

Article

Public sociology and the transformation of the university

Anthea Metcalfe and Jacklyn Cock

antheam@yebo.co.za and jacklyn.cock@wits.ac.za

Introduction: Public Sociology

In Burawoy's formulation, Public Sociology is distinguished by its use of reflexive knowledge and its appeal beyond the university. It 'engages with diverse publics, reaching beyond the university, to enter into an ongoing dialogue with these publics about fundamental values' (Zussman and Misra 2007:5). This formulation was in part a reaction to the way in which public universities in the USA have responded to mounting attacks from the 'right':

...with market solutions – joint ventures with private corporations, advertising campaigns to attract students, fawning over private donors, commodifying education through distance learning, and employing cheap temporary professional labor, not to mention the armies of low-paid service workers. (Burawoy 2007:27)

Universities in the Global South face similar challenges in terms of resisting marketisation and serving the needs of the wider society while maintaining academic freedom, adequate funding and political independence (Subotzky 1999, Webster and Mosoetsa 2001, Singh 2001, Badat 2004, Reddy 2004).

These challenges were amplified in South Africa during the apartheid era when universities were predominantly elitist enclaves serving white minority interests. For this reason Public Sociology in this context involved not only 'reaching beyond the university' to struggle for the redistribution of power and resources to promote social justice, but also attempting to transform the institution itself. This 'Janus-faced' approach distinguishes Webster's practice of public sociology from that of the originator of 'Public Sociology', C Wright Mills. Unlike Mills, Webster's practice was linked to a 'political imagination forged through collective and collaborative practices with

groups, organisations, movements beyond the academy' (Burawoy 2010 in this volume).

At the same time it should not be thought that Webster's vision of institutional transformation was limited to changing the social composition of the staff and students of the University of the Witwatersrand. In his roles as founder and director of the Sociology of Work Programme (SWOP) and as three-time head of the Department of Sociology, Webster articulated a wide vision of transformation which also involved equipping students from both advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds with the social commitment and skills to contribute to the transformation of South African society. This paper focuses on one such initiative, an internship programme, to illustrate how Webster combined his political and sociological understandings and practices in his attempts to transform the institution in which he was located.

The historical context of higher education in SA

The historical context of higher education in South Africa is a necessary point of departure to understand the ways in which colonialism and apartheid ideology shaped the character, development and provision of higher education for all South Africans, black¹ and white. In an earlier article (Buhlungu and Metcalfe 2001) it was argued that processes of social exclusion under colonialism and apartheid created an environment that ensured that whites retained control over knowledge production and dissemination which was not conducive to the emergence of a critical mass of black intellectuals. One of the consequences of this is that black people and women remain underrepresented in academic and management positions in the Historically White Universities (HWUs).

Black people gained access to HWUs through the Extension of University Education Act of 1959 that allowed a limited number of black people to apply to study at these universities on condition that they obtained written permission from the Minister of Education. Permission was only granted when the applicant's proposed programme of study was not offered at the institution designated for the race group to which he/she belonged (Bunting 2002). This meant that a disproportionate ratio of the small number of the black students registered for 'permit subjects' such as Industrial Sociology, African History and Comparative African Government and Law. African people struggled to gain permission for access to HWUs as the state was determined to force them to study at the newly established black universities (Niven 2004). In response to student boycotts, workers' strikes and the

increased pressure from economic sanctions, the government passed the University Amendment Act of 1983 that made it legal for HWUs to admit black students (Mabokela 2000). With respect to academic staff, the English HWUs appointed a few black individuals in departments such as African Literature, African Languages and Anthropology. However, in spite of increasing numbers of black students attending the English HWUs from the 1970s onwards, their academic staffing patterns in higher education remained unchanged.

The historical context of the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits)

The origins of Wits University lie in the South African School of Mines and Technology in Johannesburg. It gained full university status in 1921 and served to provide education and professional training for the burgeoning white urban population attracted to Johannesburg because of the wealth generated by the mining industry (Metrowich 1929, Shear 1996). It received a large proportion of its initial funding from the British mining companies, as reflected in the range of engineering degrees it offered. In the 1940s and 1950s, Wits University admitted a minute number of black students and only to certain faculties (Shear 1996). It had a policy of ‘academic non-segregation but social segregation’, which meant that no ‘mixed’ sport was allowed. Black students had their own separate change rooms and equipment and were not allowed to play in league matches. They were also excluded from the annual student dinners where the Vice-Chancellor argued, ‘...if non-Europeans were invited to dinners, the question of admission to dances and sporting activities must immediately be raised’ (Murray 1997:49-50). Murray (1990) has suggested that the university authorities curtailed any radical dissent and acquiesced in the application of the government’s restrictions on black admissions, mostly due to its dependence on state subsidies, its traditions of observing the law of the land scrupulously and the lack of pressure for black graduates from the professions that the university serviced, such as engineering, science and medicine.

With respect to academic staff, Murray (1997) reported that Professor Clement Doke in the Department of Bantu Languages was the only black academic staff member until his retirement in 1953. He employed two black staff members, one of which was Robert Sobukwe, the first president of the Pan African Congress. He was employed as a language assistant from 1954 until March 1960 when security police arrested him in the office of his head

of department for his role in the anti-pass campaign. Murray has suggested that Robert Sobukwe resented Wits for 'its continued failure to appoint a black as lecturer' (1997:241). Although there was no law that prohibited the appointment of black staff at the time, the government had threatened to introduce legislation to prohibit black academic appointments when UCT wanted to hire Archie Mafeje as a senior lecturer in social anthropology in 1968. Despite student protests, UCT eventually withdrew its offer of employment. The division of labour at Wits during the 1960s and 1970s reflected the racial prejudices of the society it served, ie black people were employed as language and laboratory assistants, clerical assistants and library shelvers, as well as chefs, 'police boys', kitchen and cleaning staff in residences and general labourers elsewhere (Murray 1997). Despite these practices, the English HWUs referred to themselves as 'liberal' universities rather than 'servants of the apartheid state' due to their expressed commitment to the universal values of academic freedom (Bunting 2001:70). At that time, they were not prepared to go further to challenge apartheid policies.

However, Wits University does have an alternative legacy of genuine non-racialism and commitment to the transformation of the institution. This legacy stems from the work and commitment of students such as Nelson Mandela, Ruth First, Joe Slovo, George Bizos, Harold Wolpe and a few individual academic staff members, such as David Webster and Edward Webster. They were 'in the vanguard of progressive political thought in the country' (Shear 1996:12) and through their student activism often forced the university to confront the apartheid authorities.

The increasing militarisation of the apartheid state after the Soweto student uprising in 1976, led senior university leaders to actively oppose state interference and protest the continued harassment, detention and torture of some of its students and staff (Johnson 2005). During this time, there were internal tensions and debates about academic standards, the academic boycott, supporting student protests and the role of academics in the struggle for democracy (Johnson 2005). In the 1980s, the English HWUs became increasingly vocal in their opposition to the state and received considerable support from international donors to reduce their dependence on state subsidies (Bunting 2002). Acting on its liberal traditions, Wits University exploited the permit system to increase the numbers of black students and to employ a few black academics, albeit at the lower levels. Despite the legacy of genuine non-racialism, strong opposition to apartheid and the increasing number of black students during the 1980s, the under-

representation of black people in academia persisted. This was the context in which Webster initiated a research project in 1985 which would act as a catalyst for transformation.

The perspectives on a Wits research project: a catalyst for transformation

This research project aimed to examine the role of Wits in a changing South Africa and survey the views of a number of communities who had not previously participated in shaping university policies and structures. It seemed to Webster that the 'view from below' was important, 'the opinions of people presently excluded from decision making but who will be influential in shaping the South Africa of the future' (cited in POW 1986:1). The survey thus included the views of representatives of three different 'excluded communities'. A total of 76 organisations active in the black community, as well as the international community and over 8,000 staff and students at Wits were circulated with a questionnaire.

The research found that the vast majority of informants from the community survey perceived Wits as being dominated by 'big business', government and the white community and was isolated from the experience of black people. As one informant said, 'Wits is controlled by a minority, for a minority'. Many felt that Wits must become more accountable to society as a whole, and in order to do so 'the composition of Wits must reflect the society at large- particularly with regard to race, class and gender'. This implied some form of positive discrimination or affirmative action. Academic support was believed to be essential if people from these constituencies were to reach academic standards that, it was generally agreed, must not be lowered. 'Wits is valued as an institution with an international academic reputation. To maintain this reputation would require a number of academic, psychological and material support programmes' (POW 1986:75). It was felt that these support programmes should include white students 'to enable them to overcome the disabling effects of racially segregated and uncritical education' (POW 1986:75). It was also felt that 'the present academic support programmes at Wits were somewhat "patronising", were not taken seriously enough and were based on "white" western norms and standards' (POW 1986:14). It was further felt that 'a changing student composition requires a changed content and method of teaching. A curriculum that is more appropriate to a university in Southern Africa is required' (POW 1986:76). The community survey stressed that there was a need for courses

to make all students more socially aware of community concerns, and with a more 'problem-solving thrust' (POW 1986:23).

An important theme was the realignment of relations between the university and the community. This could mean that the university establish its presence in the community through part-time courses, resource and study centres and more public lectures on contemporary issues. Also organisations such as parents associations, civil associations, trade unions and similar organisations must be more firmly represented in the decision-making structures of the university.

The report was controversial, particularly in its findings on widespread internal support for the academic boycott. This question stimulated intensive discussion in many arenas and Wits became an ideological battleground, in a process of enhancing rather than undermining academic freedom, if that is defined as the exchange of ideas. Significantly, the survey included no recommendations because it was designed as 'the first step in a process of consultation and negotiation' (POW 1986:79). However, the alternative vision articulated by these 'excluded communities' and disseminated widely in the POW report, gave a sharp impetus to institutional transformation. It generated intense debate within the university.

Institutional transformation

'Transformation' is a contested concept. After the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990, the higher education sector, as with many other white-dominated sectors, came under pressure to set transformation objectives that would meet the goals and needs of the new democratic state. In response to student protests around issues of access to higher education, Wits developed alternative admission procedures, provided academic and social support to black students and reworked its exclusion procedures (Shear 1996). In 1994, Wits adopted a mission statement that affirmed the university's commitment to the elimination of discrimination based on race and gender and to address inequalities through affirmative action and equal opportunity policies.² However, the 'Makgoba affair'³ in 1995 had served to racially polarise the university community around its pace of transformation (Webster 1998).

It was in this environment that the university established the Forum for Further Accelerated and Comprehensive Transformation (FFACT), a broadly representative forum concerned mostly with issues of institutional governance. At its first meeting, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the time, Professor Malegapuru Makgoba, stressed that 'the student populations

and staff profiles, the distribution of hierarchy, the missions and visions, the cultural values within the institution is disproportionately skewed to reflect the legacy of a sad past' (cited in Gutto 1999). He therefore stressed the need for fundamental change, and wrote, 'The transformation process embraces a series of closely related, inter-linked and inter-dependent themes. These are equity, governance, access, affirmative action, changes to curricula, effectiveness and development' (cited in *The Star* June 2, 1995). This view of institutional transformation found its way into higher education policy in the *Education White Paper 3: A programme for the Transformation of Higher Education* (Department of Education 1997:7-10) calling for increased and broadened participation, responsiveness to societal interests and needs and co-operation and partnerships in governance. In response, the University redefined institutional transformation as a process of negotiated organisational change that breaks decisively with past discriminatory practices in order to create an environment where the full potential of all staff and students can be realised (Wits 1998).

Webster's contribution to institutional transformation

A focus on institutional transformation is a distinctive feature of Webster's practice of Public Sociology. In his 33 years at Wits, Webster contributed to this process of transformation of the university in several ways. A gifted teacher, his priority public was his students and he developed the discipline of Industrial Sociology and inspired an extraordinary range of students. For him

...teaching is about the transformation of the social relations that shape our society, challenging the forms of domination and social injustice, uncovering the ideologies that conceal power relations and identifying the sources of power that could lead to a more egalitarian world. (cited in Mosoetsa 2009: 8)

He did so partly by introducing a number of new socially relevant courses, such as a course on 'Globalisation and Social Policy' which he introduced in 1992 with the aim of developing Masters students who could engage in social research and policy analysis that would contribute to reconstruction and development.

While Webster has supervised 15 PhDs, including many people who have gone on to become leading scholars and 16 MAs, his students were not restricted to those registered for a university degree. Webster established a labour studies course for the Federation of South African Trade Unions

(FOSATU) – the forerunner of COSATU, which ran from 1980 to 1985. Originating in the university, this course was moved off campus when in 1982 the contract was cancelled by the Wits University Council on the grounds that it breached ‘academic freedom’ and was being taught by ‘communists’. However SWOP continued to be active in this field, conducted research and offering short week-long courses for the labour movement. Ironically, at a SWOP breakfast last year, Elizabeth Tabete, deputy minister of Trade and Industry at the time described the FOSATU course as ‘the first good university I attended’.

Under Webster’s leadership, SWOP focused on a particular public – the marginalised and exploited – and the agency crucial to changing their situation: the labour movement. This marks SWOP’s commitment to what Burawoy calls ‘organic public sociology’ where ‘the sociologist works in close connection with a visible, thick, active, local public’ (Burawoy 2007:28); in Webster’s case this was the labour movement. As Burawoy has expressed it, ‘While in the United States we were theorizing about social movements, in South Africa sociologists were making social movements’ (Burawoy 2007:51).

In his commitment to the labour movement as an organic public sociologist, Webster linked Wits in a global partnership termed the Global Labour University (GLU). At the core of the GLU project is to produce a new generation of labour intellectuals who form a global network of teachers, researchers and alumni that interact with the university (both here and in Brazil, Germany and India). As Webster (2009:1) has written, ‘we are hoping that the synergy between university based intellectuals and union based intellectuals will revitalise labour and contribute to a genuinely global labour movement’. He has also promoted this goal through his participation in the International Sociological Association.

As head of the Sociology department four times from 1988-1994 and again in 1999, 2004 and 2006, Webster provided a model of inspiring leadership and a style of participative management which stressed the collective. This created a sense of community, a sense of being joined in a common project, which is again unusual given the individualism which marks much academic life and which the new NRF rating system encourages (and why Webster opposed its introduction). Webster promoted an alternative vision of the university as something more than the pursuit of academic credentials, bureaucratic rankings, ‘safe’ research topics and refereed publications. His vision involved the transformation of the university into a demographically

representative resource to serve all South Africans. He pursued this vision not only in the classroom but was active in many university structures such as the council, where he served from 1998 to 2001 as the senate representative, and on senate itself. In all of these sites he argued for strengthening the links between the university and the wider society as part of transformation to make the university more accessible and accountable to the society in which it was situated.

One of the core emphases in the debate on institutional transformation emanating from POW was to transform Wits by giving access to those who had been historically excluded from the university, viz black students from working class backgrounds. One such contribution to institutional transformation, generated by what Burawoy calls the SWOP/Webster 'windmill', was an innovative internship programme which challenged the historical legacy of higher education in South Africa and promoted the transformation of the university into an institution that reflected the society it should serve. In order to ensure that these black students realised their true potential, Webster was clear that it was necessary to provide a supportive environment where the pedagogical concerns of black students were systematically addressed. This is the philosophy that underpinned the SWOP internship programme.

The SWOP internship programme (1997-2009)

The SWOP internship programme is a legacy of which Webster is especially proud. As a recognised research unit of the then Centre for Scientific Development (CSD), SWOP was invited in 1996 to participate in its Research Capacity Building Programme for Honours students. With minimal funding and in the absence of guidelines from the CSD on how to proceed, it was decided that the aims of the programme were not only increased access and academic excellence but also a desire to produce students who were committed to use their new found skills to reconstruct and develop a more egalitarian and just society. In order to develop these postgraduate students into independent researchers, it was important that they gained practical experience of the academic labour process, ie from conceptualisation of the research problem through to the publication of their findings. These projects became the first step in the development of their Masters proposals in the following year.

These research projects would allow the interns the space to draw on their unique knowledge and experiences to frame research questions and analyse

their findings while gaining on the job training by working with established researchers as their mentors and receiving financial support.

Selection of candidates

As the programme was aimed at Honours students, it was advertised to third year students in the previous year. The main criteria for selection were independent thought, intellectual curiosity and academic excellence – qualities that could involve the potential to pursue academic or research careers. The provision of a stipend, research expenses and the opportunity of having a research mentor made this a highly sought after programme and attracted the top third year Industrial Sociology students and later, Economics students when they were invited to apply in 2003. In 1999, the internship was extended to Masters students.

There were many talented students that were not able to pursue postgraduate studies, as they had to find jobs so they could support their families. Many of these talented students came from working class backgrounds and spoke English as a third or fourth language but they had succeeded against the odds in their undergraduate studies. After rigorous interviews with each applicant, four interns were selected each year and in 2003, the first two white interns were appointed as it was argued that given the track record and success of the programme, it was time to normalise the process (Bezuidenhout 2009). The students were matched with SWOP mentors, including Webster, on the basis of either shared research interests or their personalities. A critical element of this programme was the priority that it gave to mentoring, which was defined as an interactive relationship that involved not only the transfer of research skills but also one that encouraged the independent development of the mentee. Another key aspect was the provision of non-formal academic training, such as writing and presentation skills accompanied by regular opportunities to present their work at seminars and conferences. After two years, the funding from the CSD dried up, as it became part of the newly formed National Research Foundation (NRF).

Webster's passion, commitment and track record for developing students who had been historically excluded from the university were crucial in securing financial support for this programme from a foreign donor for the following eight years. In the absence of this funding, it is unlikely that the programme would have attracted talented black students from working class backgrounds.

SWOP interns 1997-2009: degree completions and current positions

A total of 38 interns graduated on this programme. Four completed Honours degrees and 23 completed Masters. Five have completed PhDs and six are currently registered – five at overseas universities, five at Wits University and one at the University of Johannesburg (UJ). Six of these PhD students are women. While seven are currently pursuing academic careers at Wits and UJ, there is also a cadre of trained SWOP researchers currently employed in positions where they are able to influence public policy beyond the boundaries of the university. Dison (2007:16) has argued that the ‘high success rate of the internship programme suggests that, along with the other contributing factors, the selection process was effective in gauging interest in research and potential for developing research capacity’. As a response to transformation of the university, Lewins (2006) has argued that the SWOP internship was one example of an Active Change response, ie independent and organic responses with dedication and follow through of transformative goals, usually department/unit led skills development initiatives. This is in contrast to other responses that had transformative goals but were unable to challenge the status quo or that complied with policy but without transformative drive or responsibility.

The SWOP internship was a practical application of Webster’s version of Public Sociology on two fronts. It gave talented black students access to postgraduate studies in a supportive academic environment while increasing the numbers of independent and competent researchers working in the public sector.

Key factors that made it possible for the SWOP internship to achieve its goals

1. The supportive environment in SWOP helped the students feel at ease and provided a safe intellectual space to expose them to the processes of knowledge production. It also helped them to overcome the alienation that black students sometimes feel in their academic departments and within the institution. Webster was key in promoting an environment that helps them to realise their potential and as ex-intern Sarah Mosoetsa acknowledges helped her ‘feel understood’.
2. The programme foregrounded cultural and diversity issues, i.e. the often-unrecognised skills that black students bring to the research process were acknowledged. This is important as it influences the way

they pose research questions, interpret their findings and visibly boosted their confidence.

3. It allowed the interns the space to choose an independent topic that interested them and resulted in the contribution of new knowledge to the discipline as students were encouraged to question conventional wisdoms and come up with new interpretations of social reality, particularly when engaging in research around public policy.
4. The commitment of the SWOP mentors to achieving the goals of the programme by devoting many hours to mentoring these students to achieve their potential. They received no direct benefit or institutional recognition for time spent on this activity.
5. The organisational culture of SWOP was an open and participatory one. Students were in no doubt as to what the internship expected of them. Progress was monitored in an unobtrusive manner although non-delivery was dealt with confidentially and promptly.
6. SWOP provided skills in demystifying the university. Universities are baffling and alienating institutional environments and there are often hidden codes and conventions that take years even for academics to learn and to figure out how to negotiate in order to get things done. A key aspect of the mentoring process was a conscious effort to create a transparent and supportive atmosphere where interns had access to SWOP's staff, resources and networks in ways that facilitated their research progress and provided support in negotiating with formal institutional structures.
7. As more students passed through the internship, SWOP hosted events where past interns were invited to interact and share their experiences with current interns. In this way, a community of interns was developed, which carried significant cultural capital both inside and outside the university. In addition, interns were expected to present their research at the monthly SWOP breakfast seminar series where they had the opportunity to interact with SWOP's off-campus networks.
8. The coordinator of the programme was the Senior Administrator of SWOP. The coordinator had a sound knowledge of the institution and a thorough understanding of the academic labour process, provided intellectual leadership, had sufficient perceived authority with the mentors and a genuine empathy for the students. This enabled the coordinator to act as mediator when relationships were faltering, counsellor when students and mentors experienced problems, and facilitator of appropriate

training and networking opportunities for interns. The coordinator also became a mentor to the interns, particularly with respect to the organisational and financial aspects of the research process and developing their interpersonal skills, particularly when they are in the field (Dison 2007). The coordinator was key to demystifying the institution for the students by encouraging the development of tacit skills that help them to negotiate their way around the university in order to get things done.

9. In her study of SWOP, Dison (2007:249) concluded that:
 - ...the combination of long-term stability, sustainability, integration with the academic heartland, and strengthening of SWOP’s location in an international field of research, has the effect of building long-term pedagogic continuity for developing new generations of researchers in the field of Sociology of Work.
10. Undoubtedly Webster was the champion of the internship programme, providing intellectual and inspirational leadership and ensuring that it had the required financial resources to sustain its success. He was supported in this endeavour by the commitment of Sakhela Buhlungu and Khayaat Fakier in developing the next generation of scholars.

The SWOP internship programme highlights the difficulties of developing a new generation of scholars from working class backgrounds. Despite this and other institutional interventions, the profile of permanent academic staff at Wits in 2008 reflects the continued predominance of white and male academic staff, particularly at senior levels.

Current levels of representivity at Wits University

Table 1: 2008 Permanent Academic Staff

	BLACK		BLACK Total	WHITE		WHITE Total	PERCENTAGES						
	F	M		F	M		BF	BM	BT	WF	WM	WT	
Undesignated		1	1	0	1	1							
Junior lecturer	12	10	22	11	3	14	31.68	28.95	60.53	28.95	10.53	39.47	
Lecturer	80	78	158	150	85	235	20.36	19.85	40.20	38.17	21.63	59.80	
Senior lecturer	21	39	60	103	86	189	8.43	15.66	24.10	41.37	34.54	75.90	
Associate Professor	9	16	25	42	95	137	5.56	9.88	15.43	25.93	58.64	84.57	
Professor		20	20	32	85	117	0.00	14.60	14.60	23.36	62.04	85.40	
TOTAL	122	164	286	338	355	693	12.46	16.75	29.21	34.53	36.26	70.79	

Source: Content-Location: file:///C:/2B6A50F3/HEMIS.HDCNTS.by.RANK.INSTRRES.htm

Since the transition to democracy, Wits University has made some progress in increasing the number of black academics, mostly at the entry and lecturer levels, but they remain conspicuous by their absence at the senior levels. Whites remain the overwhelming majority, despite their numbers having declined steadily over the years. At the professoriate level, the percentage of whites has decreased marginally from 88.2 per cent in 1998 to 85.4 per cent in 2008 (Metcalf 2009). Although the proportion of white males has decreased substantially, the increase in the number of white female professors has ensured that the professoriate remains predominantly white. Disturbingly, Wits University employed no black female professors in 2008. The absence of senior black academics, notably women, in most disciplines at the research-led HWUs is problematic for the future of our country because it will limit their influence on nature, content and relevance for addressing the country's problems, educating students and building the next generation of intellectuals (Metcalf 2009). In this respect, Evans (1990:27) has argued that it is essential for HWUs not only to increase the number of black academics but also urgently to facilitate their development into independent academics that produce and publish research. This is because the question of 'who shapes the direction of the intellectual enquiry?' greatly affects the outcome of that inquiry. Equally critical is that these measures do not take the form of white paternalism, tokenism and lowered standards, but should be an integral part of the university's transformation objectives (Evans 1990). Table 1 shows that academic transformation is more than providing formal internships that support black working class students through postgraduate studies. It points to the challenges that confront our public higher education institutions such as Wits to achieve their stated transformation objectives. They need to find suitable ways to slow the 'revolving door' and create conditions that will discourage black and women academics from leaving the academy soon after entering.

Alienating institutional cultures have been identified by some black academics as one of the main reasons that black people left academia. Wits University has acknowledged this in its report on the survey of its institutional culture in 2002, when it was pointed out that:

...although Wits is an institution that comprises many cultures, the dominant culture still carries the burden of apartheid history as is seen in the demographics of the institution, and the tradition of whiteness (and patriarchy) which emerges in the discourses of difference and discrimination on campus. (2003: xxiii)

As Webster has argued:

...to achieve the twin goals of academic excellence and social engagement required a shift in the priorities of the University towards a more developmental agenda. Sadly, the university failed to take the developmental turn and chose instead the conventional path of encouraging academics to set their sights on the leading universities of the Global North rather than the difficult but only long-term goal, of building a new generation of knowledge producers and a university rooted in the Global South. (Interview with Webster, Nov 2009)

Institutional challenges

Within the current economic climate, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find donors to support initiatives at Honours levels, as they tend to focus on undergraduate and doctoral students. The challenge is to ensure that the Honours (and Masters) students are not neglected, as the talented ones represent the pool of potential academics and to ensure that they receive financial support, research training and mentoring in a supportive environment during the course of their studies. This could be achieved through an equity initiative that supports disciplinary initiatives within academic departments/research units that have committed and published senior academics with good throughput rates for black working class postgraduate students. In its audit report of Wits University in 2006, the HEQC recommended that the institution should develop ways to attract postgraduate students and increase throughput rates if it wants to achieve its mission of being a research-driven university, specifically by providing 'more support structures for postgraduate education, in particular with regard to supervision, and use its examples of good practice in Schools more effectively (Recommendation 16:73).

Mentors are key to achieving the goals of this kind of internship programme. They need to be committed to developing the next generation of scholars by walking the 'extra mile' with them. The changing nature of academic work and the continuous pressure to publish has increased individualistic approaches to research, particularly in the humanities and social sciences. Recognition by the institution of supervision workloads and time spent on mentoring, for example in workload allocations and promotions, is crucial for creating the conditions within departments/units where mentoring and collective projects can flourish.

Challenges for the academic department/research unit

Professors occupy the positions of deans, heads of departments, schools and directors of research units and, as such, have most of the responsibility in creating conditions for a critical mass of black scholars to emerge, eg to reduce the teaching load of junior academics so that they have time to complete higher degrees, and to create opportunities for co-publishing early in their careers. A well-respected and established senior academic within the discipline is necessary to champion these goals within the institution, the academic department, professional associations and funding networks.

Departments have a responsibility to ensure that they create an intellectual, social and organisational infrastructure to support interns and mentors. One of the most effective ways of doing this is to appoint a coordinator. In most instances, donors do not fund this position and it is given to a staff member. The challenge is to appoint someone who is passionate about developing young scholars, has extensive knowledge of the institution and understanding of the academic labour process and has sufficient perceived authority amongst mentors. The coordinator's roles are to ensure that the programme remains on track to achieve its goals, facilitate a sense of belonging within the departmental environment for the interns and to provide support to mentors, as appropriate. In the absence of an organisational culture that facilitates research capacity development, internship programmes such as these will have minimal chance of success.

Individual challenges for mentors and students

The challenge for mentors is to be committed to the development of the interns into independent researchers who can question conventional wisdoms and generate new understandings, even if they do not share the same world view. As mentors develop new understanding through their interactions with the interns, they should also be supported and be given the opportunity to share experiences and learn from each other. Mentors need to provide opportunities for students to work with them on research projects and to co-present or co-publish research, where possible, to build the self-esteem and confidence of these students to pursue academic careers.

In a supportive environment, students need to ensure that they are committed to their studies, make optimal use of the opportunities that are presented to them and demonstrate respect for the mentor's time. Students have to be prepared to accept constructive criticism and concede that they may require specific skills training, as recommended by the mentor and the

coordinator, to enhance their capacity as researchers, eg writing, presentation and statistical skills.

The voices of students who have been through the SWOP internship programme should also be heard. This would imply that there is a need for further research in assessing its success.

Conclusion

‘The degree to which the University has transformed continues to arouse heated debate. But... there are individuals whose contribution to transformation is without question’ (Mosoetsa 2009:1). As one such individual, Webster has contributed to shaping the university as a resource to serve all South Africans. For Webster the university was always an important site of struggle. A site of struggle, both in the apartheid and neo-liberal eras because, in his vision, the university did not stand outside the relations of power in society, but was implicated in defending, elaborating and applying power and in training the elites who use that power. It is this commitment to the university that distinguishes Webster from many other public intellectuals.

Whether Webster is described as a ‘public intellectual’ or a ‘public sociologist’ it is this notion of the ‘public’, of the collective that requires emphasis, at this time of intense individualism when we are living through an assault on all public institutions relating to crucial areas such as education, health or security.

All of the activities described above have been coloured and informed by his values, particularly his passion for social justice, for equality and human rights as well as for academic rigour and intellectual honesty. And he has worked to promote these values as an organic public sociologist. So he gave evidence in court cases as an expert witness and he engaged with the labour movement as a researcher and a teacher. He has tried to recast the way we understand the world of work, not as a management consultant getting rich and looking for ways to get workers to work harder, but in his own words ‘in an active engagement with workers helping them build their strongest weapon, the strategic use of their collective power in ways that could improve working life’. What is unusual in this practice of public sociology is Webster’s efforts to promote a broad vision of transformation which went beyond changing the social composition of the staff and students of Wits, to include equipping students with the social commitment and skills to contribute to the transformation of the South African social order.

Notes

1. In this paper, black refers to African, Coloured and Indian people as defined in the Employment Equity Act (55 of 1998).
2. Towards the 21st Century: the University's Mission (1994).
3. Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Prof Makgoba publicly criticised the university about its slow pace of transformation and this resulted in a bitter and acrimonious public dispute that resulted in his suspension.

References

- Badat, S (2004) 'South African higher education, 1990-2003: goals, policy initiatives and critical challenges and issues', in *National Policy and a regional response in South African Higher Education*. Partnership for Africa. Oxford: James Currey and Cape Town: David Philip.
- Bezuidenhout, A (2009) 'The "just do it" approach to non-racialism', in Mosoetsa (ed).
- Buhlungu, S and A Metcalfe (2001) 'Breaking the racial division of labour in knowledge production: a reflection on internship programmes', *Perspectives in Education* 19(2).
- Burawoy, M (2007) 'For public sociology', in Dan Clawson, Robert Zussman, Joya Misra, Naomi Gerstel, Randall Slokes, Douglas L Aderson and Michael Burawoy (eds) *Public Sociology*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bunting, I (2002) 'The higher education landscape under apartheid', in N Cloete, R Fehnel, P Maasen, T Moja, H Pevold and T Gibbon (eds) (2002) *Transformation in Higher Education: global pressures and local realities in South Africa*. Cape Town: Juta.
- Department of Education (1997) *Education White Paper 3: a programme for the transformation of Higher Education*. Pretoria: Government Gazette 18207
- Dison, A (2007) 'Research capacity development of individuals at three South African university research centres'. Unpublished PhD thesis. Bellville: University of the Western Cape.
- Evans, I (1990) 'The racial question and intellectual production in South Africa', *Perspectives in Education* 11(2).
- Gutto, S (1999) *Wits University transformation process: where we have come from, where we are going and the challenges of the immediate future*. Submission to FFACT. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand.
- Higher Education Quality Committee (2008) *Audit report on the University of the Witwatersrand*. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education.

- Johnson, B (2005) 'Towards post-managerialism in higher education: the case of management change at the University of the Witwatersrand 1999-2004'. Unpublished PhD thesis. Johannesburg: School of Education, University of the Witwatersrand.
- Lewins, K (2006) 'How open are our doors? A comparison of academic staff transformation at the University of Cape Town and the University of the Witwatersrand'. Master of Arts research report. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand.
- Mabokela, RO (2000) *Voices of Conflict: desegregating South African universities*. New York: Routledge.
- Metcalfe, A (2009) 'A response to employment equity policy in a South African university: a case study of an academic mentoring programme'. Unpublished MEd mini-thesis. Bellville: University of the Western Cape.
- Metrowich, FC (1929) *The Development of Higher Education in South Africa, 1873-1927*. Cape Town: Maskew Miller.
- Mosoetsa, S (ed) (2009) *Public Classrooms: essays in honour of Professor Edward Webster*. Johannesburg: Department of Sociology and Society, Work and Development Institute (SWOP), University of the Witwatersrand.
- Murray, B (1990) 'Wits University, student politics and the coming of apartheid', *Perspectives in Education* 12(1).
- (1997) *Wits: The 'Open' Years: a history of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 1939-1959*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- Perceptions of Wits (POW) (1986) *Tomorrow begins at Wits today: the role of the university in a changing South Africa*. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand.
- Reddy T (2004) *Higher Education and Social Transformation – South Africa case study*. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education.
- Shear, M (1996) *Wits: a university in the apartheid era*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- Singh, M (2001) 'Reinserting the public good into higher education transformation', *Kagisano* 1, Pretoria: CHE Higher Education Discussion series.
- Subotzky, G (2001) 'Addressing equity and excellence in relation to employment: what prospects for transformative change in South Africa', *Equity and Excellence in Education* 34(3).
- Trowler, P and P Knight (1999) 'Organisational socialisation and induction in universities: reconceptualizing theory and practice', *Higher Education* 37.

- University of the Witwatersrand (2003) 'This is where I belong: institutional culture survey report', Transformation and Employment Equity Office www.wits.ac.za/tee.
- University of the Witwatersrand (1998) *Mission Statement*. www.wits.ac.za/wcs/division.html.
- Webster, E (1998) 'Wit's going on? Revisiting the Makgoba affair', *Southern African Report*, March Edition, York University, Toronto.
- (2009) 'Editorial', *Global Labour Journal* 1(1).
- Webster, E and S Mosoetsa (2001) 'At the chalk face: managerialism and the changing academic workplace 1995-2001'. Background paper to N Cloete, R Fehnel, P Maasen, T Moja, H Perold, and T Gibbon (eds) (2002) *Transformation in Higher Education: global pressures and local realities in South Africa*. Cape Town: Juta.