

https://dspace.org/

The meaning of academic freedom in the former "open universities," in post-apartheid South Africa

Radebe, Yolanda

2009-10-08T10:27:08Z
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/7339

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

The Meaning of Academic Freedom in the Former "Open Universities," in Post-Apartheid South Africa

Yolanda Radebe

Student number: 0010452H

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Degree of Master of Arts, Political Studies,
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 2009

Supervisor: Peter Hudson

"They [white people] are, in effect, still trapped in a history which they do not understand; and until they understand it, they cannot be released from it." James Baldwin, 1964, *The Fire Next Time*, Penguin, London, pp. 16–17.

"We have set out on a quest for true humanity, and somewhere on the distant horizon we can see the glittering prize… In time we shall be in a position to bestow upon South Africa the greatest gift possible – a more human face." Steve Biko, 1978, *I Write What I Like*, Johannesburg, Ravan Press, p. 98.

Introduction

The meaning of "academic freedom" in post-apartheid South Africa has been a topic for debate among a number of scholars in the country. It remains, however, a highly contested and in many ways unclear concept. Whilst there is little disagreement over the accepted meaning of the term over the apartheid years – the arguments of T. B. Davie being centre-most here – the same cannot be said for the current status of the concept. It seems that much needs to be done to invest this concept with strong meaning today; at least this is what will be argued in this dissertation.

A number of prominent South African scholars have engaged in attempts to clarify and sharpen the contemporary meaning of academic freedom; first and foremost are a number of papers by the University of Cape Town political theorist, André du Toit, as well as important contributions from Roger Southall and Julian Cobbing, and Kristina Bentley, Adam Habib, and Sean Morrow.[1] Taken together these papers progressively advance understanding, but, it will be suggested, fail to take the debate far enough to come to terms with what must be seen as foundational to any attempt to ground the notion of academic freedom in the South African context: systemic white racism. In

[1] See, André du Toit (2000) "From autonomy to accountability: Academic freedom under threat in South Africa," *Social Dynamics* 26(1), 76–133; André du Toit (2001) "Revisiting academic freedom in post-apartheid South Africa: Current issues and challenges," commissioned paper for *Transformation in Higher Education* (CHET); Roger Southall and Julian Cobbing (2001) "From racial liberalism to corporate authoritarianism: The Shell affair and the assault on academic freedom in South Africa," *Social Dynamics* 27(2), 1–42; Roger Southall and Julian Cobbing (2006) "From racial liberalism to corporate authoritarianism." In Richard Pithouse (ed.) *Asinamali: University Struggles in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, Trenton, NJ, Africa World Press; and, Kristina Bentley, Adam Habib, and Seán Morrow (2006) Academic Freedom, Institutional Autonomy and the Corporatised University in Contemporary South Africa. Council on Higher Education research report no. 3.

essence, it is maintained that prevailing conceptions of academic freedom in South Africa are inadequate when set against past and present racial injustice.

To develop this argument, the aforementioned works are critically reviewed in turn, and then a number of case studies – cause célèbre at formerly labeled "open universities" – are used to show just what existing accounts elide and evade.[2] Centrally it will be argued that the cases – namely, the Makgoba affair at Wits, the Mamdani affair at UCT, and the Shell affair at Rhodes – can only be seen to make sense when placed within a reformulated notion of academic freedom that recognizes and speaks to white racism and racial injustice.[3] Such a reformulated notion of academic freedom will be shown to have significant impact on how the debate over the transformation of higher education should be conducted: it demands a more universalistic and humanistic (normative) level of engagement – especially, following the above quote from James Baldwin, from white people.

[2] The "open universities" is the term that was used to refer to those universities in South Africa who sought to maintain an open-door policy towards admitting students without regard to race and academic segregation: they included UCT, Wits, Rhodes, and Natal. Although primary focus is given to the first three of these universities in this dissertation it should be noted that Natal – now the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal – has also had a number of minor affairs of its own, such as the case of Caroline White and of Ashwin Desai. On the Desai case, see for instance, David MacFarlane (2006) "Rhodes grabs barred Desai," *Mail & Guardian*, 27 January, and "Makgoba's logic blasted," *Mail & Guardian*, 13 February; Jane Duncan (2006) "Our academic freedom must be safeguarded," *Sunday Independent*, and "The rise of the disciplinary university, *Harold Wolpe Lecture*, 17 May.

[3] After all, apartheid constituted a form of systemic racism that encompassed, in one way or another, all parts of South African society. For conceptual development of the notion of "systemic racism." see Joe R. Feagin (2006) *Systemic Racism: A Theory of Oppression*, New York, Routledge. It is important to realize that racism "is not discrimination alone, but also the power to control the lives of those excluded"; see, Mabogo P. More (2008) "Biko: Africana existentialist philosopher," in Andile Mngxitama, Amanda Alexander, and Nigel C. Gibson (eds) *Biko Lives! Contesting the Legacies of Steve Biko*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, p. 51.

The meaning of academic freedom

The T.B. Davie formulation of "academic freedom" was advanced in the 1950s, during the years of grand apartheid and ever-increasing state encroachment into the area of university education. This was a time when the National Party sought racial (and ethnic) "separate development" for the tertiary sector: indeed in 1956 Dr H. F. Verwoerd declared that "Where there is no segregation as is the position at certain universities, it must be established or enforced."[4] Specifically, the Extension of University Education Act 45 of 1959 created four new separate racially-segregated university colleges and imposed statutory racial constraints on the admission policies of the "open universities."[5] It was in this context that the "open universities" rallied together under the banner of "academic freedom" to resist such repressive state intervention.[6] And, accordingly, T. B. Davie proposed – in classic liberal terms – that the open universities must be vigilant to defend "our freedom from external interference in (a) who shall teach, (b) what we teach, (c) how we teach, and (d) whom we teach."[7]

Whilst there are some within the academy who maintain that this meaning of academic freedom is commonly accepted and remains the correct ideal, that it is "the

[4] Cape Times, 17 September 1956, quoted in *The Open Universities in South Africa* (1957) Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, p. 4.
[5] Mervyn Shear (1996) *Wits: A University in the Apartheid Era,* Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press, especially chapter 2. Also see, Bruce Murray (1982) *Wits: The Early Years,* Johannesburg, University of the Witwatersrand.
[6] This was most evident in the institution of academic freedom lectures – lecture series that continue to this day at Wits and UCT.
[7] As cited in du Toit, "Revisiting academic freedom," p. 2. This interpretation of academic freedom is similar in scope and design to the UNESCO declaration on academic freedom…

standard South African criteria for academic freedom,"[8] not all scholars are happy with this proposition. Most notably, to du Toit the problem with this definition is that this formulation was too narrowly cast: it overly centers on questions of institutional autonomy and ignores the question of internal threats to academic freedom, and, more than this suffers from a lack of substantive philosophical insight.[9] Part of what is at issue here is the change in circumstance: with the fall of apartheid the "open universities" can hardly be said to occupy the same political terrain: they no longer stand in opposition to a repressive racially-ordered state; although, as will become all too evident in this dissertation, this is not to say that higher education was, as a result of the transition to democratic rule, fundamentally deracialized. Certainly the "open universities" aspired to be "non-racial," but – in fact – they never were:[10] and, as the cases discussed below clearly indicate, today they are not released from apartheid (understood in systemic rather than legislative terms). The "open universities" were never representative of the South African nation, this uncontestably remains so.[11]

Rather than explicitly seek to relate academic freedom to these latter concerns, du Toit endeavours to recontextualize the meaning of academic freedom by recognizing the import of the domestic political changes, placing them alongside the significant global changes that have swept through the higher education sector in neo-liberal economic

[8] See, most notably, John Higgins (2000) "Academic freedom in the new South Africa," *Boundary 2: International Journal of Literature and Culture* 27(1), 97–119. Available online: http://boundart2.dukejournals.org/cgi/reprint/27/1/97 Also consider, John Higgins (2009) "Academic freedom: Right or practice," *Mail & Guardian*, 6–12 February, pp. 2–3 (Getting Ahead supplement).
[9] du Toit, "From autonomy to accountability"; du Toit, "Revisiting academic freedom."
[10] Consider, Shear, *Wits*; and Stuart Saunders (2000) *Vice-Chancellor on a Tightrope: A Personal Account of Climatic Years in South Africa*, Cape Town, David Philip. As Mamdani puts this: "the South African academy even when it was opposed to apartheid politically was deeply affected by it epistemologically"; Mahmood Mamdani (1998) "Is African Studies to be turned into a new home for Bantu Education at UCT?" *Social Dynamics* 24(2), p. 64.
[11] For example, analysis of the professoriate at any of the formerly "open universities" clearly indicates that appointments remain racially skewed in favour of white people.

times. Centrally, to du Toit the threat to academic freedom is *now* not so much from the South African state, but from how new public management principles have impacted on universities internal decision-making processes such that they now – to du Toit at least – represent the primary challenge facing the community of scholars. Post-apartheid the historically open universities have not been subject to undue intervention from the state, but as du Toit puts it, "the university has been affected internally by a managerial revolution," that has resulted in "defects in the quality of intellectual life."[12] Hence, for du Toit the "key issue" for academic freedom today is "*how to define and strengthen internal accountability, bearing in mind the growing pressures for forms of external accountability*."[13]

Over the last two decades or so, a new managerialism has indeed witnessed academics surrendering power and authority to a new breed of professional, highly-paid, and bureaucratically-inclined university administrators.[14] Such developments are, to many, a serious cause for concern, and to some extent do drive many of today's social tensions and conflicts within the higher education sector. But it would be stretching the point to argue that this displaces or replaces the import of how systemic racism confronts and corrupts academic life. Du Toit is right to conclude that "the traditional liberal discourse on academic freedom can no longer suffice," but he himself does not provide a convincing "alternative conceptualization of academic freedom."[15]

[12] du Toit, "Revisiting academic freedom," p. 3,
[13] du Toit, "From autonomy to accountability," p. 129, original emphasis.
[14] Consider, Eve Bertelsen (1998) "The real transformation: The marketisation of higher education," *Social Dynamics* 24(2), 130–158. Du Toit also refers to a paper by former Wits Vice-Chancellor Colin Bundy in which he draws out the impact of managerial theories on higher education "in particular that of management by objectives with the basic vocabulary of the strategic plan – mission, vision, objective, and strategies." See Colin Bundy (2000) "Innovative approaches to university management: A view from the eleventh floor," unpublished paper, pp. 4–5 (cited in du Toit, "From autonomy to accountability").
[15] du Toit, "From autonomy to accountability," pp. 128–29.

This, it can be argued, is due to the fact that du Toit misses the point that it is not so much a question of how "traditional liberal discourses" have been challenged by managerialism (real though that is), but rather it is more a question of how the traditional liberal understanding is itself deeply (inherently) flawed – as it was formulated in abstraction from the question of racial injustice.[16] To be fair, at the end of his 2001 paper on "Revisiting academic freedom," du Toit did suggest that we turn the "question around" and ask: "is the *intellectual colonisation* and *racialisation* of our intelligentsia and academic institutions not a historic reality, and if so are these not threats to academic freedom?"[17] But he does not begin to provide any intellectual tools that would enable us to answer this crucial question.

It is precisely by starting to address this point that Roger Southall and Julian Cobbing are able to present a more sophisticated reading of academic freedom through identifying the phenomenon of "liberal racialism" – a rather soft way of presenting what should more directly and accurately be called "white racism."[18] Southall and Cobbing, through drawing on the insights of the Black Consciousness critique of white liberalism as representing little more than symbolic and largely hollow opposition to apartheid,[19] take a first step towards providing a more powerful insight into the meaning of academic freedom through their particular take on the "assault on academic freedom" as played out in the Shell affair at Rhodes University (discussed in greater detail below),

[16] This, of course, reflects how liberalism itself has historically proved incapable of confronting racial injustice: see, for example, Howard McGary (1999) *Race and Social Justice*, Blackwell, Malden, MA, and Kevin M. Graham (2002) "Race and the Limits of Liberalism," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 32(2), 219–239.
[17] du Toit, "Revisiting academic freedom," p. 9.
[18] Southall and Cobbing, "From racial liberalism to corporate authoritarianism." Southall and Cobbing put the question of white racism in a politically correct formulation that deadens its true sociological import whilst simultaneously not coming over as being too threatening to their white colleagues.
[19] See, in particular, Steve Biko (1996) "Black Consciousness and the quest for a true humanity," in *I Write What I Like*, Johannesburg, Ravan Press, pp. 87–98.

but fall short in following Black Consciousness thinking all the way to seeing white racism as the central analytical frame.[20]

What is distinctive about Southall and Cobbing's paper, first published in *Social Dynamics* in 2001, is that whilst they do not under-estimate the new role of the kind of administrative authoritarianism at the centre of du Toit's formulation, they are not oblivious to understanding that the "open university," in their case Rhodes, is – and under apartheid could not escape being – a racialized and racist institution. As they put it: it is "a straightforward sociological observation that although the open universities may have committed themselves to liberal values, their liberalism was filtrated through structures which were racially based… Theirs [*white academic and administrative staff*] was a liberalism which was qualified by their socialization into, and location in, a situation of racial privilege. In short theirs was a 'racial liberalism.'"[21] This has meant that academic freedom has been compromised more than the liberal formulation could possibly imagine; with dramatic consequences for all those academics who dare to publicly – even if virtuously – engage with this reality. At the end of the day, though, Southall and Cobbing seem content to restrict their "present purpose" to just "extend du Toit's analysis by arguing that the managerial revolution which is taking place in our universities increasingly requires that the managers must themselves be made accountable *to academics as well as to society at large*."[22] A point well taken by most academics, to be sure, but not a point that deepens their earlier sociological insight.

[20] As Xolela Mangcu writes, Black Consciousness provided "a trenchant cultural critique of white racism;" see Xolela Mangcu (2004) "The quest for an African identity: Thirty seven years on," available online.
[21] Southall and Cobbing, "From racial liberalism to corporate authoritarianism," p. 7.
[22] Southall and Cobbing, "From racial liberalism to corporate authoritarianism," p. 4.

A further, and more recent, contribution to the debate over the meaning of academic freedom in post-apartheid South Africa has come from three scholars who at the time of writing their report were attached to the Human Sciences Research Council in Pretoria: Kristina Bentley, Adam Habib, and Sean Morrow.[23] Reviewing the issue for the Council on Higher Education they make the important point that the way to take the debate forward is to revitalize the normative content of the concept of academic freedom: something that can "begin with the republican conceptualization of academic freedom."[24]

In his earlier papers André du Toit suggested – without sustained interrogation – that the liberal formulation of academic freedom, largely negative and rather individualistic in scope, be supplanted with a "thicker" republican notion – a conception "associated with free public speech as a civic virtue and responsibility… [*it*] is not antithetical to notions of social accountability; on the contrary it is inherent in academic freedom as a civic virtue and responsibility that it must give a proper account of itself to the public at large."[25] Building on this insight of the need for a positive deontological account, Bentley, Habib, and Morrow proceed to argue that today a relevant conception of academic freedom "needs to be coupled with reform of the university system, meaning protection of academic freedom while coming to terms with prevailing economic and political realities."[26]

The kinds of structural reforms they have in mind, however, relate to such matters as improved academic remuneration, entrepreneurial practice, and income

[23] Bentley et al., "Academic Freedom, Institutional Autonomy and the Corporatised University."
[24] Bentley et al., "Academic Freedom, Institutional Autonomy and the Corporatised University," p. 24.
[25] du Toit, "Revisiting academic freedom," p. 8. For more on the content of republican thought see, Iseult Honohan (2002) *Civic Republicanism*, London, Routledge.
[26] Bentley et al., "Academic Freedom, Institutional Autonomy and the Corporatised University," p. 24.

diversification,[27] not the racialized structures of power and authority. True, they talk about the need to "realise a dispersal of power" by "empowering stakeholders" in the higher education system, but it is hard to see how this is likely to come about as a result of their specific recommendations. Much more is required: for, it is not enough to argue for a more positive normative account of academic freedom without giving substantive content to what the pursuit of truth and justice essentially entails for a society coming out of one of the most iniquitous histories the world has ever seen.[28]

It is precisely the argument of this dissertation that what is required here is to see academic freedom as being tied to the virtue of intellectually confronting, exposing, and transcending the injustice of systemic white racism; and, at its core, this requires a public intellectual duty to pursue "a consistent and exacting universalism,"[29] a commitment not to shy away from the fact that even the formerly "open universities" cannot be seen to be independent of and disconnected from questions of racial privilege and advantage for white people, oppression and exclusion for black people.[30] As will be seen, it is exactly such virtuous concerns that led the three main protagonists in the case

[27] Bentley et al., "Academic Freedom, Institutional Autonomy and the Corporatised University," p. 26.
[28] Bentley, Habib, and Morrow only go so far as to tie their reading of academic duty to "things like the right of access to education and therefore lack of representivity in the academy, and the need to reflect on the content of the curriculum to ensure that it adequately meets the demands of the post-apartheid context," p. 26. Such issues are not really that far removed from the T. B. Davie formulation.
[29] Nikhil Pal Singh (2004) *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, p. 42. The crucial point here is that it is not just a question of obtaining equal representation or of integrating Black people; rather it is about a struggle to widen the circle of true humanity.
[30] Decade after decade, the "open universities" served hugely disproportionate numbers of white students, enabling cumulative advantages that have undoubtedly fuelled economic and social inequality. As Richard Pithouse has written: "the racialization of South African universities under apartheid was not just about access to institutions and the division of labor within them"; Richard Pithouse (2006) "Introduction," in Pithouse (ed.) *Asinamali: University Struggles in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, Trenton, NJ, Africa World Press, p. xxi. On the import of how initial advantages cumulate, see Brian Barry (2005) *Why Social Justice Matters*, Cambridge, Polity Press, p. 45.

studies reviewed below into a racial quagmire far deeper than they could have ever foreseen.

John Higgins, of the University of Cape Town, is right to highlight that "the university is the one establishment in society whose function is the pursuit of truth,"[31] but in South Africa it is – as the experiences of Makgoba, Mamdani, and Shell illustrate – evidently naïve to believe that the university is itself neutral or impartial in all this, and is willing to hear the truth when it speaks to question its very own being. More particularly, it would seem, that to question the justice of how those attached to the formerly "open universities" have, by design or default, "accumulated wealth, power, and opportunity at the expense of the people who have been designated as *not* white,"[32] is anathema to these institutions. And yet without facing-up to such racial injustices there can be no hope of ever genuinely transforming the former "open universities" into genuinely "South African" universities that provide a common home and space for all – let alone a racially just society.

Case studies over, and of, white racism in the academy

Writing in the pages of *Social Dynamics* in 1998 in relation to the Mamdani affair at the University of Cape Town, Jonathan Jansen – a black professor of education – proposed "that a better way to understand transformation might be through the study of critical incidents… [*as*] one understands transformation much better when someone throws the

[31] Higgins, "Academic freedom in the new South Africa," p. 116.
[32] This is to paraphrase Cheryl Harris's discussion of whiteness in America, see her (1993) "Whiteness as property," *Harvard Law Review* 106(8), 1768–1777.

proverbial 'spanner in the works'. An institution provoked through crisis tells us much more about the nature and extent of transformation than any official documents or quantified outputs. For it is in the response of the institution to such critical incidents that important clues are given away about how far that institution has traveled in the direction of what it may call 'transformation'."[33] This dissertation concurs with this insight and approach, and in what follows three case studies are presented so as to bring out the issues discussed above. The critical cases all help bring out how the underlying issues around the meaning of academic freedom at the former "open universities" in post-apartheid South Africa relate to the questions of white racism and racial injustice; for, each case, on close examination, reveals the overarching reality of racial injustice.

The cases covered – the Makgoba affair at Wits (1995), the Mamdani affair at UCT (1997), and the Shell affair at Rhodes (2001) – expose racial injustice in a double sense, in that (1) the protagonists dramatically highlight patterns of racial injustice within these universities and are then (2) themselves dealt with in a racially unjust manner by the very individuals and structures that they subject to critique. As will become apparent, these cases bring out a sense of the bad faith of white liberals and their investments in white supremacy as well as their rather paternalistic approach to Black inclusion.

For a long time it was assumed that the "open universities" were above political reproach – as it has been widely acknowledged – even by the African National Congress and South African Communist Party – that they played their part in the struggle against apartheid by defying apartheid legislation, admitting black students, and advancing

[33] Jonathan D. Jansen (1998) "But our natives are different! Race, knowledge and power in the academy" *Social Dynamics* 24(2), p. 106.

progressive social scientific research.[34] So, to suddenly be told otherwise – that they are better seen as racialized institutions, was never going to be well received (to put it mildly). But this is exactly what William Makgoba (South African), Mahmood Mamdani (Ugandan), and Robert Shell (American) – all outsiders to their institutions – proceeded to do. All three criticized in good faith, respectively Wits, UCT, and Rhodes, for their racially mediocre, nepotistic, and paternalistic nature and practices. In other words, they took on those who had benefited from the many processes integral to systemic racism.

Consider, just one telling quote from each of these academics: Makgoba argued that "a significant majority of the academics here [*at Wits, and by definition predominantly white*] have no international experience or recognition. They have been tested only in this institution, so their standards are merely their own"[35]; Mamdani declared that "it is time to question an intellectual climate which encourages the inmates of this institution [*black students at UCT*] to flourish as potted plants in green houses, expecting to be well-watered at regular intervals" [36]; whilst Shell asserted that "the African student at East London [*campus*] is expensive cannon fodder for the Rhodes coffers… the African student body, is also politically correct window dressing for a wholly false image of

[34] See, Blade Nzimande (1996) "Academic freedom in the new South Africa," for one such typical reading. It has been remarked, however, that the "open universities" have hidden behind their "historical reputation for principled opposition to apartheid" so as to avoid examining current practices that could be seen as racist"; Cheryl Potgieter, 2002, *Black Academics on the Move*, Centre for Higher Education Transformation, available online: www.compress.co.za, p. 10.
[35] Makgoba, M. W. (1997) *Mokoko: The Makgoba Affair – A Reflection on Transformation*, Johannesburg, Vivlia, p. 80.
[36] Mahmood Mamdani (1998) "Teaching Africa at the post-apartheid University of Cape Town: A critical view of the 'Introduction to Africa' core course in the Social Science and Humanities Faculty's foundation semester, 1998," *Social Dynamics* 24(2), p. 14.

transformation."[37] What happens to well-established scholars who make such arguments? Is there any attempt to assess their truth value? We shall see how what were virtuous interventions came to be seen as merely audacious. If "white privilege, like the water that sustains fish, is invisible,"[38] then when exposed the fish turn out to be sharks. In retrospect, it is clear that all three protagonists could not have been fully aware of what they were taking on – and that, in fact, racial injustice ran far deeper than even they uncovered.

The Makgoba affair at Wits, 1995

William Makgoba, a world renown medical scholar, arrived at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, on 1 October 1994; he was specifically head-hunted from the United Kingdom to fill this post and was the University's first ever African Deputy Vice-Chancellor – more than that he was the "first Deputy Vice-Chancellor in its seventy-two year history to be recruited from outside the university."[39] Makgoba was enthusiastic about this appointment, and the Wits community was proud to have someone deemed a politically-safe Oxbridge educated "outsider" – at least, at first.

Initially accepting the university's self-image (and promotion) as a world-class university with excellent standards, it became an issue of some concern to find that the

[37] *The Shell Report* (second edition) (2001) "Strictly Confidential Report on the Structure and Function of the Board of Studies and its Liaison with other University Bodies," by Shell and others, Executive summary, first edition, p. 28.
[38] Marjorie M. Shultz and David Wellman (2003) *Whitewashing Race: The Myth of a Color-Blind Society*, Berkeley, University of California Press; p. 35
[39] Makgoba, *Mokoko*, p. 58.

reality did not exactly match the image: that in a number of ways the institution was riddled with signs of white mediocrity.[40] In question, to Makgoba, were the qualifications of Wits academics (the lack of doctorates amongst senior staff), black student representation (unfairly skewed and with low exit rates), the level of nepotism within power structures (too high), the level of administrative competence (outmoded), and the commitment to Africanization (non-existent).[41] Wits University was seen to mainly serve "only one community – English-speaking White people from the wealthier areas of Johannesburg," and to suffer from a superficial understanding of racial politics. In fact, Makgoba was later to write that power at Wits "is concentrated in the hands of a small, highly inbred elite… a junta"[42] – a "junta" that by force of history was all white.[43]

As Makgoba increasingly aired these concerns – internally within the University's newsletter (*The Wits Reporter*), externally through the mass media, with feature articles in the press (*The Star* and *Mail & Guardian*, in particular) – more and more Wits academics and administrators felt challenged, if not threatened. Attempts to defend these allegations – such as a stringent response from Charles van Onselen (a prominent social historian, but also the son of an Afrikaner policeman) – came over as unconvincing and were, issues of Africanization aside, ably countered by Makgoba time and again. Rather naïvely, perhaps, Makgoba "was at least hoping that South African academics would soon face the truth and facts and discover how far behind in

[40] Consider, in this regard, the important insights offered on the mediocrity of the colonizer in Albert Memmi's (1990) *The Colonizer and the Colonized, Introduced by Jean-Paul Sartre*, London, Earthscan Publications.
[41] All these issues are drawn out in some detail in Makgoba, *Mokoko*.
[42] Makgoba, *Mokoko*, p. 79.
[43] At Wits, at this time, Wits had four deans – they were all white and they were all Wits graduates, Senate had eight professorial representatives – they were all white and almost two-thirds were Wits graduates.

organizational skills, leadership, management and academic excellence they are."[44] Instead, *he* would find out what many black South Africans have found time and again: that even in a post-apartheid South Africa one cannot win if you, an "assertive Black" take on the weight of systemic white racism.[45]

More than anything, the way in which Wits chose to deal with Makgoba vindicates the charge that Wits has a long road to racial transformation: it had racism written all over it. What effectively amounted to a witch-hunt against Makgoba was instigated by what the media dubbed "The Gang of 13" – thirteen senior academics, who with one exception were white;[46] and who under the guidance of Charles van Onselen, and with the tacit approval of the Vice-Chancellor, engaged in the kind of unethical behaviour which would – outside of a racialized setting – have resulted in professional outrage, widespread condemnation, and disciplinary action.

In essence, it was resolved that Makgoba must be forced out of office, as his appointment had proven to be a "mistake."[47] The pretext for this would be an all out assault on the academic credentials of Makgoba – that surely no black South African could be so smart as to "ridicule" Wits, and that there were bound to be discrepancies on his curriculum vitae (CV). Two American scholars from Bard College, James Statman and Amy Ansell, put it thus: "They [*did*] not object to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor *because* of… his vitae, they [*had*] already found M. W. Makgoba sufficiently objectionable that they initiate a concerted search to find a reason, a

[44] Makgoba, *Mokoko*, p. 74.
[45] Makgoba realizes as much when he writes that what happened to him "was not unique for a Black South African. Many of my brothers and sisters have suffered under the so called liberal attack. Their identities, their self worth, their credentials and confidences have been questioned, battered and destroyed by these evil people"; Makgoba, *Mokoko*, p. 115.
[46] The Gang of 13 included eight Deans and one Registrar.
[47] Makgoba later observed that "the Wits that was offering me a job did not really believe in South African blacks"; Makgoba, *Mokoko*, p. 50

discrepancy, a misrepresentation, an academic skeleton-in-the-closet through which to dispose of him."[48] This search – on which many working hours and university resources were invested and which was pursued in a highly unethical manner – unearthed "inconsistencies" or misrepresentations in Makgoba's CV, or so it was claimed.

A dossier detailing the alleged discrepancies was presented to the Vice-Chancellor in full expectation that "appropriate" disciplinary action be bought against the Deputy Vice-Chancellor. However, in his defense Makgoba argued that the "wide-ranging allegations regarding my CV are a classic mixture of misrepresentation, misinterpretation, pettiness and Procrustean research,"[49] and proceeded to photocopy the personal files of his accusers for cross-examination by his legal team. To this day, the contents of those files have not been made public, but in his book *Mokoko* assures the reader that he "discovered a lot of rot and juicy stuff."[50]

Makgoba was able to defend his CV from the concerted attack upon it,[51] but the affair had reached such a state of intensity that – as Makgoba came to recognize – there could be no victor and no vanquished; there could be no victory for Makagoba for in essence what he had taken on was more than just the Gang of 13, he had taken on the white South African liberal establishment, and for him to have exposed his accusers would have seen the implosion of the entire Wits power structure – something definitely

[48] James M. Statman and Amy E. Ansell (2000) "The rise and fall of the Makgoba affair: A case study of symbolic politics," *Politikon* 27(2), p. 284.
[49] Makgoba, *Mokoko*, p. 166.
[50] Makgoba, *Mokoko*, p. 125.
[51] In fact, more serious charges can be leveled against Makgoba's book *Mokoko*, for this is a book that verges on plagiarism and is marred by inadequate referencing, sloppy proof reading, and unnecessary repetition. The book is also remarkable for the excessive, over-the-top self-aggrandizement – itself, perhaps, a psychological response that reflects the need for black people to overly prove oneself in a white racist environment. Willem van Vuuren, in his review of *Mokoko*, highlighted the "extremely repetitive nature and very bad editing of the text. If it was edited at all… there are many… examples of verbatim repetition which should have been editorially corrected"; Willem van Vuuren (1998) "Review article. African identity, Africanism and transformation [review of Makgoba' Mokoko]," *Politikon* 25(1), p. 164.

not even desired by the ruling ANC-government.[52] At the end of the day Makgoba took the "gentlemanly" way out: most of the accusers chose to withdraw their allegations and Makgoba agreed to take the matter no further whilst accepting appointment to a research chair in the Faculty of Medicine.

What stands out from all this is the morally indefensible position of the accusers – the double-standards at play in this case are reprehensible. For, whilst Makgoba had to endure the public airing of false charges against his academic reputation and scholarly standing, the files of his accusers containing – it would seem – some really controversial material remained closed to public view; hence, at no time were the accusers ever subject to the kind of critical and forensic scrutiny (indeed humiliation) that Makgoba had to endure. Furthermore, whilst many Wits administrators and academics were quick to condemn Makgoba on the basis of the Gang of 13's dossier, there was a total lack of institutional censure for the unethical ("dirty tricks") manner in which van Onselen sought to indict Makgoba's CV – for in contacting a range of institutions and organizations to verify points on Makgoba's CV this scholar was never upfront about his purpose, often presenting it as "esoteric social research," and often gleaning information through white referents who would not challenge his enquiry or who would inappropriately release confidential information.[53] Such imbalances can only be asserted

[52] This is made most evident in the final chapters of Makgoba's *Mokoko*. Statman and Ansell also put this well when they write: "all those involved recognised that the affair constituted far more than a limited academic or institutional dispute: that it symbolically revealed and represented fundamental, usually hidden, tensions within the nation-building framework"; Statman and Ansell, "The rise and fall of the Makgoba affair," p. 279.

[53] If today any research student proposed such a method for their social enquires it would be shot down by any Ethics Committee worthy of that name. It is also interesting to observe that no-one, apart from Makgoba, was willing to call into question the worth of van Onselen's entire scholarly work (i.e., in the same light as Makgoba's supposed CV "manipulation" was seen to cast his entire integrity into doubt); see Makgoba, *Mokoko*, p. 166. And such a question is not altogether uncalled for; see Harrison Wright's

and maintained in a racialized setting. Why did the Gang of 13 escape disciplinary action for what can only be seen to be racially-executed and racially-motivated deeds? In South Africa, it would seem, such questions are best not asked.[54]

Once Makgoba moved office, his initial claims against Wits University submerged back under the "water," so to speak; a state of affairs that was in no small measure due to Makgoba's lack of ability to provide a sustained social analysis that others could champion – and his one major contribution to the debate on transformation around "Africanization" was riddled with contradictions. As a medical scholar Makgoba has a particular penchant for using biological terms in writing about and analyzing South African society (words such as "organic" and "body" abound the pages of *Mokoko*), so it is perhaps fitting that the term "misdiagnosis" be used to best describe his reading of Africanization. For, Makgoba presents Africanization in crude essentialist terms; it is not even close to the subtle and sophisticated arguments advanced by Makgoba's former student classmate – Steve Biko.[55] Willem van Vuuren, a political scientist at the University of the Western Cape, makes the point well: "Makgoba… often employs formulations reminiscent of Biko's writings to express ideas regarding the necessity of black self-determination… However, some of these similarities appear to be superficial

---

review of van Onselen's work in his (1977) *The Burden of the Present: Liberal–Radical Controversy over Southern Africa History*, Cape Town, David Philip.

[54] This is not to say that the Gang of 13 paid no price – racism has costs for all involved: psychological stress, early retirement, and voluntary resignation from Wits for some. On the costs of racism, consider Joe R. Feagin and Hernán Vera (1995) *White Racism: The Basics*, New York, Routledge.

[55] Makgoba was in the same class as Steve Biko at the University of Natal's Medical School (Non-European Section), and indeed, as Mark Gevisser observed (as quoted on p. 196 of *Mokoko*) some of Makgoba's "statements come almost verbatim out of Biko's writings," but unfortunately it seems that the philosophical content of Black Consciousness was not fully absorbed by Makgoba. Perhaps not that surprising for someone who, by 1979, had left the country. Also see, Malegapuru Makgoba and Sipho Seepe (2004) "Knowledge and identity: An African vision of higher education transformation," in Sipho Seepe (ed.) *Towards an African Identity of Higher Education*, Pretoria, Vista University and Skotaville, pp. 13–57.

when compared to Adam and Nolutshungu's portrayal of Biko's black consciousness approach."[56] Such superficiality can be easily shown.

In *Mokoko: A Reflection on Transformation*, Makgoba boldly declares: "When Europeans decide about their institutions, be they French, German or British, the first principle is to capture the essence of France, Germany and Britain. The primary principle of a South African university should be to capture and encapsulate the essence of Africa."[57] First of all: just what is the "essence" of Africa? And second: if European universities are to be defined in terms of their *national* essence, then why should South African universities be defined in terms of a *continental* ("African") rather than a national ("South African") essence?[58] Is South Africa politically, culturally, and economically the same as the rest of Africa? why should it be?[59] And, in any case, to Steve Biko, it is precisely the "South African" dimension – tied to a new fusion of cultures – that should be placed centre-stage if real change is to be effected.[60] In South Africa, it is not a question of discovering the "essence of Africa," it is – as African scholar Mahmood Mamdani (and the subject of the next case study) has eloquently put it – far more a question of creating a common citizenship, of effecting "an overall

[56] van Vuuren, "Review article," p. 163. Also see: Heribert Adam (1973) "The rise of Black Consciousness in South Africa," *Race* 15(2), 149–165; and Sam C. Nolutshungu (1982) *Changing South Africa: Political Considerations*, New York, Africana.
[57] Makgoba, *Mokoko*, p. 194.
[58] These points were also well articulated by Mark Gevisser in his *Mail & Guardian* feature article ("The Don who wants an ebony tower," reproduced in Makgoba, *Mokoko*, p. 194) and by Willem van Vuuren in his "Review article" for *Politikon*.
[59] Africa is a such a diverse continent that it seems an impossible task to try and distil a single essence: there is Anglophone Africa, Francophone Africa, and Arab Africa (not to mention Christian Africa and Islamic Africa) – so what exactly is the African essence that Makgoba is referring to? What should a South African university expect to have in common with an Algerian or Zairian university? (It is not exactly clear why Makgoba is averse to promoting a "South African" university – he just does not; this is his misdiagnosis.)
[60] "If South Africa is to be a land where black and white live together in harmony without the fear of group exploitation, it is only when these two opposites have interplayed and produced a viable synthesis of ideas and a *modus vivendi*"; Steve Biko (1996) "The definition of Black Consciousness," in Biko's *I Write What I Like*, Johannesburg, Ravan Press, p. 51.

metamorphosis whereby erstwhile colonizers and colonized are politically reborn as equal members of a single political community."[61]

The Mamdani affair at UCT, 1997

In 1996, Mahmood Mamdani, a leading African scholar with a PhD from the New School for Social Research in New York City and a number of highly regarded publications to his name,[62] was appointed by the University of Cape Town as the A. C. Jordan Professor of African Studies; and the following year was subsequently given the post of Director of the Centre for African Studies. The Centre for African Studies was a research-oriented extra-curricula body that was not responsible for basic university teaching – Mamdani had no students for whom to profess.[63] So, he felt somewhat pleased and excited when in October 1997 he was approached by the Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Social Science and Humanities, Charles Wanamaker, with a proposition to design the syllabus for a foundation course on "Africa"; a task he entered into with enthusiasm and all good faith to make a progressive contribution to the University. Little did he realize that he would soon find himself up against the same kind of systemic white privilege and mediocrity that infused the University of the Witatersrand, Johannesburg.

[61] Mahmood Mamdani (1998) "When does a settler become a native? Reflections of the colonial roots of citizenship in Equatorial and South Africa," Inaugral Lecture, University of Cape Town.
[62] Most notably: Mahmood Mamdani (1996) *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press.
[63] Mamdani, "Teaching Africa," p. 1.

Mamdani worked six hours a day, over six days a week, to compile a draft outline for a new course, that he presciently entitled "Problematizing Africa." This foundation-level course sought to cover seven key debates: including such questions as: "Was there an African civilization and culture before Euro-Arab domination?" "Is 'real' Africa only Black Africa, Equatorial and Bantu?" and, "The colonial in the post-colonial: Drawing lessons from anti-colonial resistance and post-independence reform."[64] Central to Mamdani's pedagogic conceptualization of "African Studies" was the belief that one first had "to take head on the notion of South African exceptionalism and the widely shared prejudice that while South Africa is a part of Africa geographically, it is not quite culturally and politically, and certainly not economically."[65] Was, however, the University of Cape Town (self-promoted as "a world class African university") ready to receive such an intellectually challenging approach?

As events transpired, Mamdani's new course was, to put it rather mildly, not well received by his colleagues. Indeed, a concerted attempt was made to keep what was seen as an all too problematic course off the curriculum; Mamdani was suspended from future involvement and teaching, and other scholars in the faculty designed a substitute course – imaginatively entitled "Introduction to Africa." In turn, in protest, Mamdani suspended institutional involvement with the University and proceeded to expose the racial dynamics at play in the whole matter. For, most disturbingly, the alternative course propagated all those things the "Problematizing Africa" had been designed to avoid. To Mamdani the substitute course was an introduction to "sub-standard," "racialized" thinking; altogether "carelessly designed" and "a poisonous introduction

[64] Mamdani, "Teaching Africa," Appendix E, pp. 26–32.
[65] Mahmood Mamdani (1996) "Centre for African Studies: Some preliminary thoughts," *Social Dynamics* 22(2), pp. 3–4.

for students entering a post-apartheid university."[66] As Jonathan Jansen put it: "Mamdani's principal thesis [*was that the Introduction to Africa*] course represent[*ed*] a colonial conception of Africa… projected and reinforced through its particular selection of political geography, research methodology, pedagogical expertise, acknowledged authorities and political periodization."[67]

Mamdani, acting out of a sense of righteous indignation at the violation of his "academic rights" also proceeded to express his honest professional judgment that the History Department at UCT was "weak";[68] inferred that the Deputy Dean had the attitudes of an American "redneck"; and asserted that other Faculty members were ahistorical, lacked expertise, and suffered from a "total ignorance" of key debates on Africa. Regardless of the merits of such stringent and "impolite" criticism, the real point is that Mamdani posed the question of deracializing African studies and transforming the curriculum only to be met with classic stonewalling tactics from a racialized structure of power and authority: all of Mandani's detractors "without noticeable exception" were "white and English."[69]

As with the Makgoba case, having said all this is not necessarily to maintain that Mamdani had it right – that his particular take on how to Africanize the curriculum was the alpha and omega of the matter. A number of points can be made in this regard: most importantly, South African exceptionalism does exist – not least with regard to the distinctiveness of the colonial encounter and apartheid,[70] and it is only in confronting

[66] Mamdani, "Teaching Africa," pp. 5, 7, 13.
[67] Jansen, "But our natives are different!" p. 108.
[68] Mamdani, "Teaching Africa," p. 5, 9.
[69] Jansen, "But our natives are different!" p. 113.
[70] Consider, the debate around South Africa having experienced "colonialism of a special type," and also see A. W. Stadler (date) *The Political Economy of South Africa*, Cape Town, David Philip. Where-else in Africa have white settlers called themselves "Afrikaner" (African)? On another level, Wits

this that a "South African" university can come into being.[71] Consider this: how far removed is it to have a situation where you have one African scholar originally from Uganda (assuming the self-appointed face of "African Studies" for South Africa) confronting a "a narrow" group of white academics with a "cliquish camaraderie,"[72] from the ideal situation of having unconstrained scholarly deliberation between black and white South African scholars where power relations are equalized? (A situation that UCT – like the other former "open universities" – have subtly and sometimes not-so-subtly contrived to foreclose.[73]) If, as Mamdani put it, "curriculum is identity," then the question is one of who should define that identity: should it be a cliquish group of white academics? a US-trained African scholar? or the people of South Africa?[74]

---

anthropologist, Robert Thornton, pointed-out that Mamdani set his spell-checker in American rather than South African – "when even Microsoft recognizes this degree of South African exceptionalism"; quoted in Jansen, "But our natives are different!" p. 114.

[71] It can also be remarked that Mamdani had little appreciation of just how debilitating the South African education system has been for poor black students (who all to often use English as their second language) – thereby over-estimating their ability to handle his "Problematizing Africa" course, which reads more like an American Ivy League course (Mamdani has taught at both the New School for Social Research and Columbia University in New York).

[72] Mamdani, "Teaching Africa," p. 13.

[73] Mamdami himself was of the view that even he had actually been "hired as an advertisement;" Mamdani, "Teaching Africa," p. 1. Namely, that he was simply there for appearances sake. Also, that Mamdani's colleagues gave him the impression that he should not take himself seriously indicates their low expectation of black academics.

[74] Transformation cannot be generated from current conceptions of how to Africanize the curriculum – with attempts to capture the essence of Africa, mimic externally-developed African Studies programmes, or exclude black South African participation – but from a genuinely South African approach to the problems in higher education institutions. In this regard, as Makgoba himself stated (without taking the issue further), "diversity is the untapped variable of the transformation equation"; Makgoba, *Mokoko*, p. 221.

The Shell affair at Rhodes, 2001

Robert Shell, a white American academic, arrived at Rhodes University in 1996 – coming from the Ivy League Princeton University, New Jersey. Appointed as a senior lecturer in History and as Director of the Population Research Unit (PRU, funded by the National Research Foundation), Shell was keen to contribute to post-apartheid South African society. The East London campus of Rhodes University (RUEL), where he and PRU were based, turned out, however, to be a most inauspicious place for the pursuit of anything remotely resembling unhindered first-class academic enquiry: and not just for progressive scholars such as Shell but all staff and students who happened to be black.[75] The twists and turns of what was to become a national issue reads like some Coen Brothers movie script – indeed many who perused Shells' Report would like to have recommended: "burn after reading."[76]

It all began with a sense of growing unease with the strange goings on with respect to the non-transformative management style at the East London campus: illogical course closures, nepotistic employment patterns, and racially-biased redundancies being some of the most evident concerns. Issues, again, that point to inbred white privilege, maladministration, mediocrity, and "social closure" within the former "open universities"[77] – at least that was the conclusion of Robert Shell who in August 1998 was part of a sub-committee, along with Cornelius Thomas and Robert Stuart, that was

[75] Looking around the East London campus Shell was disturbed to see that "most of the African students sit in the woefully under-resourced library while the European students go to the expensive and well equipped labs and the World Wide Web." See *The Shell Report*.
[76] To cite the name of the Coen Brothers latest movie (2009).
[77] On the sociological conception of "social closure," see Frank Parkin's (1979) *Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeois Critique*, New York, Columbia University Press.

tasked to formally investigate issues of governance (in particular relation to the structure and functions of the Board of Studies).[78] The findings of this sub-committee, compiled in a highly confidential report of over 400 pages – the Shell Report – were extremely damning.[79] Southall and Cobbing have summarized the "central thrusts" of the Shell Report well: "firstly, there was clear evidence of 'both nepotism and cronyism' at the RUEL campus, notably during the three and half years of the incumbent Director's administration; secondly, there was 'curriculum chicanery' where certain subjects were targeted for axing whilst others (Psychology, Education and Social Work) were unduly favoured; and thirdly 'empire-building' with the connivance of the Director was 'rife.'"[80]

To get a sense of just what was happening consider the case of the appointment – in a climate of academic retrenchments (that included a black South African scholar holding a doctorate and who held the position of "transformation officer") – of a part-time sports administrator when there were no sports facilities to speak of "apart from a ping-pong ball" in the campus café.[81] Here, the Shell Report states: "It emerged that the appointee, Sam van Musschenbroek, was the brother of Felicity Coughlan, the LIC of Social Work. The Director appointed Sean Coughlan, the husband of Felicity, to the search committee. The Rhodes East London defence of this appointment is that Sam

[78] Southall and Cobbing, "From racial liberalism to corporate authoritarianism," p. 23.
[79] A full electronic copy of the Shell Report was obtained from a former Rhodes University employee. It is important to note that as the affair played itself out Shell's co-authors increasingly distanced themselves from the Report.
[80] Southall and Cobbing, "From racial liberalism to corporate authoritarianism," p. 24. Notably, as far as the curriculum was concerned, the humanities "were ruthlessly axed"; *The Shell Report*, p. 18. And as the Shell Report (p. 40) put it, "Curriculum chicanery may be defined as the process whereby changes in national curriculum are used to promote personal academic agendas or empires which have little connection to the original purpose of the proposed changes."
[81] *The Shell Report*, pp. 20–21.

was disabled (dyslexic) – and therefore a minority."[82] Such a disability did not, however, stop the subsequent appointment of Sam van Musschenbroek to the post of editor of a student newspaper and he "quickly received promotion to full-time status as Student Advisor and is now among the best paid admin staff."[83]

More generally, the Report disclosed that "retrenchments are most likely to effect people who have no relatives working in Rhodes. Single and/or minority status [*here meaning not white*] is next. Appointments work the other way. Marriage or blood ties to an incumbent staff member is a key to both job access and security."[84] The Shell Report did not stop there – it spoke an uncomfortable truth: that "there has never been an African voice in senior management, nor has a woman's voice ever been heard in any of the corridors of power [*at Rhodes University*] before or since 1994"[85]; adding that "Rhodes' spirit and ideas of Anglo-Saxon superiority have pervaded the entire administration to this day."[86] Moreover, in words strongly redolent of Makgoba or Mamdani, the Shell Report declared that South African universities such as Rhodes do "not have any individuals trained in modern University administration," they do "not yet have international best standards in University administration which is at a correspondingly low level of professionalization."[87] Shell was perhaps naïve not to

[82] *The Shell Report,* p. 21.
[83] *The Shell Report,* p. 21.
[84] *The Shell Report,* p. 20. Specifically, the executive summary of the Shell Report pointed to "irregularities" in appointments that "included white nepotism (sons and brothers) type of appointments, while retrenchments had a distinct racial basis (three blacks and one gay person were also retrenched); *The Shell Report,* p. 1.
[85] *The Shell Report,* p. 2. And note that "one solitary Indian Dean of Student Affairs, Dean Motara, spoils the otherwise unbroken ninety-seven years of white male managerial supremacy"; *The Shell Report*, p. 2. Southall and Cobbing add to this by pointing out that in 1992 Rhodes University Council was "composed of 27 members, all of whom were male and with one single exception, all white; its 28 member Board of Governors was exclusively white and male; and its Senate of 83 included just two blacks and four females"; Southall and Cobbing, "From racial liberalism to corporate authoritiarianism," p. 13.
[86] *The Shell Report,* p. 2.
[87] *The Shell Report,* p. 5,

recognize that for someone in his position some things are best not seen nor said, but there is no doubting his moral virtue in pressing the issue (even revealing – as with the case of the dyslexic friend-of-the-family ping-pong ball administrator – the kind of "juicy stuff" that Makgoba kept under wraps).

Overall, the Shell Report's executive summary stated that: "It is strongly recommended that the findings presented here are taken up and corrected by the University's highest authorities before the situation described becomes critical and the subject (perhaps) of a national scandal."[88] The case did indeed come to receive national attention, being well covered in the mainstream press; but the outcome was not a serious attempt to redress the racially-loaded problems of "cronyism" at the East London campus – the result was the dismissal of Robert Shell; an outcome as unjust as that uncovered by Shell's report. It seems that at Rhodes University, even after the end of apartheid, white people can have their privileges reserved and maintained with impunity. Perhaps it could be no other way given the systemic nature of the problem: for when, as two other scholars have argued, Rhodes is "almost wholly controlled by a white hierarchy,"[89] and when as a later analysis by Shell calculated "fully 40 percent of White staff (who constitute 89 percent of the academic and administrative employees) at RUEL are related to each other,"[90] where is the mobilization of institutional bias going to fall when push comes to shove? The colour of Shell's skin could not save this "race

[88] *The Shell Report,* p. 11.
[89] Southall and Cobbing, "From racial liberalism to corporate authoritarianism," p. 19.
[90] Southall and Cobbing, "From racial liberalism to corporate authoritarianism," p. 32.

traitor."[91] But what possible pretext could be used to get rid of a "race traitor" as opposed to an assertive black?

Attempts to tarnish Shell's academic qualifications – although pursued, were found to be groundless. So, enter the call for a report on the report (the Midgely Report) by a new style of managerialism with its regime of disciplinary practices so well identified by André du Toit as now constituting the greatest threat to academic freedom in South Africa;[92] the upshot of which was that Shell was maneuvered into a position whereby he faced a disciplinary hearing at which – in all seriousness – it was maintained by Rhodes' advocate that the case had nothing to do with academic freedom, that Shell had to be adjudged in purely legalistic terms.[93] Such obfurification through bureaucraticization – some might say such intimidation and victimization – always served totalitarian regimes so well as a means for curbing dissent,[94] apartheid included; so with regard to Rhodes it could be argued that the more things change the more they stay the same. Almost needless to say, the real concerns raised by the Shell Report have now retreated back into their shell.

[91] For a discussion of the concept of a "race traitor," see Feagin and Vera, *White Racism*. In fact, also indicative of the closing of the ranks was that Shell was also blocked from taking up a chair in History at the University of Stellenbosch (after actually being offered it) as a direct result of the intervention of the Rhodes University "old boys' network." See Southall and Cobbing, "From racial liberalism to corporate authoritarianism," p. 26.
[92] du Toit, "From autonomy to accountability." The Midgely Report challenged the standing of the Shell Report on the grounds that it "had no official status" and that Shell had gone too far with this allegations – it denied the charges in the Shell Report and recommended that Shell face a disciplinary hearing by a neutral party; see Southall and Cobbing, "From racial liberalism to corporate authoritarianism."
[93] Southall and Cobbing, "From racial liberalism to corporate authoritarianism," p. 29. This related to the allegation that Shell had breached an agreement with Rhodes not to bring the University into pubic disrepute by criticizing the Rhodes administration in an e-mail addressed to the National Research Foundation – this, to him, essentially private communication was deemed a "legal publication" and was taken as grounds for dismissal. (Rhodes was not prepared to consider mediation as a serious option.)
[94] Consider, Hannah Arendt (1967) *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, London, George Allen and Unwin.

Case analysis and beyond

It is not hard to see what comparatively-speaking these three cases have in common: they all expose a total reluctance – almost a will to ignorance – for white people to face how the former "open universities" have been, and continue to be, affected by a systemic racism that has granted them unjust privileges at the expense of the material and psychological well-being of black people. And it will only be when white people make an open attempt to become self-critical and understand this truth that a just way forward and academic freedom for all can begin to unfold – and thus genuine transformation can take effect. Norman Duncan, a black professor at Wits University, has put the current attitude at his own institution well: "the widespread discomfort with, and denial of, racism evident in broader South African society, on the surface, appears to be virtually ceaselessly replicated in academia."[95]

What stands out as a telling political feature in all three cases is that they show that even in a post-apartheid society black South Africans (and anyone representing their plight) can never win when they take on, head-to-head, the entire racialized structure of power and authority extant in today's former "open universities." As shown, speaking-out extracted a high price from all three protagonists.[96] And however virtuous the exposure of white privilege, mediocrity, and bias might be – it simply does not seem to

[95] Norman Duncan (n.d.) "'Race,' racism and the university: Some personal observations and reflections," unpublished paper, Dept Psychology, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, p. 25.
[96] All three cases seem to vindicate a broader philosophical point that has been well put by Judith Shklar: namely, that "in our cognitive poverty we court self-defeat when we believe that our little institutional inventions can cope with… colossal injustice"; Judith N. Shklar (1990) *The Faces of Injustice*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, p. 27. Not surprisingly, it is more usual, as Minister of Arts and Culture Pallo Jordan has observed, for "African thinkers" to "became shy to mention racism," as they are "intimidated into silence"; see Caiphus Kgosana (2008) "Whites in denial about racism, says Pallo Jordan," 27 April, p. 4.

have enough moral suasion on those most directly implicated to want to make them seek atonement; rather, energy is directed to the normalization of injustice – as Richard Pithouse, of the Centre for the Study of Civil Society at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, has more generally argued: "The white elite relentlessly seeks to naturalize its privilege by disguising its history of conquest, expropriation and exploitation."[97]

If, as Robert Shell recognizes, academic freedom "implies being able to speak the truth without fear or favour,"[98] then it has to be said that South African universities are universities of a special type, for here academic freedom currently seems to imply being able to speak the truth without fear or favour – just as long as you do not call the university itself into question; and avoid any questioning of their inability to acknowledge and accept the equal humanity of black South Africans.[99] Transforming this state of affairs, as James Baldwin would be quick to grasp, would necessitate white people being "able to admit the racial construction of their own identities and ask how that construction affects their commitments," something that is easier said than done, for "the ramifications of such an enquiry is not only psychological; it is intimately tied to matters of relative material comfort and power."[100]

At the moment there is nothing close to a genuine transformation agenda at the former "open universities" – that much the case studies made evident; but there are many other signs that reveal the continuing systemic disempowerment of black South

[97] Pithouse, "Introduction," p. xxii.
[98] Bentley et al., "Academic Freedom, Institutional Autonomy and the Corporatised University," p. 21, interview with Robert Shell (May 1, 2006).
[99] Properly understood, as Charles Taylor would have it, academic freedom speaks in defense of the neutrality of the university environment. See Charles Taylor (1975) "Neutrality in the university," in Alan Montefiore (ed.) *Neutrality and Impartiality: The University and Political Commitmen*t, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 128–148.
[100] Lawrie Balfour (2001) *The Evidence of Things Not Said: James Baldwin and the Promise of American Democracy*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca & London; p. 56,

Africans at these institutions. Undertaking a survey on black academics for the Centre for Higher Education Transformation, Cheryl Potgieter cites one respondent who declared that "there is nothing like a transformation agenda… a liberal [agenda] is not to transform but to create the idea of transformation."[101] A point that can, in addition to all that has been said above, be seen in relation to the seriously skewed – unaddressed – nature of post-apartheid black student representation, and how black scholars and students from the rest of Africa are favoured over black South Africans.[102]

One of the changes that have occurred at the "open universities" in the post-apartheid era is the dramatic increase in the number of black students – but even here things are not quite what they seem. For African student enrolment was been very much concentrated in certain programmes of study: as André du Toit has observed "given the higher entrance requirements for other faculties the arts, humanities and social sciences become the residual depository for academically weaker African students… there is a massive clustering of African females in the social sciences and humanities as well as in education"[103] – a too large number of whom do not even end up graduating.[104] Moreover, a survey by David Cooper found that African female student representation in 1998 stood at 30 percent of the student body, yet that for African male student

[101] Cheryl Potgieter (2002) *Black Academics on the Move*, Centre for Higher Education Transformation, available online: www.compress.co.za , p. 10.
[102] Such changes, du Toit, maintains "have not yet been widely noted or properly understood;" du Toit, "Revisiting academic freedom." p. 4.
[103] du Toit, "From autonomy to accountability," p. 96.
[104] As Makgoba has written: "Annually the public has been receiving the same message, i.e. the number of Black students is increasing in all these universities. The public is not informed about the quality or the rate of increase"; Makgoba, *Mokoko*, p. 220. A recent article in the *Mail & Guardian* that dealt with the question of throughput rates found that "fewer than 12% of blacks aged 20 to 24 were at universities and only 5% graduated"; Primarashni Gower (2008) "Failing the majority," *Mail & Guardian*, 10–16 October, p. 15.

representation was significantly lower at 22 percent.[105] There is also a clearly skewed pattern, especially at the level of graduate student enrolments and staff appointments, in offering preferential places to Africans from outside of South Africa – a trend that is politically and psychologically motivated on the grounds that foreign black nationals present less of an existential threat to many white academics and rarely have the wherewithal to challenge systemically racist practices.[106]

Given all the failings that can be put at the door of the former "open universities," it is little wonder that, when in office, former President Thabo Mbeki received reports that universities like Wits were "unwelcoming to black staff and students"[107] – or that the current Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, sees the universities as being "out of touch with the society… lack[*ing*] the commitment to producing the public good."[108] It is also no wonder that Potgeiter's survey found that for black academics to succeed at historically white institutions they had to be "super human beings."[109] It is surely time for this to change: for South Africa's former "open universities" to deracialize and take their rightful place as genuine "South African" universities that accepts its citizens "as equal members of a single political community."[110]

---

[105] David Cooper (2000) "The skewed revolution: The selective 'Africanization' of the student profile of historically white universities and technikons in South Africa in the 1990s," Centre for African Studies paper, University of Cape Town; cited in du Toit, "From autonomy to accountability," p. 91. If this seems bad, then the patterns at the level of academic staff appointments is far worse. For South Africa as whole some 80 percent of the population is black; see "Demographics of South Africa," http://en.wikipedia.org/ wiki/Demographics_of_South_Africa

[106] It is hard to determine the relevant aggregate statistics here – itself a telling silence. It is also important to point out that foreign students pay far higher fees. All this is not to say that foreign black nationals should not be admitted or hired – it is a question of establishing a just balance.

[107] Caiphus Kgosana, "Wits shuns black profs," *City Press*, 5 July 2005, p. 2.

[108] Naledi Pandor, "We cannot stand by and watch institutions collapse," p. 2.

[109] Potgeiter, *Black Academics on the Move*, p. 12. Potgeiter also found that although some "black persons had been appointed to senior posts there was still the assumption that "hard decisions" were still vested with white persons" (p. 26).

[110] Mamdani, "When does a settler become a native?" As Adam Habib, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research at the University of Johannesburg, recognizes academic freedom must be tied to the creation of

Conclusion

The classic liberal formulation of academic freedom by T. B. Davie did, of course, in its own way represent a moral stand against apartheid; but it was too restrictive in taking its own epistemological integrity for granted. In the context of a country beset by centuries of a systemic racism that was foundational to how that society was ordered and governed, any conception of "freedom" cannot be (colour) blind to the resultant injustices.[111] The presentation of the above three case studies have incontrovertibly made it clear just why "the mere re-assertion of the liberal discourse on academic freedom no longer provides a coherent or adequate assistance in getting to grips with the current challenges to academic freedom."[112] Basically, the liberal formulation and indeed, as earlier argued, more recent formulations by scholars such as André du Toit, Roger Southall, Julian Cobbing, Kristina Bentley, Adam Habib, and Sean Morrow fail to come to terms with how the underlying social structures that generate racial injustice relate to the former "open universities."

It has been the main argument of this dissertation that going beyond the liberal formula requires coming to terms with white racism – expressed as much at the systemic level as the individual level. In terms of political theory, there is only one

---

an enabling environment for a "plurality of ideological voices including those that are intellectual dissidents in our society"; Adam Habib (2006) "The practice of academic freedom in South Africa," University of KwaZulu-Natal University Forum Lecture, 19 October, p. 4.

[111] It is not hard to see that any "pretense of race blindness allows racial injustice to persist"; Balfour, *The Evidence of Things Not Said*, p. 55.

[112] du Toit, "From autonomy to accountability," p. 79.

approach that has taken the same starting-point for analyzing South African society: that of Black Consciousness. For, at the heart of Steve Biko's book *I Write What I Like*, first published in 1978, is recognition of the centrality of white racism.[113] In this work Biko provided a powerful and instructive critique of white racism, which in relation to his critique of white liberals echoes many of the issues that unfolded in the Makgoba, Mamdani, and Shell affairs.[114]

Biko urges his readers, black or white, to consciously and openly confront such insidious racial politics – to work for a new fusion of what it means politically, socially, and culturally to be "South African." The ends of Biko's critique of white racism are that we all arrive at a "true humanity." Applying such insights to the question of academic freedom it is clear that the former "open universities" must strive to escape from their history, correct and rise above the continuing presence of white racism, and develop a new post-apartheid common "South African" identity: only then can they present a more "human face."[115]

[113] See, in particular, Steve Biko (1996) "White racism and black consciousness," in Biko's *I Write What I Like*, Johannesburg, Ravan Press, pp. 61–72.
[114] Steve Biko (1996) "Black souls in white skins?" in Biko's *I Write What I Like*, Johannesburg, Ravan Press, pp. 19–26.
[115] Steve Biko (1996) "Black Consciousness and the quest for a true humanity," in Biko's *I Write What I Like*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, pp. 87–98. It is interesting to note that some ten years after the Makgoba affair, Mokgoba was able to formulate the following important insight: "The creation of a non-racist society will emerge to a large extent through the conscious confrontation of the current pervasive racism by all"; Malegapuru Makgoba (2005) "Wrath of dethroned white males," *Mail & Guardian*, March 24–31, p. 23.

References

Adam, Heribert (1973) “The rise of Black Consciousness in South Africa,” *Race* 15(2), 149–165.

Arendt, Hannah (1967) *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, London, George Allen and Unwin.

Baldwin, James (1964) *The Fire Next Time*, London, Penguin.

Balfour, Lawrie (2001) *The Evidence of Things Not Said: James Baldwin and the Promise of American Democracy*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca & London.

Barry, Brian (2005) *Why Social Justice Matters*, Cambridge, Polity Press.

Bentley, Kristina, Adam Habib, and Seán Morrow (2006) “Academic freedom, institutional autonomy and the corporatised university in contemporary South Africa,” *Council on Higher Education research report no. 3*.

Bertelsen, Eve (1998) “The real transformation: The marketisation of higher education,” *Social Dynamics* 24(2), 130–158.

Biko, Steve (1996) *I Write What I Like,* Johannesburg, Ravan Press.

Biko, Steve (1996) “Black Consciousness and the quest for a true humanity,” in *I Write What I Like*, Johannesburg, Ravan Press, pp. 87–98.

Biko, Steve (1996) “The definition of Black Consciousness,” in I Write What I Like, Johannesburg, Ravan Press, pp. 48–53.

Biko, Steve (1996) “White racism and Black Consciousness,” in *I Write What I Like*, Johannesburg, Ravan Press, pp. 61–72.

Bundy, Colin (2000) “Innovative approaches to university management: A view from the eleventh floor,” unpublished paper.

City Press (2005) “Campuses fail badly on their equity targets,” 6 August.

Cooper, David (2000) “The skewed revolution: The selective ‘Africanization’ of the student profile of historically white universities and technikons in South Africa in the 1990s,” unpublished paper, *Centre for African Studies*, University of Cape Town.

Duncan, Jane (2006) “Our academic freedom must be safeguarded,” *Sunday Independent.*

Duncan, Jane (2007) “The rise of the disciplinary university, *Harold Wolpe Lecture*, 17 May.

Duncan, Norman (no date) “‘Race,’ racism and the university: Some personal observations and reflections,” unpublished paper, Dept Psychology, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

du Toit, André (2000) “From autonomy to accountability: Academic freedom under threat in South Africa,” *Social Dynamics* 26(1), 76–133.

du Toit, André (2001) “Revisiting academic freedom in post-apartheid South Africa: Current issues and challenges,” commissioned paper for *Transformation in Higher Education* (CHET).

Feagin, Joe R. (2006) *Systemic Racism: A Theory of Oppression*, Routledge, New York.

Feagin, Joe R, and Hernán Vera (1995) *White Racism: The Basics*, New York, Routledge.

Gower, Primarashni (2008) "Failing the majority," *Mail & Guardian*, 10–16 October, p. 15.

Graham, Kevin M. (2002) "Race and the limits of liberalism," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 32(2), 219–239.

Habib, Adam (2006) "The practice of academic freedom in South Africa", *University of Kwa-Zulu Natal University Forum Lecture*, 19 October.

Harris, Cheryl (1993) "Whiteness as property," *Harvard Law Review* 106(8), 1768–1777.

Higgins, J. (2000) "Academic freedom in the new South Africa," *Boundary 2: International Journal of Literature and Culture* 27(1), 97–119. Available online: http://boundart2.dukejournals.org/cgi/reprint/27/1/97

Higgins, John (2009) "Academic freedom: Right or practice," *Mail & Guardian*, 6–12 February, pp. 2–3 (Getting Ahead supplement).

Honohan, Iseult (2002) *Civic Republicanism*, London, Routledge.

Jansen, Jonathan D. (1998) "But our natives are different! Race, knowledge and power in the academy" *Social Dynamics* 24(2), 106–116.

Kgosana, Caiphus (2005) "Wits shuns black profs," *City Press*, 5 July, p. 2.

Kgosana, Caiphus (2008) “Whites in denial about racism, says Pallo Jordan,” *City Press*, 27 April, p. 4.

MacFarlane, David (2006) “Rhodes grabs barred Desai,” *Mail & Guardian*, 27 January.

MacFarlane, David (2006) “Makgoba’s logic blasted,” *Mail & Guardian*, 13 February.

McGary, Howard (1999) *Race and Social Justice*, Blackwell, Malden, MA.

Makgoba, Malegapuru William (1997) *Mokoko: The Makgoba Affair – A Reflection on Transformation*, Johannesburg, Vivlia.

Makgoba, Malegapuru, and Sipho Seepe (2004) “Knowledge and identity: An African vision of higher education transformation,” in Sipho Seepe (ed.) *Towards an African Identity of Higher Education*, Pretoria, Vista University and Skotaville, pp. 13–57.

Makgoba, Malegapuru (2005) “Wrath of dethroned white males,” *Mail & Guardian*, March 24–31, p. 23.

Mamdani, Mahmood (1996) *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press.

Mamdani, Mahmood (1998) “Teaching Africa at the post-apartheid University of Cape Town: A critical view of the ‘Introduction to Africa’ core course in the Social Science and Humanities Faculty’s foundation semester, 1998,” *Social Dynamics* 24(2), 1–32.

Mamdani, Mahmood (1998) “When does a settler become a native? Reflections of the colonial roots of citizenship in Equatorial and South Africa,” *Inaugural Lecture*, UCT.

Mamdani, Mahmood (1998), "Is African studies to be turned into a new home for Bantu education at UCT? Available online: www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/30/136.html

Mangcu, Xolela (2004) "The quest for an African identity: Thirty seven years on," available online.

Memmi, Albert (1990) *The Colonizer and the Colonized, Introduced by Jean-Paul Sartre*, London, Earthscan Publications.

More, Mabogo P. (2008) "Biko: Africana existentialist philosopher," in Andile Mngxitama, Amanda Alexander, and Nigel C. Gibson (eds) *Biko Lives! Contesting the Legacies of Steve Biko*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 45–68.

Murray, Bruce (1982) *Wits: The Early Years*, Johannesburg, University of the Witwatersrand.

Nolutshungu, Sam C. (1982) *Changing South Africa: Political Considerations*, New York, Africana.

Nzimande, Blade (1996) "Academic freedom in the new South Africa." Available online: www.sacp.org.za/main.php?include=docs/sp/1996/bladeaug96.html

The Open Universities in South Africa (1957) Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press.

Pandor, Naledi (2004) "We cannot stand by and watch institutions collapse," available online www.chet.org.za/download/2735/issues_241004.doc, p. 1.

Parkin, Frank (1979) *Marxism and Class Theory: A Bourgeois Critique*, New York, Columbia University Press.

Pithouse, Richard (2006) “Introduction.” In Richard Pithouse (ed.) *Asinamali: University Struggles in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, Trenton, NJ, Africa World Press.

Potgieter, Cheryl (2002) *Black Academics on the Move*, Centre for Higher Education Transformation. Available online: www.compress.co.za

Saunders, Stuart (2000) *Vice-Chancellor on a Tightrope: A Personal Account of Climatic Years in South Africa*, Cape Town, David Philip.

Seepe, Sipho (ed.) (2004) *Towards an African Identity of Higher Education,* Pretoria, Vista University and Skotaville.

Shear, Mervyn (1996) *Wits: A University in the Apartheid Era,* Johannesburg, Witwatersrand University Press.

Shell, Robert, et al. (2000) *Confidential Report on the Structure and Function of the Board of Studies and its Liaison with Other University Bodies*, Rhodes University East London.

Shell Report (second edition) (2001) *Strictly Confidential Report on the Structure and Function of the Board of Studies and its Liaison with other University Bodies*, by Shell and others, Executive summary, first edition, Rhodes University East London.

Shklar, Judith N. (1990) *The Faces of Injustice*, Yale University Press, New Haven.

Shultz, Marjorie M., and David Wellman (2003) *Whitewashing Race: The Myth of a Color-Blind Society*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press.

Singh, Nikhil Pal (2004) *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press.

Southall, Roger, and Julian Cobbing (2001) “From racial liberalism to corporate authoritarianism: The Shell affair and the assault on academic freedom in South Africa,” *Social Dynamics* 27(2), 1–42.

Southall, Roger, and Julian Cobbing (2006) “From racial liberalism to corporate authoritarianism.” In Richard Pithouse (ed.) *Asinamali: University Struggles in Post-Apartheid South Africa,* Trenton, NJ, Africa World Press.

Southall R. and Cobbing J. (2001), “From racial liberalism to corporate authoritarianism: The Shell affair and the assault on academic freedom in South Africa,” *Social Dynamics* 27(2), 1–42.

Stadler, A. W. (date) *The Political Economy of South Africa*, Cape Town, David Philip.

Statman, James M., and Ansell Amy E. (2000) “The rise and fall of the Makgoba affair: A case study of symbolic politics,” *Politikon* 27(2), 277–95.

Taylor, Charles (1975) “Neutrality in the university,” In Alan Montefoire (ed.) *Neutrality and Impartiality*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 128–148.

van Vuuren, Willem (1998) “Review article. African identity, Africanism and transformation [review of Makgoba’ Mokoko],” *Politikon* 25(1), 159–66.

Wright, Harrison (1977) *The Burden of the Present: Liberal–Radical Controversy over Southern Africa History*, Cape Town, David Philip.