Editorial: Humanities, Knowledge Production and Transformation

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This edition of *Alternation* entitled: Humanities, Knowledge Production and Transformation essentially examines and engages with, (to borrow from the title of an article by Bert Olivier 2009), the critical and emancipatory role of the Humanities in the age of empire.

His statement that 'it is no exaggeration that the humanities are under threat today' (p 78) is shared by many. The call for papers and motivation for the special edition culminating in this publication is underpinned by the position that the humanities should not take on an identity of 'victim'.

The global agendas which marginalise the transformatory and critical role of the humanities have to be challenged by the production and dissemination of knowledge. New knowledge (what is being produced) is crucial for the 'survival' of the humanities and equally important is (who) is producing the knowledge. A number of articles in this volume are authored by Black academics and this is an additional and important contribution to the transformation and production of knowledge and the humanities.

The articles in this volume vary in terms of topics and the theoretical underpinnings of the articles are diverse. However, the common thread is the re-imagining of the Humanities, the promise of what could be, for the common good of humanity.

As we write this editorial, we come to the conclusion that the articles in this volume engage with transformation of the humanities and thus also address challenges facing the African continent. There is thus a tacit link between humanities, higher education and the development of Africa.

Opening this journal volume, Nhlanhla Mkhize and Nobuhle Ndimande-Hlongwa engage 'African Languages, Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), and the Transformation of the Humanities and Social Sciences in Higher Education'. They argue that historically, higher education

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in South Africa and Africa in general has relied on foreign languages; this has become a basis for social discrimination and inequality. They then review the historical development and current status of African languages and indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) in higher education. They argue that, in recognition of the plural and multi-vocal nature of the knowledge domain, the project to develop IKS cannot be meaningfully pursued without taking cognisance of local languages, as it is in these languages that the cognitive, philosophical, and other frameworks of the local people are embedded. African languages and IKS are indispensable to the transformation of the higher education landscape. Using anti-colonial theory and hermeneutics as theoretical frameworks, they discuss the progress that has been made in terms of implementing language policies in South African higher education institutions. They conclude with the recommendation to firmly embed African languages and IKS in higher education systems.

In their contribution, Gregory Kamwendo and Cheryl Potgieter engage a PhD programme for selected SADC countries currently being developed by the College of Humanities, at UKZN. The programme is targeted at four Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries: Botswana, Malawi, Swaziland and Zimbabwe, with specific reference to disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences. An analysis of this capacity building initiative is situated within the realm of knowledge production and knowledge-based economies/ societies. Their article offers a motivation for the PhD programme. It also provides brief descriptions of the higher education situation in each of the four target countries. The PhD programme runs on the basis of the cohort model of supervision, and this model is outlined in the article. The authors also narrate some advantages, opportunities and challenges that are linked to the PhD programme. This capacity building programme is a contribution to the strengthening of the skills of African knowledge producers. It is also contributing to the reduction in dependence on the West as a training ground for African knowledge producers.

In her 'When Black Consciousness Walks Arm-in-arm with Critical Race Theory to Meet Racism and White Consciousness in the Humanities', Rozena Maart situates *the Black woman subject* as producer of knowledge by locating her within the very site – the university where knowledge production takes place. Raised and educated on the philosophy of Black Consciousness, which is key to how she enacts her knowledge, constructs it, and as a

consequence interrogates the site upon and within which she is expected to produce it, she takes the reader on a tour-de-Azania-a-la-Black Consciousness excursion by constructing the absence of the knowledge of White consciousness at the backdrop of the university's policy on transformation guided by its Transformation Charter. In doing so she situates the White woman and the White man as beneficiaries of apartheid, which draws upon racism as its key tenet, and how through the body, the flesh, agency, acts of racism are perpetuated, reinforced, and reproduced within the university much like outside of it, thus maintaining the very system of apartheid most White academics claim to be against. Invoking Tunisian scholar Albert Memmi's text, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, she draws analogies between the agent of racism and the agent of colonization and in the process revealing the salient features of 'the colonizer who accepts' begging the question, where is 'the colonizer who refuses'?

Lesibana Rafapa and Kgomotso Masemola focus their research on representations of the national and trans-national present in Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to our Hillbrow*. They argue that, as creative agents of knowledge production in the domain of humanities knowledge, South African writers such as Phaswane Mpe have the historical burden of participating in the transformation of knowledge in ways that revolutionize the role of artistic performance with a view to prompting social transformation. Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to our Hillbrow* actively generates emergent grammars that underpin a transformational thrust through a distinctive transnational bent, where xenophobia and rural myopia are countered through a deliberative narrative of doubt cast on a putative insular South African-ness pitted against master narratives of national unity, on the one hand, and disruptive vectors such as HIV/AIDS and witchcraft, on the other. As a significant discourse that constitutes humanities knowledge, a novel such as Mpe's contributes to transformation of knowledge in its departure from, and disavowal of, a totalizing master narrative of nationalism, putting in place a macabre post-national struggle of dystopia. It specifically tests the limits of knowledge production and consumption around the topical issues of HIV/AIDS and immigration. It proceeds to show how Phaswane Mpe's novel has successfully debunked myths of a privileged autochthonous habitus. The novel eschews characterising unstable homologies of the rural and urban divide and, in like manner, the South African and 'foreigner' bar, as a starting point for meaningful knowledge transformation about immigration and the HIV/

AIDS stigma through transnationalism and transculturation of language by way of an idiom of intertextuality represented by a transnational bent.

In his 'Plastic Knowledges: Transformations and Stagnations in the Humanities' André Keet focuses his research on the crisis in the humanities and social sciences. Employing Bourdieu's notion of *habitus,* he first argues that the challenges of the humanities and social sciences are internally constituted around their scholarship and the social practices of the agents and authorities of the disciplines. This is because these disciplines already produce the principles of their own production and *stagnations*, so determined historically. He proceeds to argue, via the interpretive scheme of Malabou's excavation of the concept of *plasticity,* which suggests that *transformations* are inscribed in the humanities and social sciences because their originary positions are *plastic;* their knowledges are plastic. Using the notion of *plastic knowledges*, and in speculative argumentative form, he formulates various interplays between *habitus* and *plasticity* to provide an explanatory frame for *transformations* and *stagnations* within the humanities and the social sciences.

Bert Olivier focuses his article on the 'network society', social transformation and the 'ecological rift'. He points to Manuel Castells' incisive analysis of space and time in the so-called 'network society' and argues that this has brought to light a stark contrast between those modes of space and time that are dominant today – what he calls the 'space of flows' and 'timeless time' – and older, traditional modes, namely 'the space of places' and 'experiential (or sequential) time, as well as a different, planetary time, called 'glacial time'. In his article, he explores briefly the transition to the newly dominant temporal and spatial modes, as well as their relation to what John Bellamy Foster has dubbed 'the ecological rift' – the rapidly widening gulf between nature and human society. In the course of the argument, he points to the role of humanities knowledge-production, and of knowledge production in general, in relation to social transformation, which for him seems to imply two kinds of social transformation. The first is the social transformation potentially and to a certain extent actually brought about by the kind of knowledge generated by the humanities (and one might add the social sciences), despite the tendency among practitioners of the humanities themselves, not to take them seriously. The second is the social transformation that occurs as a result of knowledge production generally, and more especially of a techno-scientific kind, which has, since the 1980s, laid

the material foundation for the transformation of society through electronically mediated communication systems. Evidence points to the fact that the latter kind of transformation, being situated at the 'cutting edge' of technological, economic, political and military power in the network society (which is itself the result of this transformation), is incomparably more effective in its transmutation of the very conditions of possibility of human society (space and time) than the transformation that could potentially emanate from humanities knowledge-practices. However, although the latter are far less powerful in their immediately perceptible social effects, there is nevertheless no reason to throw in the towel, as it were, because events unfolding at the level of 'glacial time', and responsible for the accelerating manifestation of the 'ecological rift', are likely to generate or cultivate growing receptivity to humanities-knowledge on the part of social actors. The article also addresses these closely related issues, with a view to affirming the enduring value of the knowledge generated by and archived in the humanities.

Focusing on the revolution in social media, Graham Stewart titled his contribution, 'Here Comes Everybody: Humanities Computing Meets the Era of Social Media'. The article sets out to re-evaluate some of the themes raised in the *Alternation* issue on humanities computing that he guest edited in 2002, and to trace their subsequent evolution. To what degree can the meeting of literature and technology, however tentative, influence social transformation? He reflects on the themes of cyberspace and 'collective intelligence', ICTs and creative writing; virtual classrooms as open forums for discussion and dialogue; digital libraries to support research in the humanities; the Internet as a platform for promoting development, the advent of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and their implications for education in developing countries; making the information society accessible to all. The effects of the mobile Internet are wide-ranging and this article explores the extent to which knowledge production in the humanities may be able to harness the potential of the new digital ecosystem to effect social transformation.

Johannes A. Smit and Denzil Chetty focus their article on how the Humanities could be re-imaged in terms of interdisciplinarity and a proposed collaborative 'digital Humanities' in Africa. They point out that where student numbers and financial viability often trump the intellectualization of disciplines, the humanities more often than not find itself victim to higher

education 'cut backs'. In addition, major shifts in society, brought about by the recent technology and globalization driven communications revolution, pose serious questions about the continued viability of sole reliance on 'traditional' communication approaches that have preoccupied humanities scholars over the years. Despite these anomalies, there are major attempts within Africa to strengthen and advance the contribution of the humanities to national life and development of the continent, such as the Council for Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), and the Ministerial Special Project for Humanities and Social Sciences in South Africa (NIHSS). While both these initiatives advance arguments for the importance of the humanities in the twenty-first century, very little attempt is made to engage with robust debates on the technological potential for reimaging the humanities in Africa. It is against this background that they aim to articulate a reimaging of the twenty-first century humanities as a 'digital humanities', thereby advancing an groups of scholars and researchers that engage 'interdisciplinary' research collaboratively – 'collaborative' knowledge production in a 'digitalized' environment. This new categoriza-tion of an interdisciplinary and collaborative 'digital humanities' serves as a proposal that could advance knowledge production on the African continent. To this end, the article draws on definitions of the 'digital humanities'; an analysis of the current modalities of the digital humanities; an analysis of emerging trends in institutionalizing the digital humanities; and finally reimages the humanities in Africa with a focus on 'interdisciplinarity'' and 'collaboration' in knowledge production.

Gregory Kamwendo focuses on 'Language Policies of South African Accredited Journals in Humanities and Social Sciences' and asks whether they are speaking the language of transformation or not. Within the context of the post-apartheid era in South Africa, the higher education sector (the main site of knowledge production), is undergoing transformation. The language factor, one of the central pillars of the apartheid days, ranks high on the transformation agenda. This agenda can, for example, be detected in key official documents such as the Constitution and the language policy for higher education. The national language policy has been transformed from two official languages (English and Afrikaans) during the apartheid era to eleven official languages (English, Afrikaans, and nine previously marginalized African languages). In the higher education sector, there is now a strong call to convert African languages into languages of scholarship. It is

against this background that he attempts to establish the extent to which South African accredited journals (as publishing outlets for knowledge producers) are pursuing the transformation agenda. To this end, the article critically analyses language policies of selected South African accredited journals. The study is confined to journals that lie within humanities and social sciences disciplines. The study indicates that 70 % of the journals are monolingual (English), 20 % of the journals are bilingual and 10 % are multilingual. In addition, there is no accredited journal that is published exclusively in an African language.

Denzil Chetty, Tennyson Mgutshini and Sunette Pienaar point out that we have seen the production of knowledge in the academe undergo fundamental change over the past decade. This change has challenged traditional disciplines, practices and policies that form the foundation of established educational institutions. In their article the authors focus on elements such as the interrelatedness of abstract and applied research, the transdisciplinarity setting, the heterogeneous institutional setting, increased reflexivity (i.e. a more dialogical processes), and new ways of assessing the quality of knowledge. These have all challenged the type of knowledge produced and facilitated within higher education. Additionally, critical disparities regarding the role of the community and critical stakeholders, and the purpose for which knowledge is produced, have received noteworthy attention. Within this transitioning environment, contradictory impressions of 'social accountability' and 'relevance' continue to place the humanities under a critical lens. It is against this background of purported transitions and increasing theoretical aspirations that the authors problematize and probe the prospects for a contextually relevant epistemology of knowledge production. While cognisant of the many theories and approaches that seek dominance within this field, the authors explore a Gramscian approach of 'organic' knowledge production within the humanities. In so doing, they explore the relationship between researchers and the researched through the critical lens of Gramsci's theorizing. Thus, they critically engage with the broader social and economic issues of knowledge capital, and positioning the humanities more critically within the broader domain of knowledge production.

In his contribution 'Education for Freedom' Shane Moran revisits elements of the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, in order to begin to explore the connection between education and freedom. Freire is associated with a method of teaching basic

literacy and a philosophy of education. From a consideration of Freire's work in Latin America and Africa, the author sketches the debate around the reception and appropriation of his ideas. Then the article moves to locate his critical pedagogy within a tradition that sheds some light on his legacy.

Writing from a human geography perspective, Urmilla Bob and Edwin C. Perry argue for the transforming of human geography in the light of the embracing of Afrocentricity. Re-examining what constitutes valid knowledge and how knowledge is produced and used, the authors argue that these two factors are major focus areas in relation to the transformation agenda in higher education. Their article critically examines these aspects in relation to the discipline of geography with a special focus on human geography which is substantially influenced by the humanities and social sciences. The article specifically uses Afrocentricity as a methodological and conceptual framework to inform the transformation of human geography and provide insight into how to centralise African experiences and contexts in human geography teaching and research. The article has two main sections. The first section undertakes a critical reconsideration of human geography in the transformation context. The next section specifically examines the role of geographical research in advancing African scholarship. The article concludes that Afrocentricity provides a useful framework to critique accepted and widely used geographical categories and concepts; thereby rethinking what geographers do and the implications thereof, from a African-centred perspective.

Finally, Johannes A. Smit reviews the study of religion at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, and Social Transformation. Initiated in 2000, the study of religion at UKZN, Durban campus, takes place via three programmes, viz. the undergraduate programme in Religion, and the two postgraduate programmes in Religion and Social Transformation and Religion Education. His article reviews some of the seminal considerations for developing programmes as well as the dynamics and main considerations that impacted on their actual development over the last ten years. Pointing to the legacies of apartheid, underdevelopment and de-Africanisation, the article reviews the programmes with regard to their multi-religious approach, and their focus on religion and development and religion and society. Content-wise it explains the rationales for both religion-specific and inter-, comparative or multi-religion modules. The article closes by summarising the critical theoretical perspectives and frameworks in terms of which

postgraduate research took place in a major research project on Religion and Social Transformation in the areas of religion and civil society; religion and counselling; religion, globalisation and poverty; and the southern African Religion and Culture Encyclopaedic framework. The author concludes by pointing to the critical perspectives that informed the founding of the programme in Religion Education.

In concluding and finalising our work as guest editors we were reminded of the appropriateness for this edition of *Alternation* of the following sentiment of Chamberlain and Vale (2012) 'Like all quests for knowledge, understanding intellectual traditions can never be complete … this collection is only a moment in our understanding'.

References

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