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Symbolism and substance: towards an understanding of change and continuity in South African higher education

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Introduction

The scale and significance of recent changes in South African higher education are profound and are probably unprecedented in recent times. This in itself constitutes an interesting case. However, what makes the South African case particularly informative is the way in which the pattern of this change has been shaped by two distinct and opposing discourses - the 'transformative-redistributive' and the 'global market-driven reform' discourses.

The first derives from the great expectations that arose after the demise of formal apartheid in the late 1980s to mid-1990s for the reconstruction of all sectors of South African society out of the ravages of apartheid. This strongly felt aspiration for democracy, social justice, human rights and the redistribution of wealth and opportunity was captured in the ill-defined, but symbolically significant discursive term 'transformation'. Indeed, amidst these widespread expectations for fundamental change, any perceived lack of transformation has been interpreted as a heresy and usually attributed to political recalcitrance (Muller 2003).

The nature and pace of this transformation process (and as part of this, the restructuring of higher education) has not met these expectations, for a number of inter-related reasons explored below. While the political transformation and the establishment of democratic organs of government have been successfully - indeed miraculously - achieved, the anticipated social and economic transformation has, for the majority of South Africans, not transpired. On the contrary, conditions for the poor have decidedly worsened (Terreblanche 2003). Unemployment remains rampant, with associated high crime levels and massive social dislocation, and South Africa has the highest HIV/AIDS rates in the world. While government consistently committed itself *symbolically* in all policy documents to reducing inequalities and addressing the socio-economic priority of the poor, it has not instituted the range of redistributive and social development measures required to

achieve *substantive* structural changes that would widen opportunity and reduce poverty.

A number of recent analyses have attempted to track the trajectory of public policy and socio-economic change in South Africa (see Alexander 2002; Gerwel 2002). The key issue is explaining how the new government's progressive framework of redistributive transformation, which underpinned the anti-apartheid struggle and framed its first election manifesto in 1994, was subsumed in four short years into a basket of conservative macro-economic policies.[1] It is a deep irony that these have exacerbated, rather than reduced, social stratification and poverty in the new democracy.

The transformation process in South Africa has thus been increasingly shaped by the second discourse - the dominant neo-liberal 'global' discourse. This derives from the coincidence of two other significant inter-related developments: the intensification of globalized socio-economic and cultural relations, and the collapse of the Soviet Union with the concomitant ascendancy of market-driven neo-liberalism and universal hostility to, and scepticism of, the Left. These events created a set of global and local conditions that presented the new democratic government in South Africa with a two-fold development challenge, each governed by the opposing discourses: to meet the basic needs of the majority poor by providing adequate social services and redistributing opportunity and wealth, and concurrently to situate the nation competitively in the knowledge-intensive network society and the market-driven globalized economy. Pursuing a redistributive agenda shaped by the transformative discourse, needless to say, stands in direct ideological tension with the prevailing market-oriented framework of deregulation, fiscal constraint and minimalist government, shaped by the dominant 'global' discourse. This raises questions about the nature of the contemporary state and the constraints and contradictions it faces in addressing inequalities amidst the current global balance of forces. It also raises the issue of the feasibility of local mediation of the impacts of globalization and of developing and implementing alternatives to the neo-liberal orthodoxy. The discursive role of policy is examined in this light below.

Not surprisingly, the vital contribution of higher education to meet the nation's contemporary developmental challenges has been prominently foregrounded in policy documents - in particular, its critical role in preparing graduates and in producing relevant knowledge not only for effective participation in the global knowledge-driven economy but also for addressing the basic needs of the majority. To these ends, the new South African government developed a policy framework for higher education restructuring, embodied in the largely symbolic 1997 White Paper on higher education transformation (DoE 1997).

Over the last two decades the system has witnessed considerable changes that were in some respects skewed but nonetheless revolutionary, notably in student and institutional profiles (Cooper and Subotzky 2001). However, many of these changes were unanticipated and cannot be attributed only (or even primarily) to the effects of policy. They are instead the outcome of the

complex interplay between institutional initiatives, societal needs (driven mainly by market forces) and policy - all framed by globalization discourses and practices (Cloete *et al.* 2002). In this context, many of the new developments were not necessarily transformative in nature, but shaped by market-oriented individual institutional interests, freely pursued in an increasingly competitive environment and in the absence of a regulatory policy framework. At the same time, despite emerging policy initiatives, other key systemic features have remained persistently unchanged, notably the 'race' and gender composition of academic staff.

This chapter explores this pattern of continuity and change that characterizes the transformation process in South African higher education and examines the combination of factors underlying it. Two features of the recent policy process provide the starting point of this analysis. First, the implementation of the national policy framework has been slow and uneven, and has currently become somewhat fragmented and diverted from addressing stated goals. Indeed, the 2001 National Plan for Higher Education (DoE 2001) acknowledges an 'implementation vacuum', which occurred between the White Paper and the National Plan. Second, concomitant to the macroeconomic policy trends mentioned above, a discernible shift occurred in higher education policy discourse - from an initial symbolic commitment to addressing equity and redistributive concerns to increasing emphasis on the global discourse of the market and efficiency. Furthermore, the ministry is currently preoccupied with a literal interpretation of transformation in the form of large-scale mergers. While this will undoubtedly transfigure the system, it is not clear how it will advance the range of policy goals captured in the White Paper. Driven mainly by political and policy exigencies, this measure constitutes what Fataar (2001) refers to as the 'narrowing' of the education policy trajectory.

The main contention is that systemic continuities, which preclude the translation of progressive symbolic policy into substantive implementation, are rooted in a number of related factors. These comprise persistent *structural* impediments,[2] as well as the complexity of higher education institutional change (in the light of which rationalist assumptions underlying the government's predilection for 'grand' transformative policy and planning appears naive); and a range of *conjunctoral* factors, including the implementation vacuum (which is only partly attributable to inadequate capacity and resources) and the discursive shifts described above (driven by the power of the dominant global discourse and the government's ready adoption of this).

Understanding this pattern of change and continuity, as well as the implementation 'gap' and discursive policy 'shifts', requires aligning four analytic lenses, each of which inform the next. First, it is necessary to re-examine the nature of policy- in particular, distinguishing between symbolic and substantive policy, identifying the limits and indeterminacy of policy (and the policy research implications of this), and highlighting its discursive function. Second, given the limits to policy as a driver of change, it is neces-

sary to systematically identify the other key drivers and trace their interrelationship. Third, the obstacles to change and policy implementation must be identified. Fourth, a significant change factor, which tends to be underplayed by other analysts, is how the dominant global discourse has foreclosed (and has been allowed to foreclose) the redistributive-transformative discourse that forms one component of the two-fold development imperative of post-apartheid society. The case of South African higher education is thus informative not only because of the ambitious scale of the transformative agenda and what this suggests about the complex challenges of higher education systemic and institutional change, but also because of what it tells us about how prospects for translating progressive symbolic policy into substantive implementation have been reduced by the combination of structural persistence, limits to policy, market forces and fragility of redistributive-transformative aspirations in the face of the dominant global discourse.

Revisiting the nature of policy and change

The point of departure in this chapter, then, is to revisit key aspects of policy itself and its relation to change theory and strategy, with a view to providing key analytic constructs with which to account for the pattern of change and continuity in South African higher education. Here, I briefly examine the complexity of policy, significant types of policy, its limits and indeterminacy and some implications for managing change and researching policy.

Policy, it hardly needs stating, is a complex, multi-faceted, indeterminate and inevitably contested process. It comprises distinct types and involves several non-linear but related elements and a variety of agents and stakeholders in different settings. Amongst the voluminous expansion of policy research and analysis, interpretations of policy are varied and bedevilled by unstated assumptions and multiple meanings, with the result that much of this work remains theoretically thin. This is so not only in South Africa, where the pressure for large-scale policy formulation exacerbated this tendency, but elsewhere, as Ball (1993: 15) indicates:

> One of the conceptual problems currently lurking within much policy research and policy sociology is that more often than not analysts fail to define conceptually what they mean by policy. The meaning of policy is taken for granted and theoretical and epistemological dry rot is built into the analytic structures they construct. It is not difficult to find the term policy being used to describe very different 'things' at different points in the same study.

The various elements of the policy process are commonly regarded as sequential: prior research, identifying and choosing options, formulation, adoption, planning, implementation, evaluation and adaptation. In reality, they are related in complex ways, iterative, mediated or obstructed by context and by the diverse policy agents involved in the process. In South African

debates these elements are often falsely dichotomized with the assumption that while policy formulation is sound (and indeed often admirably progressive), the problem simply lies in implementation, usually interpreted as a capacity problem (Cloete *et al.* 2002: 452). For this reason, these authors question the notion of a higher education implementation 'vacuum' precisely because this displaces the problem onto poor implementation, thus reinforcing the dichotomy. The thrust of my argument below is that good policy incorporates implementation and its multi-faceted demands, while understanding the inevitable indeterminacy and contingency of actual outcomes.

Different policy agents, situated in different institutional locations and driven by their own exigent interests and agendas, affect policy outcomes at different points. These are: government, parliament, the bureaucracy, organized business, civil society (organized labour, teacher and student organizations, academics, researchers and other stakeholders), foreign advisors and the donor community.

Policies can be classified in a number of ways. For the purposes of this chapter, it is important to distinguish between the following types:[3]

- *Distributive, redistributive or regulatory policies:* Distributive policies aim at favouring all groups in the allocation of resources and benefits, while redistributive policies distribute additional resources to one set of beneficiaries for equity reasons. Regulatory policies limit or direct behaviours of particular groups through conditional resource allocation.
- *Symbolic policy:* Several recent analyses have drawn attention to symbolic policy as a key construct to explaining the pattern of South African higher education transformation and policy process (see Jansen 2001, 2002; Subotzky 2001b; Cloete *et al.* 2002). Symbolic policies signify general values, principles and normative ideals with very little or no indication of implementation procedures or resource allocations. Symbolic policy captures aspirational goals sufficiently broadly, without operational details, in order to consolidate general consensus, which disguises the nature of the political settlements and trade-offs. It thus makes decisive breaks with the past and signals new directions (Cloete *et al.* 2002), which are especially important functions in post-conflict situations. It is widely accepted that the framework for higher education transformation captured in the 1997 White Paper is quintessentially symbolic in character (see below). Jansen (2001) regards symbolic policy as necessarily negative in that its political function to secure consensus masks any intent to implement. Against this, it can be argued that symbolic policy formation performs a legitimate function in securing consensus and in providing undisputed benchmarks (through stated values and goals) against which implementation can be evaluated.
- *Substantive policy:* By contrast, substantive policies deal with the concrete actions governments want to take, that is, the content of decisions. The distinction between symbolic and substantive policy is related to that

between the 'intrinsic' logic of policy, which captures broad values and interests, and the 'institutional' logic, which refers to the concrete conditions of implementation (see Young 2001). The successful implementation of symbolic policy, that is, its translation into substantive policy, rests on a number of enabling resource and conjunctural conditions. These are elaborated shortly.

- *Top-down or bottom-up:* Top-down policies are developed by an authoritative structure and distributed downwards through the system in a linear, hierarchical process, described by Elmore (1980) as 'forward mapping'. This assumes that those closest to the source of policy have greatest authority and influence, and that responding to problems in complex systems depends on clear lines of authority and control. By contrast, bottom-up policies build on existing practices and, through analysing the conditions at the coalface of implementation, seek to create conducive behaviours (compliance, knowledge, skills, capacities and resources, attitudes and perceptions) among practitioners to support successful implementation. This relates to Elmore's concept of 'backward mapping'. It assumes that those closest to the source of the problem have the greatest ability to influence it and that problem solving in complex systems depends not on hierarchical control but on maximizing discretion at the point where the problem is most immediate (Elmore 1980: 605). Backward mapping 'begins not with a statement of intent, but with a statement of the specific behavior at the lowest level of the implementation process' (Elmore 1980: 604). Effective policy, then, proceeds from identifying the sufficient conditions for successfully changing practice and then extrapolating backwards 'up' the system, and determining what is required through the structure of implementing agencies, asking at each level about the ability of the unit to affect the behaviour that is the target of the policy and what resources are required to have this effect. Here, policy implementation theory and change theory converge. Elmore's framework provides key insights about the limitations of top-down policy, which does not adequately address conditions required for successful implementation. Recent South African education policy is replete with examples of this, most notably the Curriculum 2005 fiasco, which has been fundamentally reviewed for these reasons. Elmore's concept, therefore, has significant implications for how policy is formulated and enacted, and how change is managed and strategized. Ball (1993: 19) comes to a similar position in stating that 'the enactment of texts relies on things like commitment, understanding, capability, resources, practical limitations, cooperation and (importantly) intertextual compatibility'.

Regarding the discursive function of policy, Ball's distinction between policy as *text* (representations that are encoded and decoded in complex ways) and policy as *discourse* (the way in which policy ensembles exercise power through a production of 'truth' and 'knowledge' as discourses) provides a key analytic tool by which to further our understanding of how dominant

discourses have shaped the pattern of higher education policy in South Africa, with the effect of closing down the transformative redistributive discourse. These two elements of policy, though distinct, are implicit in each other. Drawing from Foucault, Ball argues that 'discourses are about what can be said, and thought, but also about who can speak, when, where and with what authority' (Ball 1993: 21). In these terms, 'the effect of policy is primarily discursive, it changes the possibilities we have for thinking "otherwise"; thus it limits our responses to change' (Ball 1993: 23). In this sense, discourses constitute objects, and in so doing conceal their own invention. Policies thus 'create circumstances in which the range of options available in deciding what to do are narrowed or changed, or particular goals or outcomes set' (Ball 1993: 19).

Another significant feature of policy is its indeterminacy. The outcomes or effects of policy depend on multiple variables and conditions embedded in the various contexts of policy-making (Ball 1993). Each of these involves interpretation and reinterpretation, struggle, compromise and 'ad hocery', the outcomes and settlements of which cannot be predetermined. Consequently, Ball argues that 'we cannot predict or assume how they will be acted on in every case in every setting, or what their immediate effect will be, or what room for manoeuvre actors will find for themselves. Action may be constrained differently (even tightly) but it is not determined by policy' (1993: 17). Further indeterminacy arises through the political process where 'policies shift and change their meaning; representations change, key interpreters . . . change' (Ball 1993: 17). Similarly, Muller (2003) draws attention to the mediating effect of context by distinguishing between *intended* policy, the *effects* of policy on practice, and the crucial intervening step, the *enacted* policy, the outcome of which is mediated by context. This resonates with Elmore's notion of backward mapping and implies not only the necessity to focus on practitioners' required behaviours to maximise effective implementation, but also to offsetting of assumptions that effective implementation relies on a top-down policy process - which, as we shall see, constitutes government's current approach.

Following from this, the limits to the effectiveness of policy as a change mechanism become evident. Given the post-apartheid transformative and redistributive imperatives mentioned at the outset, the South African policy community - both government and analysts - understandably perhaps placed heavy reliance on modernist, centralized 'grand' policy and planning as drivers of change (Subotzky 2003a). As Muller (2003: 13) observes 'South African commentary dwells over-much on the intended policy, investing it with an importance that is rarely borne out empirically. We tend naturally to expect that the policy can and should have its intended impact, and are invariably surprised when it doesn't'. The White Paper and the National Plan were conceptualized as instruments for what Cloete *et al.* (2002) identify as 'comprehensive' or 'big-bang' theory for system-wide transformative steerage, which carries the expectation of 'transformation at once'. Embedded in this policy and planning framework are implicit (and ungrounded)

rationalist assumptions about the effectiveness of strong centralized policy in steering change. Besides the current discursive frowning on modernist centralist strategies, evidence shows that these assumptions are questionable because change is a complex indeterminate process driven by multiple agents and agencies, which casts doubt on the extent to which policies and plans lead to anticipated outcomes. Cloete *et al.* (2002: 448) capture this key point thus:

> Changes in the day-to-day realities of higher education are related to a complex set of interactions between government, society and higher education institutions, as affected by globalization. Consequently the changes are not simply the result of specific policies or deliberate actions by a single agency such as the government, the market or a higher education institution . . . Social institutions and social actors have a much greater role in change than is generally anticipated in government policy reform.

In contradistinction to grand 'comprehensive' policy, Cloete *et al.* (2002) identify the need for a different kind of change strategy, which they call 'differentiated policy'. While consensus is easily attained consultatively at the level of symbolic policy, such an approach is needed to deal with the contested details of implementation. It involves 'trade-offs between competing interests, on the basis of indicators or specific criteria, with the intention of addressing targeted problems or sub-sectors' (Cloete *et al.* 2002: 448). Particular institutional targets would be identified against systemic benchmarks, as well as a regulatory environment that pressures and encourages progress towards these. Based on the information-rich interaction between government, institutions and society, they argue, this will be more effective in facilitating change and implementing policy. This view draws from Carnoy's vision of a network state which is 'made of shared institutions, and enacted by bargaining and interactive iteration all along the chain of decision-making' (cited in Cloete *et al.* 2002: 185). This is a state 'whose efficiency is defined in terms of its capacity to create and sustain networks - global, regional, and local, and through these networks, to promote economic growth and develop new forms of social integration' (Cloete *et al.* 2002: 185). This approach, with its underlying vision of a networked state and its goal of information-based iterative relations generating new forms of 'social integration' provides a refreshing antidote to top-down centralist policy. However, in presenting such a brave new world of negotiated information-based social cohesion, it may optimistically underestimate the depth of social divisions, conflictual interests and asymmetrical capacities among developing country governments, institutions and stakeholders, especially given the knowledge intensity of this approach.

The limits to policy and planning apply at the institutional level as well. The new worldwide emphasis on innovative entrepreneurialism in an increasingly competitive environment has generated the need for centralized institutional strategic planning. While institutional capacity to develop

and implement strategic plans is critical to the success of the transformation process, recent research (Rhoades 2000) suggests that even where abundant capacity is evident, the effectiveness of management planning initiatives to achieve change cannot be assumed. Rhoades concludes that several key premises of current university strategic management thinking amount to little more than 'myths'. It is now common that higher education institutions are complex, loosely coupled organizations, comprising multiple centres of power, authority and interests, which give rise to intricate dynamics of formal and informal decision making and contestations. In addition, faculty often have stronger cosmopolitan allegiances to their disciplinary networks than to their local institutions. It is often through these linkages that independent initiatives arise in the substructures of departments and centres. These both subvert centralized managerial planning objectives and realize institutional goals in spite of, and not because of, them. Within these complex dynamics, intricate overt and covert strategies are utilized to facilitate decision making and to effect or obstruct change. This is especially so given growing concentrations of power in executive management and the increasing tensions between corporate and collegiate styles of management. For these reasons, it is often strategically counterproductive to reveal such strategies as part of the culture of disclosure and consciousness-raising associated with the current vogue of the 'learning organization' This insight suggests the notion of 'strategic organizational non-learning' as a way of describing these kinds kin5 th int7j0 Tc(f,) Tj1.j3.070 Tw0.448 Tc(cnt7Tj0 Tc() Tj0 Tc3.268 Tw0.51

However, these insights and the bulk of recent definitive policy theory derive from analyses that focus on power relations and discursive contestations as conceptualized within the framework of the nation state. The contemporary challenge is to reconceptualize the nature of policy in relation to the current global balance of forces - fertile ground for further inquiry, drawing from empirical evidence in developing countries. This raises the tension between the worldwide trend towards minimal government as part of market-driven global discourse, and the need for strong interventionist government in developing countries to offset the negative impact of market-driven globalization, linked to the transformative discourse.

To conclude: successfully translating symbolic policy into substantive policy requires specific conditions and overcoming obstacles. These are set out in the next section. Following Elmore's concept of 'backward mapping' and the notion of the mediating effect of context, effective implementation also entails understanding and identifying the range of facilitating or obstructive 'behaviours' in each context: the various roles, interests, motives, resistances, priorities, capacities, technical skills, knowledge and discretionary ability to deal with contingencies. Successful implementation involves attaining adequate compliance, based either on sufficient ideological consensus and shared belief in the symbolic value, substance and planning strategies of policy, or on sanctions. In the developing country context especially, political will to counter hegemonic discourses and to address inequalities through sound redistributive alternatives is 0 Tc(s) Tj4.280 T

- *At the national and regional levels:* the various sectors of the state; national, provincial and local government (including the ruling party and its relations with its political allies); parliament and statutory bodies; civil society and community organization; organized business; the organized higher education sector.
- *At the institutional and sub-institutional level:* executive leadership and management and institutional policies; organized academic leadership and structures at institutional and sub-institutional level; informal individual academic initiatives; organized non-academic structures; organized and informal staff and student structures and activities; individual student choice.
- *At cross-cutting levels:* the domain of science and knowledge.

Complementing this, the following brief framework of the obstacles to the implementation of policy and to change is set out. This is not meant to be an exhaustive account or a composite model, but an illustrative range of factors drawn from the current analysis. As is apparent from the description below, these factors vary according to *context* (different institutional and other locations) and *time/moment.* Of course, the absence of these obstacles means that they can facilitate change when they are present.

- *Structural impediments:* particularly as a developing country and given its apartheid history, South Africa faces a range of particularly sharp structurally rooted obstacles to change, embedded in unequal socio-economic relations. These impediments will vary according to different contexts, institutional locations and time.
- *Resources and capacity:* human, technical, time (needed for realistically paced transformation and to avoid unrealistic 'grand' policy) and informational resources and capacity at the level of government, stakeholder bodies and institutions. Although fiscal constraint is ubiquitous, given South Africa's relatively strong base, lack of resources is not (and should not be regarded as) a major obstacle.
- *Interpretation and operationalization of policy by various policy agents:* The extent of policy naivety and policy maturity. The latter entails a more nuanced understanding of the nature of policy and the connection between the various elements identified above. An important aspect of this is systemic and institutional policy overload: the extent of simultaneous demands without the proper operational sequencing of priorities. There are currently something like 30 higher education change initiatives emanating from the South African government (Muller 2003).
- *Discursive environment:* the extent to which particular discourses dominate or are subordinate in various government and institutional locations. Following Ball (1993), this will determine what choices, ideas and options are allowed or foreclosed, according to the prevailing political balance of forces and power relations at particular moments and in specific contexts. This is embedded in both background macro-economic/political, as well

as foreground educational values, discourses, theories, current trends and 'fashions' in policy and practice. It relates to the extent to which government and other policy agents demonstrate political will or reluctance, that is, whether they are politically prepared to make decisive choices. This would shape, for example, interpretations of the appropriate role of the state, across the spectrum from interventionist to minimalist. An important element of this is political compliance or resistance from various agents in central and decentralized bureaucracy and institutions. A prominent example here are the shifts in meaning of equity and transformation that have occurred in the South African higher education context. As indicated, the two principal discourses framing this analysis of current South African higher education are the 'global' and the transformative-redistributive. The analysis then depends crucially on the periodization of policy, identifying key moments when shifts occur. For example, the moment when the balance of forces shifted from the ANC to corporate interests during the informal negotiations leading up to the first elections in 1994 (Terreblanche 2003). The notion of 'settlement' is crucial to how discursive and political conflicts are negotiated in different contexts at different times by policy agents. This process results in a particular balance of forces and discursive moment.

- *Contingent and individual factors:* this ranges from unanticipated institutional crises to the initiatives and behaviours of particular policy agents in different contexts and moments. This would include the biographical and temperamental particularities of key agents at different times, for example, particular ministers or leaders at particular moments in their terms of office or career paths. In the case of academics, this often relates to the process of their winning their reputational credibility as scientists.[4]

A final point on theorizing policy and policy research: elaborating these kinds of analytic frameworks points to the need for greater theoretical complexity in policy research. Ball (1993) identifies the then prevailing theoretical poverty of policy research, as a result of which, he concludes, we cannot yet really talk about an 'applied policy sociology'. In the South African context, the bulk of policy research has been largely operational in nature or has comprised analyses that are not extensively theory-based. Ten years later, Ball's (1993: 11) challenge remains before us:

> The *complexity* and *scope* of policy analysis - from an interest in the workings of the state to a concern with contexts of practice and the distributional outcomes of policy - precludes the successful single-theory explanations. What we need in policy analysis is a toolbox of diverse concepts and theories - an applied sociology rather than a pure one (original emphasis).

Ball thus makes an appeal for composite theories that accommodate 'localised complexity'. The challenge, in his view, 'is to relate together

analytically the ad hocery of the macro with the ad hocery of the micro without losing sight of the systematic bases and effects of *ad hoc* social actions: to look for the iterations embedded in the chaos' (Ball 1993: 15). Drawing from Ozga, Ball argues that it is necessary to bring together structural, macro-level analysis of education systems and education policies and micro-level investigation, especially that which takes account of people's perception and experiences. Ball links this to the need to rethink the simplicities of the structure/agency dichotomy and, drawing from Harker and May, to 'account for agency in a constrained world' (Ball 1993: 15). Consequently, he contends that 'Policy analysis requires an understanding that is based not on constraint *or* agency but on the changing relationships between constraint *and* agency and their interpenetration. Furthermore, such an analysis must achieve insight into both overall and localized outcomes of policy' (Ball 1993: 21). The methodological implications of this for Ball is to conduct policy trajectory and implementation studies across the various 'contexts' of policy making that he identifies, namely the contexts of influence, policy text production, practice, outcomes and political strategy.

An important elaboration of current policy theory would be to build on frameworks that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, which were based on relations within the nation state and to re-examine these in the light of globalization. This would theoretically clarify how change actually occurs or is inhibited in this broader context and across the macro, meso and micro levels. Some recent work addresses these issues (see, for example, Marginson and Rhoades 2002 on the mediating effect of the national). At the institutional level, the utilization of neo-institutional and organizational theory (Cloete *et al.* 2002; Muller 2003) are other instances. At the sub-institutional level, there is a need for studies on the micro-politics of social and institutional relations in for example equity and gender studies (see Subotzky 2001a).

The final section of the chapter examines the patterns of change and continuity in emerging higher education policy in South Africa, utilizing these analytic perspectives on policy, change and key agents in higher education. Before this, however, it is necessary to sketch the background macro-economic trends and government choices that frame higher education policy in South Africa. As indicated, the policy formulation process in post-apartheid South Africa has been particularly challenging, not only because of the scale of the social reconstruction agenda, but also because of the contradictory competing discourses of redistributive transformation and the new globalized world order. How did the global discourse come to dominate the transformative? A comprehensive answer to this crucial question lies beyond the scope of this chapter and is the subject of further inquiry in which the author is currently involved. Nonetheless, it is possible to trace some relevant trends in this regard.

Origins and emerging dominance of the global discourse in the political economy of South Africa

It has already been mentioned that South Africa's emergence as a new democracy in the 1990s coincided with the intensification of global economic, cultural and social relations. As the anti-apartheid struggle intensified and the various internal and external crises facing the apartheid government deepened, it became apparent that the period of political negotiation and transition was approaching. Anti-apartheid activists began to envisage a new democratic government and society. Some, especially those in exile (including the current president), who were exposed to global trends and foreign government thinking, envisaged the new South African nation from the outset in relation to the new global order. Others focused much more inwardly on the transition to democracy. There was at times considerable animosity and contestation between these two streams, which persisted through the negotiation and transition periods into the new government.

The consistent and sometimes militant socialist tenor of the anti-apartheid struggle raised serious concern among the (mainly white) middle class and business community about the effects of likely redistributive and redress measures on the market and thereby on their privilege. However, during the first meeting between 'enlightened' Afrikaners and the ANC in Dakar in 1987 pressure was brought to bear for a moderate and conciliatory political-economic approach that would affirm the importance of foreign and local investment to kickstart growth and thereby assure business confidence and the role of the (mainly white) business class in the new South Africa. Subsequently, during formal and informal meetings after 1990 between the ANC and business leaders, the balance of power shifted from the ANC to the corporate sector, with the global perspective prevailing among key figures of the government-in-waiting (Terreblanche 2003). In so doing, the global discourse began to take 80 the r the o e leadersibutivedandm e a s u r e s (mainls0 Tc(h) Tj0.828 Tw0.07

National Party (the ruling party under apartheid). However, the extent to which this was a factor is offset by the prior history of the ANC's global orientation prior to the elections in 1994. By the time the National Party withdrew from the GNU in 1996 and ostensively provided the political space for government to assert its redistributive-transformative agenda, government had already prioritized the global discourse above redistribution.

During the lead-up to the first elections, there were strong and demonstrative aspirations among the mass democratic movement for redistributive policies to offset the ravages of apartheid and to complement the political victory with a programme of socio-economic development that would manifestly benefit the majority poor. This was captured in the government's 1994 Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) - a people-centred programme committed to meeting the basic needs of the majority of the population. It was, crucially, premised on growth through redistribution. While there was constant rhetorical commitment to the RDP goals of meeting basic needs, severe delivery problems and organizational haphazardness resulted in the dismantling of the RDP ministerial portfolio and the effective closure of the programme itself. This was a reflection that behind the scenes, the notion of redistribution was being discursively banished.

While retaining a broad moral and political commitment to redistribution and reconstructive development, government instituted a range of monetarist macro-economic and fiscal policy measures, thereby positioning itself squarely within the prevailing neo-liberal paradigm of deregulated markets and capital flows and fiscal restraint. It thus created deep contradictions in relation to its redistributive commitment. To name a few: while offering relief to the low income groups, the proportional tax burden was increasingly shifted from companies to individuals in order to create conducive conditions for investment. In efforts to reduce the budget deficit, state expenditure on social services, though high proportionally, was restrained. Consequently, services are still inadequate to meet the priority needs of the poor, despite some redistributive reallocations from richer provinces to poorer ones. Ongoing trade and exchange control deregulation created conditions conducive to foreign investment and the free flow of capital, but have made the economy vulnerable to short-term speculation, the negative effects of which have impacted more directly on the poor. While the privatization of state enterprises provides for the injection of huge capital for development, the ownership of parastatal organizations is increasingly passing to foreign interests and linked to this, major South African firms have been allowed to relocate overseas, with a huge outflow of assets. Finally, although social spending is up, the last few budgets have provided huge individual tax cuts and massive military spending - at a time when social services are inadequate and the needs greatest. While financial resources are not the only problem (indeed some social welfare budgets have not been spent due to lack of absorptive capacity), allocating these resources would help build the required capacity for effective service delivery.

A turning point in the process occurred around 1995-96, by which time the ascendancy of the global discourse within two key ministries was assured: the Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry. Ironically headed by prominent previous activists, both of these departments appear to have exerted considerable influence within government to bring about a decisive shift towards a global orientation in macro-economic policy. This manifested in the emergence of the government's 1996 Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy. In direct contradistinction to the RDP, this was premised on redistribution through growth and structural adjustments. It aims at job creation and budget deficit reduction through a projected growth rate based on increasing foreign investment. The GEAR strategy is thus consistent with World Bank macro-economic principles of reduced spending and deregulation. The redistribution element in its title is, therefore, somewhat anomalous. To date, apart from successes in the reduction of the budget deficit, its targets have not been reached. Under sustained pressure from its Tripartite Alliance partners (the Congress of South African Trade Unions and the South African Communist Party), the ANC agreed to modify GEAR targets, but remained committed throughout to its framework. Even the Church was asked at one point to oppose the GEAR policy on the grounds that this policy favours the global development path at the expense of RDP concerns and the interests of the poor. Since then, GEAR has been the target of ongoing criticism by the Alliance and others, but the ANC leadership has sustained the hegemony of this discourse and policy orientation nonetheless.

Given the socialist leaning of the African National Congress during the years of anti-apartheid resistance, the unanticipated moderateness of its emerging macro-economic policy was (and still is) somewhat surprising. These developments represent significant ideological shifts in government g frot itt Ironically bus ant Nationas department to r deregulationf departmentt r e a c h e n surpris

Change in this area of higher education was driven principally by institutional strategic and market-related initiatives in the domains of teaching and knowledge production, influenced by the globalization-related trends of entrepreneurialism and commercialization, the use of IT for diversified delivery and inter-disciplinary programmes.

A second major area of change is that, over a period of about 15 years, the student composition radically changed, with a huge increase in African enrolments in the system as a whole and in historically disadvantaged institutions particularly. While this was revolutionary at the aggregate level, the pattern remained somewhat skewed at lower levels of disaggregation, with black and female students remaining clustered in traditional fields and lower qualification levels (see Cooper and Subotzky 2001; Cloete *et al.* 2002 for details). Enrolments at some historically disadvantaged institutions dropped significantly, mainly as a result of student fee problems, but to some extent also the result of the attractiveness of previously white universities to which academically able students were now gaining access. Over the past two years, enrolment patterns have shifted, again, with growth among some disadvantaged institutions and increases in white students. These patterns of student choice are largely unresearched and unknown, though it is clear that perceptions of institutional reputation and financial considerations are paramount.

In stark contrast, staff composition regarding race and glnn h 0 1j00 0 1 57.840 450 Tj1.2w0.140 T

These characteristics are reflected in the National Plan for Higher Education, released in 2001, four years after the White Paper. It is a strongly interventionist document, indicating stronger centralized control of the system. The minister made it clear that with the publication of the plan, the long process of consultative macro-policy formulation was now over and the time for decisive intervention and delivery had arrived. Systemic governance in South Africa is a paradoxical combination of strong interventionism and minimalism. The former is linked to the idea of 'grand' policy, transformative discourse and perhaps even to the government's socialist roots, while the latter relates to the global discourse. The interventionist character of the plan and the ministry is paradoxical in that it largely fosters market-like behaviour through the planning process, while transformation and equity - the goal of the 'traditional' interventionist role - are not foregrounded. This is the result of the closing down of the discursive space in which the role of state in supporting redress was narrowed (see below). An example of minimalism is the new funding formula's indication that the subsidy now comprises 'state funding in the last resort'. The framework for systemic governance in South Africa was established in the White Paper in the form of the notion of co-operative governance: the aspiration towards a co-operative relationship between state and higher education in which institutional autonomy and public accountability would be mutually accommodating. As indicated, this has recently come under strain, both at the systemic and institutional levels.

Other examples of interventionism include the new programme mix, which addresses the proliferation of higher education programmes by an increasing range of providers, without planning and adequate safeguards to ensure the quality of provision. This is a clear indication of the assumption of that the state has a strong role to play in regulating what is perceived as the *laissez-faire* operation of the market. Ironically, it was the government's own management and interpretation of the policy process which created the conditions for certain institutions' seizing market opportunities during the regulatory vacuum. Also, the non-voluntary mergers signal a shift 'from co-operative governance to coerced co-operation' (Cloete *et al.* 2002: 484). Another indicator of greater interventionism is that stronger powers have been vested in the minister through recent legislation and amendments, reflecting a strong directive role (Cloete *et al.* 2002). Following the notions of backward mapping and the mediating role of context, this shift in government-stakeholder relations has consequences for policy implementation. Consultation cannot be regarded linearly as a single phase in the policy process. Without appropriate participatory involvement by stakeholders in consultative policy-making and implementation, they will be unlikely to comply with government's stronger interventionism. Legal and bureaucratic obstructions to implementation will arise.

The National Plan provides the detailed framework and operational steps to implement the goals of the White Paper. Among other things, it establishes targets for increased participation and graduation rates, for reshaped enrolments by field of study and for staff equity. It also provides for the

restructuring of the institutional landscape through mergers, but without reducing the number of institutional sites and capacity for expanded participation. The plan establishes three main policy levers of change. First, the iterative national and institutional three-year rolling planning process, which is linked to the ministry's 'Programme and Qualifications Mix' process, in terms of which ministerial funding for approved programmes is allocated. Second, the new quality assurance framework is in the process of being operationalized, and third, a new funding framework is being developed, though here too a long delay in implementation is evident.

Beyond this, in terms of the plan a ministry-appointed National Working Group was mandated to make recommendations about the optimal way to reduce the current 35 institutions to 22. Thus the minister focused his preoccupation on the size and shape of the system to the reduction in institutional numbers. From the outset, however, it was never clear how this reduction would necessarily advance the policy goals of efficiency (mergers are not a cheap option), effectiveness and systemic equity (despite numerous mergers between previously advantaged and disadvantaged institutions). In the absence of a compelling rationale, the minister's single-minded insistence on system pruning appears to be primarily motivated by the political need to achieve demonstrable change. He appears personally intent, in the twilight of his career, to stamp his change on the system by removing the anomalies of apartheid planning at all costs. With an election year looming next year, and given persistent demands for meaningful socio-economic transformation, the need for visible transformation is understandable. However, mergers absorb enormous energy and resources, with little certainty of cost benefits. This highlights the danger of policy being primarily motivated politically, rather than educationally. In this view, mergers represent a reductionist quantitative narrowing of the goal of higher education transformation and as such mistake means for (essentially political) ends. Nonetheless, the system will radically change (we will have 11 universities, 5 technikons and 6 hybrid comprehensives), with new institutions and regional institutional clusters, in some cases with radically different student populations. Whether these changes will effectively enhance the achievement of broader goals remains to be seen.

A number of factors and conditions can be seen to have contributed to the gap between the formulation of the White Paper and the implementation of its framework for transformation. The National Plan acknowledges clearly that the central policy goal of the White Paper, namely the development of a single, national, diverse, co-ordinated higher education system, remains 'unachieved'. This is largely due to the fact that it has adopted an 'incremental approach to the development and implementation of the [necessary] key policy instruments' (DoE 2001: 8). Although the three-year rolling planning process commenced in 1998, this was 'developed in the context of the broad transformation agenda and policy goals signalled in the *White Paper*, rather than a clear set of implementation and funding guidelines linked to a *National Plan'* (DoE 2001: 8). This clearly locates the White Paper

and the initial three-year rolling plans in the domain of symbolic policy as opposed to substantive elements of implementation and funding guidelines linked to the National Plan. According to the plan, the incremental approach was adopted for three reasons. First, the lack of systemic person-power, capacity and technical skills; second, the absence of an adequate information base, as well as analyses and understanding of systemic and institutional trends; and third, the need to develop a consultative and interactive planning process as part of co-operative governance partnerships with institutions.

From the DoE's perspective, the prior phase of policy development *was* necessary. It would not have been possible to develop the substantive and procedural aspects of policy as they have now been captured in the National Plan any earlier. In addition, as indicated, various organizational and political challenges facing new government - the realities of governance, transforming the bureaucracy and capacity constraints, and the need to consult on the 'size and shape' issue - also limited implementation possibilities. Policy naivety, as Muller (2001) suggests, also

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