

The Demise of Student Movement in Higher Education Institutions in South Africa: A Case Study of UKZN

**Elias Cebekhulu,
Evan Mantzaris and
Michael Nhlapho**

1 Introduction

In South Africa there is a need to establish a common understanding on the contextualization of the role and purpose of higher education and its impact on society in general. More importantly there is a need to more clearly define and articulate the role and nature of student activism in the broader transformation processes taking place in South Africa. The central issue of this article, therefore, is to examine the role and purpose of education as one that should be accessed in terms of its relation to the political economy and ideological hegemony of the ruling elite, development, teaching, learning and research. Though the role and purpose cannot only be restricted nor influenced by the above facts alone, the relationship between political economy and education remains of primary importance. The University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (UKZN) will be the case study upon which this paper is based.

The authors acknowledge that the noble intentions of the transformation process are to enhance and equalize resources, and avoid duplication of structures thus eroding the power relations dominated by the entrenched power holders, thus dictating the pace, content and institutional form of the new democracy (in this regard the post merger era). The theoretical framework of this research will be based on Ginsburgh's,

Transition theory on broad issues and Paulo Freire's Transition Articulation Theory. The main aim of this paper is to highlight the lack of radical critic and dialectical inclination of the student movement in South Africa.

Intellectuals associated with the student movement argue that apathy and mass demobilization depoliticizes student leadership. The key question in this regard is whether the current student leadership has been critical of the merger process and its moral and, political implications for UKZN. Based on the above statement and line of questioning, the following hypothesis is advanced:

Student leadership and UKZN as a centre of knowledge production have become breeding grounds for mere functionaries of the ruling party. This is a reality that is in a direct dialectical contradiction to the process of the liberation role of education and greater transformation in South Africa.

The judgmental sampling technique was used for the collection of data. In this case, the principal criterion that determined the selection of the interviewees was that they were in leadership positions in the major student political organizations. The principal techniques that were used to gather data were semi-structured interviews. The reason for employing this technique is that it allows interviewees to offer opinions and draw attention to issues that may not have been considered by the interviewer. The sample population was drawn from a number of former student leaders available in UKZN campuses. Ten student leaders were interviewed. The study population consisted of eight people from various clubs and societies and two ordinary students who were regarded as 'neutral'. The eight student leaders were selected as representatives of the four main student political organizations, namely the (South African Student Congress (SASCO) , which is aligned to the ruling African National Congress (ANC), the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL), the youth wing of the ANC), the South African Democratic Student Movement (SADESMO), which is aligned to the Inkatha Freedom Party(IFP), the Student United Christian Action(SUCA), a Christian student movement and the Socialist Student Movement, loosely based International student movement. Two interviewees were chosen from each organisation.

The questionnaires used through the study were open-ended. This was specifically for the purposes of gathering the additional information from the interviews. Most of the interviews had to be conducted in the individual respondent's residence. The interviews were conducted at times that were appropriate to the individual's schedules. This was to assist those with literary problems and to allow for flexibility. Each of the respondents was given a copy of the questionnaires which was filled accordingly. The open-ended questions were answered verbally and copious notes were kept by the researchers.

The main limitation of this study is that it comprised of a small sample of interviewees at the Westville and Howard College campuses. This may not be regarded as a wholly accurate representation of the UKZN student population, which is to be found in five campuses (Howard College, Westville, Medical School, Edgewood and Pietermaritzburg). The Howard College campus was chosen because of accessibility and reducing costs of conducting the research, considering that the study was self-sponsored. Another limitation of the study is that the use of questionnaires did not allow for probing and in-depth description of participants' opinions about student leadership and their services.

2 Background to Education Transformation in South Africa

The current mergers of educational institutions in South Africa are the brainchild of the first democratically elected government of our country. The proposed mergers 'sparked a racial rumpus, with Black Vice Chancellors saying the government is leading their historically under funded institutions to a final collapse' (Sunday Independent 2000). Drawing from the transitional theory it can be argued that the Vice Chancellor's of HBI's did not voluntarily surrender their power or did not willingly renounced control (Gingsburg, 1996). Apartheid robbed historically black institutions of solid financial backing and turned them into 'bush colleges'. A report compiled by the National Working Group suggested that 'most of historically black institutions and technikons be closed or merged while the majority of white institutions based on their financial and academic strength, be retained' (Sunday Independent 2002). This is an indisputable truth.

The merger process had similar bearings at Durban Westville and the University of Natal., which were the two institutions that merged to form UKZN. In such situations dominance in power relations is inevitable. Thus the then University of Natal in the process sought to prove their organizational capacity and seek popular support in the pre-merger phase. It is in this context that the Natal University power elite ignored its own legal advice and pressed ahead to appoint a new Vice Chancellor before its merger with the University of Durban Westville (UDW), thus alienating momentarily even the then Minister of Education. Senior academics at the university were dismayed that council persisted with the selection process and expressed concern at the damage this could cause to the merger (Mail & Guardian, 2002). UDW's last Vice Chancellor, Dr. Saths Cooper did not take this lightly. The 'cold war' that followed the appointment of Prof Malegapuru Makgoba and Dr Sath Cooper led to a near stalemate situation, which could be easily resolved through negotiations. This concurs with Gingsburg (1996) when he argued that in similar situations a resolution is devised from a series of pacts negotiated by elites representing the various protagonists. Academics, council and student leadership were integral components of the 'elite' who took part in the merger negotiations at various levels. The underlying reason behind this is, that negotiations cannot be conducted by the masses themselves, at the venues other than the bargaining table, but must be entered into on their behalf by a leadership (elite) that ostensibly speaks for them (Gingsburg, 1996: 4).

Series of talks between management and student leadership of both Universities took place dealing with a wide variety of student systems, functions and services (Student governance, Financial Aid, Administration and Student Support) which culminated in the signing of a 'Record of Understanding' at Umhlanga now known as the 'Umhlanga Resolutions' in September 2003. At student leadership level the merger can be seen as an endeavour to create a homogenous student society considering the crucial role of both external and internal factors. Freire (1996:4) argued that times of transition involve a rapid movement in search of new themes. This was evident at Umhlanga as student leadership grappled with issues that affected them and tried to put interim guidelines to help them through the merger process.

However, the student body at Westville campus was evidently divided. An endeavour to create a homogenous open student body at UDW was a huge challenge for its leadership in order to advance the transformation agenda towards the merger. There were forces, however, that sought at all costs to obstruct the advance towards the merger (Interview with SASCO leader in 2004).

The division of the student body became evident in the process and the transition process faced a number of serious challenges. As Freire has commented aptly, the deepening of the clash between the old or the other, and the emotional climate of the time encouraged the tendency towards radicalism Radicalisation involves increased commitment to the chosen position. However, the person who has chosen the radical option should not deny another person's right to choose, or attempt to impose his /her choice (Freire 1996:10). The Socialist Student Movement felt the obligation to warn that the merger process would bring with it the commercialization of higher education (Interview with SSM). A similar position was adopted by the dominant trade union at UDW, the Combined Staff Association (COMSA) (COMSA 2003).

At the Westville campus, both elite and masses (student body) alike, were unprepared to evaluate the transition critically and so tossed by the force of contending contradictions, they began to fall into sectarian positions instead of opting for radical solutions. This was accompanied by management inertia, shoddy planning and internal fighting amongst senior managers. Sectarianism is emotional, uncritical anti-dialogical and thus anti-communicative. Sectarians disrespect the choices of others and try to impose their own choices. In our case imposed choices on the student body had serious negative repercussions for the struggles ahead. There was action without the vigilance of reflection; sloganeering at the level of myth and half lies disguised as the 'absolute truth'.

3 Demobilisation of Student Movement

Whilst the radicals do not consider themselves as the proprietors of history, and while they recognize that it is impossible to stop or anticipate history without penalty, they are no mere spectators of the historical process. Freire (1996) argued that in Education the Practice for freedom must be reflected

by radicals who must participate constructively in that process by discerning transformation in order to aid and accelerate it. However this was not the situation in the pre merged institution. The student leadership remained uncritical, and this reality stalled its preparations for the transformation process. Responsibility cannot be acquired intellectually but through experience. This led the radical potential of the student movement to be driven towards a reformist approach seeking accommodation with a moderate and indecisive management as Gingsburg (1996) has commented. A thoroughgoing participatory alternative became elusive.

As Mannheim (1968:23) has aptly commented:

In a society in which main changes are to be brought about through collective deliberation, and in which revaluations should be based upon intellectual insight and consent, a completely new system of education would be necessary, one of which would focus its main energies on the development of our intellectual powers and bring about the frame of mind which can bear the burden of scepticism and which does not panic when many of the thought habits are doomed to vanish.

Student leadership entered into the transition phase where the main changes [were] made by collective deliberations only as minors. Their situation demanded that they be armed with courage, education, and knowledge in order to discuss their issues in their own context, be able to warn others of the dangers of times that lies ahead and offer them the confidence and the strength to confront those dangers instead of surrendering their sense of self through submission to the decisions of others (Freire, 1973). It is important to note that Freire distinguishes, though with varying degrees of clarity, between the power of 'the elite' and the potential power or agency of 'the masses'. The elite are the creators of myths and the primary forces behind epochal shifts. The elite are responsible for massification and the importation of solutions to problems. The elite dominate, destroy, crush, and place fear in the minds of the people. In contrast the people or the masses are consistently dehumanized by such practices during epochal transitions and engender varying degrees of transitive consciousness delineated by Freire as naive transitivity, critical transitivity, and fanaticized consciousness.

He further argued that the emergence of critical transitive consciousness is a central component for generating a notion of collective agency among the masses to circumvent the top down power of the elite. Transitive consciousness emerges as the people begin to perceive and respond to the themes and myths which characterize their world. Naive transitivity is the initial stage of transitive consciousness and is marked by gross simplifications and generalizations of problems; frail arguments and lack of interest in critical investigation; polemics rather than dialogue; and magical, emotional explanations for problems (Freire 1973). This paper contents that student leadership was characterized by the above mentioned characteristics of naïve transitivity.

4 Transitional Theory and Transition Articulation

Transitions are social transformation processes in which society or a complex subsystem of society gradually changes in a fundamental way over a period of time. Transitions are the result of technological, economic, ecological, social-cultural and institutional developments at different scale levels that influence and reinforce each other (Rotmans et al, 2000)¹. Transition theory is based on three underlying concepts, multi-stage, multi-level and multi-change (Rotmans *et al*, 2001). Multi-stage at the conceptual level has four different transition phases that can be distinguished as follows:

(a) A *pre-development phase* of dynamic equilibrium where the status quo does not visibly change. In our case, the government proposed the reduction of Higher Education institutions from 36 to 21 in an effort to prevent the duplication of structures, systems and services inherited from the past. This process should involve all relevant stakeholders.

¹ Rotmans, J, R Kemp, MBA van Asselt, F Geels, G Verbong, G, KGP Molendijk, & P van Notten 2001. *Transitions and Transition Management: The Case for a Low Emission Energy Supply*. ICIS BV, Maastricht, Netherlands. [ONLINE] Available at:

<http://www.icis.unimaas.nl/projects/transitions/general.htm> (Accessed: 04 April 2005).

(b) A *take-off phase* where the process of change starts to get under way because the state of the system begins to shift. In our case this was epitomised by the discontentment of Black Vice Chancellors nationally. At UKZN this was characterised by pre-merger phase confrontations amongst the elites.

(c) An *acceleration phase* where visible structural changes take place through an accumulation of socio-cultural, economic, ecological and institutional changes, which all mutually influenced. In the acceleration phase, there are collective learning processes, diffusion and imbedding processes. In this sense the 1st of January 2004 was the cut off date as the old institutions as in UDW and UND ceased to exist and merged into UKZN officially as according to government requirements. According to the Higher Education Act, 1997 (Act No. 101 OF 1997) Standard institutional Statute applies to every public higher education that has not made an institutional Statute until such time as the council of such higher education institution makes its own institutional Statute under section 32 of Higher Education Act, 1997 (Act No. 101 of 1997), as amended. This was followed by an appointment of Professor M.W. Makgoba as Acting Vice Chancellor of the new institution. A new coat of arms was unveiled and a new institutional motto was also introduced: *'to become a premier university of African scholarship'*. Further a new mission as: *'a truly South African University that is academically excellent, innovative in research, critically engage with society and demographically representative, redressing the disadvantages, inequalities and the imbalances of the past'* was adopted.

(d) A *stabilisation phase* where the speed of social change is reduced and a new dynamic balance is reached from the experiences gained i.e. a series of pacts negotiated by elites representing the various protagonists academics, council and student leadership was part of the 'elite' who took part in the negotiations at various levels. On student systems (Financial Aid, Administration and Student Support) there was consensus on every issue. There were also series of talks with regard to student governance policies. The transition phases can be illustrated as follows:

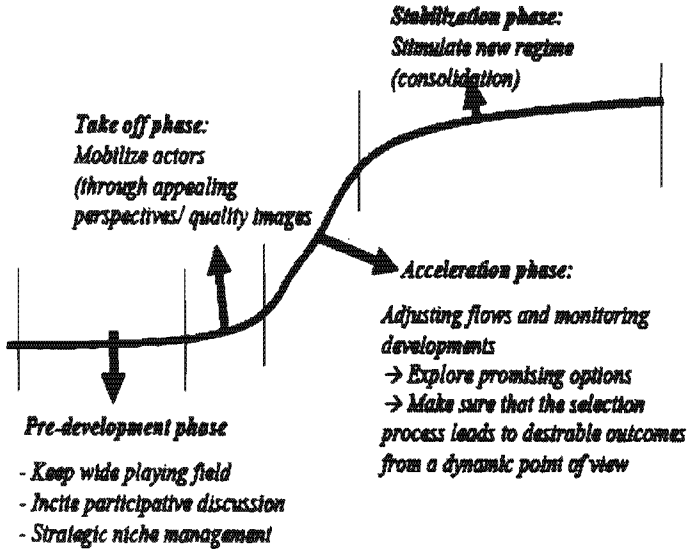


Figure 1: Showing different Phases of Transition. Source: adapted from Rotmans *et al* (2001).

Education for freedom implies constantly and permanently the exercise of consciousness turning in itself in order to discover itself in the relationships with the world, attempting to explain the reasons that can viably clarify the concrete situation people find themselves into. However, this is not enough – one needs to transform reality, through the unity between action and reflection. Knowledge exists because of consciousness, in the context of its reflective power.

In this continuous process, instead of transferring the existing knowledge it is necessary to invite consciousness to assume the active attitude without which it is impossible to create radical knowledge. What is witnessed at present is a serious demise in consciousness as evidently the student movement has aligned itself with party politics which shift power and dominance. This has led the student movement into conscious neutrality.

For example the ANC-aligned South African Student Congress and the ANC Youth League cannot bite the hand that feed them (the ANC led government). They have become neutral as the ANC government privatizes education. Freire (1973) argues that neutrality always conceals a choice. As education seeks to unveil its own political options, to define itself in relation to the productive forces, the political power structure, and the dominant ideology of the South African society, the student movement of the present day has retreated considerably.

Not only in the universities, but also in secondary and primary schools, education is always a political reality steeped deeply into power relations. Power is inseparable from education. Those who hold power define what education will be, its methods, programme and curriculum (Freire 1973).

5 Challenges Facing Student Movement at UKZN

The corporatisation of management (the adoption of business models of organization and administration of universities), especially when strategic decision making positions are still occupied by white conservative bureaucrats, makes one wonder whether the much talked about transformation will ever take place. This despite the much talked about 'massification' propagated by the then Minister of Education Kader Asmal when the mergers were forced upon Historically Black Universities (HBUs). UKZN can no longer persist on providing superannuation to a whole cadre of White retirees. This is not transformation but retrogression. Having an African Vice-Chancellor and few Africans in management positions does not mean that transformation has taken place (Mantzaris and Cebekhulu 2005, Inauguration paper pg 32-34).

STUDENTS AT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING ARE FACING SERIOUS THREATS WITH THE RECENTLY UNVEILED PLAN BY THE GOVERNMENT TO CURB WHAT THEY REFERRED TO AS 'UNSUSTAINABLE' GROWTH IN STUDENT NUMBERS (STEPHEN 2004). AHMED ESSOP, THE CHIEF DIRECTOR OF HIGHER EDUCATION PLANNING IN HIS PARLIAMENTARY STATEMENT LASHED OUT AT INSTITUTIONS WHICH ENROL STUDENTS IN

AREAS SUCH AS HUMANITIES RATHER THAN SCIENCE OR BUSINESS BECAUSE THE GOVERNMENT DOES NOT CONSIDER THEM AS A PRIORITY. SUCH A STATEMENT SHOULD HAVE SPARKED DEBATE AMONG STUDENT LEADERSHIP, BUT THE SILENCE IS DEAFENING. THE POSSIBILITY OF A ROBUST DEBATE ON THIS ISSUE WAS NULLIFIED BY THE FACT THAT THE DAYS OF STUDENT ACTIVISM HAVE DIED A SLOW AND PAINFUL DEATH AT A VERY CRITICAL JUNCTURE OF THE COUNTRY'S INTELLECTUAL AND KNOWLEDGE SEARCH.

5.1 Lack of Conscientisation

The 'Progressive Youth Alliance' (PYA) structures (alliances of the ANC Youth League, SASCO and 'independents') are allies of the ruling party and to a greater extent they are sponsored by it. The question arises then, who will reflect on their plight? The greatest mistake for the student movement was to fail to assert itself post 1994. They failed to re-conscientise themselves and their constituencies. Conscientisation does not occur automatically or overtime. It is the dialectical outcome of a critical educational effort based on favourable historical conditions, and it is related to a process in which the student movement leadership and constituency are not merely recipients but knowing subjects, striving to achieve a deepening awareness of both of the socio-cultural reality which shapes their lives, and their capacity to transform it.

Conscientisation seeks the awakening of critical consciousness as Freire asserts, and results in the identification and naming of social ills which constitute oppressive circumstances such as fee increase for first entrant students, limited access to higher education, as well as financial and academic exclusions. The fragmented consciousness suffered by student movement denies them access to each other in their collaborative search for a picture of their total situation. The present day student movement, even sister structures do not unite on common issues. Maintaining fragmentation of consciousness is always on the side of the power holder (management of transition). Conscientisation is essentially geared to the radical transformation of social reality.

Freire is correct when he asserts that objective social reality neither exists nor can be transformed by mere chance, because both are the results of

human action. Social reality is produced by student and conditions then; transforming their condition is an historical task which also must be performed by them. One of the main obstacles Freire discovered in the quest for the achievement of liberation is that oppressive reality absorbs those that are within it and thus stifles the emergence of critical consciousness. In this regard student activities are failing to articulate their position partly because they are looking for jobs in either the university or the government (BAZINGEL' BEPHEH' USAWOTI), they become pawns in the games perpetrated by the political and university elites. They fail to unmask the oppressor (especially neo-liberal policies in education) and thus continue working for their liberation through organized struggles and action.

The silence of the reflective voices of student activist is deafening. This on its own raises questions of the content of the existing educational curriculum as to whether it is responsive to the needs or ails of our society. Given the heroic past history of previous Black institutions steeped in courageous resistance, the questions on this silence abound. The silence that has been adopted in the post merged institution and post 1994 is broadly due to the failures of the student movement to engage in the discourse of oppression with the goal of exploring and deconstructing the dominant ideologies of subjection, betraying the scrutinizing role of a liberating education. Higher education institutions, especially universities, have a long history of struggle against apartheid and the generally accepted demand for transformation. These struggles have scored many victories over the years. However, their impact has been unequal, with more visible progress in universities – especially black institutions. .

The merger has managed to deal with signifiers (Name, Emblem, Process, Vision and Statute), but there are a number of hurdles and impediments in the process itself. There have been fee increments and increases in 2005, academic and financial exclusions, raising of the entry levels in each faculty. As Balibar declared several years ago: 'Dimly (the student movement) and steadily (students) are losing the love, respect, sacrifices of (their struggle) because of circumstance' (Balibar 2002). In fact the student movement is no longer taken serious by its own allies.

The cardinal premise is that the analysis of political and ideological structures must be grounded in their material conditions of existence and their historical premise (Morrison 2002). The merged institution was to be

the premier university of African scholarship serving as a facilitator in engineering the highest level of quality teaching, excellence in research and community service and outreach. In this context it aimed to create and innovate advancement in technological and human development in the African continent and world wide. Its mission is to be

a truly South African university that is academically excellent, innovative in research, critically engage with society and demographically representative, redressing the disadvantages, inequalities and imbalances of the past.

However, its management has already contradicted its own mission. UKZN does not consider the material conditions and realities of the majority of South Africans, yet it claims to be a truly South African University. As one of its documents states:

For the purpose of this report, student fee income in 2005 has been based on inflation linked increase of 3,7% in tuition and miscellaneous fee ... an important assumption underlying the 2005 fee budget is that a net reduction of 2000 in student numbers within the university as a whole.

This calls for the student movement to revisit its struggle which is fundamentally shaped by the fact that higher education occupies a special place in the struggle for ideological hegemony in the society in this case, production of bourgeoisie characterized by social and economic inequalities. Institutions of higher education are usually the base from which intellectual ideas and the shaping of public opinion are produced. To this end, universities are sites for production of new ideas; occupy a special place in the struggle for hegemony (Gramsci 1971 Vol 1 *Letters from Prison*).

Karl Marx writes in his selected works that the bourgeois want all the advantages of modern social without struggles and dangers necessarily resulting there from. They desire the existing state of the society minus its revolutionary and disintegrating elements. Such is the movement today, they wish for a bourgeoisie without a proletariat. The bourgeoisie naturally conceives the world in which it is supreme to be the best. This is not the case

in at UKZN. The reality is that not enough attention has been paid to the transformation of the institution, particularly on curriculum transformation. It is highly impossible to begin to think about shaping the type of an intellectual that will be produced by an institution of higher learning, without firstly, and foremost, dealing with or even changing the curriculum content that will give rise to them. The issue of transforming the curriculum at UKZN is particularly a tricky one, since such demands are always projected by academics as interference of academic autonomy and lowering of standards. Kaarim (2004) argues that the main aim of education is not to acquire knowledge alone, but action. As graduates, it is your responsibility to pursue without fear, the change that you regard as necessary and just. We need to apply their knowledge wisely and use it for the betterment of broader society.

6. Students' Responses on the Merger

The empirical parameters of the study were described above. The following responses were obtained during the interviews.

In relation to the question 'What do you think is the underlying problem that makes people think that the merger is "fragile"', the following responses were obtained.

Respondent A: 'The merger is a top down process imposed on us, and students did not have much of any other choice but to jump onto the band wagon. However, they (we) have ourselves to blame because of not supporting those that said that this process was happening too fast and this will be a take over. We labelled them reactionaries who are resistant to change. In my thinking the merger is fragile because, nothing was put in place as a shock absorber to ensure that this transition does not damage us a lot, but looks at what is happening'.

Respondent B: 'The main problem is that we do not have leaders to start with. We have power mongers who enjoy the privileges of been in power. When last did we have a student body meeting this year? We are told that things will be fine and students will register whilst we still get excluded. Yes

the merger is fragile this year because even Indians are excluded and possibly the students of UKZN will come as one to fight these exclusions’.

Respondent C: ‘The last time I checked SRC’s they were student representative councils, but now they have become managers themselves. As a student leader myself I have never heard of a vacation executive that never even met for a meeting. They only are acting now because there are exclusions which make you think of what has become of the SRC’s. They account only to their girlfriends and management. They do not inform us about the developments, the SGO’s who by their very nature of their work should account to the SRC’s account to management. It’s all a joke. I fear that students at Westville campus might do something but this is only going to last for a day or two and everything is going to go back to normal. Having said that, I do not rule out any possibilities that in a long run especially Westville students can engage into serious action. My other concern is that all these other campuses are quiet but with the merger I think they might also join the Westville campus should they co-ordinate their action well. The merger is not necessarily fragile but could be if students are not taken seriously’.

Respondent D: ‘The problem is not ‘our merger’ but the whole neo-liberal system. These problems are not only in our campus but in the whole country. This is evident because of this years strikes across campuses and strongly so at DIT our neighbours. Our Vice Chancellors only deliver what has been put down on the national agenda that is the politics of GEAR and restructuring. What happens in the labour movement will happen in the student movement. GEAR is the problem and so are these mergers. They exclude students and in the country there has been increasing levels of unemployment within the youth constituency which makes matters worse’.

Respondent E: ‘I really do not see much of a problem with the merger. The only thing is that there are no more vibrant student politics. There is nothing to fear everything shall be put in place and merger shall continue as planned by the managers and the Department of Education. This is because there are no strong links between student leadership nationally which was evident at the document of the Standard Institutional Statute of 2002 (Higher Education

Act, 1997 (Act No. 101 of 1997) which informed these mergers. It is a quiet document for a quiet student population. Things have changed’.

Respondent F: ‘I just do not know much, I only got into these politics last year November and I am still trying to grapple with these issues. I know that there has been a tremendous progress made by our predecessors with regard to the merger and we only can work to defend their hard work. Furthermore, it is important to equalize resources in both campuses and to merge the Health Science faculty. To me it makes no sense to have the medical school functioning independently from the other health sciences. I wonder what informs that but I have a feeling that academics are very much intransigent to this merger whilst we are taught of the multi-disciplinary holistic approach to health care and yet we are taught at distant campuses. It would be ideal also to have a bridge for those who are doing B.Med to have an automatic entrance to medical school should they wish to do so. The inconsistency of failing to harmonize the curriculum frustrates students who are of the view that we are one institution. Possibly on that note the merger is fragile because it really frustrates students who really had high hopes to achieve their dreams but refused entry to medical school even at post graduate level; this shows that the issue of standards is still a problem where the former University of Natal looks down upon graduates from the former UDW. Until this problem is resolved, we have not merged’.

Respondent G: ‘There was failure in student leadership, particularly the SRC’s as they did not coalesce the merger process with the transformation agenda so as to impact on the curricula review and to bring on board the entire student body. There is no revolution that starts from top. It is exactly like Mugabe’s land grab project and expecting a buy in from the people. This whole process is fragile and it needs examination from time to time. It is an elite transition to benefit a few in the long run. We cannot only blame the students but also the technocrats of these mergers, the principals who bowed down to the government pressure and accepted this. For them, their jobs were guaranteed, their children had free Higher Education but for us there are only financial and academic exclusions. There has been a lack of understanding about the policies of these mergers from the onset. Even when we expressed discontent and disillusionment with our participation in the

policy and institutional governance issues, we were not taken seriously. What happened to the Umhlanga Resolutions? Did any member of management bother to read them? If they did I assure you we would not be having such problems. This to me says this process is very fragile’.

Respondent H: ‘This has just been a take over not a merger. Everything is set according to former Natal University standards from FAB to academic matters. There has never been a consideration of what was good at the former Westville campus. Everything has changed and we are saying nothing. I am only concerned about those that used to benefit from HBI’s for instance there were no high matric points entry requirement. Secondly, the numbers of those that used to get into the Upward Bound program and other foundation programs has since decreased. I am a mentor and a senior student and a former student leader. In former Westville, the intake of Humanities Foundation Program would be +- 2000 students but this year (2005) the intake is less than 600 students across five campuses of UKZN. What does that say to you? This merger is bad for Africans because it does not benefit us at all’.

Respondent I: ‘The merger is good, it has not affected us that much nonetheless it needs to be well managed to prevent the problems that we had at the beginning of the year. The lack of funding is a national question NSFAS and the Minister should come up with solutions before this becomes a national insurrection. As a member of SASCO, I still maintain that ‘THERE SHOULD BE FREE EDUCATION FOR ALL’, the ruling party knows that and I still stand by that. Yes, this also has some serious bearing onto us because we seem to be quite about this yet our comrades fought so hard for this. Whether we like it or not there is an emergence of the new social movements who seem to be singing this song and who are against the commodification of education which comes along with these mergers. Our merger has been so far smooth but it is not immune to national questions. The student leadership has tried to bring us together for a common good and it is up to us to make it work. It has to work but this does not mean that we won’t have problems. I do not see the merger being fragile but a policy that informs it is not student friendly, which is the problem’.

Respondent J: ‘Universities are State institutions and they should be seen contributing towards nation building, consolidating democracy and promoting student welfare. These mergers are the result of serious consideration by government and academics who studied their implications. Students are just recipients of the product of what have been long decided by the powers that be. Nonetheless they have the power to agree to or not to agree with these decisions. The question is on what basis? Since 1994 the student movement has no ideological inclination. This does not at all assume that students are homogenous and in unison in their issues. This is the problem that they had no theoretical critic of this transition which in their mind believed that all shall be well. These mergers present the current student leadership with an enormous challenge. It is an ideological challenge that forces us to further define ourselves as student leadership and a student movement. So far student leaders are just playing according to the rules of the masters and hence there is such a pleasant relationship with their principals. These mergers and this one in particular should be careful of the managerialism as a dominant style of leadership. This reinforces the top down leadership approach. This is in relation to the role of SGO’s who seem to manage or contain the student leadership because of their penetration to influential university officials and camouflage with comradeship’.

In relation to the question ‘In your view, what do you think were the challenges that are facing student leadership post 1994?’ the following responses were recorded:

Respondent A: Our organization stands for the principles of God and Good governance. We are confident that God is going to lead us onto understanding the challenges that are facing students today as they face society. We got our democracy in 1994 and we should make it work on campus, society and the world.

Respondent B: Since 1991 SASCO has been in the forefront of the struggle for advancement of student interests in the Higher Education sector. Over the years we have participated in shaping the landscape of the South African Higher education system. SASCO is the only organization that submitted a comprehensive policy input to the National Commission on Higher

Education (NCHE) policy process that eventually led to the adoption of Higher Education and Further Education and Training Act. We were involved in policy debates around the report on the size and shape of the Higher Education sector led by the Council on Higher education (CHE). We also compiled responses to these report, thus ensuring that our slogan: 'from ivory towers to people's institutions' remains a total summation of our strategic objective in transforming the higher education system. We are up to today's challenges.

Respondent C: We were formed and launched around 2001 but our house has never been in order. A year ago, Sadesmo, called on the party (IFP) to have a clear succession policy but these have felt on deaf year in our mother body. Honestly, until we get support from our mother body and until we get our house in order, it is only then that I think we will be ready to face student's challenges of the post 1994 era.

Respondent D: We are an issue based organization that is why we have an alliance with SASCO here on campus. Nationally we believe that SASCO is still an organization that has the potential of representing students on fundamental educational issues.

Respondent E: We are strategically located within the Progressive Youth Alliance on campuses and in government as led by the ANC. We are committed on the following issues: Education and Training Expand and improve the quality of basic education.

Respondent F: things have changed since 1994. We need to clearly organise ourselves because of the following reasons:

The difficulty of sustaining struggles based on very localised issues,

The lack of political, ideological, and organizational flexibility in being able to provide direction to a range of student's initiative.

And the limited understanding of the functioning of the neo-liberal state.

Therefore, the challenge is far bigger than we think, and the decline of student activism in the past decade leaves much to be desired. The erosion of a collective student identity is a serious crisis whilst we have a space to can congregate and organize ourselves.

Reproduced by Sahinif Gateway under license granted by the Publisher (dated 2019)

The question 'What remedies do you suggest to be put in place to correct this?' elicited the following responses:

Respondent A: Let God's people lead.

Respondent B: We are open to change, dialogue and robust debates as an organization. If there is a need for new remedies let the people talk and issues shall be debated.

Respondent C: Let the bread and butter issues come first and be addressed (meaning issues that affect us locally) and all the rest shall follow. Issues such as affordable accommodation, disability issues, gender and the basic student services are of great importance and need to be debated urgently...

Respondent D: Put students first and maybe party politics later. This has got a bearing in all students' formations not only our own organization.

Respondent E: We are clearly guided by our party's mandate as the (ANC) Youth League, and further we are delivering within our alliance (the PYA) on all student, and campus based issues.

Respondent F: An ideology that will help us understand the functioning of a neo-liberal state and that which is going to help us challenge the ruling classes.

The answers to the question 'Why do you think SASCO is not broadly representing students and in your thing do you suggest a formation that will be representative of all?' were as follows:

Respondent A: They have turned Student Governance into a rapist haven, brothel and spaza shop. Whatever you think of as rubbish belongs to SASCO.

Respondent B: SASCO does represent students at all level, both locally and nationally. Nonetheless, it is true that we need to audit ourselves as an organization and check if we are still relevant within the current political

climate. That can only be done in our Annual General Congress and then changes shall be seen unfolding.

Respondent C: SASCO is the only relevant organization on student matters. As I said it is our ally and we maintain that it articulates student issues nationally.

Respondent D: Avoid party politics and put students first. You cannot bite the hand that feeds you. If SASCO should lead, it should move away from the politics of the ANC and SACP.

Respondent E: We will continue to lead as the PYA and represent students.

Respondent F: A new revolutionary student organization.

In relation to the question 'In your view, what kind of relations exist between the student leadership and management?' the responses were as follows:

Respondent A: It is a good relationship because we get a lot of assistance from management.

Respondent B: It is quite a working relationship because sometimes we agree to differ but we do get the job done. The merger came with its problems but we managed under difficult circumstances to come to terms with it. We still do have problems with members of the management but also we need to recognize them as managers and let them manage.

Respondent C: I still have problems with management; I think they dominate our leadership. We are still faced with the same problems that we face every year. They (management) do not keep their word. If you remember during negotiations, they said that the merger will not affect pipeline students, but look at what is happening now. Students are moved from pillar to post and are met by hostile professors who do not consider our backgrounds. If I should say this: The Management of UKZN needs to CHANGE and TRANSFORM. Furthermore, they are corrupting the student leaders and make them sell out on their mandate.

Respondent D: Management has always been management. As for us from Westville campus, we feel like our leadership that we have been betrayed by management of UKZN. In all that we agreed upon, the management has since somersaulted. We cannot trust them but we should make them understand that we shall retaliate if needs be to their unfriendly policies.

Respondent E: Honestly, we have been betrayed by this management. Our organization from Westville feel that indeed this has been a take over of our vibrant campus and been swallowed up into a white super culture of the former Natal. This management just copied and pasted all the rules and regulations from the former Natal and implemented them here. The relationship with our deployed comrades in the SRC and management is to seek the best for the student but it still remains to be seen, what will happen.

Respondent F: How can you bite the hand that feeds you?

7 Leaders cannot Lead when they are Ill Informed

It needs to be said that the responses in all questions leave us with no alternative, but to conclude that despite the majority disillusionment evident in these interviews, the lack of understanding of concrete realities facing the merger process and its outcomes is indeed frightening. There is an undoubted lack of a holistic understanding of the dynamics of the merger itself. It is indeed instrumental that not one respondent pinpointed the complete lack of proper planning in the institution that is the root and foundation of the continuous erosion of student rights at the institution. The historical knowledge of at least some rudimentary dynamics of the merger process as well as their resultant repercussions is completely absent. The lack of comprehension of the functions of key university organs that make the important decisions on the curriculum and student access, exclusions and similar aspects is more than evident.

It is thus vital that the present student leadership have no comprehension, with one exception, of the dialectical power relations between the state, economic policy and higher education. Thus they continue playing the stupid games of the Sleeping Beauty as Fanon (2001:81) asserted. The shackles of disillusionment, apathy and de-politicisation do not allow them to become agents of change through alliances with their

communities and the progressive workers forces. These realities need to be de-constructed and simplified in a language and syntax that the students and communities understand and sympathise with.

'Proper behaviour' within 'cooperative governance' in the UKZN merger process is indeed a stupid game of Sleeping Beauty given the heroic history of the student movement and its significant impact on higher education institutions and landscape. However, the current circumstances of 'corporatised' student leaders and movement in the education system, calls for a thorough examination of concrete issues of relativism as it relates to the questioning of current state of affairs in student leadership.

It was Mannheim who many years ago asserted that:

Human beings have the potential for self-examination and contextual awareness. And only when these are understood can one have a comprehension of the formal object under study (Mannheim 1968:46f).

The question remains whether student leaders can lead when they are inadequately informed. The old maxim: 'Knowledge is power' pinpoints to the transformation of student leaders into public intellectual's re- attached to their delicate and challenging social environment.

Lessons that could be learnt in the process of transformation are always rooted in questions that arise as to the nature and the character of a holistic process. To be a protagonist one needs to critically engage relentlessly in the battle of ideas and the challenges of both History and the Present. Arrogant and ignorant leadership blinds people into comfort zones of party allegiances which on its own defeat the purpose of academic, political and intellectual independence. Throughout the world student movements have turned into tokens of the ruling party, rubberstamping every decision without interrogation or critique.

The challenges of merger and transformation provide student leadership with an opportunity for exploration in the terrain of ideas in search of the objective truth. The terrain of ideas is the one of the points of struggle for social transformation and, it is incumbent upon student leadership to confront dominant knowledge regimes, tracing their linkages and structures of domination.

8. Conclusion: The Future Beckons

The major challenges for the student leadership at UKZ are no different from those nationally or internationally. They are tangible, obvious, but crucial. These are:

Equal Opportunity and Equal Access to Higher Education

The struggle against poverty, education for all, and the awareness of needs and the increase in demand for equal opportunity and access to higher education in South Africa is the crucial demand of youth and its leadership.

Knowledge Attained should be Transferred to Society

The struggle for knowledge should not be seen as an adventure, but a process demanding selfishness and sacrifice. These will give the knowledge attained a unique value to both student leaders and society at large.

There should be Independent Critical Thinking from Student Leadership

Student leadership should guard and be vigilant not to fall into the neo liberal adaptation to all forms of domination, becoming acquiescent, if involuntary, participants in their own subjugation. They must critically engage the merger and its consequences for the entire student population. Theirs is to really show how education, supposedly the par the foundation of social mobility has instead reproduced social inequality.

It has been said that

Central to this process is the way in which inequalities of wealth and incomes appear in society to be not so much the products of economic injustice, as the natural consequence disparities of ability, judgments or lifestyle.

They should help in deconstructing the theories of the existing realities that confront them and act.

Student Leadership must Become the ‘Voice of the Voiceless’

Student leadership’s mission should be to speak for those who have no voice and whose voice has been silenced by the draconian university policy e.g.

the student who was nearly expelled at Howard College. The leadership's ultimate goal should be to form the mind and the character of new generations which is essential in the present conjuncture of youth and student de-politicisation. These are challenges that need to be faced head on and without procrastination.

References and Bibliography

- Arlene, F & J Kosecoff 1998. *How to Conduct Surveys: A Step-by-Step Guide*. Thousand Oaks. C.A: Sage Publications.
- Babbie, E & J Mouton 2001. *The Practice of Social Research*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Badat, S 1999. *Black Student Politics - from SASO to SANSCO, 1968-1990*. Pretoria: Human Science Research Council.
- Balibal, E 2002. *A Nation Form*. New York. N.Y: Continuum Publishing Company.
- Balibal, E 2002. *A Nation Form*. In Essed P, & D Goldberg (eds): *Race Critical Theories*. Massachusetts, USA: Blackwell Publishers INC.
- Biko, S 1978. *I Write What I Like*. Stubbs, A (ed). London: Heinemann Education.
- Biko, S [article available on line] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steve_Biko
- Bond, P 2000. *Beyond Neo liberalism? S.A & Global Economic Crisis 2000. Elite Transition from Apartheid To Neoliberalism in S.A.* Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.
- Bougues, A 2003. *Black Heretics Black Prophet: Radical Political Intellectuals*. London: Routledge.
- Brink, H 1991. *Quantitative Vs Qualitative Research*. *Nursing RSA* 6:14-16.
- Cebekhulu, E & EA Mantzaris 2005. *Stop Beating About the Bush: UKZN merger a tragic mishap (Forthcoming) Alternation*.
- Combined Staff Association (COMSA) 2003. *Our Position on the Merger*. Position Paper presented by its President, Main Hall, UDW, April 9
- Duboise WEB 2001. *The Education of Black People*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- de Vaus, D 2002. *Surveys in Social Research*. London: Routledge
- deVos, A 1996. *Introduction To Research Process, Social Work Research: A Premier for the South African Researcher*. Hildae: Nj Erlbaun.

- Engels, F. 1969. *Karl Marx & Frederick Engels: Their Thinking in Philosophy, Political Economy, History, Social Change*. New York: International Publishers,
- Fanon, F *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Farrington, C Johannesburg: Penguin Classics Books.
- Freire, P *Education as the Practice of Freedom*. Translated and edited by Ramos, M New York. N.Y: Continuum Publishing Company.
- Freire, P 2000. *Pedagogy of Hope*. New York. N.Y: Continuum Publishing Company.
- Ginsburg, D 1996. The Democratisation of South Africa.: Transition Theory Tested. *Transformation Journal* 29: 74-101.
- Ginsburg, D, & E Webster 1995. *Taking Democracy Seriously* Durban: Creda Press.
- Guevara, .C. The Revolution of Love: [article available on line] <http://www.sonic.net/~doretk/Issues/01-09%20FALL/cheguavera.html%20>
- Gramsci A 1971. Volume I: *Letters from Prison*. (ed) Rosengarten, F. Translated Rosenthal, R. New York: Colombia University Press.
- Gramsci, A *Gramsci and Informal Education* [article available on line] <http://www.infed.org/thinkers/et-gram.htm>
- Hayes, N 2000. *Doing Psychological Research*. Buckingham Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Human Rights Activist has Passed On [article available on line] http://www.gaycentre.org.za/news2.asp?Section_ID=1
- Kaufman, C. *Ideas For Action: Relevant Theory for Radical Change*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.
- Lodge, T 1983. *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*. Johannesburg: Raven Press.
- Machiavelli, N 1999. *The Prince*. Translated by Bull, G. Rosebank: Penguin Books.
- Mannheim, Karl [1936]1968. *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*. Translated by Louis Wirth and Edward Shils. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World.
- Mantzaris, EA & E Cebekhulu 2005. *Universities Sites of Knowledge Research and Contestation*. Public Affairs, UKZN.
- Mayo, P 1999. *Gramsci, Freire & Adult Education: Possibilities for Transformative Action*. London: Zed Books.

- Mishra, R 1999. *Globalization And The Welfare State*. Chaltonham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing limited.
- Molefe, P, 1995. *The Role of the Student in the Transformation Process of the Northwest Province*. Speech in the ANC Daily News Briefing, 25 July 1995. [ONLINE: Available at <http://www.anc.org.za/anc/newsbrief/1995/news0725> Accessed, 21 March 2005].
- Morrison, T 2002. Black Matter. In Essed P, & D Goldberg (eds): *Race Critical Theories*. Massachusetts, USA: Blackwell Publishers INC.
- Nkomo, MO 1984. *Student Culture and Activism in Black South African Universities*. London: Greenwood Press.
- Owomoyela, O 2001. *The African Difference*. Johannesburg: Witswaterand University Press.
- Popper, K 1996. *In Search of a Better World*. New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc.
- Przeworski, A 1991. *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ritter A, et al 1998. *Rousseau's Political Writings: Discourse on Inequality, Discourse on Political Economy, on Social Contract*. New York: Norton & Company.
- Rodney, Walter 1982. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press.
- Rotmans, J, R Kemp, MBA van Asselt, F Geels, G Verbong, G, KGP Molendijk, & P van Notten 2001. *Transitions and Transition Management: The Case for a Low Emission Energy Supply*. ICIS BV, Maastricht, Netherlands. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.icis.unimaas.nl/projects/transitions/general.htm> (Accessed: 04 April 2005).
- Singer, P 1993. *Practical Ethics*. Second edition. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Schonlau, M, R Fricker & M Elliot 2001. *Conducting Research Surveys via e-mail and the web*. Rands Publications data Base. <http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/> (accessed: 07/08/2005)
- South African Constitution Chapter 2 Section 27.

- Stubbs A 1978. *Martyr of Hope. Forward to I Write What I Like* by Steve Biko. London: Heinemann Education.
- Taylor, C *Ethics of Authenticity*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press.
- Trochim, M 2002. *Research Methods Knowledge Base*. Cornell University: <http://www.trochim.human.cornell.edu/kb> (accessed 13/08/2005).
- Ulin, P, E Robinson, E Tolley & E McNeil 2002. *Qualitative Methods: A Field Guide for Applied Research in Sexual and Reproductive Health*. Research Triangle Park: Family Health International
- Wolfreys, J 2002. *Pierre Bourdieu: Voice of Resistance*. Spring: 98-101.

Other Sources

- Umhlanga Resolutions in September 2003.
SASCO's Congress Discussion papers 2003

Newspapers

- Karim Abdool*, UKZN INdaba Vol 11 November 2001.
Mail & Guardian 05.04.02.
Star Newspaper, Drastic Changes 12/2/2002.
Sunday Independent, 17/02/2002 Black Vice Chancellor Up in Arms at Merger Plan.

School of Sociology and Social Studies
University of KwaZulu-Natal
cebekhulue@ukzn.ac.za
mantzarise@ukzn.ac.za