Academic Freedom, Critique and the Humanities: some current challenges

John Higgins[1]

Abstract

This article presents some of the current challenges facing academic freedom and the humanities in South Africa as well as across the world. It focuses first on the shifting fortunes of academic freedom in South Africa, contrasting the pride of place given to it in the pre-1994 social imaginary with its current undermining in higher education policy. It further examines how this undermining is related to a general trend in a global higher education policy which privileges STEM disciplines, and argues that a fuller understanding of the contribution of the NAIL disciplines to the public good is essential to help counter current challenges.

Keywords: academic freedom; democracy, higher education, Humanities; South Africa

Introduction

In the Students' Union Foyer, at the base of the University of Cape Town's Jagger Library, hang a series of paintings by the South African artist, Keresemose Richard Baholo. These form part of a permanent exhibition that commemorates the university's resistance to the key instrument of racial segregation in the apartheid era, the 1959 Extension of University Education Act, and celebrates the final stage of its repeal in 1993. They were given to the university by the artist as thanks for its support for his education as a student at the Michaelis School of Art. Here, in a striking extension of modernist montage, Baholo produced an extraordinary range of work which

---

[1] Corresponding author email: john.higgins@uct.ac.za

juxtaposed and integrated themes and experiences of the Venda supernatural world with themes and conventions of Western Renaissance art.[2]

One particular painting in the permanent exhibition depicts a demonstration against former president FW De Klerk's regulations that took place at the University of Cape Town on 28 October 1987 (over the page). For me, this painting captures a certain dimension of academic freedom, one that was powerful enough to be registered by the new Constitution, though it has since been undermined since in most policy, discussion and debate.[3] In the painting, with a sense of irresistible forward momentum, a crowd of academics, workers and students flows down the steps from UCT's Jameson Hall. The forces of apartheid law and order – here figured as a single policeman in blue on the bottom left of the painting – are pushed casually aside by the crowd. They carry placards which reiterate the key educational slogans of the day – 'Forward to a people's education', 'Education is a right not a privilege', '*VIVA NUSAS VIVA SANSCO AMANDLA*' (long live student activist groups), while the specific occasion of the demonstration is made evident by those reading '*PHANSI* (down) with De Klerk's bills on education' and 'No subsidy cuts for UCT'.

What interests me most is the central organising banner for the demonstration, and from which the demonstration seems to flow: how it gathers everyone together under the slogan of academic freedom – or more specifically, 'Stop de Klerk's assault on academic freedom'.

---

[2] For a useful survey of Baholo's work, see 'Saints and Sinners' in *Mail and Guardian* 8 March 1996 while for useful studies of montage thinking, and associated collage practices, see Perloff (2003), Higgins (1998), Teitelbaum (ed) (1992).
[3] As I explore in greater detail in the book from which much of the substance of the current article is drawn, Higgins (2013).

What this painting evidences, I would suggest, is that at this moment in the social imaginary, academic freedom is seen as a positive social force and as an essential component of the democracy to come.

In *Academic Freedom in a Democratic South Africa* (Higgins, 2013)*, I* argue that we should insist on remembering this once powerful sense of academic freedom as a positive social force at a moment when policy and politics together are determined that we forget it. This essay, which extracts and further develops several key arguments from the book, emphasises that the commitment to defend critical thinking in all its modes stands at the centre of academic freedom, and it further examines the ways in which the core values of academic freedom as embodied in

the disciplines of the humanities are currently under threat, both generally, in the global policy environment, and also in the complex and contradictory terms of local policy implementation.

Assault on Academic Freedom

This essay is motivated in large part by a dismaying sense that, with regard to the question of academic freedom the wheel has come full circle, and that in entirely unexpected ways recent government legislation has come to echo and mirror the threats to academic freedom presented by the apartheid state. For - structurally at least, and with particular regard to the long-contested relations between state and higher education system - the Higher Education and Training Laws Amendment Act of 2012 appears to threaten an unexpectedly similar assault on the autonomy and academic freedom of South African universities.

I write 'unexpectedly similar' here, because there is hardly a need to stress the world of difference that exists between the educational policies designed by an apartheid government to restrict access to, and undermine, education for the (black) majority of people in South Africa, and the current policy of the government which is consciously and determinedly devoted to the transformation of the higher education system aimed precisely at undoing the evils of the past, and providing the necessary redress to that majority. But what interests and concerns me here is less, for the moment, any comparison between the *content* of higher education policy in the apartheid and post-apartheid periods, than the *form* of regulation of higher education, and this so with particular regard to the vexed questions of academic freedom and institutional autonomy. For it is clear enough that with regard to this question of form, some sense of these disturbing continuities has already surfaced in a number of immediate public responses to the new Higher Education and Training Laws Amendment Act.

For one, Barney Pityana, former vice-chancellor of the distance University of South Africa, argues that 'rather as in apartheid style legislating', the Nzimande regulations 'give the minister open-ended and ill-defined powers to intervene in higher education institutions well beyond the powers already available to him' (Pityana, 2012). Similarly, Professor Ihron Rensburg, vice-chancellor of the University of Johannesburg, emphasises that the new legislation – though at the moment of writing is still to be signed into law by President Jacob Zuma – 'undermines the careful balance struck between university autonomy and public accountability

crafted by the Constitution and the initial Higher Education Act' (Rensburg cited in *Mail and Guardian,* 2013). The new act, he warns, not only gives 'one individual enormous power over the higher education system', but 'also confuses the "public" with the "state"' (ibid.).

In line with Rensburg's analysis of the anti-democratic authoritarianism at work in the new legislation is the simple fact that it was developed without following any of the usual processes of consultation with stakeholders and interested parties established in higher education to encourage democratic participation and accountability since 1994. Neither the statutory Council on Higher Education, which exists precisely to advise the minister on higher education matters, nor Higher Education South Africa (HESA), the body that represents all 23 vice-chancellors at South African universities, were consulted prior to the promulgation of the new act. 'Under normal circumstances', notes HESA chair Professor Ahmed Bawa, vice-chancellor of Durban University of Technology, 'the minister would have consulted us on his intentions to introduce new amendments to the act and would have given a context for the new amendments and the inadequacies they seek to address in the current legislative framework' (Bawa cited in *Mail and Guardian,* 2013). In its response, the Council on Higher Education points out that the 'New Clause 8 – 49A (1) is even more broad and open-ended and provides the minister with the power to intervene and to issue directives on a range of matters and the power to appoint an administrator if an institution does not comply' and adds that the 'nature of the directives that the minister can issue and the steps that institutions would be expected to take in response are not defined, nor are there any limits placed on ministerial action' (cited in *Mail and Guardian,* 2013).

These and other responses suggest that the new Nzimande regulations (like de Klerk's before them, and as referred to in the Baholo painting) may similarly be found to stand *ultra vires*: that is, above and beyond the scope of the administrative power envisaged for the minister by the Constitution and therefore null and void.[4] That will have to wait for the decision of the Constitutional Court,if the matter goes that far as HESA fears it will.

The Debates Are Far From Over

---

[4] I discuss the de Klerk regulations and the struggle against them which Baholo's painting refers to in Higgins (2013: Ch 1),'The Warrior-Scholar versus the Children of Mao'.

In any case, whatever the outcome of this potential conflict in the Constitutional Court, the intended new legislation draws attention to the simple fact that debates around institutional autonomy and academic freedom – and indeed the very definition of the university and its purposes in the contemporary world – are far from over, as, in the initial euphoria of post-apartheid, many in South Africa thought they were.

One dimension in which this is particularly clear is with regard to current debates, both in South Africa and globally, around the social functions of the university, with particularly widespread concern being raised around the question of the place of the humanities in higher education policy. In this regard, and as I argue at greater length elsewhere, it is by now crucial to recognise that the core skills of humanist education – often referred to as the skills of a 'critical literacy' – have much to contribute to the public good in ways which are being denied or simply made invisible by the terms currently dominating higher education policy.

To get a sense of these, it is important to note the ever-increasing confluence of local with global higher education policies, in a contagion of policy I refer to as 'template fever'.

Is South Africa exempt from template fever?

Is South Africa exempt from template fever? By template fever, I refer here to what higher education policy scholar Roger King has called 'policy internationalism' (King, 2010: 35). Policy internationalism is the marked increase in the international convergence of policies in higher education (and other areas of government), visible over the past twenty years or so, and usually attributed (at least in part) to the extraordinarily rapid increase in the speed and ease of global communications (35). 'Widespread policy borrowing', notes King,

> spreading policy imaginaries by national decision-makers predicated on global comparisons and the notion of the competition-state, and the growing influence of bodies such as the OECD, underpins global convergences in government policy prescriptions (King, 2010: 35).

Even where governments are well aware of the pressure of local realities and contexts, research has revealed significant reluctance to question or even query the regime of global

governance templates in order to 'evade international and other criticism that would follow outright non-adoption' (36).[5] With regard to the higher education template he claims that:

> Everywhere we find the view (not necessarily well-evidenced) that universities help to provide economic well-being and comparative national advantage through providing the research and the educated personnel necessary to enable countries to compete effectively in the global economy (King, 2010: 37).

and this despite the fact of the widespread belief that 'universities have wider social functions than simply economic' (King, 2010: 38).

> Similarly, Mala Singh observes that,

> Policy convergence under the pressurising influence of emerging global "templates" may be an even greater challenge for higher education systems and institutions in developing countries. This is because of the frequent lack of capacity to "contextualize" and mediate relevant elements from powerful global "prescriptions" for social and economic development (Singh, 2010: 48).

> and warns that the 'potential of such templates for distracting attention from pressing local challenges is also great' (ibid.).[6]

To what extent has South African higher education policy fallen a prey to these pressures, and to what extent has it successfully resisted them? The answer is clearly crucial with regard to any potential that making a case for the humanities in South Africa will have. The answer is – not surprisingly – a mixed one, but a mixed one that I will argue expresses deeper, more structural features of the South African context that make for a real possibility in this regard.

The guiding-lines of much South African higher education reform policy were set out in the 1997 paper, *Programme for Higher Education Transformation*. What is interesting here is

---

[5] For in-depth analysis of this see Higgins (2013, especially pp.155-170). For an interesting comparative assessment of the interaction of global templates with local thinking with regard to the formation of South Africa's constitution, see Klug (2000).
[6] Compare also Singh's earlier insistence that in 'developing country contexts with fragile public institutions and social development priorities that do not stop at market liberalisation, it is crucial for the "public good" functions of higher education not to disappear completely' (Singh, 2001: 13).

less the dominance of the demands of the global template within it than the (internationally) remarkable fact of a key point of resistance to that template. For the *Programme* is an interestingly complex and perhaps even contradictory document. While (arguably) a vocational and instrumental view of the roles and functions of higher education tends to dominate the document as a whole, there is nonetheless a key commitment to the public value of higher education which – as we have seen – had been erased in reform policy elsewhere.

The instrumentalist view common to global reform policy is fully present and active in the *Programme*, with its call for higher education to 'address the development needs of society and provide the labour market, in a knowledge-driven and knowledge-dependent society, with the ever-changing high-level competencies and expertise necessary for the growth and prosperity of a modern economy' (Department of Education, 1997: 1). Here we have the familiar terms of a global policy in which education and higher education need to be carefully controlled and directed, and tailored to the ever-shifting needs of the economy; but here we have also and at the same time a policy commitment to the values of the public good, and in particular to the role of higher education in promoting 'critical citizenship' or the 'socialization of enlightened, responsive and constructively critical citizens' (ibid.). It is this stated commitment that gives at least a formal opening for the making of a case for the humanities in the traditional humanist terms of the 'socialization of…critical citizens' (1997: 1), and, more importantly, for the terms of the argument slowly developing here, for the articulation of a *contradictory* consensus – more correctly known as *dissensus* - to replace the *exclusionary* consensus of reform policy in general.

Dissensus, like exclusionary consensus before it, may be little more, in logical terms, than a contradiction in terms; but it usefully helps to articulate the real opening that the *Programme* allowed simply by the fact of not suppressing dissent.[7] Political theorist Jacques Rancière's recent dissection of consensus in contemporary forms of democratic politics is much to the point here, and particularly his astute comment that while the word consensus 'apparently exalts the virtues of discussion and consultation that permit agreement between interested parties', a 'closer look' at its actual deployment 'reveals that the word means exactly the contrary: *consensus* means that the givens and solutions of problems simply require people to find that they leave no room for discussion' (Rancière, 2010b: 1). As described at some length

---

[7]For a powerful and accumulating body of work around ideas of democracy and the critique of consensus, see, for example, Rancière (1995, 2006, 2010a and 2010b).

above, this was precisely the dynamic of exclusionary consensus. In contrast, and demonstrating some level of immunity to template fever, the *Programme* worked precisely to open or keep open a space for real discussion and debate by embodying, by contrast, a state of *dissensus*.

What might explain this breach in the exclusionary consensus of higher education policy? Undoubtedly, it is in part due to the existence, in South Africa, of the critical intellectual capacity Mala Singh identified as a necessary precondition for the ability 'to 'contextualize' and mediate' the 'global "prescriptions" for social and economic development' (Singh, 2010: 48); but is also surely due to the simple fact of South Africa's revolutionary transition from apartheid state to full democracy. The idea of the value of citizenship could hardly be denied to a new nation of first-time citizens, and the long history of the relations between humanist education and democracy – usually identified with the emergence of the *studia humanitatis* in Renaissance Europe – could well be foregrounded.[8]

All in all, if South Africa was not exempt from the ravages of template fever, it did at least prove to have some levels of immunity to it, as the very existence of the current Academy of Science (ASSaf) report itself suggests.[9]

Questioning the question

It is an old adage of critical thinking – and one that lies at the centre of most understandings of the practice of academic freedom - to question the question, when to answer it in the given terms can only perpetuate a mystification.[10] With regard to the dominant international template of higher education policy – which informs and infects a significant portion of South Africa's policy in a living example of template fever – what needs to be questioned with regard to the potential dialogue of that policy with the humanities is the rigid series of oppositions that currently tend to structure the space of discussion in such a way that the exchange of views

---

[8] Though for an important discussion of some of the internal complexities of the term in South Africa, see Chipkin (2007), while for useful surveys of the relations between democracy and humanist education, see Nussbaum (2000 and 2011). A suggestive starting point for a historical survey of the role of the humanities in South Africa is Vale (2009) .

[9] And as the related work of the Charter for Humanities group suggests.

[10] A classic instance is to be found in the opening pages of *The German Ideology*, where Marx writes of Hegel's philosophical system that 'Not only in its answers, even in its questions there was a mystification' (Marx & Engels, 1976: 28).

proper to dialogue is impossible, and in its place we have the exclusionary consensus presented above.[11]

Making the case for the humanities in the face of an exclusionary consensus of the kind described above means somehow breaking out of the framework of received ideas which together constitute what can only be called a dialogue of the deaf.

From STEM to NAIL

A contributing factor to this dialogue of the deaf is the visible promotion of the STEM disciplines in higher education policy, and the making invisible or overlooking of the contribution of the humanities and social sciences to the functioning of the social order.[12] Recent years have seen, both globally and locally, a significant increase in research support in higher education systems to what have become known as the *STEM* disciplines: *S*cience, *T*echnology, *E*ngineering and *M*athematics. This has been done with the eminently worthwhile goal of improving innovation and the bringing of better goods to the market in better ways, improving South Africa's competitiveness, and consequently (and following Marx's old logic of the economic base determining the social superstructure) assuring continued social and economic development. The STEM disciplines, it is argued, provide the drivers for the future economy. As such, they have a stronger claim on the public purse when it comes to financing research and teaching at our universities. In this focus on the STEM disciplines, the humanities and social

---

[11]If anyone should doubt the force of this, despite the opening of possibility breached by the *Programme's* commitment to 'critical citizenship', we need only recall the moment of the 'Marcus Brief' of 2003-04. Here, humanist academics were asked, at a series of workshops sponsored by the National Research Foundation to talk about developing 'a National Research Agenda for Social Science, Law and Humanities', but with the questions framed in such a way that a bias towards the most extreme forms of scientism was more evident (key questions included why is it that the social sciences and humanities have 'trailed behind natural sciences in the quest for better understanding of the contemporary world' and why have they failed to make clear their role 'in stimulating innovation and technology in a way that addresses human needs and issues' (Marcus, 2003; for further discussion, see Higgins & Green, 2007).

[12] For a deliberately satirical attempt to defamiliarise the received terms of this dialogue of the deaf (in which the government is threatening to withdraw all funding 'from the teaching of science and technology subject' and 'recognises that arts, humanities and social sciences subjects are essential to society's well-being', see Collini (2010b). For his further related claim that once 'contributing to economic competitiveness must automatically over-rule contributing to enhanced understanding' must necessarily lead to 'third-rate universities', see Collini (2011). This is precisely a claim of the kind that deserves further consideration and evidential enquiry before the full adoption of potentially damaging policy directions in South Africa.

sciences have come to be marginalised and even ignored altogether, as one commentator – the late Masao Miyoshi - noted, 'as if this branch of knowledge had already vanished' (Miyoshi, 2000: 38).

My intention here is to try and bring out some of the dangers of too exclusive a focus on science and technology in higher education policy, and to do this precisely by drawing attention to what is marginalised or left out in this excluding focus.[13]

Briefly, too narrow a conception of the benefits of economic and technological innovation runs the risk of forgetting that economies subsist within the larger social totality.[14] Though economies help to determine social structures, social structures also work to constrain, support or enable economic advances as they create particular roles and identities in the social order. Relations between economy and society are best understood in terms of a mutual interaction which tends to disappear from view with any too-exclusive focus on science and technology.[15] One way of getting that mutual interaction into focus is, I think, by deliberately offering a new acronym and turning our attention to its components. If we want to give South Africa's development the complex consideration it needs, we must give due consideration to the NAIL disciplines.

If the STEM disciplines represent, as their proponents claim, 'the core technological underpinning' for a developing and competitive economy, what is it that the NAIL disciplines achieve? Summing up in advance, the NAIL disciplines provide education and training in the key communicative skills that underlie or form part and parcel of all economic transactions, as

---

[13] The *Consensus Study on the State of the Humanities in South Africa: Status, prospects and strategies* (ASSAF, 2011) examines in some detail the ways in which policy has attempted to bring the sciences and humanities together (in and through promoting the study of science, technology and society) but points out how policy tends to 'shape the role of Humanities as handmaidens and junior partners in the scientific contribution to this task, with the SET domain as the dominant role-player' (55).

[14] As Sibusiso Vil-Nkomo put it recently, 'The private sector has an interest in both the macro-stability of its investment locations as well as the micro-context of its operations. Sustainable private enterprise can only thrive in a society that is stable and predictable; and this means that creative solutions must be found for pressing social needs through the think industry, including research institutes and universities' (Vil-Nkomo, 2011).

[15] As is to be found, for instance, in the foundational statement of South Africa's National Research Foundation that 'It is generally accepted that the capacity of a country in science and technology is directly related to its potential for development and progress and for promoting the quality of life of its people'. That such a statement exemplifies the rhetoric of exclusionary consensus should be clear enough by now.

well as in the realm of personal life.[16] Research in these disciplines concerns some of the key questions of social reproduction that any complex idea of development – one that pays due attention to the mutual interaction of economy and society – requires to make it work. The NAIL disciplines help us to recognise and understand the complex but constitutive ways that economies are always grounded in particular social orders.

What are the NAIL disciplines?

N in NAIL stands for *N*arrative. Narrative is the province of all of those disciplines in the humanities and social sciences – and notably disciplines such as sociology and psychology, as well as history, and textual disciplines such as literary, cultural, and rhetorical studies - that examine the ways in which the stories we tell ourselves frame and affect our actions in the real world. For the NAIL disciplines, narrative is important because it provides the evaluative framework for our conscious agency as well as the informing background to our unconscious reactions. Narrative helps to order and construct both the realm of the political and the realm of the economic, which together constitute the social order as a functioning unity.

So it is that many disciplines in the social sciences and the humanities are, for instance, concerned with the role-models that different narratives allow or prohibit – questions, say, of what is to be a man or a woman in a particular historical time and place, or a particular social and cultural setting, and just how that sense of a gendered identity both enables and constrains choices and actions in the social world, ranging from job opportunities to acts of violence, consumer choices to family responsibilities. Similarly, the narratives associated with class, racial and cultural identities of various kinds are generally held to be key elements for social development.

The *A* and *I* of NAIL stand for *A*nalysis and *I*nterpretation. These two modes of critical attention are, of course, linked, and they are perhaps best understood as the two ends of a

---

[16]For a useful comparative statement, see Yu (2009), and her forceful assertion that in 'an increasingly knowledge-based global economy, study of the humanities…are prerequisites for vocational mobility, personal growth, and civic participation…the humanities impart practical skills needed by all Americans, including reading, writing, language proficiency, critical thinking, moral reasoning, effective communication, historical knowledge, civic awareness, and cultural literacy' (Yu, 2009: n.p.)

spectrum of techniques and skills in advanced or critical literacy that run from the (apparently) simple act of paraphrasing through to the often considerable complexities of interpretation.

In the 'information age', a key defining feature of competitive economies lies in the distinction between generic labour and self-programmable labour.[17] Within this, the skills of analysis and interpretation are paramount – and form the bedrock of graduateness across all disciplines, as well as the core of many disciplines in the humanities and social sciences.[18]

At one end of the spectrum, we have the one-page summary that you might prepare from a variety of sources for a business meeting. At the other, a two-hundred page critical interrogation of a single sentence of even word (something like French philosopher Jacques Derrida's interpretation of the Greek term *pharmakon*). Between the two, we have a vast array of communicative activities in which assessment and persuasion play key roles. Graduates from the NAIL disciplines, with their particular emphases on the skills of paraphrasing and interpretation, have valuable roles to play in the ever-growing sectors of the entertainment and creative industries, in policy advice roles around topics such as xenophobia, in NGOs such as the Treatment Action Campaign, as well as in contributions to educating others in the medium-level literacy skills so desperately needed in just about all spheres of municipal administration.

---

[17]See, for instance, Castells' claim that the key distinction for the promotion of economic growth is that between generic and self-programmable labour, that is 'the capacity to research and recombine information' (Castells, 2009: 30) which is an essential component of all innovation. Compare also his fuller description: 'The critical matter is to shift from learning to learning-to-learn, as most information is on line, and what is really required is the skill to decide what to look for, how to retrieve it, how to process it, and how to use it for the specific task that prompted the search for information. In other words, the new learning is oriented toward the educational capacity to transform information into knowledge and knowledge into action… Communication is the essence of human activity' (Castells, 2001: n.p.). Compare also Beth Stafford's useful reminder 'Academic research involves three stages: finding relevant information, assessing the quality of information, then using information either to try to conclude something, to uncover something, or to argue something. The Internet is useful for the first step, somewhat useful for the second, and not at all useful for the third' (Stafford, 1999: n.p.) and Tara Brabazon's useful distinction: 'Operational literacy – encoding and decoding – is a cultural practice of reproduction. Critical literacy requires the production of argument, interpretation critique and analysis' (Brabazon, 2008: n.p.)

[18]For a useful discussion of graduateness as the core of higher education, see Wally Morrow's important paper, 'Higher Knowledge and the Functions of Higher Education', and its claims that 'the kind of knowledge involved in HE is not a question of quantity; it is qualitatively different' (Morrow, 2009: 116). It is 'seen as a catalyst in breaking through the inevitable limitations of common sense and settled consensus. In this sense it is seen as a potent source of innovation and development, and is in the background of discourses claiming that societies are "learning" or "knowledge"societies' (117).

Just as Mathematics provides the ground for the STEM disciplines, so *L*iteracy – or better, the multiple literacies of an increasingly visual and digital communication order – gives foundation to the NAIL disciplines.[19] It may be that we can get a sense of the economic importance of these advanced forms of literacy from the particular vogue in business studies around the idea of Intercultural Communication. Though often trivialised as '10 rules for business meetings in 25 cultures across the world', Intercultural Communication does point to the general importance of what we might call 'ordinary translation' in the everyday encounters and frictions of social and economic life.[20]

The thesis of ordinary translation helps us to understand the difference between primary and advanced literacies. It argues that recognition of differences is crucial to successful communication, not only between different languages, but within national languages themselves. Ordinary translation accepts and seeks to understand the fact of the conflicts and divisions within society that we usually prefer to forget, but which the NAIL disciplines insist on remembering.

In the end, too exclusive a focus on the STEM disciplines is perhaps entirely understandable in a country with a past like ours. This focus offers the utopian vision of a nation which can find a place in the world and excel through feats of innovation and scientific creativity; but in offering this focus, it prefers to marginalise or even forget the hard reality of a country suffering from mass illiteracy, and still plagued by social and racial divisions.[21] Above all, this focus, in its relentless narrowing down to the narrowest dimensions of the economics, neglects the role of humanistic education as training citizens in the civic values and understanding necessary to weave a social fabric which may otherwise unravel.

Education remains the key to development in South Africa, but we need to open up to a far broader conception of education than our dangerously narrow preoccupation with the STEM disciplines alone allows. No economy can right itself or approach anything like optimal

---

[19]And of course, especially so in a multi-lingual society such as South Africa's. In this regard, see especially Alexander 2007 regarding the teaching of African languages at all levels of the education system.

[20]For a deliberately non-essentialist exploration of intercultural communication, see Holliday et al (2004). The oblique reference here is to Quine's thesis of 'radical translation' in his 1960 study, *Word and Object* (Quine, 1960).

[21]For some intriguing remarks concerning the ideological appeal of scientific advance in the apartheid era, see Dubow (2006, especially pp. 256-66) and, for discussion of some of the complexities of post-apartheid attitudes to science, pp. 268-278.

performance levels without the skills and understanding that research and training in the humanities and social sciences can provide; no social order claiming to partake of the substance of democracy is likely to be fashioned without the help that training in the critical literacy skills of the humanities enables in all the everyday transactions that together constitute the social totality.

In my view, we need to resist the shrinking of the space for the humanities in our higher educational policy framework, just as we need to assert the principles of academic freedom and open enquiry that should be central to policy as a whole.

Author bionote

John Higgins is Arderne Chair of Literature at the University of Cape Town, and a member of the Academy of Science of South Africa. His award-winning study *Raymond Williams: literature, Marxism and cultural materialism* was published in 1999, and Blackwell published his *Raymond Williams Reader* in 2001. He is currently working on a study tentatively called *Marx@Marikana* for UKZN Press.

References

ASSAF. 2011. *Consensus Study on the State of the Humanities in South Africa: Status, prospects and strategies*. Pretoria: ASSAf.

Brabazon, T. 2008. *The University of Google: education in the (post)information age*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Caramani, D. (ed.) 2008. *Comparative Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Castells, M. [1991] 2001a. *The University System: engine of development in the new world economy*, [extract] in Muller, J., Cloete, N. & Badat S. (eds.) *Challenges of Globalization*: *South African Debates with Manuel Castells*. Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman.

Castells, M. 2001b. *The Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, Business and Society*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Castells, M. 2009 *Communication Power.* Oxford: Oxford UP.

Chipkin, I. 2007. *Do South Africans Exist? Nationalism, democracy and the identity of the 'people'.* Johannesburg: Wits UP.

Collini, S. 2010a. 'Browne's Gamble', *London Review of Books,* 32(21), 4 November, 23-25.

Collini, S. 2010b. 'Science Geeks of the World Unite' in *Guardian*, 1 December. Online at http://www.guardian.co.uk.

Collini, S. 2011. 'Research Must Not be Tied to Politics' in *Guardian*, April 1. Online at http://www.guardian.co.uk.

Department of Education. 1997. *A Framework for Transformation.* Pretoria.

Dubow, S. 2006. *A Commonwealth of Knowledge: Science, Sensibility and White South Africa 1820-2000*, Oxford: OUP.

Hesmodhalgh, D. 2002 *The Cultural Industries,* London: Sage.

Higgins, J. 1998. 'The Age of Wittgenstein', *Pretexts: Studies in Writing and Culture,* 7: 129-139.

Higgins, J. 2013. *Academic freedom in a democratic South Africa: essays and interviews on higher education and the humanities*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.

Higgins, J. and Green, L. 2007. 'The Necessary Conjunction: Science *and* the Humanities', *scrutiny 2,* 12(1): 5-18.

Holliday, A., Hyde. M. & Kullman, J. 2004 *International Communication: An Advanced Resource Book*. London and New York: Routledge.

King, R. 2010. 'Governing Knowledge Globally: policy internationalism and higher education in the age of globalization' in *Higher Education and Society: a research report*. Centre for Higher Education Research and Information, The Open University.

Klug, H. 2000. *Constituting Democracy: Law, Globalism and South Africa's Political Reconstruction.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Marx, K. & Engels, F. [1845/46] 1976. *The German Ideology,* in Marx K. & Engels F. *Collected Works.* Vol. 5. New York: International Publishers.

Miyoshi, M. 1998. '"Globalization", Culture and the University' in Jameson F. & Miyoshi, M. (eds.) T*he Cultures of Globalization.* Durham N.C.: Duke UP.

Miyoshi, M. 2000. 'Ivory Tower in Escrow', *boundary 2*, 27:1, 7-50.2005/06.

Morrow, W. 2009. 'Higher Knowledge and the Functions of Higher Education' in Morrow W. *Bounds of Democracy: epistemological access in higher education*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.

Nussbaum, M. 2001. *Cultivating Humanity: a classical defence of reform in liberal education*. Cambridge: Harvard UP.

Nussbaum, M. 2011. *Not for Profit: why democracy needs the humanities*. Princeton: Princeton UP.

Phoenix, A. 2009. 'Enabling research: whose voice gets heard?' in Satterthwaite, J., Piper, H. & Sikes, P. (eds.) *Power in the Academy*. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.

Quine, W.V. 1960. *Word and Object.* New York: Wiley.

Rancière, J. 2010. *Chronicles of Consensual Times*. London: Continuum.

Singh, M. 2001. 'Re-Inserting the "Public Good" into Higher Education Transformation', *Kagisano: CHE Higher Education Discussion Series 1*, 7-22.

Teitelbaum, M. (ed) 1992. *Montage and Modern Life: 1919-1942*. Cambridge, Mass and London: MIT Press.

Vale, P. 2009. 'Humanities and Social Sciences: Orphaning the Orphan' in Diab, R. & Gevers, W. (eds.) *The State of Science in South Africa*. Pretoria: Academy of Science of South Africa.

Vil-Nkomo, S. 2011. 'SA needs to think to tackle challenges', *Business Report*, March 29. Online at: http://www.iol.co.za/business/opinion/columnists/sa-needs-to-think-to-tackle-challenges-1.1048780.

Yu, P. 2009. 'The Humanities and the Economy', Testimony submitted to the Appropriations committee, April 23, 2009. Online at http://www.acls.org.