# Vying for Legitimacy:
# Academic vs. Corporate Culture

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## Abstract

Following the general trend already existing in the Western world, state universities in South Africa, in seeking other sources of income and in meeting policy demands for transformation, have embraced the corporate model as the most efficient system of organising education today, thus opening the door to activities and processes such as commercialisation, applied and contract research, and the development of stronger links with external stakeholders. This paper questions the legitimacy of the commodification of intellectual enquiry. Do financial or ideological considerations justify the adoption of a corporate system in education? Can cost efficiency, which is global in nature and which is accelerating social change, legitimise corporate practices in the university in South Africa without affecting a) its character as a public institution, and b) the role of each individual member? The author argues that claims for legitimacy of the present form of rationalisation of the university serve to institutionalise corporate power in educational institutions, making it appear valid and acceptable. Complex though the term may be, however, the generic meaning of 'legitimacy' refers to 'rights': the right to claim, the right to question whether correct procedures have been followed, and, ultimately, the right to assess whether a policy or a system serves the good of all concerned. In this sense, in determining the notion of the 'right thing to do', any discourse on legitimacy, by taking into account a wide diversity of viewpoints, will deal primarily with values and the recognition of human aspirations.

## Résumé

Suivant la tendance générale déjà en vigueur dans le monde occidental, les universités publiques d'Afrique du Sud, en recherchant d'autres sources de revenus et en faisant face aux exigences de la politique d'orientation pour la transformation, ont

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adopté le modèle de gestion de l'entreprise comme étant le système d'organisation de l'enseignement le plus efficient aujourd'hui. Elles ouvrent ainsi la porte aux activités et aux processus tels que la commercialisation, la recherche appliquée et la recherche de contrats ainsi que le développement de liens plus solides avec les parties prenantes extérieures. Cette étude s'interroge sur la légitimité de la marchandisation de la recherche intellectuelle. Les considérations d'ordre financier et idéologique justifient-elles l'adoption d'un système de gestion de l'entreprise dans l'enseignement ? La rentabilité, qui est un phénomène mondial par nature, et qui est en train d'accélérer la mutation sociale, peut-elle légitimer au sein de l'université en Afrique du Sud les pratiques propres à l'entreprise sans affecter son caractère d'établissement public, et le rôle de chaque membre ? L'auteur soutient que les revendications en faveur de la légitimité de la forme actuelle de la rationalisation de l'université servent à institutionnaliser le pouvoir de l'entreprise dans les établissements d'enseignement en le faisant apparaître comme valable et acceptable. Bien que le terme puisse être complexe, le sens générique de « légitimité » se réfère toutefois aux « droits » : le droit de revendiquer, le droit de s'interroger pour savoir si les procédures correctes ont été suivies, et enfin, le droit d'évaluer pour savoir si  une politique ou un système sert l'intérêt de toutes les personnes concernées. Ainsi, en définissant la notion « d'agir dans le bon sens », n'importe quel discours sur la légitimité, en tenant compte d'une grande diversité d'opinions, traitera d'abord des valeurs et de la reconnaissance des aspirations humaines.

Following general international trends, there has been a rapid growth in South Africa over the last ten years of private tertiary education providers, enhancing the notion that corporate culture in these institutions is the most efficient system of organising education today. With reduced government funding, state universities, in seeking other sources of income, are also embracing the corporate model, based on strict business and managerial principles, thus opening the door to activities such as commercialisation, applied and contract research, and the development of stronger links with external stakeholders. The growth of industries based on digital communications technology and media, moreover, has created a market for on-line courses and degrees which, by relying primarily on training (Noble 2002), favour the 'delivery' of skills-oriented 'products' much sought after in the new South Africa where, for historical reasons, a backlog of specialised labour exists.

In a press release in May 2004, the Minister of Public Service and Administration, Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, announced the government's intention of recruiting some 20,000 professionals from other countries in order to meet present requirements, while remaining committed to a programme of re-skilling and re-deploying existing staff (Emdon 2004:13). Since then there have been repeated calls to this effect by authoritative ANC politicians, culminating in

President Thabo Mbeki's speech during his annual opening of Parliament in Cape Town in February 2006. President Mbeki reiterates the urgency of the matter:

> Everything we have said so far [...] points to the inescapable conclusion that, to meet our objectives, we will have to pay particular attention to the issue of scarce skills that will […] negatively affect the capacity of both the public and the private sectors to meet the goals set by Asgisa [Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative of South Africa]. In this regard [...] we have agreed to a vigorous and wide-ranging skills development and acquisition programme to meet any shortfalls we may experience (Mbeki 2006).[1]

The implementation by the Ministry of an outcomes-based education beginning from primary school, the timely and efficient provision of knowledge to meet market demand, and the outsourcing of course content to make it more cost effective, add further impetus to the corporatisation of higher education in South Africa. Bantu education, as the schooling system for blacks under apartheid was known, adhering to the Verwoerdian model, was designed to produce inadequate results, leaving the great majority of pupils bereft of academic qualifications and the opportunity of finding suitable employment outside the sphere of menial labour. Sipho Seepe explains the historical motives behind the restriction:

> In South Africa, as in the rest of the continent, education was used to legitimize unequal social, economic and political power relations. Central to apartheid-colonial education was the production of Africans who would remain forever subservient and subordinate to white South Africa and western interests. Apartheid ideology permeated the entire system including the higher education sector (Seepe 2004: 11).

It is worth noting that Seepe calls for the overhaul of the system not solely for the purpose of inclusion of African students into the existing structure to meet practical demands, but for much loftier goals. Seepe questions, 'How do we now make education a force for transformation of our continent? How can Higher Education Institutions contribute to education as the practice of freedom?' (2004:11). In the meantime, and in order to close the educational gap, universities have been asked to accommodate African school leavers by accelerating the training process, thus providing greater access to tertiary institutions. Recognition of prior learning has further aided this process of integration and admission at university level.

Faced with an official unemployment figure between 27 and 28 percent[2] in a population of about 47 million, and the fact that many are unemployable because of the high rate of illiteracy and/or lack of formal training, the present

government's insistence on structural change at tertiary level of education seems more than justified, thus lending legitimacy to the establishment of institutions which can function successfully as 'education providers'. There are, however, other considerations which have impacted strongly on the need to view education as a source of skilled personnel, and to view the university as a corporation governed by managerial expertise rather than by collegial authority. The following, in my view, are a number of important initiatives, not unrelated to each other, which have been undertaken by government since South Africa's first democratic elections held in 1994, and which have given shape to the process of transformation at universities (see Habib and Morrow, this volume).

## 'Representivity'

The general drive towards the restructuring and transforming of society in order to redress the imbalances created by South Africa's colonial past is premised on the notion of what government calls 'reprensentivity', a notion which envisages that all social activities must reflect proportionally the various ethnic groups comprising the present population. Legislation related to 'affirmative action' and 'employment equity' provides specific guidelines for both government institutions and private enterprises with the aim of giving precedence to previously disadvantaged black South Africans. There is, however, a shortage of skilled black candidates to fill the required quotas at all levels of competency, hence the urgency not only of training promising students for specific ends, but of fast-tracking their upward mobility.

Within the university itself the demographic equation according to Barney Pityana (2004), the vice-chancellor of the University of South Africa (UNISA), is far from satisfactory:

> It appears that with so much change occasioned by the democratic dispensation, [...] universities in South Africa remain largely untouched by the winds of change sweeping through every other aspect of South African life. Although there is much improvement in the admission of black students, among academics the representation of black scholars remains very poor (Pityana 2004).

Pityana's statement is indicative of the pressure facing university authorities to comply with government directives. Various methods have been used to achieve this end, entrenching a managerial style of governance. Prior to Pityana's speech, for example, UNISA management took a unilateral decision to embark on a bid to upgrade all potentially deserving black academics to more senior positions, while a moratorium was placed on promotions for white staff. In so doing, management not only circumvented regular procedures for promotion, but they also waived all financial considerations, which are linked to the availability of

internal posts in each department. To cite another example of managerial control, in 2005, all positions of heads/chairs of departments, deputy and executive deans, etc. were declared administrative posts subject to contractual agreement, and hence within the brief of management itself and not of academic staff.

## Globalisation

Since the demise of apartheid, South Africa has regained its place in the international arena and can ill afford to stay out of touch with the tenets of globalisation: the revolutionary changes in technology and communications; the ubiquitous presence of multinationals; the increasingly integrated cross-border organisation of economic and financial activity. As a player in the new economy, it cannot ignore the importance of foreign investments, considered by many as the mainstay for economic growth and the alleviation of poverty. Nor can it disregard the dictates of the multinationals, the IMF and the World Bank, which call for the training of individuals to meet specific economic goals, for research to be benchmarked and for the deregulation and privatisation of public services such as health, welfare and education. The curtailing of public spending leaves the university with little alternative but to generate its own income by commercialising its 'products', thus adopting, in line with global trends, the prevalent Western model of a corporate university for what is historically a uniquely South African situation.

Competitiveness in world markets and the logic of supply and demand calculated in relation to the 'market share' of students have further coerced the university, in the name of efficiency and cost-effectiveness, to give priority to those faculties which can deliver the desired results. Indeed, at UNISA, a plan has been drawn up to phase out (rationalise) all disciplines which have no strategic value as corporate assets. A steady shift in the status of knowledge has taken place, says Akilagpa Sawyerr, chairperson of the Association of African Universities (AAU):

> [...] from the importance of acquiring a particular body of knowledge to developing skills for acquiring new knowledge and the capacity of using knowledge as a resource in  addressing societal needs. These developments have brought demands for new kinds of knowledge, new modes of knowledge production and dissemination, and thus a complete transformation of the environment of knowledge institutions such as universities and higher education organizations (Sawyerr n.d.).

That knowledge acquisition can be so narrowly goal-directed, so associated with utility and not with the 'life of the mind which has for decades defined

and sustained academic communities everywhere in the world', as Sawyerr reiterates, is evidenced in the downscaling of the role played by the liberal arts in forging the critical consciousness of students.[3] Equally diminished is the right of students and staffs to engage with the life of the imagination: the right 'to think the unthinkable, discuss the unmentionable, and challenge the unchallengeable', says Seepe (2005), quoting not from the country's new dispensation as it may seem, but from Yale University's policy on 'Free Expression, Peaceful Dissent, and Demonstrations'. Clearly, Seepe's vision of the Africanisation of the university does take into account its commercialisation and its present mode of governance.

## Mergers

Economic rationalism also envisages the elimination of duplication and inequity of services created by apartheid ideology which saw a proliferation of institutions of higher learning, each with its own identity and objectives: from universities catering for Afrikaans- and English-speaking students respectively, to those logistically situated in apartheid's 'homelands' destined to serve only black students. Not only could the government no longer sustain full funding of these institutions, but their dismantling or amalgamation was a necessary political step to undo the pattern of discrimination that had defined them until recently. Thami Mseleku gives voice to this aspiration:

> While institutional sub-groups, based on histories, were a feature of higher education in South Africa, the merger process seeks to blur such distinctions by bringing together historically white and black institutions and nurture truly South African institutions that are not historically black nor historically white. With that objective comes a greater responsibility on merged and merging institutions to create new identities (Mseleku 2004:2).

Besides the avoidance of duplication, other reasons advanced for mergers are increased efficiency, enhanced status, innovation, better academic offerings, and plainly and simply survival. However, where they have occurred in South Africa, mergers have not been voluntary and have been piloted chiefly by government policy on transformation of higher education. Since an institutional merger can be defined as an amalgamation in which two or more institutions give up their legally independent status in favour of a new joint authority, it stands to reason that the 'new joint authority' has fallen into the hands of administrators and managers, rather than of academics, particularly if the emphasis in these new institutions falls on productivity and performance. C. L. S. Chachage, a professor at the University of Dar-es-Salaam in Tanzania, deplores this state of affairs since, in his view:

> [E]ven the concept of a university [is] transformed to that of the administration, being the university and faculties [...] mere subsidiaries[...] Traditionally, the faculty has always been the University, while the administration has played a supportive role (Chachage 2001:9).

Though certainly not simply the outcome of mergers, there has been a 'usurpation of traditional areas of academic authority by an expansive and increasingly powerful administration through the application of private sector management models', says Lucien van der Walt, a lecturer at the University of the Witwatersrand. To mark the importance of their function within the new structure, there has also been 'a growing salary gap between academics and management' (2004). Ironically, according to Johnson and Cross (2004) who draw on empirical data concerning the restructuring process at the University of the Witwatersrand, the passage from academic to executive deanship, for example, has not resulted in greater efficiency but rather in increased bureaucracy as well as in the demise of academic and intellectual leadership.

By the beginning of 2004, the merging of a great many of these institutions has taken effect.[4] There is still much debate and contestation on whether the fusion has achieved its goals. The naked reality, however, remains that these sweeping reforms have done away with the traditional binary system in higher education by breaking down the division between academic and vocational institutions. Colleges of Advanced Education and Technikons have been reined in with universities and made to serve the state in its drive for the most basic and urgent utilitarian needs. With the distinction between university and technikon obliterated, greater demands have been made on the lecturers at the newly forged universities to increase their teaching and administrative load at the expense of time devoted to research. In an overview of the new university model, Jonathan Jansen, dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria, describes how easily the intellectual status of an institution, and hence its autonomy, could be irrevocably compromised by the downscaling of the function of critical inquiry of which the professoriate are the custodians:

> A university ceases to exist when the intellectual project no longer defines its identity, infuses its curriculum, energises its scholars, and inspires its students. It ceases to exist when state [...] interference closes down the space within which academic discourse and imagination can flourish without constraint. The university ceases to exist when it imposes on itself narrowing views of the future based on ethnic or linguistic chauvinism, and denies the multiplicity of voices and visions that grant [such] institutions their distinctive character. And the university ceases to exist when it represents nothing other than an empty shell of racial representivity at the cost of academic substance and intellectual imagination (Jansen 2005).

## Africanisation

Black empowerment, both economically and intellectually, is perhaps the most notable feature of Thabo Mbeki's presidency since taking over from Nelson Mandela in 1999. His formulation of an African Renaissance as a developmental model for the purpose of promoting self-affirmation and agency among South Africa's previously oppressed black majority (Nethersole 2001:34) has provided a framework for the deracialisation and restructuring of society that also encompasses the university (see Education White Paper 3 1997). The vision of a rebirth of an African university much acclaimed by Malegapuru Makgoba, vice-chancellor at the University of KwaZulu Natal and author of numerous articles on the subject, rests on the assumption that the university's primary objective, 'the pursuit of knowledge, scholarship and excellence in teaching, research and community service', must be put in context and rendered relevant, that is, it must serve primarily African interests (Makgoba 2004:11; see also Makgoba 1999).

The Africanisation of the university is not only firmly on the agenda of the Ministry of Education, but it is increasingly gathering support among academics who view the process as a means to restore a legitimate identity to historically disenfranchised black South Africans and to refocus academic discourse on matters that affect African societal realities.[5] Milton Molebatsi Nkoane, a lecturer in the Faculty of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, makes this objective clear:

> I want to start from the premise that the majority of people on this continent are Africans. As such universities should be reflective and be informed by the culture, experiences, aspirations of this majority as well as addressing itself to continental objectives. Africanisation refers to a process of placing the African world-view at the centre of analysis [resulting in] a perspective which allows Africans to be subjects of historical experiences rather than objects on the fringes of Europe. It is not a matter of colour but an orientation to data. [...] it is about the grounds for knowledge, about epistemology, about objects of our intellectual aspiration (Nkoane 2005: 4).

Progressively, Nkoane's argument discloses a will to act 'in the face of the [Western] dominant discourse' which, he claims, has monopolised the parameters for the interpretation of realities, and to 'decolonize our institutions' (2005:12). The process of Africanisation, in Seepe's view, should also envisage a new curriculum based on indigenous knowledge systems:

> If anything, modern day universities are the inheritors of this vicious virus [dominant discourse] that erodes the very nature of our seeing, our explanations, our method of inquiry, our conclusions. Afrocentrists do not claim that

western oriented historians, sociologists, literary critics, philosophers do not make valuable contributions, but rather that by using the Eurocentric approach they often ignore an important interpretative key to the African experience (Seepe [quoting Asante] 2004:12).

In advancing their proposals, however, Africanists have failed to address the influence of the digital revolution on the learning experience itself. The means of reconciling the indigenous knowledge systems with the new communications and information technologies (CIT) have challenged the models of traditional epistemology on which formal education is based worldwide.

With the new rationale for Africanisation, an ever-increasing stratum of management with a top-down chain of command has been established at tertiary institutions. This management can functionally take control of the transformation process by the renaming of faculties, by restructuring curriculum contents, by taking over most of the non-didactic functions of Senate and by forming centres of applied African Studies with the aim of reaching out to the rest of the continent. The creation of this managerial apparatus with little or no commitment to collegiality, to replace the role occupied by former academic administrators goes hand in hand with the corporatist mission of the new university. Most noticeable is how executive deans and directors have largely excluded academic teachers and researchers in the traditional structures from making any policy decisions. At the University of South Africa, full professors are no longer automatically members of Senate by virtue of their seniority and expertise as scholars. Participation is limited to the heads of department and only one additional full professor for each department. Departments, moreover, have become giant units through merging, often comprising more than two or three disciplines. Senate, therefore, can no longer exercise its function as ultimate arbiter of academic standards. Roger Southall and Julian Cobbing endorse this view when they argue:

> [Administrative authoritarianism] which is inherent to the new managerialism, represents a major attack upon academic freedom in that it aspires to subject individual academics to centralized control, and interprets dissent and criticism as insubordination, whilst itself remaining largely unaccountable (2006:35).

Ironically, calling this type of transformation towards corporatism the 'ruling ideology', Seepe, a convinced Africanist by all accounts, believes that the entire higher education system has become a 'function of specific psychological and material interests' which further undermine academic freedom:

> Unfortunately, and owing to the fractious history and intolerance, transformation has become a self-legitimating ideology. Officially sanctioned

> [...] pronouncement and process are justified and are gradually presented as
> non-negotiable imperatives of transformation. Invoking transformation renders
> all discussion irrelevant (Seepe 2005; see also Makgoba and Seepe 2004).

There are few in South Africa today who would object to the process of trans-
formation of society, few indeed, who would question its legitimacy in the
light of the dehumanising legacy of apartheid, and even fewer who would not
acknowledge the need for the redistribution of wealth and for rebuilding the
confidence of a citizenry who for so long have been disenfranchised by a racial
past. It is evident from the above discussion, however, that if historical, social
and educational considerations have necessitated a change in the structures and
missions of the universities, the restructuring process has also taken a distinctly
managerial hue, creating new hierarchies and outcomes. The resultant con-
figuration emanating from the general reform is a unique South African solu-
tion for higher education, as will be shown, one which will have to come to
terms with conflicting interests and objectives.

Presently, as I have implied, the goal of the government is twofold: to find
a common African identity among the country's multi-ethnic population with
distinct language groups (there are eleven recognised official languages in South
Africa) and a dignified path towards common citizenship. When it comes to
the restructuring of the university, however, the government's imperatives seem
at odds with each other. On the one hand, because of a shortage of skills, the
university is being reshaped along the corporate lines of a 'service provider',
as an institution in the service of vocationalism and the formation of competent
labour to meet market demands. On the other hand, the university is viewed as
a site for meeting developmental goals and for creating a national culture. One
should bear in mind that while the process of globalisation (and corporatisation),
as expressed by contemporary neoliberalism, is transnational in character and
reliant on differentiation, nation building, on the contrary, gives emphasis to
social coherence. According to David Pick, globalisation, though a complex
process, is 'allowing new links to be established across social, political, cul-
tural, and economic boundaries that do not correspond to the old hierarchies'
(2004:102).

The creation of a national identity through the retrieval and reconstitution
of traditional cultures via centralised control of the social sphere, relates in
education to what Bill Readings in his now famous book, *The University in
Ruins* (1996), calls the University of Culture, that is, to an institution which
owes its roots, via the University of Ideas or Reason, to the age of Enlighten-
ment and to the fostering of relations between the individual and the social,
between the disciple and the university, and between the university and the

nation state. Historically, therefore, the university was ideally understood as having a distinct public role, that is, for Kant, a critical role, while engaging in disinterested research and in the pursuit of knowledge (Calhoun 2002:1; see also Kant 1992[1798]; Newman 1996). Scholars (Redfield 2001) have discussed at length whether unity of purpose ever existed in the university since, from the outset, it was founded on tensions between the idea of scholarship (cultivation of accumulated knowledge) and education (teaching students), between elitism (mastery for only a few) and democracy (formation of informed citizens), between independence (production of knowledge as its main rationale) and association with the state (serving national interests). Until recently, however, unity of purpose was preserved thanks to the very concept of nationhood, a concept in which national literatures and the liberal arts, seen by and large as the repository of the 'soul' of 'a people', played an important part. Such is the belief in the acculturating power of the humanities that, in calling for the government to sort out the present education system, prominent South African teacher, scholar and writer, Es'kia Mphahlele claims:

> Without an education system, writing dies. When literature dies, a nation is no longer a nation. South Africa is failing to describe itself as a nation for a number of reasons - most of them stemming from education (quoted in Khumalo 2004:7).

In the face of empirical evidence, Mphahlele's appeal for the preservation of literature as part of the learning process can be viewed as a nostalgic yearning for a system which has undergone considerable and irreversible changes in the last decade in South Africa, changes which have radically redefined the nature and purpose of higher education. Indeed, by submitting education to the dictates of deregulation which is based solely on market forces and the practice of free enterprise, the government has yielded to global trends. The university, in this case, has become one of 'excellence', says Readings (1996), where the previous connotation of 'excellence' as the highest conceivable standard of scholarship and research has been displaced by a notion of 'excellence' that shows assiduous regard for evaluative devices and machineries rather than the didactic component of course content. Excellence, in other words, is defined in business terms, not in academic terms. And there is a convergence between globalisation and higher education policies which, as previously discussed, is best reflected in 'a growing relaxation of government control, emphasis on economic competitiveness, the channeling of resources into curriculum areas that meet the needs of the global marketplace, a focus on preparing students for being part of a global workforce, and creating efficiencies in the management of the universities' (Pick 2004:100).

If the present state of the university in South Africa reflects this conflict between two viable but incompatible systems, the university of 'culture' vs. the university of 'excellence' as Readings would have it, then the question arises as to which is the more legitimate. Complex though the term may be, it is useful to note that the generic meaning of legitimacy refers to 'rights': the right to claim, the right to question whether correct procedures have been followed, and, ultimately, the right to assess whether a policy or a system serves the good of all concerned. In this sense, in determining the notion of the 'right thing to do', any discourse on legitimacy, by taking into account a wide diversity of viewpoints, should deal primarily with values and recognition of human needs such as the right to education which is entrenched in the Constitution.

With a view to prioritising these 'needs' on its own terms, the South African government has deemed the commodification of education and the application of business practices as the most rational way of repositioning the university according to the demands of globalised late capitalism, that is, as the most efficient methods of achieving ends. And by adopting this form of rationalisation, government wants it to be seen as the most legitimate and therefore the most undisputable choice for the good of all. 'Legitimation', in Weber's view, is 'a process by which power is not only institutionalized but more importantly is given moral grounding' (quoted in Allan 2005:152). 'Legitimations', Weber continues, 'contain discourses or stories that we tell ourselves that make a social structure appear valid and acceptable' (ibid.).  The new government can, according to Jansen:

> claim legitimacy for its intervention on the basis of an outright electoral victory. It [can] also, as guardian of the crusade against apartheid, mobilize strong moral arguments for bringing the higher education system under greater centralized control through appeals to politically loaded commitments like equity, access and redress (Jansen 2006:15-16).

As a result of its intervention in the structural reorganisation of the education sector, it is, therefore, necessary to assess the government's legitimation of its policies against the changes that these policies have brought to the role and function of the university.

There is ample documentation today which comments on the marketisation of the university. Perhaps the most penetrating vision of this new dispensation was advanced more than two decades ago by Lyotard (1984) who, in his concise account of the changing nature of the epistemological model in late capitalist societies, dwells on the effects of the commodification of knowledge, the logic of performativity and the impact of computerisation on teaching and learning, and concludes that knowledge will increasingly be translated into quantities of

information with a corresponding reorientation in the process of research. Moreover, since knowledge in computerised societies is becoming exteriorised from the knowers, there will no longer be a need for the professoriate. The learning process as we know it can no longer be the same (Lankshear 1999).

The redefinition of knowledge as a quantity of information brings with it a redefinition of the role of all the players within higher education restructured as a competitive enterprise. Not only has the rise of managerialism downgraded the status of teachers, their input being quantified and measured as units of labour, but branding and advertising have effectively emptied courses of their use, instead, valorising their profitability, their exchange value as products to be sold and consumed. Students are 'clients', and contents of courses are to be suitably packaged and promoted. However, because education presents itself as a product and not as an experience, and because it conceals the power relationships involved in its transmission, its value must perforce be relativised in terms of what the market has to offer. In this case, according to Hannah Arendt, anticipating Lyotard's observations, the term *value* has lost its meaning for 'values are social commodities that have no significance of their own but, like other commodities, exist only in the ever changing relativity of social linkages and commerce' (1977:32). Moreover, since the commercialisation of a product depends on the laws of endless reproduction, advertising is the key to its success, achieved by differentiating the sign of the commodity in order for the product to stand out in the market place, thereby making it more attractive to the buyer. The system of producing sign values, therefore, aims effectively at modifying the sign of the commodity rather than the commodity itself.

The corporatised university cannot escape the logic of commerce and the dominant discourse of the day if it has to compete with other institutions, both public and private, in order to be economically viable; but, the question to ask is whether students will buy into the image to the detriment of the course contents. Inevitably, the more successful the promotion of a product, the more that product will be in demand and the more it will survive the accounting mentality of the bottom line. Curriculum choice, in this instance, results mainly from extensive manipulation of the consumer's desires rather than from practical or intellectual needs. Jean Baudrillard (1998) has admirably exposed the consequence of the relentless hyperreal encoding prompted by the collapse of a sustainable distinction between the real and the simulated in the world of representation. Taking the logic of consumption to its very end, Baudrillard (1983) envisages the progressive abstraction of commodities from any human context. Since our relationship with objects will always be mediated by the sign, our desire for any specific object is no longer informed by its use or exchange value, but by its symbolic value as mediated by such things as status, prestige,

aspirations and so forth which, in turn, shape and define the consumer's sub-jectivity.

What then, of the university as one of the appointed sites for nation building and for the promotion of an African Renaissance? What of culture as a regula-tory or communal ideal? In other words, can the University of Excellence meet the requirements of the University of Culture's emancipatory project, and progress through reason, as Makgoba seems to imply it will? Transformation of South African universities, according to him, should aim to deconstruct the 'geopolitical imagination of apartheid engineers' and to replace it with a sys-tem that is 'more rational, more equitable and that will meet the knowledge demands of a developing African country in a highly competitive global envi-ronment' (Makgoba 2004:11). Fort Hare academic, Fhulu Nekhwevha echoes this sentiment in more radical terms. His 'liberatory pedagogy' advocates the elimination of 'the hegemony of the alien Western experience' in education in order to develop 'authentic African epistemological paradigms' (Nekhwevha 2004:2-3). Predictably, by wishing to retain both systems simultaneously, that is the university of culture and the university of excellence, or by assuming that the one will be naturally fostered by the other, the university in South Africa finds itself in a time warp. These two models, it is obvious, cannot co-exist without contradicting each other.

If the concept of nationhood can no longer be accommodated, least of all within the confines of the changing nature of knowledge and the legitimacy of the market, a vision of an African Renaissance based on the nationalised role of culture in identity formation must of necessity depend on strong state interven-tion for implementation. The Africanist project to create tradition, to found my-thologies and to form a democratic subject, therefore, can be viewed as an ideol-ogy that requires imposition and that demands obedience. For the project to succeed, it will have to be beyond questioning and beyond the critical challenge of academic inquiry. More poignantly, however, since culture, and African cul-ture at that, in the University of Excellence can only be offered as a commodified product, it, too, will be treated as a quantity of information subject to the laws of simulation. What then, of academic culture and the space for thought in a corporatised university? Forced to operate from the margin, will there be any room left for 'dissensus', as Readings (1996) asks, and for the concomitant rec-ognition of difference, of the other, and disputation without end?

**Notes**

1.  As a matter of interest, President Mbeki's speech continues with an appeal to expatriates to return to South Africa. He states, 'I would like to extend the sincere thanks [to those] who have responded to our appeal for South Africans

with the necessary skills to make themselves available to provide the required expertise in project management and other areas' (Mbeki 2006). The ANC leadership's call has generated a number of critical reactions centering on the appropriateness of the legislation on affirmative action since 1994. The Afrikaaner led Freedom Front party feels vindicated that the legislation has been discriminatory against whites and that the exodus of many highly qualified individuals may in part be the reason for the skills crisis in the country. Others, like Vuyo Mvoko (2006), an independent media and political consultant, resent this stance by government in that it undermines the just cause of the law in redressing the imbalances of the past.

2.  The unofficial figure, on the other hand, is believed to stand close to 40 percent.

3.  There seems to be a growing awareness among educators of the potential deleterious effect for society at large of a single-minded utilitarian view of education despite the need for skills' development in South Africa. In a telling article, 'Unpractical Graduates Wanted', Glen Mills (2006), a former dean, explains how the cultivation of the so-called 'unpractical' wisdom in students, that is, the acquisition of critical thought and creative practice offered by the liberal arts, is necessary for problem solving even in a vocationally oriented system of higher education.

4.  Charlton Koen outlines the Ministry of Education's plan to streamline the apartheid-created system by 'reducing the 21 universities and 15 technikons by January 2005 to 11 universities, 5 technikons, 6 comprehensive institutions, and 2 national institutes in provinces where no higher education institutions exist' (Koen 2003:12).

5.  In 2003, a meeting was held between President Mbeki and Vice-Chancellors of universities to discuss transformation and African identity in higher education. As a consequence, the Minister of Education asked Makgoba and Seepe to prepare an initial document entitled 'Knowledge and Identity: an African Vision of Higher Education'. The ensuing publication (Makgoba and Seepe 2004) also contains the response from a number of scholars.

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