruction of the university. Some authors go even further in professing 'the strange death of the university' (Brecher and Halliday, 1996), its 'dismantling' or its 'imminent demise' (Nussbaum, 2006). These sentiments rise up in a global educational environment that is "shifting from an elite, introspective, stable system. . . to a

mass, open, unstable one" (Farnham, 1999, p.4). Not only is the context of higher education changing, but so is its very nature. The traditional participatory structure of governance, which provides academics with a sense of institutional ownership, has become managerialised. This challenges the traditional hegemony of academics, their level of professionalism as well as their intellectual autonomy (Farnham, 1999).

Such radical transformations have necessarily brought about a change in employee attitudes, which include feelings of pessimism, a sense of loss of social exclusiveness of the profession, defensiveness in light of an impending crisis, and a sense of the fragmentation of the profession (Altbach, 2000). Restricted outlet to air these concerns and no recourse to address them, lies at the heart of staff discontent (Beale, 2004).

The findings of the Senate Ad Hoc committee reflect similar, highly negative and largely unsettled sentiments of the UKZN staff expressed in the language of discontent.

For purposes of analysis the perceptions and experiences that were reported by the staff could be loosely grouped into the following clusters of related experiences that can be identifiable as particular areas of discontent.

Governance

Multiple concerns were expressed around "poor leadership and governance" that are summed up as the "experience of a complex top-down bureaucratic structure" (*Report*, 2006, p.11). A lack of consultation and transparency is "interpreted as autocracy and authoritarianism. . . and indicates the lack of respect for the opinions, abilities and potential contribution of professional people" (*Ibid,* p.12). There is also the perception that the central self-governing body of the university – the Senate has been largely silent and inquorate during the whole course of the industrial action (*Ibid*.), adding to the perception that the academic voice has been marginalised (*Ibid*.). It is important to note that many staff members who reported the perceptions of a lack of democracy and of 'autocratic governance' related such perceptions to 'corporatisation' (*Ibid*.).

Human relations

Staff report that "relationships of trust and social networks broke down in the face of new structures and new practices and protocols" (*Ibid*. p.3), and have been replaced with 'rudeness' and an 'adversarial stance' (*Ibid*. p.4). Human relations are perceived "as strained and often unhappy, expressed variously as *fear*, *a lack of a sense of safety*, and *suspicion*" (*Ibid*. p.13). Experience cited includes "grievances going unheard; verbal and physical harassment; humiliation and intimidation; no encouragement of free critical thinking; denigration and silencing; labelling and blaming" (*Ibid.* p.13). The above perceptions of the staff seem to be symptomatic of what Jane Duncan refers to as "the rise of the disciplinary university" that indicates a systemic shift in the academic freedom climate via usurpation of democratic means of academic self-government by corporate bureaucratic control and state steering of academia (2007, pp.1–4).

On the surface this signals a conflict between the authoritarian leadership of the management and the academic staff. As a result the recommendations of the *Report* recommend improving the style of the management.

Although this recommendation could lead to the creation of better cohesion within the university structure it will not address other sources of discontent, especially those that arise as a result of the conflict between the simultaneous institutional commitments to academic freedom and corporate rationalization. This conflict arises when an institution becomes dominated by mercantilism, at which point it becomes "a 'psychopathic' entity focused on fiscal outcomes to the exclusion of the humanity of the organization" (Bakan, 2004, pp.69–71; Sanderson, *et al*., 2006, p.6).

Work conditions

The hegemonic process of commercialization signifies the threat of education being reduced to a commodity in which teaching itself becomes an incidental activity (Myrick, 2004). Such is the reality of corporate university culture where academics face the demands of greater work discipline, closer managerial supervision, reduced autonomy, job insecurity, the pressures to reduce the costs and increase the profits, which invariably leads to the 'deprofessionalisation' of the professoriate (Noble, 2002). All of the above finds expression in the *Report* through the overwhelming sense of staff being

under-valued, disposable, treated without respect, experiencing a general depreciation of self-worth and esteem (*Ibid*, p.6), with an apparent perception of disparities in remuneration between the staff and the executive (*Ibid*, p.8).

Job dissatisfaction

According to the findings of the *Report* UKZN academics (including those in senior positions) experience job dissatisfaction of four broad types: a sense of powerlessness, a sense of meaninglessness, a sense of isolation, and a sense of self-estrangement, i.e. their own work does not make sense in the context of the institution (*Ibid,* p.14), or put differently, the function and purpose of the academic profession is perceived to clash with those of the institution. Considering that pedagogy is an inherently moral and value-laden activity, the value systems that are core to the personal sense of academic identity become of paramount significance. External changes in the pedagogical process and the implicit values are bound to have a direct impact on the values and self-apprehension of the academic.

Ethical dilemmas

Dissatisfaction is expressed around issues of race and gender discrimination in a surprisingly broad number of manifestations and applications ranging from accusations of racism, to perceived nepotism, to a radical claim that the "university does not seem to be addressing equity" (*Ibid.* p.13). Moreover, many respondents expressed an open doubt in the Council's choice of imperative to 'balance the books,' (the metaphor clearly referring to the 'business-model' of a university that prioritises the bottom-line return on investment) while overlooking the core function of an university – effective delivery of the academic programme and addressing the needs of social justice.

The findings of the *Report* are compatible with our earlier stance that 'transformation' as corporatisation is not conducive to 'transformation' as redress and that the goals of 'transformative managerialism' are antithetical to the goals of social justice and democratization. The dissonance between the two commitments places South African academics between the horns of a moral dilemma whether to make money for the institution or invest in the primary goods of the profession as dictated by post-apartheid social reality.

The fact that the two sets of goods (namely the goals of profitability, efficiency, and performativity which are measured mostly by the numbers of postgraduate students and publications, and the goals of equity and redress that require the involvement with large classes and time-consuming remedial teaching) are incongruent contributes to the experiences of disharmony and discontent, and is damaging to the staff morale.

Psychological strain

Respondents consistently report a decline in their emotional states. The experiences fluctuate from 'low morale' and 'demoralisation' to 'weariness', 'apathy', and depression. One of the respondents comments that "this is a depressing time for those who still value their role as academics" (*Ibid*. p.12), which in our view is of double significance. It most appropriately sums up the situation and confirms the broadly accepted assumption that managerialism not only corrupts the profession and alters the practice that is a university but also exhausts and demoralises its practitioners (Enslin *et al.,* 2003; Giddy, 2007).

Local dissent

The above explains the discontent felt by academics in general, but fails to account for the phenomenon of the UKZN strike. While we have sought to provide a broader theoretical/global understanding for the conflicts experienced at UKZN, we have also taken cognizance of the fact that "globalization cannot simply be reduced to transnational homogenization because a nation's specific historical, political and economic characteristic do influence the ways in which globalization has unfolded and continues to unfold in each country" (Ntshoe, 2004, p.138–139). Even this is insufficient to account for the UKZN strike. We will argue that the heart of the strike lies within the particular historical elements that constitute UKZN.

UN, one constitutive element of UKZN, was known for its staff and student anti-apartheid activism, and includes well known activists such as Steve Biko, Fatima Meer, Mamphela Ramphele and Alan Paton in its alumni.

UDW, the other constitutive element, was an institution steeped in a tradition

of struggle, strike action and social activism.[14] Student enrolment in the 1960s was low due to the Congress Alliances policy of shunning structures of apartheid. This policy was reformulated in the 1980s into a strategy of 'education under protest'. The end of apartheid did not bring any peace to the university as staff and student opposition was levelled against university management in 1995 over the retrenching of support staff in the name of greater efficiency (Khan, 2006). In 1996 a vote of no confidence in MANCO (UDW management committee) was passed by the student body in response to the negligence of management toward its workers, an increase in student fees, and over the adoption of neo-liberal policies. This strike saw the physical removal of MANCO from campus. In response to further 1998 fee increases students occupied the administration building, and were arrested. On being released they embarked on a hunger strike that forced university management to meet their demands. Issues surrounding student fees remained an ongoing issue that erupted in 2000. Regrettably, this strike action resulted in the death of a student – killed by the riot police. This effectively smothered the student political terrain, creating a political vacuum that was filled by a group of academics who, in 2001, organized an off campus march, including over 700 staff and students, in protest of broader social and economic issues. That same year staff and students combined in protest against the governance style and decisions of the university vice-chancellor.

This culture of dissent was an ethos UDW students were encouraged to partake in, and was supported and practiced by staff. As much as student and staff dissent hampered the administration, at times forcing it to capitulate on decisions and policies, and at other times impaired it's functioning, it was tolerated – with very few casualties.[15] This toleration reflects the institutions commitment to democratic principles and processes.

The formation of UKZN, through the merging of UN and UDW, saw the combining of both staff and at least some students. With this blending of personnel came a blending of institutional cultures. The culture of dissent that characterized UDW was imported into UKZN. It is our contention that this culture of dissent, at least in part, fueled the UKZN strike – a process driven mostly by former UDW staff members.

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[14]   The reason why discussion is predominantly focused on UDW as it was the institution of employ for both authors from at least the mid-90s through to 2004. We have therefore had first hand experience of the culture of dissent that characterized the institution.

[15]   Strike activity at UDW saw the banning of a member of staff – Ashwin Desai – from the UDW campus in the 1990s for his involvement in union campaigns and strike organization, and the death of Michael Makhabane.

Conclusion

This paper challenged the localized findings of the Senate Ad Hoc Committee for the cause behind the 2006 UKZN strike. There is no doubt that the merger lay behind the strike, but we were not satisfied that this fully explained the causal elements contributing to the strike. Seeking a broader account we identified national objectives which created the demand for educational reform, and the global trends which were adopted as a means to attain them. Divergent commitments, contrary discourses and opposing values in higher education converged in a terrain of conflict, which contributed to the sense of discontent amongst academics.

We recognised that the experience of discontent of the UKZN staff is largely analogous to the experiences of academics all over the world. An accurate account of this is achieved when analysed through the prism of the global transformation of higher education. However, there is a discernible range of perceptions that are specific to the South African context and are the source of an additional anguish and stress for local academics. We returned to explore the particular context of UKZN, and identified the institutional culture of dissent as the primary driving force behind the strike.

Having identified the underlying values and principles in conflict we recognize a) that the impossibility of resolution between competing commitments reinforces discontent and contributes to further malfunctioning of the institution; b) that if committed to democracy and democratization we as academics have a moral obligation to critically engage in the ongoing transformation of higher education with a clear understanding that above all a university has a commitment to the development of people, not profits, and c) the latter places academics in the middle of the ethical caught between the opposing forces of our intellectual and pedagogical commitments, and our institutional demands and requirements.

The end of the strike should in no way signal that the issues at UKZN, and in South Africa, are resolved. "Higher education transformation in South Africa is best characterized as highly complex, consisting of a set of still unfolding discourses of policy formulation, adoption, and implementation that are replete with paradoxes and tensions, contestations, and political and social dilemmas".[16]

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[16]   http://www.che.ac.za/documents/d000081/SA_HE_10years_Nov2004_Chapter13.pdf, p.6

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