Transformation of the South African schooling system

'Transformation' Revisited

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List of acronyms

ANC	African National Congress
CEPD	Centre for Education Policy Development
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CUP	Committee of University Principals
DoE	Department of Education
DoF	Department of Finance
DoL	Department of Labour
DPLG	Department of Provincial and Local Government
EU	European Union
FET	Further Education and Training
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution
GNU	Government of National Unity
NEPI	National Education Policy Initiative
NNP	New National Party
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
RNE	Royal Netherlands Embassy
SAIRR	South African Institute of Race Relations
SALB	South African Labour Bulletin
SRN	School Register of Needs
UDUSA	Union of Democratic Staff Associations of South Africa
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal

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About the Publication

In 1997, the CEPD and its partner organisations (the Education Policy Units based at the Universities of the Witwatersrand, Natal and Fort Hare) embarked on a major longitudinal study – Education 2000 Plus. The study sought to track and examine the transformation of the schooling system in South Africa, focusing on the policies and programmes of the new government. The study was undertaken over a period of five years, and several intermediate reports emerged as the study progressed.

Towards the end of the study, the team spent a year examining and analysing the data, with a view to sharing the findings of the study with regard to the extent, nature and direction of education transformation in South Africa, specifically in relation to the schooling system.

The papers in this series – *Transformation of the South African Schooling System* – reflect on that process. The papers in this series have undergone a several review processes. Firstly, they were all presented at a national conference that was held in 2004. Following comments that were received at the conference, the papers were revised. The papers were then given to two independent reviewers.

The ten papers in the series have all undergone the review processes discussed above. Each of these papers provides an account of the transformation processes relating to the schooling system. The titles in this series are as follows:

1. Change Agents in the South African Schooling System: Challenges and Prospects, *George Moyo*
2. "Transformation" Revisited, *Enver Motala*
3. Transformation in the School Environment: An Analysis of Photographs from One Rural Secondary School, *Jenni Karlsson*
4. Exploring the Mutability of School Ethos during South Africa's First Post-apartheid Decade *Jenni Karlsson and Sandile Mbokazi*

5. Prospects and Challenges of Doing Social Justice Research: Experiences from the Education 2000 Plus Study, *Madumetja Kgobe and George Moyo*
6. Policy Change and the Experiences of Learners in Post-apartheid Schooling, *John Pampallis and Princess Tabata*
7. The Fault-lines in South African School Governance: Policy or People?, *Veerle Dieltiens*
8. Districts: Looking for a Place in the Education System, *Hersheela Narsee*
9. Teacher Professionalism and Education Transformation, *Julie Douglas*
10. Selected Macro-indicators of Education Transformation, 1991-2001, *Monica Bot*

Each of these papers reflect the multiple dimensions of the change processes, and the many aspects and features of transformation. Collectively, the papers suggest that important achievements have been made in driving education transformation towards an open, democratically organised quality for all, although major challenges remain.

1. Introduction

The theme of *transformation* is writ large into and is the *leitmotiv* of the reports produced by the CEPD for the Education 2000 Plus project funded by the Royal Netherlands Embassy. The term "transformation" is used throughout the reports in relation to the purpose of monitoring "the state of South African schooling and trends in its transformation through an investigation into the schooling system at three levels", namely, policy, macro-data and schooling (CEPD, 2000:v). But what indeed does this transformation signify? The report itself does not endeavour to provide an analysis of the concept, nor of its history or contextual uses. Especially in the light of a decade of developments in South African education (and society), the idea of transformation has assumed great importance because of the ubiquitous attempts to evaluate the progress of South African society in the aftermath of apartheid. Yet even a casual reading of the daily media, let alone of more scholarly writings, on social change, will demonstrate how evasive the idea of transformation can be.

This is because the term has been used as a descriptor that is attachable to almost any phenomenon associated with social change. Conceptions of change can be, and are, associated with relatively unobtrusive interventions as much as with wholesale social engineering. They refer to both minimalist and maximalist interpretations of change, to politically "conservative", "liberal" and "radical" constructs of social intervention, to processes, to the means of change and to their purported outcomes. Transformation is called upon to evaluate post-apartheid progress in every realm of life and in areas touching on such varied subjects as affirmative action, institutional culture, the uses of language, the "colour" and gender of the judiciary, the structure of the bureaucracy in the civil service, nationhood, values and socialisation, administrative and managerial systems, institutional outputs, legislative policies, governmental practices, plans, strategies, and their consequences, and so on.

This state of affairs invites the need for greater clarity, certainty and definition since the nebulousness of the concept of transformation is analytically untenable. For the purposes of the CEPD's report it is

necessary to provide a framework for thinking about what is implied in the uses of the concept of transformation and what is not. The writers of the CEPD's report are concerned about the limited theorisation and understanding of the concept, since it is hoped that such a theorisation will serve the purpose of informing readers of the report about how the concept itself might be understood in the wider discourses in education and training in South Africa, and even outside the immediate ambit of educational discourse.

2. The CEPD's report – an attempt at theorising "transformation" more fully

This paper tries to address that problematic. It does so by examining some attempts at dealing with transformation in the public media and in some scholarly writings on the subject. The background to this undertaking is to be found in the purposes set out in the Education 2000 Plus Report. The report (CEPD, 2000:4) specifically says that:

> The overall aim of the project is to monitor and evaluate the education transformation process in relation to the government's stated goals of equity, redress, democracy, access and participation. Specifically the project aims to:
>
> - track processes of policy development and implementation at macro- and micro-levels;
> - examine the links between education policy development and implementation;
> - track/monitor the shifts in policies of transformation over time;
> - evaluate the impact of policies of transformation at macro- and micro-levels.

The CEPD's reports themselves evince some understanding of the complexity of the concept of transformation and its association with *historical* processes, even though such an understanding is not

attempted explicitly. For instance, in reviewing developments between 1998 and 2000, Karlsson (in CEPD, 2001) refers to Cleaver Ota's article that juxtaposes the positions adopted by the African National Congress (ANC) and the New National Party (NNP) and "collapses the distinction between transformation and reform". For the ANC the key goal was to concentrate on "quality education based on the principles of equity and redress, democracy, efficiency and effectiveness, and choice" (Karlsson, in CEPD, 2001:10). In her view transformation is affected by a complexity of contested processes and she argues that:

> My interpretation of the African National Congress' *Policy Framework for Education and Training* (1995) and the ANC-led government's first *White Paper on Education and Training* (DoE, 1995) has the concept 'transformation' being code for the discursive 'imaginary' (Norval, 1996) or mythical space that replaces apartheid education and achieving that goal through state machinery and with minimum resistance from stakeholders, roleplayers and the citizenry in general. …A weakness with a reform oriented strategy is that planners and bureaucrats (not to mention school administrators and educators) may lose sight of the goal during the serpentine convolutions of reform, withering transformation to the residual rhetoric of politicians (Karlsson in CEPD, 2001:11)

She presents evidence of the "incremental progress (reform) leading towards the key transformation goals" and interprets these goals as increased access, deeper democracy in structure and process, greater equity to redress the inequalities of the past, and improved efficiency. She then provides a context and an analysis of developments in school financing and resources; curriculum; governance and school management and, finally, teacher development and support, drawing useful conclusions for each. For example, in relation to the first – resources and finance – she argues that

> Marketisation of schooling has been an unintended outcome of the way in which government has influenced policy to balance economic efficiency and redress. …The scope and scale of the transformation project has required central government to source additional funds from the fiscus and international development agencies (Karlsson in CEPD, 2001:16).

Context, too, is important in the way in which transformation is approached by the reports. They endeavour to provide a context for the evaluation of the project of transformation, and this is related in the 2001 report to the discourse of policy and implementation. Important contextual factors affecting the development of education and its transformation refer to a wide range of national and global issues. These include the international environment in which the transformation takes place within the South African national setting and, in regard to these global forces, the 2000 report quotes Nzimande to say that:

> Globalisation with its attendant features of deregulation and privatisation has been accompanied by a radical curtailment of the provision of basic social services and the rolling back of the state's commitment to social provision (Nzimande in CEPD 2000:2).

The CEPD's 2002 report is, however, quite conscious of the lack of theorisation of the idea of transformation and the contestation around it, even while restating the mandate to "monitor education transformation by examining the processes of education policy development and implementation" (CEPD, 2002:164), although "*it should be noted, however, that the transformation goals are themselves the subject of much debate* (my emphasis) (CEPD, 2002:164)

That being so, and while "there may be various interpretations of the idea of transformation, depending on the context and purpose for

which the concept is used" the report's analysis refers only to the goals of transformation relative to specific themes in education, such as the following:

- Access is assessed through an examination of the themes of quantitative access and efficiency.
- Quality is examined in relation to resource provision, content, curriculum and learning achievement.
- Democracy is related to the themes of democratic school governance and various structures of participation in the policy process.
- Equity and redress are examined in relation to education finance (CEPD, 2002:164).

These are its main points of departure, even while acknowledging that "the government's conception does not encompass other key aspects of educational inequity and inequality such as those reflected in learning achievement or performance in Maths and Science by race and location" (CEPD, 2002:3). Referring to Alexander's warnings about the importance of language for the acquisition of real learning, the report talks of the "problems and limitations of conceptions of equity which concentrate [merely] on resource distribution" (CEPD, 2002:3). A reduction of the concept of equity to a form of restitution, the report argues, seeks to compensate for the impact of the "unjust distribution of advantage and seeks to compensate for its impact" (CEPD, 2002:3). This is what appears to "underpin government's education transformation agenda in South Africa. However, there is need to expand it to other aspects of educational practice in order to address inequalities in different spheres" (CEPD, 2002:3).[1]

[1] The CEPD's 2003 Report, too, confirms the three-pronged approach of previous reports concentrating on:

- a review of policy developments at the national level,
- a study of micro-indicators, and
- school-based studies of policy implementation.

These are indeed perceptive recognitions of the potential breadth of the idea of transformation and of the limitations of current use in the educational discourse. Yet, understandably, no sustained analysis of the idea of transformation appeared in the reports since they were largely about an analysis of the trends relating to "the government's stated goals of equity, redress, democracy, access and participation" (CEPD, 2000:4). To the extent that the report itself seeks to theorise the idea of transformation, such a theorisation is limited to the domain of education, and while the report speaks to important issues through the modes of policy making, it only cursorily examines the broader political and other discourses impacting on education.

It remains important, therefore, to clarify why the notion of transformation has become such a *leitmotif* for the process of change envisaged by South Africans, and indeed by observers of the unfolding epic of South Africa's destiny.

3. Transformation: some laws and policies

Whereas the CEPD's first report examines the implications for transformation of the "changes in the policy discourse" about certain "concepts of transformation",[2] the later reports draw on the "discourse" of policy and implementation (CEPD, 2000:6-9). The Constitution and a number of laws and policy documents speak to transformation in one way or another. In post-apartheid South Africa, the first direct injunctions about transformation were set out in its laws. What were these injunctions? The Interim Constitution (Act 200 of 1993) was passed by Parliament in 1993, and was replaced (after

[2] These are: (a) Equity and redress – financing, resource allocation, resource targeting, school ranking for SRN, staffing and personnel resources, physical improvement; (b) Access – positive things done to improve access; (c) Quality – quality measures and indicators (for example, learner assessment tools for Grade 3); (d) Democracy – the presence of school governing bodies does not mean democratic governance in all cases.

a series of amending Acts) by the final Constitution of 1996 (Act 108 of 1996). Chapter 2 of the Constitution of 1996 sets out a Bill of Rights entrenching the rights of equality, human dignity, freedom and security of the person, as well as various other freedoms and political and social rights. It requires the state to "respect, protect, promote and fulfil the rights in the Bill of Rights". The Constitution asserts the idea that the state should be seen to be intervening in order to ensure these human rights. Judging by its strong directive language, it signalled quite clearly the mood of the Parliament of the time – hardly surprising given the historical conjuncture under which it was framed.

The important factors affecting transformation relate to a plethora of attendant difficulties: “the drive to meet the basic needs [is] undertaken within the boundaries of fiscal discipline – a manifestation of the broader global forces that define the parameters for change” (CEPD, 2000:3), the problems of implementation, national and provincial competencies, bureaucracy, poverty and inequality, etc. And indeed, questions about the ideological orientation[3] of policy makers and the laws themselves play no less important a role in the unfolding provision of services and their relationship to the quest for transformation. We begin by examining the legal framework for transformation.

The rights to education are set out as follows in the Constitution (RSA, 1996a):

> 29 [1] Everyone has the right-
> (a) to a basic education, including adult basic education; and

[3] This refers, for instance, to their conception of the relationship between markets and the state in the provision of social goods, and their orientation to labour market and human development theories, to the role of lending agencies, together with their orientation to fiscal and macro-economic policies, etc.

(b) to further education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible.

This right is supported by "the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where that education is reasonably practicable".... and a right in regard to the establishment of "independent educational institutions" (RSA, 1996a: Section 29(2) and (3)).[4]

Both the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) (ANC, 1994b) and the *Policy Framework for Education and Training* (ANC, 994a) were important in defining the idea of transformation at the time. They capture the intentions of the liberation movement, and of the ANC in particular, regarding the role of a future government, and are a prelude to the Constitution itself.

The RDP was "the result of many months of consultation within the ANC, its alliance partners and other mass organisations in the wider civil society" (ANC, 1994b: Preface). It sets out the core principles to redress the legacies of apartheid South Africa including:

> colonialism, racism, apartheid, sexism and repressive labour policies"; poverty and degradation .... an income distribution that was racially distorted and ranked as one of the most unequal in the world; the fact that the economy was built on enforced racial division; the practice and policies of segregation in the availability and access to social services; the dominance of very large conglomerates in commerce and industry; the fact that "in every sphere of our society – economic,

[4] Section 36 of the Constitution explains the circumstances in which particular rights may be limited, but here too the caveat which is sounded to such a limitation is that it must be "reasonable and justifiable in an open and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom" and have regard to particular "relevant factors" such as the "nature of the rights" and of, for instance, its limitation and the purposes of such limitation. Nowhere in these limitations is it suggested that the rights referred to in the Bill of Rights can be limited without justification or by omission.

> social, political, moral, cultural, environmental – South Africans are confronted by serious problems (ANC, 1994b:2- 3).

Based on these realities, the RDP set out six basic principles – a sustainable and integrated programme, a people-driven process, peace and security for all, the idea of nation-building and the necessity of linking reconstruction and development. All these principles depended on the "thoroughgoing democratisation of South Africa". In the words of the programme:

> An integrated programme, based on the people, that provides peace and security for all and builds the nation, links reconstruction and development and deepens democracy – these are the six basic principles of the RDP (ANC, 1994b:7).

Indeed, the Government of National Unity (GNU) formally adopted the RDP as the programme of government. The ANC's *Policy Framework for Education and Training*, which followed the RDP, is similarly instructive because it argued the case for enshrining the right to education and training:

> The right to education and training should be enshrined in a Bill of Rights, which should establish principles and mechanisms to ensure that there is an enforceable and expanding minimum floor of entitlements for all... All individuals should have access to lifelong education and training irrespective of race, class, gender, creed or age (ANC, 1994a:4).

The *Policy Framework* refers to various principles, including the following:

- "the state has the central responsibility in the provision of education and training";
- the planning of education and training as a part of a comprehensive national programme for the development of the country;

- " a national strategy for the development of human resources"; and
- a framework of "policy and incentives shall ensure that employers observe their fundamental obligation for the education and training of their workers" (ANC, 1994a:4).

These refer to democratic educational practice, the idea of redress of historically disadvantaged groups such as "youth, the disabled, adults, women, the unemployed and rural communities", mechanisms to make the provision of education more flexible, the determination of national standards, the enhancement of a national democratic culture, and so on (ANC, 1994a:4–5).

The ANC's view of the governance of education was that:

> Governance at all levels of the integrated national system of education and training will maximise democratic participation of stakeholders, including the broader community, and will be oriented towards equity, effectiveness, efficiency, accountability and the sharing of responsibility (ANC, 1994a:23).

Several other pieces of legislation and policy deal with the intentions of the democratic government in its quest to transform education and other social policies and practices. For example, the White Paper on Education and Training (DoE, 1995) itself refers to the provisions of the Interim Constitution as necessary to "guarantee a number of individual and collective educational rights" and outlines the framework and values for the actions of national and provincial governments. According to the White Paper, the:

> Constitution is a living instrument of justice in our society [requiring government] to determine its policies with a conscientious interpretation of the meaning of the Constitution (DoE, 1995:37).

Further, the White Paper states that:

> The government is bound to interpret .... in a manner which is balanced and reasonable and in a way which affirms the constitutional goal of a new order in our society; protects the fundamental rights, freedoms and civil liberties of all persons (DoE, 1995:38).

It interprets the Interim Constitution as binding legislatures and government organs at all levels, and as applying to all laws and administrative decisions and acts. Referring to the "right to education" in particular, the White Paper argues that

> Such a right applies to all persons.... Basic education is a legal entitlement to which every person has a claim.... Attaining this level of availability of opportunity for basic education will be an immense achievement in the reconstruction and development of the country (DoE, 1995:40).

Similarly, instructive approaches to transformation can be gleaned from a reading of various other laws and policy documents such as the Higher Education Act of 1997 (RSA, 1997) which refers to the "desire" to transform programmes so that these might "respond better to the human resource, economic and development needs of the Republic" and the need to redress discriminatory practices in respect of representivity and access and various freedoms and values respecting scholarship, international standards and academic quality. Education White Paper 3, which deals with higher education, enunciates the “fundamental principles guiding the transformation of higher education institutions" (DoE, 1997:12–13). It refers to the Ministry’s vision of a "transformed, democratic, non-racial and non-sexist system of higher education" through which "equity of access and fair chances of success will be promoted and all forms of discrimination will be eradicated" (DoE, 1997:13).

The Preamble to the South African Schools Act of 1996 (RSA, 1996c) reads:

> … this country requires a new national system for schools which will redress past injustices in

> educational provision, provide an education of progressively high quality for all learners ... advance the democratic transformation of society, combat racism and sexism .... contribute to the eradication of poverty and the economic well-being of society, protect and advance our diverse cultures and languages, uphold the rights of all learners, parents and educators...

The National Education Policy Act of 1996 (RSA, 1996b) refers to its intention to "facilitate the democratic transformation of the national system of education into one which serves the needs and interests of all the people of South Africa and upholds heir fundamental rights". The White Paper on Education and Training (DoE, 1995), whose values and principles "drive national policy" in education and training are set out in Chapter Four of the National Education Policy Act. These reaffirm education and training as "basic human rights", and the state's "obligation to advance and protect" its citizenry so that they "have the opportunity to develop their capacities and potential, and make their contribution to the society" (RSA, 1996b: 21), including the duty "to provide advice and counselling" to people "fragmented by such factors as past unjust laws, migratory labour practices, marital breakdown, and handicapped by illiteracy" together with "appropriate care and educational services for parents, especially mothers, and young children within the community".The White Paper commits itself to "redress of educational inequalities among those sections of our people who have suffered particular disadvantages"; the principle of "equity, so that they are used to provide essentially the same quality of learning opportunities for all citizens"; the "rehabilitation of schools and colleges"; the idea of democratic governance 'in every level of the system"; and other such aims (DoE, 1995:21-2).

In the Green Paper on a Skills Development Strategy for Economic and Employment Growth in South Africa (DoL, 1997:1-2), the government's vision is that of an "integrated skills development system which promotes economic and employment growth and social development through a focus on education, training and employment services" as integral to overall human resource

development which includes education reform. This strategy must be seen in conjunction with a number of transformative institutional arrangements to give effect to, and the passing of laws relating to, other policy initiatives of the Department of Labour, including the South African Qualifications Authority Act of 1995 and other "facilitative laws" (DoL, 1997:19).[5]

The Department of Education's (1998) White Paper 4 on Further Education and Training refers to the right to basic education conferred by the Constitution and adopts a strongly developmental approach to the transformation of Further Education and Training (FET). It signals the critical role of FET in social and economic development, reinforces the Ministry's vision and strategy, and requires serious and systematic efforts to overcome the resource and capacity constraints which hold back the process of change.

Even the government's Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy, widely criticised for its conservatism, refers to a "strategy for rebuilding and restructuring the economy ... in keeping with the goals set in the RDP" (DoF, 1996). It argues that unemployment will be addressed by engineering greater economic growth and through "accelerated labour-based infrastructural development and maintenance of public works in urban and rural areas" and "from institutional reforms in the labour market, employment-enhancing policy shifts and private sector wage moderation".

4. "Popular" uses of the term "transformation"

While we do not think it possible or necessary to provide a complete list of commentaries about the process of transformation, we hope to provide a careful selection of a few that might lend greater clarity to the discussion about transformation. Even a perfunctory glance at

[5] The contradictory and "ideological" nature of the skills development legislation is dealt with in the debate between Vally (1997) and Kraak (1997).

the media (daily and weekly) will show how egregious ideas about transformation, transition, restructuring and the like are in the popular consciousness. Nearly every social commentator (including educationalists, business leaders, political and cultural commentators, financiers, government officials and "activist-intellectuals") refers either directly or by implication to the idea of transformation. Indeed the recent celebration of ten years of democracy has unleashed a forbidding catalogue of interviews and statements concerned with the state of the nation in various domains, offering intelligent expositions on the subject of national transformation and change. We examine some of these.

The president of the last apartheid government of South Africa, F.W. de Klerk (2004) writes that the first ten years after 1994 represent a successful "constitutional transformation from minority rule to non-racial democracy". According to him, this has had very little effect on the lives of the majority of the population, even with the vote, because of the lack of jobs, housing, and so on. "They continue to live in poverty and deprivation; they have been promised the world, but in reality they feel that they have received only crumbs" (De Klerk, 2004). He states that the second ten years of change will be "dominated by economic and social transformation". For him, there is some way to go to achieve substantive equality and the human rights and freedoms associated with such equality because of the many "unresolved issues" which affect the process of transformation – the degree of equality to be achieved, minority representation and their potential disempowerment, and the lack of clarity with regard to "institutions that have a special cultural identity" (such as churches, schools, universities, the media and old age homes).

By this De Klerk clearly posits a particular conception of political and economic "emancipation", based on "non-racial" democracy, the alleviation of poverty, the need for economic and social change, and the achievement of substantive conditions for the achievement of human rights. Given his political orientation and past history, it is hardly surprising that De Klerk pays particular attention to the role of minorities in the public service and of the security establishment in particular, although he is also concerned about whether transformation will continue "forever", whether it is about the

enrichment of “advantaged black South Africans”, and about its effects on companies and investment. Perhaps the most instructive clue to his orientation to the idea of transformation is to be found in the argument that transformation must address poverty and deprivation of the poorest South Africans *within the “framework of the basic rules governing the globalised economy. Any attempts to significantly dilute existing property rights, economic freedoms or basic standards of administration and management would prevent South Africa from effectively competing in the international economy …”* (my italics) (De Klerk, 2004). and tThis would, in his view, ensure that transformation is implemented in ways that do not undermine “national unity”, even while conceding that the concept of transformation expresses “‘widely differing perceptions”.

By contrast, an article representing the viewpoint of the ruling party in government – the ANC (2004) – talks about it being an “able steward” in times of “revolutionary economic changes” (*This Day*, 13 April 2004). The article goes on to say that South Africa’s economic transformation in the past ten years has been “nothing less than astonishing". In an era of unparalleled economic change, both globally and at home, the ANC has proved a capable and responsible steward of the interests of the nation while safeguarding “the interests of workers and the poor”.

The article spells out the conditions under which the ANC’s transformation project has taken place, referring in particular to “a global transformation of unprecedented scale”, which included the liberalisation of economies, the collapse of the socialist states, and Third World debt. Economic prices, such as interest rates, have all been irreversibly altered during a time of enormous global volatility. It argues further that the reintegration of South Africa into the global economy takes place under conditions where “old established national-industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries….” In these circumstances, the article argues, South Africa has achieved a level of macro-economic stability unsurpassed in the previous years of its history.

Its conception of "revolutionary economic changes" is therefore largely about macro-economic stability, interest rates, engaging "global volatility" and the like. This concept of transformation is manifestly not about more traditional concepts of "revolution" associated with changes in property rights and production regimes or class-based conceptions of state power and society.

Opposing the approach of the ANC, an important concern of the politics of parliamentary opposition in South Africa can be gleaned from Tony Leon, the Leader of the Opposition (*ThisDay,* 26 May 2004). Speaking on the occasion of President Mbeki's State of the Nation address, Leon agreed with the need for "radical and fundamental change", but criticises the ANC because, according to him, "the goal of this transformation is to achieve representivity – a state of affairs in which every institution, public and private, reflects the demographics of South Africa as a whole…The role of the individual citizen is determined in advance by his or her race''. He adds, "There is a difference between encouraging diversity and enforcing representivity. We believe that the government should create equality of opportunity, but it cannot create equality of outcomes" (*ThisDay,* 26 May 2004).

For a sophisticated and powerful captain of industry, Bobby Godsell,[6] Chief Executive Officer of Anglo Gold Ashanti, the changes that have taken place as a result of the "transition" posit a whole range of important challenges that continue to face the country. In particular, he talks of South Africa being

> … restored to the community of nations, to a position of leadership in that community. Our economy is fundamentally in better shape than at any time since the commodities boom in the 1960s. Our institutions are working, with some, like the Independent Electoral Commission, clearly being world class. We enjoy a functioning democracy, the rule of law, a free media and an amazing degree of religious freedom. Perhaps more

[6] Godsell is the CEO of possibly one of the largest gold-mining companies in the world.

> than anything, the children of this generation of black and white South Africans are growing, celebrating their shared national identity and that which makes them distinctive (Godsell, 2004).

Here, too, the benchmarks for change are associated with economic issues, electoral process, constitutional democracy, media and religious freedom, and the celebration of a national identity. Not unexpectedly, little attention is paid to questions about wealth and income distribution, the relative power of large and small business and proprietary interests, control over the commanding heights of the economy and the like, not to mention issues of language and privilege in the construction of that national identity.

A further variant of the concept of transformation is that from the vantage point of Iraj Abedian, a savant among bankers. Writing on the occasion of the ten-year celebrations of the democratic process in South Africa, he argues that the "past decade witnesses a remarkable transformation of South Africa's fortunes" (Abedian, 2004). He refers to the socio-political changes that have led to South Africa becoming "a global model of political process management and peaceful, constructive conflict resolution. The government's economic policy management has worked to transform an economy that a decade ago was saddled with structural instability and vulnerability to internal and external shocks". Abedian refers to four developments that have contributed to this happy conjuncture:

- the change of the structure of the economy from one for the production of primary goods and commodities to one based on the service sector, which has facilitated a broader revenue base;
- changes in the composition of exports and the consequences for foreign exchange earnings;
- the mix of financial, budgetary and institutional reforms and the changes these have had on government's fiscal institutions and operations, enabling it "to better address the historic backlog in public service delivery";
- the "modernisation" of policies and institutions which have improved the integration into the world economy, a

"corporate governance" framework, and improving levels of "social trust".

While Abedian recognises the great challenges that lie ahead, these developments are beacons of transformation taking advantage of the prevalence of social trust in South Africa. It is clear that this conception of transformation can be counterposed to others where an orientation to these "global realities" does not emphasise the criteria of global acceptability as fundamental. These alternative approaches might, for instance, refer to what they regard as equally important considerations such as the unequal relations of global trade and exchange and the undermining role of powerful trading blocs in the north, the burden of debt, the unremitting outflows of capital and human resources to further privilege powerful states, the unregulated behaviour of corporate capital and their lack of accountability. Indeed, these latter emphases are invariably associated with questions about patterns of asset ownership, income distribution, land access, poverty and inequality, social protest and the like.

In a somewhat similar vein, and speaking of a "restructured South Africa", the Governor of the Reserve Bank, Tito Mboweni (2004), enunciates his view of the main policy planks of government since 1994. He sets out a comprehensive list of state policies which have achieved particular effects in relation to import liberalisation, import tariff reductions (to levels "even lower than that required by GATT"), a new Competition Act to "create a greater spread of ownership of enterprises", the abolition of the "financial Rand system" in 1995, and the relaxation of other controls. Fiscal stability is given "considerable emphasis" as a "precondition for sustained growth and employment creation" to make possible the expansionary fiscal policies from 2001-2002. Despite the emphasis placed on infrastructural development and social upliftment, the main budget deficit remained at "an estimated 2,4 per cent of gross domestic product in fiscal 2003-2004". Mboweni adds that the government has become a credible borrower, reflected in upgraded credit ratings since 1994, has achieved control over foreign debt which amounted to 6% of

GDP in December 2003, reduced the rate of inflation to the average of its trading partners and competitors and in so doing developed a sound financial infrastructure. The government has also made interventions in the foreign exchange market to maintain healthy foreign reserves, and produced policies for an "inflation targeting monetary policy to make monetary policy more transparent and accountable and to promote co-ordination with other policy measures". (These were complicated by fluctuations in the Rand value.). The Reserve Bank's interventions have improved the "operations of the financial market in South Africa", bringing these "in line with international standards".

The emphasis, therefore, is on questions of monetary and fiscal stability, the regulation and development of financial institutions, import liberalisation, tariff reduction and the spread of enterprise ownership. Here, too, the quest for "international standards" is an important policy beacon promoted by measures that are regarded as mechanisms in support of growth and employment. Yet, there are unquestionably a number of extant writings which provide an acerbic criticism of the actual effects of these policies, especially for the poor (Adelzadeh, 1996; Bond, 1996; Marais, 1998). Such writings allege that the real effects of these policies has been to enhance opportunities for the privileged, to permit the untrammelled access of corporate capital to national assets, to increase the levels of poverty and inequality dramatically and to reduce the directive and sovereign power of the nation state.

For Willie Madisha (2004), President of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), on the other hand, questions about inequality, joblessness and state function are critical in measuring the progress of change. He argues that even after ten years of democracy and many positive changes in South African society, South Africa remains "one of the most unequal countries in the world". In his view, the "principal factor hampering efforts to reduce inequality is the catastrophic rise in joblessness over the last ten years" and the doubling of the unemployment rate. Madisha talks of a "growing consensus" about a developmental view of the state "that promotes the interest of the working class and the poor. Left to itself

the market will not deliver to these constituencies if there is no prospect of reaping a profit". Hence COSATU's support of the agreements at the Growth and Development Summit of 2003 and the public works programmes for job creation while it disavows the strategy of speeding up privatisation and reduced corporate taxes and commits itself to "deepen the struggle for social transformation and economic justice" so that the political gains of 1994 do not remain "empty promises". In this approach, the state has a critical role to play in achieving the goals of social equity and of safeguarding the interests of working class and poor constituencies.

For a judge of the Constitutional Court in South Africa, the much-heralded Constitution is an important repository of transformation, representing the ardent hopes and aspirations of South Africans. Judge Yvonne Mokgoro, Constitutional Court judge and chairperson of the South African Law Commission, avers that:

> Our Constitution, which is the supreme law and represents the aspirations of our nation, is therefore a transformative document, providing the legal and moral basis for change in this country. … In the light of this our judiciary plays an important role in transformation and has, as the primary agent of the interpretation and application of our Constitution, made significant strides in the past decade, creating and developing a South African human rights framework. Often government's own judicially created frameworks have guided transformation initiatives (Mokgoro, 2004).

Mokgoro (2004) writes that "the growing diversity of the judiciary",[7] the entrenchment of the ideas of human dignity, freedom and equality, and the protection of socio-economic rights

[7] About which see the scathing comments of Shadrack Gutto (2004), a legal scholar, who accuses the Judicial Services Commission of failing to take on the challenge of transformation, "a consequence of several factors: a paucity of transformative leadership, legislative obstacles and outdated and dysfunctional structural arrangements".

> …have been able to play an increased role in the socio-economic transformation, …to bring a measure of relief to some of the most desperate in our society when reviewing government programmes for the provision of housing, healthcare and social security.

Added to this are the "entrenched right of access" clauses and the provisions in the Constitution regarding the bringing of class actions to protect those "who cannot themselves afford to bring matters before the courts".

All these are clarion restatements of the pre-eminence of constitutionalism in the foundations of a new South African society. Yet, as the Constitutional Court itself has conceded, its power of judgement must be equalled by a similar determination on the part of the Executive to give substance to the imprimatur of the Constitution, to develop concrete and imaginative plans and the will to give them substance. Otherwise, the path-breaking pronouncements of the Constitutional Court remain unfulfilled. It has enjoined that in the area of practice the intentions of the lawmakers be matched by the behaviour and activities of public bureaucracies and not be frustrated by them. By so doing, even while making "instructive" judgements about the implications of policy, the judiciary has deliberately limited its review of executive function so as not to substitute for it or to impute to the judiciary functions, which speak directly to those functions. This approach, it can be argued, is derived from a particular interpretation of the law and of transformation as distinct from other conceptions of it, such as the approach adopted by "critical legal theory".[8]

Speaking more directly about the role of education in transformation, the former Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, on the occasion of

[8] There is a well-developed literature on this subject, which is not traversed here. A clear exposition of the tenets of critical legal theory for continental Europe is to be found in the accredited journal, *Capital and Class*, in various articles from 1980 onwards, while for North America see Leonard Harris (1999).

his budget vote speech to the National Assembly on 20 May 2003, refers to how

> … we contribute to national development by shaping the nature and character of the society in which we live through the values and socialisation provided within the education system; by educating young people about the nature and beauty of our diverse cultures and backgrounds; and through providing skills that fill shortages in the labour market and build the entrepreneurial spirit to support the creation of new jobs. This is why we needed to overhaul completely the system we inherited in 1994. Nine years ago, almost to the day, we took responsibility for the education of over 12 million children in schools and colleges and another half million students in universities and technikons. The system was a chaotic collection of 19 departments, defined by the apartheid racial geography and ethnic illogic, and with huge discrepancies in the resourcing, curriculum and administration of each. I believe that only South Africa, under the leadership of the African National Congress, could have achieved the goals of this monumental restructuring (Asmal, 2003:2).

He adds that

> the achievement of establishing a national system of education must not be underestimated, for it is a powerful contributor towards the development of a national identity, and the determination of our national character (Asmal, 2003:2).

Here national identity, national character, a system of values, skills and addressing the “racial geography” of apartheid were

matters of paramount interest in the conception of an agenda of transformation.[9]

For one of the great icons of South Africa's literary tradition, Es'kia Mphahlele, transformation is more than an ephemeral change of racial form:

> The partying must now stop. The replacement of white personnel with black personnel within our education administration, within our educational institutions, the replacement of whites with blacks in government, and, to some extent, the private sector, has not meant much for transformation. Instead, it is giving credibility to a system that is not functioning (Khumalo, 2004).

For the journalist and commentator Sandile Dikeni (2004),matters of nation-building are paramount in realising the idea of South Africa's transformation:

> The tricky part of our transformation from an apartheid, racist state to an inclusive democracy was making true the alternative to the flawed system – building a nation.

From these "reflections" alone, what becomes clear is that the range and emphases about what constitutes the project of transformation often depend largely on the social and institutional location, history, gender and other attributes of the observer, relative to the process of change and, of course, her or his *Weltanschauung,* itself a consequence of particular forms of socialisation and consciousness.

[9] The former Minister has, of course, spoken on the theme on countless occasions and it would be a grave injustice to suggest that this pronouncement alone indicates what he regarded as "transformation". Suffice it to say that there can be little doubt about the importance he attributed to education in the broader project of social change.

5. Some scholarly attempts at understanding transformation

More scholarly attempts at examining the concept of transformation have produced similar (if more systematised) differences in the orientation to this issue. Here we also provide a few examples of how transformation has been conceived, especially in South Africa. Our analysis extends outside the boundaries of educational discourse because it is in such discourse that wider conceptions of social change are considered and their meaning for transformation assessed although, as we will show, educational thinkers have also considered this issue.

Some commentators, including some analysts of education policy, have examined transformation as relative to a wider ambit of social and other policies. They point to the complexity, context, history and multi-faceted nature of social policy in general, and especially to its relationship to political and economic processes. Attempts at limiting the scope of analysis about transformation to education alone are renounced in favour of more encompassing ones because of the relative nature of educational transformation – that is, relative to a broader canvass of social change shaped by a combination of political, economic, social, cultural and other factors, themselves weighed down by the chronic consequences of "globalisation".

These more expansive approaches to transformation are canvassed below through a somewhat eclectic selection of texts. It would be impossible, for the purposes of this present task, to do more than that. In this article we undertake a modest enterprise, seeking mainly to understand what is implied by transformation through the discursive writings of a few of the more thoughtful commentators on this issue, chosen principally from commentators on the South African case.

For educationalists like Sayed (2001), post-apartheid transformation (particularly in relation to policy development) can be viewed from the lens of "five different, though inter-related frameworks"– of history, equity and justice, freedom and democracy, the economy and global order, and efficiency, effectiveness and quality (Sayed,

2001:250-1). He discusses each of the frameworks in turn in order to "interrogate the different concerns, approaches and implications of the various policies that have been formulated in order to fundamentally transform the legacy of the apartheid system" and by highlighting the "conceptual tensions and difficulties that underpin the educational reform process in South Africa" (Sayed, 2001:250). He complains about the "symbolic" nature of policy change and its lack of attention to questions of practice, relying on Samoff's critique of policy change as essentially "frameworks or symbolic policies with a singular lack of attention to developing strategic priorities and singling out finite areas of intervention" (Sayed, 2001:252).

The preoccupation with the weaknesses of policy development, outside a strategy for its implementation, is also germane to Jansen's (2001) critique of policy as "symbolism". His article extends the idea of symbolism to explain why there has not been much change in the educational system in South Africa. He is "concerned with the evidence for and elaboration of the theory of political symbolism as explanation for non-implementation in South African education reform after apartheid" (Jansen, 2001:271). For him, the process of educational transformation was severely emasculated because, despite the real material constraints on policy choices, "the state has been inclined to play up the symbolic role of policy rather than its practical consequences" (Jansen, 2001:288). It is not true, Jansen argues, that if there were no material constraints policy would be implemented, because "the original point of departure for my thesis on political symbolism is that politicians do not always invent policy in order to change practice. It often represents a search for legitimacy". The theory is, therefore, not intended to deny that some change has taken place.

> But these uneven, unexpected and small-site changes do not discount the observation that at a system wide level, education remains steeped in crisis and inequality despite the flurry of policy in the six years since the first democratic elections (Jansen, 2001:289).

An explicitly political and democratic content is ascribed to transformation in education by Nzimande and Mathieson (2004), who write about the role of the ANC's Education Study Group in Parliament during the period 1994 to 1999. They characterise the ANC's policy for education and training as follows:

> This policy was based on the premise that the inherited education system would need to be fundamentally transformed if it was to overcome the legacy of the past, while at the same time becoming responsive to a new set of challenges. The transformed education and training system was to be a unified system based on the principles of equity, quality, non-racialism and non-sexism, and that was more appropriate to the socio-economic needs of the emerging democratic society. These goals were to be met by moving towards the provision of lifelong learning, so that workers, adult learners and others who had been denied access in the past would gain access to education and training opportunities. It was asserted that the state would have to play a leading role in overcoming the inherited fragmentation and achieving these policy goals (Nzimande & Mathieson, 2004:3).

This approach to education transformation suggests thoroughgoing reforms based on a number of fundamentals such as equity and quality. It goes somewhat further than most academic reviews of the educational transformation process by referring to principles relating to lifelong learning, especially as these affect adult learners and working class constituencies. Nzimande & Mathieson (2004:5) quite rightly posit the role of the state in educational reform as fundamental, since, in their view, the state itself had to be "sufficiently empowered to carry out the most thorough transformation of the inherited education and training system".

Nzimande and Mathieson (2004:25 *et seq.*) also argue that despite the considerable legislative changes and policy initiatives, implementation remains a key challenge. In this regard they refer to a number of issues such as the allocation of greater resources to the

poorest for redress purposes, administrative and management backlogs, the declining non-personnel expenditure in the provinces, inconsistencies between national and provincial practices, teacher redeployment, the "demobilisation of communities and progressive educational organisations" and such issues. This raises a wide variety of issues affecting the project of transformation, and suggests that political interventions remain critical to give effect to these reforms.

Here the idea of transformation is intrinsically about state function and about the project of democratising society in ways which enhance the power to participate actively in democratic processes. In this regard, the authors refer to the approach put forward in "an alliance summit" document (*Umrabulo*, 1998) about

> [the] need to build a developmental state, founded on the principles of democracy, justice and an abiding culture of human rights…. It obliges the state to ensure that the citizens are informed of policies and activities of government, and that they themselves take part in their formulation and implementation. It also requires political and civil society organisations and institutions which are accountable and in constant touch with the people (Nzimande & Mathieson, 2004:32).

Writing on a similarly broader canvas, Harold Wolpe (1995), one of the foremost writers on education and social change issues in South Africa, reflects on the difficulty of theorising transformation simply through an inventory of successes and failures so soon after 1994 and in the absence of a broader view of the state by which to do so. It was premature to provide a useful scorecard of the process of transition in South Africa so soon after it had begun, because

> The transition from apartheid thus involves not merely changes in specific policies, but also extensive cultural and ideological, as well as institutional and social structural, transformations. In short, the actualisation of the transition will amount to nothing less than a revolution of the social order (Wolpe, 1995:88).

One can see from this that Wolpe's (1995:88) conception of the "transition" anticipates nothing less than a "social revolution". However, such a revolution would have to take place "through incremental changes over a more-or-less lengthy period of time". Moreover, these incremental changes should not be regarded simply as an inventory of successes and failures but should rather be seen as part of an "analysis of systemic transformation" because it made little sense to place too great a value on specific changes over a brief period. Accordingly, Wolpe argues "open diagnosis of systemic change on the basis of specific reforms [is] quite problematic".

Wolpe proceeds to examine major GNU documents such as the RDP (ANC, 1994b) and President Mandela's Preface to the *White Paper of the Reconstruction and Development Programme* (DPLG, 1994). In the latter document, the then President argued:

> Our country is going through a profound transformation at all levels of government and society to ensure the implementation of the RDP. At the heart of the Government of National Unity is a commitment to effectively address the problem of poverty and the gross inequality evident in almost all aspects of South African society. This can only be possible if the South African economy can be firmly placed on the path of high and sustainable growth (DPLG, 1994: Preface).

According to Wolpe, this idea of "profound transformation" of the political system was the commitment to transform the social and economic system, which "permeates virtually all accounts of contemporary South Africa". The electoral democratic and parliamentary system provided a platform for the ANC and a "principal enabling condition" for such "fundamental

transformation".[10] Wolpe invokes the intentions of the RDP programme to illustrate this; the RDP programme is regarded as:

> … [an] integrated coherent socio-economic policy framework. It seeks to mobilize all our people and our country's resources towards the final eradication of the results of apartheid and the building of a democratic, non-racial and non-sexist future. It represents a vision for the fundamental transformation of South Africa (Wolpe, 1995:4).

Wolpe refers to the six basic principles and the five key programmes of the RDP, and to the Minister (in the RDP office) for the RDP's view that these projects were a "major success in transforming government and ensuring delivery". He is concerned about the difficulty of making an assessment of the claims of the RDP after such a short period of time, that is, in 1995. However, his primary concern lies with the absence in the debate over the RDP of any discussion "of the politics of implementation. Indeed the very terms in which the RDP and the White Paper are cast submerges the central political issues" such as "the eradication of the sources of contradiction and probable contestation and conflict by asserting harmony in the RDP". For Wolpe, the "consensual model", which is the premise for achieving the RDP goals, conceptualises the state as the "unproblematic instrument of the RDP". The post-1994 state's

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[10] The concept of "fundamental transformation" is defined in the White Paper as:

> [The] integrated process of transformation must ensure that the country
>
> - Develops strong and stable democratic institutions and practices characterised by representatives and participation becomes a fully democratic and non-racial society [sic];
> - Becomes a prosperous society having embarked upon a sustainable and environmentally friendly growth and development path;
> - Addresses the moral and ethical development of society [Wolpe, 1995:100].

commitment to democratisation as an instrument to transform "both the state and civil society" and the existence of a democratic parliamentary system and an elected government intent on social change

> was in itself something of a revolution – it represented the end of the institutional basis of white minority political rule and in this sense suggests one possible interpretation of the meaning of 'fundamental transformation' (Wolpe, 1995:92).[11]

Wolpe (1995:32) then builds an argument against an instrumentalist view of the state, and argues "the inadequacy of the assumption that the state can be conceived of as a simple, homogeneous, consensual entity in the shape of an instrument which, in a straightforward and unproblematic manner, would carry out the RDP". He argues that this transformation takes place "within the orbit of a transformed capitalism". Hence the RDP "is an impressive programme for welfare capitalism coupled with a strong emphasis on the role of civil society and democratisation of the economy" (Wolpe, 1995:100). He emphasises the importance of the analysis of the "conflicts of interests, social forces and power relations" affecting the goals of the RDP and the "realisation and implementation of policies for social transformation" (Wolpe, 1995:101).

Clearly, Wolpe regards any conception of fundamental transformation as contingent upon an analysis of state, on the recognition of the slowness of change process, and on the recognition of its objective base in "the orbit of capitalism". These impute to transformation a character which affects how it is analysed to provide a more rigorous view of the "limits and possibilities" for the realisation of its goals.

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[11] According to Wolpe, Sam Shilowa, the then Secretary General of COSATU, sought to extend this concept of fundamental transformation by arguing in January 1995 that "the decisive election victory of the ANC has placed the demands and concerns of the working people firmly on the national agenda, but … that victory alone will [not] determine how those demands and concerns will be dealt with" (Wolpe, 1995:92).

Linda Chisholm's (2004) analysis of transition in South Africa is embedded in serious political discourse and draws on Wolpe's analysis of the changing character of the relationship between "class" and "race" in the South African literature. She takes the changing class character of the "reconfigured education system" as a major analytical point of departure based on the changing economic and political landscape. The key to this is the constitutional compromise between

> old and new ruling elites accompanied by the creation of conditions for the globalisation and further intensification of South African capital… The creation of a democratic state committed to reliance on the market and fiscal austerity enabled political incorporation, but little respite from poverty and unemployment… (Chisholm, 2004:11).

In the Introduction to the book, Chisholm provides a useful discussion of how various authors deal with the question of social change, about which a "veritable industry has emerged in the last two decades", focusing on "reform", "transformation" and other issues. In these analyses globalisation, marketisation, changing forms of work and the transitions from authoritarian to democratic states have been the focus. For her, social change has been interchangeably described as "transition" or "transformation" or "reform". This has often led to the denudation of these concepts of any historical and contextual value. In the volume in question, the term "social change" is used by

> some authors (to) emphasise the role of social reproduction within the broader process of social transformation, while others focus on policies in this period… Some emphasise the interrelationship of continuity and change, and yet others the potential of education, such as adult basic education, to serve as vehicles for radical discontinuities. In short, the term 'social change' is variously deployed to emphasise diversity and complexity, contradictions and tensions and, not least, specificity in studying a society

> seeking to emancipate itself from the inheritance of apartheid (Chisholm, 2004:12-13).

However, for her these approaches are "not entirely satisfactory" because they cannot, for instance, account for cases where education is a force for change; it is also problematic simply to regard it as such without accounting for its role in status quo maintenance. While for some the transition signalled opportunities for "upward mobility", for others this in itself was indicative of the arrival of the politics of the Washington Consensus, its neo-liberalism and the conditions for the creation of a "compliant national bourgeoisie" and widening social disparities. For Chisholm, both perspectives reflect some truth since there has been both "change and continuity", and this in itself requires an examination not only of policy but also of the "social actors" shaping the emerging social environment and its possibilities (Chisholm, 2004:14).

The idea that transformation is both complex and highly contested is best captured by Singh (1992), who approaches the issue from the standpoint of a dialogue about the confusing plenitude of uses to which the concept has been subjected. She begins by referring to how the word "transform" is defined in *New Webster's Dictionary*:

> change in form or appearance; metamorphose; to change in condition, nature or character; convert; to change into another substance; transmute (Singh, 1992:48.

According to Singh, South Africa is "in an age of transformation" because transformation can only be viewed as an unfolding process not given to easy characterisation, moving "discordantly and defying easy description". For her, the future trajectory of change is not yet recognisable, making "the description of the present as an age of transformation most compelling" (Singh, 1992:48), but no less clear because in fact

> [t]hrough its frequent use, transformation is acquiring, contradictorily, both an obviousness and a mysteriousness that is making it into a rather slippery notion… Its gain in popularity may be accompanied by a problematic gain in generality and fuzziness in a way that threatens the very specificities that the term is intended to signify.… An examination of many of the uses of transformation indicates either a sliding into a highly generalized notion of radical change or a plethora of specific concerns and issues connected by a common thread that is not at all transparent (Singh, 1992:49).

For her, the idea of transformation had become current "as denoting or encompassing the institutions, values, practices and social relations of an alternative political order desired by radical opponents of the present one" (Singh, 1992:49). It is referring to "the present" and not to the politics of protest that characterised the period before that present. One could not assume that it was "more or less self evident" or predetermined historically, but rather that it could be viewed as "the outcome of contestation" between "reformist" and radical positions between and among constituencies. The idea of transformation could represent a number of things such as "the search for new bearings for oppositional political activity … beyond … distinctions between reform and revolution"– that is, as a "post-modern metaphor for political struggles in the present", or an accommodation to the realities of changing global and national politics including the "crisis of socialism", giving way to the discourse of "democratisation, restructuring, reconstruction, and, of course, transformation…" (Singh, 1992:50). It was hardly possible to adopt a monolithic view of the idea of transformation, and indeed it was necessary to insist on giving creative rein "to a variety of initiatives involving as many people and institutions" as possible, she argues (Singh, 1992:55).

Singh regards the debates about the notion to be intrinsically about "transformation as process, mechanism and goal", where transformation is best understood as the idea of reconstructive agency requiring meaningful participation rather than the views of

elites. It could be viewed as "a network of principles and values" about the reorganisation of power relations, an "irreversible shift in the balance of forces", a "network of intersecting struggles around different social categories and issues (class, gender, race, ecology, peace, etc.)", and as a "progressive mode of change [that is] committed to and actively seeks a disjuncture between the present distribution and any future one" (Singh, 1992:51-2).. It has displaced ideas about "reform", "liberation", and "transition".

Referring to the related concept of "transition", Singh elaborates her argument by referring to the Eastern European and South American contexts. There, the idea of transition refers to the change from command to market economies and from totalitarian-militaristic to civilian rule. While in South Africa the concept of transition is a "serious contender of transformation", it

> seems to describe only the movement between different conjunctural phases. Whether a transition produces emancipatory outcomes or not depends on the prevailing balance of forces and can be judged by specific developments in the socio-political and economic spheres (Singh, 1992:53).

She refers to Du Toit's distinction between "liberalisation", "democratisation", and "socialism" or "socialisation", the latter implying that economic inequality and economic democracy be addressed. Most importantly, we are reminded that, at the time, debates about transformation were no less about confronting the question of socialism – spelling out its ideological boundaries and the goals of transformation.

Singh concludes her article by warning about the need to pay careful attention to the "moral and political character of the oppressed and exploited" and the challenges posed by "the enemy within". Here she refers to careerism, opportunism, greed sectarianism, apathy and so on, concluding that transformation could be viewed as

> the maximal utilisation of new political space to push the struggle for popular participation and empowerment

> further. It could be viewed as the opportunity to insert progressive constituencies into positions where, through contestation with ruling bloc forces, they could intervene in the struggle to shape the South Africa of the future … [and] … could be viewed as the process within which, through contestations that take many forms, the ground could be prepared for a reconstruction of South African society that is not closed off to aspects of a possible socialist project (Singh, 1992:57).

This is manifestly a far cry from the muted conceptions of change that characterise present debates about transformation.

For the political scientist, Habib (1995:52), there are three "central questions" for understanding the idea of "transition" in South Africa. These are (a) to understand the character of the conflict in South Africa, (b) to account "theoretically" for the "form, pace and content" of the transition, and (c) the prospects for democratic consolidation in South Africa. For him, extant explanations of the transition are unconvincing and largely descriptive. They do not "tell the whole story", they lack analytical strength and cannot explain "why particular choices have been made, the forces and factors that have prompted these choices, and the possibilities and limitations of this transition" (Habib, 1995:58). He renounces approaches to theorising political transitions which are based either on "structural determinist or a free-for-all voluntarism". To Habib, much of the "scholarly literature" is not able to tell the whole story:

> It is able to describe the events, argue for one or other ideological solution, but its lack of an analytical focus prevents it from telling us why particular choices have been made, forces and factors that have prompted these choices and the possibilities and limitations of this transition (Habib, 1995:58).

After reviewing the literature based on these approaches, Habib (1995:61) concludes that a

> dynamic and holistic explanatory model, then, must steer clear from these pitfalls and locate itself within a structuralist mould. It, however, must also avoid the weaknesses of earlier structuralist explanations, and not succumb to an inevitability thesis. The political choices of social actors, including social movements and decision makers, crucially influence the pace, content and outcome of the transition. Their decisions also determine whether existing structures carry over into the new era, or are transformed, thereby facilitating new possibilities and limits for action.

This is because structures themselves are transformed by social action and conflict. A "historical structuralist" approach facilitates, for Habib, the development of a dynamic model of transition.

The objective of the transition in South Africa would, therefore, be to undermine "racial and ethnic identities", to establish a broader South African identity, and the realisation of the aspirations (class and national) of "the constituencies that fought against apartheid". His model outlines the conditions that would make democracy possible. Such a transition is more than an "electoral event" and would take many years to "consolidate itself" to resist the "totalitarian impulses within its midst". It requires the nurturing of democracy by behaviour and policies and by scholarly analysis to strengthen the democratic forces for change (Habib, 1995:69).

Neville Alexander's (2004) argument reflects on how "race" and "identity" are constructed and how they affect questions of transformation. In his short piece for the newspaper, *ThisDay*, he argues that it "is common cause in the social sciences" that individual and social identities are "constructed, not 'given'", and that the state sets "the template on which such identities are based". Alexander warns, however, against dismissing the idea of identity given that "social identities have a primordial value for most people, precisely because they are not aware of the historical, social and political ways in which their identities have been constructed. This is, ultimately, the psychological explanation for the tenacity of such

identities". Against this tenacity is the "dream of a raceless, perhaps even a classless society".

According to Alexander, despite the "laudable" legislation (such as in relation to affirmative action) these policies "as implemented, on balance … benefit mainly the rising black middle class and in effect deepen[s] the inherited class inequality in our society". He argues that there is "another way". It is "possible in the absence of a social revolution such as that which began to transform the practices of racial discrimination and racial prejudice in Cuba" to deal with the problem of racialised identities, even though he reminds us that racial prejudice continues to endure in that country. In South Africa this would require dealing with issues of identity openly and publicly. For him "the basic issue we must grapple with is the optimal relationship between our national (South African) identity and all manner of sub-national identities". This would require distancing "ourselves from racial identities" and finding ways to take "corrective action" in "each domain" since, through the continued use of racialised identities, "we entrench the very racial categories that undermine the possibility of attaining a truly non-racial democratic South Africa".

Inevitably questions about how transformation is associated with the subject of reform and revolution have also been examined. John Saul's article on the subject of transformation is written in the context of the "collapse of 'actually-existing socialisms' and the apparently unchecked hegemony of an evermore ambitiously globalizing capitalism" (Saul, 1992:2).. For him, it was necessary to put a great deal more thought into "new ways of conceiving of modalities – at once socialist and realistic – of a radical restructuring of inherited socio-economic institutions". According to Saul, the "juxtaposition of revolution vs 'mere reformism'" did not represent "the full range of present possibilities in South Africa…." Resolving this could not happen through a "dialogue of the deaf" between these seeming opposites because it was possible to argue from "different premises" to address the challenge of long-term socio-economic transformation. It was necessary to avoid "a romantic ... ultra-revolutionary approach, and, on the other hand, collapse into a mild reformism that will do little to alter the balance of inherited class

power and conservative/technocratic decision-making" (Saul, 1992:2).

Saul posits the idea of "structural reform" to describe a strategy "in the uncertain journey towards 'structural transformation'". He refers to Andre Gorz's view on this subject and talks of

> two essential criteria for distinguishing 'structural reform' from mere 'reformism', the first being the insistence that any reform, to be structural, must not be comfortably self-contained … but must, instead, be allowed self-consciously to implicate other 'necessary' reforms that flow from it as part of an emerging project of structural transformation (Saul, 1992:3).

Saul reflects approvingly on Boris Kagarlitsky's (1990) approach which has the ability to "bind revolution and reform together as being, potentially, two mutually reinforcing preoccupations and processes in Marxism". As Kagarlitsky (1990:5) argues:

> In and of itself, Marxism is neither a 'revolutionary' nor an 'evolutionary' theory. As a *theory of practice* Marxism derives from the alternation of evolutionary and revolutionary stages in history and crucially from their organic interconnection. This latter feature has been completely overlooked by both right social-democrats and their left-wing critics.

This, of course, has profound implications for how we ourselves view the concept of transformation in relation to the *process* of change, since the approach raises the intrinsic relation between theory and practice – in this case, the relationship between transformation *as an idea* and the *practices* associated with its achievement.

Another sociologist, David Ginsburg (1996), speaks about the limits of the "transition" in South Africa from the perspective of class analysis. He suggests that the Constitution itself propounds a limited approach to democracy and, moreover, that such an approach

facilitates the weakening of particular social forces relative to others. For him,

> the South African version of democracy manifestly stops at the factory gates notwithstanding occasional protestations to the contrary. In other words, it already seems clear that the political system established by the new Constitution offers only a limited form of democracy in which the government 'is rendered strong enough to govern effectively, but weak enough not to be able to govern against important interests'. Secondly, it is precisely in consequence of this shrunken democracy that the new government has had to pursue quite vigorously a policy of demobilisation of those forces and social movements in civil society that might effectively contest its inability to make meaningful social and material improvements to the well-being of the underprivileged majority (Ginsburg, 1996:82).

From this class-based perspective, he derives a critique about the limited nature of the process of transformation in South Africa, since it represents the interests of the population only partially and strengthens the purchase of particular class forces on the structures of control. In regard to a theory of transition, Ginsburg argues that it has limited merit because it privileges some parts of the transformation relating mainly to "entrenched interests" and ignores others.

> The idea that transitions flow from the untenability of the status quo in authoritarian societies; the fact that they are typically the outcome of pacts reached by elites representing reformers and moderates; the historical and systemic pressures disposing the negotiators towards a democratic settlement that leaves entrenched interests more-or-less intact in the new society – all these seem particularly apposite to transition in South Africa. Where the theory is less than useful is in

> providing a framework for understanding the principled and strategic responses those independent organs in civil society must make to government efforts to demobilise them (Ginsburg, 1996:100).

This suggests that transition theory is unable to deal with questions of social mobilisation and the role of civil society, and brings into question issues about political alliances and, in South Africa, the particular "tripartite alliance" between the Communist Party, the trade union, COSATU, and the ruling political party, the ANC, about which "transition theory" has little to say (Ginsburg, 1996:101).

For Bawa, Desai, Habib and Padayachee (1993), the concern was about how transformation was to be understood in the context of their role as "scholar-activists" participating in shaping the future of a higher education institution and in particular the University of Durban-Westville, South Africa, where they were employed. For them the questions about transforming that university has relevance for the university system as a whole. The existence of an organisation for advancing the ideas of progressive academics – the Union of Democratic Staff Associations of South Africa (UDUSA – provided opportunities for intervening on a national canvas and for influencing change processes beyond the confines of a single institution. Such an intervention is critical both to prise open the spaces for constructing the agenda of change in universities in South Africa and to obviate what they regarded as the pervasive intrusions in the domain of policy by advisors from powerful international lending agencies like the World Bank. Referring to Saul's "central thesis" as the idea that "mere reformisms will not meet the real needs of South Africa", they approvingly adopt his standpoint of "structural reform" as a point of departure for their own analysis of the transition. According to Bawa *et al.* (1993), his "transitional strategy" involves a struggle for reforms which are not comfortably self-contained, but which instead "self-consciously implicate other necessary reforms that flow from it as part of an emerging project of structural transformation". This project must be based on "popular initiatives" and the building of organisational capacity to represent

the population and strengthen its ability to engage in "struggles" (Bawa *et al.,* 1993:1-2).

They argue that there is no universal model of university transformation because of their different "history and tradition", and that no models exist that are not "ideologically contested constructs, not only as models of transformation but as models for transformed universities" (Bawa *et al.,* 1993:2). They reflect on the existence of competing interests in the project of university transformation such as the Committee of University Principals (CUP), the National Education Policy Initiative (NEPI), and UDUSA itself. Reflecting on the debate between Jakes Gerwel, then Vice-chancellor of the University of the Western Cape, and Neville Alexander, they argue that Gerwel's approach suggests the "possibility of establishing an institution that is distinguished by its alternative radical agenda, reflected in its access policies, curriculum, and community orientation" (Bawa *et al.,* 1993:5).

Counterpoised to this is Alexander's approach which

> emphasises the limits of transforming institutions and suggests that no institution can be totally transformed outside a fundamental transformation of the society as a whole. Alexander then suggests that the further transformation of individual institutions would be dependent on the capture of state power (Bawa *et al.,* 1993:5).

Criticising Alexander for being "overly pessimistic" and because his approach "may lead to abstentionism" on the part of "radicals" who are intent on university transformation, they argue for a recognition of the idea of "continuity" in the process of struggle. This "continuum of struggle" presents possibilities for radicals to act, to challenge what exists and to enhance the potential of "revolutionary forces" with struggles to ensure the maintenance of a progressive discourse and to provide the opportunity for a theory and a practice to evolve (Bawa *et al.,* 1993:7).

They call on Wolpe's characterisation of the transformatory moment as a "theoretical paradigm that captures the essence of the transformative practice we are trying to come to terms with" because Wolpe argues a strong relation between educational transformation and the more general project of transformation socially defined.

The alternative approach Wolpe suggested is to establish policies and institutional changes, which, while realisable in the present context, undermine racial, gender and class inequalities, and lead in the direction of radical transformation of the society (Bawa *et al.,* 1993:8).

Transformation as a process is therefore intrinsic to the approach of Bawa *et al.* 1993:9) because of its emphasis on "transformatory reform" as more important than an "end product".

Transformation also raises heuristic issues. The search for a framework for sociological analysis begs questions about what Ronaldo Munck (1996:41) calls a "sociology of transformation". In his critique he refers to "a conservative strand in the post-modernist movement of born again free-marketeers and true inheritors to the dark side of Nietzsche" (Munck, 1996:41). Clarifying his understanding of the idea of transformation, he says:

> My feeling is that the idea of transformation emerged as a response to the inadequacy of the binary opposition reform/revolution in the post-1990 conjuncture…. It is at once a goal and a process which is ongoing. It does, of course, mean many different things to different people, some usages being more innocent than others. … Its meaning is constructed on a discursive terrain where contradictory articulations play themselves out in a fluid and conflictual process. My own preference is not to use the term transformation as a covert way of talking about socialism in polite social circles so as not to be laughed out of court. South African society can be said to be in 'transformation' because as with the global system the

> old is dying while the new has not yet been born, as Gramsci would have put it (Munck, 1996:43).

He refers to Gramsci's concept of *transformismo*, which essentially referred to the formation of a new ruling class through "tranformism", which "involved the gradual but continuous absorption … of the active elements … from antagonistic groups" (Munck, 1996:44).

According to Munck, the process in South Africa occurs in a "hybrid society", a society in which millions of the population have incomes below the official minimum subsistence level, and in which there are problems of homelessness and landlessness, a poor education system, malnutrition, etc. In these circumstances, he argues that sociology for transformation must itself "be in transformation". Moreover, it must of necessity

> be global in its approach and its vision, leaving behind the blinkered focus on the nation state …. In this new situation, progressive strategies for transformation at the level of the nation state have their inevitable constraints and limits (Munck, 1996:49-50).

For Richard L. Harris (1987), questions about cultural and ideological change are critical to social transformation in writing about the "revolutionary transformation" of Nicaragua and how he characterises that transformation by reference to far-reaching programmes of social, economic and political change. Harris pays particular attention to the implication of transformation not only for social, economic and political change but also to the issue of political mobilisation and the role of ideas, values and cultural expression. He states that

> Nicaragua is a society undergoing a profound process of revolutionary transformation. In the short span of seven years the revolution has made major changes in the country's political, economic, and social structures. The most important of these changes include the formation of a sizeable state sector in the economy, the implementation of an increasingly far-

> reaching agrarian reform programme, and the political mobilisation of a vast majority of the population through their incorporation into unions, political parties and various types of mass organisations (Harris, 1987).

In regard to the question of ideological transformation in particular, Harris (1987:11) insists that

> Alongside the important transformations that have been taking place in the productive and political structures of Nicaraguan society, there has been a significant transformation in the domain of ideas, values, cultural expressions and religious beliefs of the population. The transformation of this ideological or subjective dimension of social reality is considered by Nicaragua's revolutionary leadership to be of great importance to the success of the revolution.

Daniel, Habib and Southall's (2003) reflections on the "state of the nation" are also instructive for understanding what transformation means in South Africa. The authors ask how the state of the nation should be defined at this time – approaching the tenth anniversary of the South African democracy. Somewhat contradicting one of the authors,[12] the approach adopted in this review is one of a "balanced score-card" in which the positives and negatives of reform are evaluated together to provide a picture of both the "advances" and failures, even if these reflect contradictory elements in the reform process. This is how Daniel *et al.* (2003:19) put it:

> [M]arked progress [has been] made in some areas, whereas in others there are troubling features that remain or are even developing. On the positive side, there has been delivery, or at least there is now the prospect that such delivery might happen. On the negative side there is a dominant party syndrome, the lack of managerial capacity within public institutions,

[12] Habib, whose writings we have referred to earlier.

> the policy limitations placed on the state by its neo-liberal ideological underpinnings, an alarming level of unemployment, the elite nature of black empowerment, and the increasing weakness of the labour movement. Our assessment of the state of the nation has to be holistic, capturing both the advances made and the setbacks experienced.

Daniel *et al.* further argue that there are "contradictory elements" in all states, but that it was necessary to understand the essential nature of the phenomenon under investigation.

> This is even more the case when grand political projects and social engineering exercises are undertaken. Thus analysts interested in understanding the long term implications of political projects need to go beyond their contradictory elements and the intentions and rhetoric of statements of their leaders (Daniel *et al.,* 2003:20).

They see two defining characteristics in South Africa's post-apartheid democracy. The first relates to the project of the deracialisation "of the apex of the class structure, not the entire class structure". The second refers to the "conundrum" which President Mbeki himself has captured in a speech to Parliament in May 1998. On that occasion the President opined that

> To refer to the reality that our past determines the present is to invite protest and ridicule even as it is perfectly clear that no solution to many current problems can be found unless we understand their historical origins … but this means, it comes about that those who are responsible for or were beneficiaries of the past, absolve themselves from any obligation to help to do away with an unacceptable legacy … to which we must respond seriously. In a speech again in this house we quoted the African-American poet, Langston Hughes when he

> wrote,'What happens to a dream deferred?' His conclusion was that it explodes (quoted in Daniel *et al.,* 2003:20).

Daniel *et al.* argue that even though some elements of the society would be deracialised and constitute a "first nation", a "second nation", composed largely of the black South African population, will remain since market-oriented projects simply reproduce social divisions; the racial form of the class character of the second nation will most likely continue into the future (Daniel *et al.,* 2003:20).

Debates about transformation have also evoked strong ideological disagreements, especially in regard to the role of markets in democratising societies. Here the conflict of interests is perhaps most trenchantly expressed in the critique of "free markets" and their social consequences, underpinned by the ideology of neo-liberalism.[13] Neo-liberalism strongly supports particular approaches to transformation, if not expressly then by implication. Several writers in South Africa have pointed to this. They include educationalists like Salim Vally[14] and sociologists, economists and development practitioners more generally.[15]

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[13] The critique of neo-liberalism is hardly new and might well be associated with the critique of Hayek's writings from the first half of the last century. However, it has assumed considerable relevance and vigorous scrutiny, especially in the years since the ascendancy of the ideas associated with Thatcherism and Reagonomics. Here we provide only a glimpse of one aspect of this debate in an attempt to show its importance for the theme of social transformation in South Africa. A cursory glance at the bibliographic notes in Bond (2001) is a useful starting point in any search for the relevant literature.

[14] See especially his various writings in the *Quarterly Review of Education and Training in South Africa,* published by the Education Policy Unit, University of the Witwatersrand. In an earlier article about the state's macro-economic policy (Vally, 1997), he argues that GEAR is premised on, subordinated to and completely dependent on market forces and the private sector for the delivery of services, job creation and economic growth. In this approach, social development depends on winning markets and exporting goods. Education and training must meet narrow industrial

In fact, these arguments are raised to illustrate both the shifts and the ostensible contradictions in the government's policies – social and economic policies being central to the examination of such policies. These contradictions are, in the view of these writers, evidence of the disjuncture between the constitutional imperatives of the state and its social policies. For example, in a scholarly critique, Williams and Taylor (2000) argue that the "economic continuities" of the post-apartheid government are "perhaps more fundamental, than the more celebrated and obvious constitutional changes" (Williams & Taylor, 2000:21). They set out to examine how the "economic trajectory of the ANC" was altered from "being broadly social democratic, to the conservative, neo-liberal position it advances today. … We believe that the international discourse of neo-liberalism has played a crucial, and often underestimated, role in this process" (Williams & Taylor, 2000: 21). According to them, the rise of the discourse of neo-liberalism is "neither natural nor inevitable" and presently held views about it show "a blatant disregard for the traumatic social consequences which arise from the imposition of unfettered market-logic to the international realm. By contrast, the classical liberal theorists such as Adam Smith exhibited a concern for the well being of society *as a whole* which is lacking from the chief exponents of neo-liberalism" (Williams & Taylor, 2000:22). They further argue that the purpose, today, of expounding neo-liberalism is "to engineer a stable environment in which internationally mobile capital can reproduce and which significantly constrains the possibilities of collective action in the global political economy".

Williams and Taylor enunciate a number of neo-liberalism's assumptions. These include its institutional separation of the political and economic sphere, reproducing the "economistic fallacy" enabling "liberals" to claim that "problems defined as 'economic' can be solved

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ends to ensure an internationally competitive economy. Calls by the union movement to redress historical imbalances and eliminate inequalities through a policy of "growth through redistribution" have been replaced by a trickled-down version of an export-oriented "growth first, redistribution later" strategy

[15] See references to Bond, Marais, Adelzadeh and Ginsburg.

by ‘experts’ through the application of socially-neutral, technical rationality”, leading directly to the assumption that the driving force behind human activity is its “economic motivation”. Secondly, they assume that economically driven decisions should be accorded primacy over the “irrational processes of political decision making” (Williams & Taylor, 2000:23). The consequence of this is the emphasis placed on market-driven “solutions” and the “one-size-fits-all” prescriptions of “adjustment programmes”. The market is, for liberals, the key policy instrument for resolving domestic and international policy problems.

> However, the political consequence of such prescriptions is to privilege the desire for maintaining the smooth and efficient running of the *status quo* over claims for redistributive justice. In practice, this often goes hand in hand with policies designed to maintain a system of law and order based on the protection of the rights of the property owning individual (Williams & Taylor, 2000:23).

This is in support of the idea that free markets are based on a community of interests. Thirdly, they argue, neo-liberalism “ultimately stresses that the natural size for an efficient economic community is the global market”; this implies a reduction in the role of the national state with the “limited functions of providing security from external threats and ensuring law and order at home” (Williams & Taylor, 2000:23).

This ideology, based on considerable material interests, has played an important role in influencing the policies of the ANC in government, even though it is based

> on a highly selective reading of the empirical evidence concerning the ‘success’ of numerous neoliberal-inspired development projects emanating from the international financial institutions. The result is a deeply political policy, portrayed as solely ‘economic’, which has enormous repercussions for the whole of South

> African society but most notably for the richest and poorest elements (Williams & Taylor, 2000:24).

They are concerned, therefore, with the extraordinary influence of neo-liberalism on the ANC, in particular because it is portrayed as "the only game in town, discrediting alternatives before they even reached the negotiating table". This has resulted in the ANC's volte-face in economic policy and the jettisoning of the idea of redistribution because of the "fetishising" of trans-national capital's demand for "competitiveness".

> In sum, there is considerable cause to regret the current shape of South Africa's transition. As always, it is the poorest who have suffered the most … Only when the ANC is able to concentrate its efforts on the eradication of poverty and confront the question of redistribution head-on will a genuine transition occur (Williams & Taylor, 2000:37).

Associated with the critique of the ideas of neo-liberalism, and especially the limited role it ascribes to state activity, is the important question of what such a role implies. Here, too, there is a voluminous literature pointing to the severe dichotomies between those who argue for an "interventionist state" and those against it.[16] Suffice it to

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[66].For a more elaborate view of this issue see Dreze and Sen (2002). They argue that the connectedness between state, markets and the public need to be viewed in the context of a larger framework, not derived from "simple formulae used by different sides in the contemporary debates". What, they ask, should be the content of economic reform beyond the mantra of liberalisation in particular? What about issues such as employment promotion, land reforms, and the building of economic infrastructure? What were the changes required in the social and other fields – such as social opportunities, basic education, healthcare, effective political participation and the like? Sen (1999:7) had argued in his earlier book:

> In seeing development as freedom, the arguments on different sides have to be appropriately considered and assessed. It is hard to think that any process of substantial development can do without very extensive use of markets, but that does not preclude the role of social

say that there is now an increasing acceptance by many of the most obdurate critics of state activity that it is necessary in developing economies and societies.[17] Even President Thabo Mbeki has recently stepped into the fray by remarking on the weaknesses of the market. Writing in the *ThisDay* newspaper, he says that progress towards alleviating poverty and its effects would not have been made in the European Union (EU), "if the EU member states had relied solely on the market to meet this challenge". He argues that "structural intervention" is therefore necessary to deal with root causes of

> regional imbalance and is aimed at strengthening the factors which provide the basis for sustained growth. In other words, these structural and cohesion funds help to build the underdeveloped regions toward the level where they can be integrated into the mainstream economy, with the poor being given the possibility and ability 'to jump on board the asset-building train' (Mbeki, 2004a).

In a rejoinder, John Kane-Berman (2004), the head of the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), argues that the attack on the market is unwarranted. Among other things, he states, Mbeki's view about transfers within the EU to resolve its "internal disparities" omitted any mention of internal disparities which were actually attributable to the fact that "the richer parts of Europe have long been capitalist democracies, while the poorer parts suffered until the 1990s under socialist dictatorships". For Kane-Berman, the attack on globalisation was similarly unwarranted because "globalisation, liberal capitalism, neoconservatism, neoliberalism, or whatever call it what you will (*sic*) has helped to lift millions out of

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> support, public regulation, or statecraft when they can enrich – rather than impoverish – human lives. The approach used here provides a broader and more inclusive perspective on markets than is frequently invoked in *either* defending *or* chastising the market mechanism.

[17] See for instance the most recent writings of Stiglitz (2000), and even documents emanating from the World Bank itself.

poverty". According to him, developments in India and China are ample proof of this. The "outrage" against increasing inequality in the world should not "obscure" the improved living standards of many in the world. He concludes that

> far from putting global markets under UN control, the state must liberalise them, and help the poor, especially poor women, to enter them by providing literacy, basic health care, clean water, and all the other things necessary to individuals to exploit their own potential.

An interesting adjunct to this issue is raised in by Moore (2004), who draws attention to the historical role of the state in capitalist accumulation – something that has been ignored by many analysts of the relationship between states and markets. In particular, Moore argues that the theme of markets and the state has "so far avoided capitalism's long and violent evolution – and the state's tightly bound relationships with an emerging bourgeoisie, its contending fraction and opposing classes". For him, debates about development emerged after World War 2 but they are themselves "layered in deliberations about the roots of capitalism", – that is, before the "ahistorical debates" conducted in the discipline of development studies and "development economics". He castigates both the neo-liberals and the "statists" for their naivety and their mutual blindness"'to capitalism's violent emergence". The state's role has now become more apparent "after the evidence of the disastrous consequences of structural adjustment", relying on the voices of development agencies like the UNDP. Now, "even the World Bank sounds more like the Salvation Army than the Big Business Brigade". There is an increasing call for, and an awareness of, state function in relation to development in a number of quarters that are united against the "neo-cons" who "invade instead of develop".

For Moore, the depth of the relationship that exists between capitalism and the state, and their inseparability, is inescapable since it was hardly the market that "entice(d) peasants and serfs to sell their magically 'free' labour to it. It needed the 'state' to force serfs off the land 'privatised ' by their lord-cum-agrarian capitalists, and to

gather resources from societies antecedent to and surrounding it". Thus historical violence is critical to understanding the role of the state in capitalist accumulation and its "brutal genesis", its "new imperial conquests, and new wars were all part of the package". And so too in the case of South Africa, the birth of capitalism in South Africa could hardly be free of these characteristics. Consequently, South Africa "cannot stop from exporting capitalism's birthing pains, be they through NEPAD or MTN". He concludes that in such circumstances "debates about whether variations on this theme are 'left' or 'right' seem oddly beside the point".

6. Towards a synthesis

What do all these differing interpretations and emphases in defining the concept of transformation signify? What can we generally deduce from them other than that the proclivity evinced by each attempt at explaining the concept is largely an expression of the particular standpoint – individual, institutional and social – of the respective commentator on the subject, and that there are indeed, as some authors have already remarked, considerable variances of interpretation even in the conceptualisation and theorisation of the idea and practices associated with transformation. Is it simply that social concepts are no more than expressions of particular social roles and of the forms of consciousness associated with those roles, and that as long as these represent divergent interests there is little likelihood of any real convergence in the interpretations brought to particular concepts and their application in practice?

This conflict of interest relates not only to the policies and practices affected by transformation, but also to its very definitional boundaries, scope and outcomes. We can see that interpretations of the form and content of transformation differ widely, based on such interests, and these bequeath specific proclivities in each such interpretation. Whatever the claims of competing formulations, any analysis of transformation must endeavour to fulfil a number of criteria if it is to have a claim to defensibility. What might some of these criteria be?

It is possible more generally to argue that the history of human existence is nothing less than a process of transformation of individual lives and societies, and of the relationships between and among them. Some historians and philosophers, in Western philosophy beginning at least with Socrates,[18] have argued that transformation is no less than a permanent state of affairs through successive periods of human intercourse. All of it is characterised by a succession of changes and a process of constant reconstruction, sometimes of the fundamentals of existing social arrangements and at other times of only some elements of those arrangements, of limited and imperceptible social mutations, and at other times of egregious and even violent turns. The great historian, Hobsbawm (1978), even while reflecting on the "profundity" of particular episodes in human history (the French and the Industrial Revolutions), remains always conscious of the continuity of change and the interrelatedness of human achievement in successive historical periods. He talks of the

> …profundity of the revolution which broke out between 1798 and 1848, and forms the greatest transformation in human history since the remote times when men invented agriculture and metallurgy, writing, the city and the state. This revolution has transformed, and continues to transform, the entire world (Hobsbawm, 1978:13).

Stephen Toulmin (1979) makes an equally interesting observation concerning the nature of revolutions. Commenting on Kuhn's distinction between "normal science" and "scientific revolutions", in discussing the problematic of scientific revolutions and "paradigmatic change", he writes as follows:

> As we know from political history, the term 'revolution' may serve as a useful descriptive label, but it has long since worn out its value as an explanatory *concept*. … in the case of such drastic changes [revolutions], no

[18] And indeed many oriental world views in which the idea of continuity is expressed in various ways.

> explanation could be given of the rational kind we rightly demand in the case of normal political developments. But in due course they [historians] were compelled to recognise that political change never in fact involves such an absolute and outright breach of continuity. Whether one considers the French Revolution, the American Revolution or the Russian Revolution, in each case the continuities in political and administrative structure and practice are quite as important as the changes. … So, in the political sphere, statements about the occurrence of 'revolutions' are only preliminary to questions about the political mechanisms involved in revolutionary change. At the explanatory level, the difference between normal and revolutionary change in the political sphere turned out after all to be only one of degree (Toulmin, 1979:41).

Another historian of revolution, George Novack (1966), propounds a theory of "uneven and combined development" to capture the idea that qualitative changes in social systems sometimes result in "leaps" of development which could catapult "formerly backward" societies in this way.

> These variations amongst the multiple factors in history provide the basis for the emergence of exceptional phenomena in which features of a lower stage are merged with those of a superior stage of social development. The combined formations have a highly contradictory character and exhibit marked peculiarities. They may deviate so much from the rule and effect of such an upheaval as to produce a qualitative leap in social evolution and enable a formerly backward people to outdistance, for a certain time, a more advanced. This is the gist of the law of combined development (Novack, 1966:6).

Brian Greene (2000), string theorist and natural science writer, puts it thus in relation to the evolution of science, no less a human endeavour than social history:

> Progress in science proceeds in fits and starts. Some periods are filled with great breakthroughs; at other times researchers experience dry spells. Scientists put forward results, both theoretical and experimental. The results are debated by the community, sometimes they are discarded, sometimes they are modified, and sometimes they provide inspirational jumping-off points for new and more accurate ways of understanding the physical universe. In other words, science proceeds along a zig-zag path toward what we hope will be ultimate truth, a path that began with humanity's earliest attempts to fathom the cosmos and whose end we cannot predict (Greene, 2000:20).

We might ask, in the light of these discerning statements, whether the great social and political revolutions of the past against slavery, feudalism, monarchies, ecclesiastical orders, political dictatorships, militocracies, capitalist and commandist social orders and the scientific revolutions that accompanied them are any less evidence of transformation than are the slow but palpable processes of incremental change in the consciousness of individuals and societies? What exactly is the description that best attaches in the long sweep of history regarding both its most momentous and barely perceptible changes? What are the primary conditions that need to be understood in any serious attempt at conceiving of transformation?

In South Africa, given the long sweep of its colonial and apartheid past, there can be little doubt that any legitimate appeal to transformation must speak to the lives of the most oppressed and exploited, and to the mechanisms and strategies for dealing with centuries of deprivation and deceit. In that case, transformation cannot but imply a fearless confrontation with the fundamentals of conquest and apartheid, with its racist, discriminatory, oppressive and exploitative policies and practices in all social matters, with its

draconian state and disregard for basic human rights and with its humiliating and pariah status in the community of nations. And its outcome must be a demonstrable and qualitative improvement in the conditions of the poorest and most marginalised (through oppression and exploitation) members of society. This can only be achieved through the agency of political will and administrative competences that are critical attributes in the realisation of the goals of transformation. Transformation simply cannot be conceived of as a single, even if glittering moment. Rather, it must be regarded mostly as a slow and cumulative process in which both the impulses of reform and reaction contest each other for recognition. Even if the most conspicuous and troublesome attributes of the earlier period of South African history are dealt with incrementally, transformation must speak to the most adamantine issues in its agenda of reconstruction and be able to demonstrate how change could act against the ostensibly implacable barriers of the past.

This implies an onerous responsibility on the national state. That is why in South Africa the agenda for transformation is defined in the very imprimatur of its Constitution, which seeks to engender wide-ranging social change both to deal with the inequalities of apartheid and to ensure continued social stability and sustainability. The Constitution specifically enjoins the state to ensure that its goals in regard to social justice, human rights, equity, fairness and so on are firmly entrenched in practice. For the Constitution, the state is the primary instrument for the achievement of the unifying, humanising and conciliatory goals of the nation. The state bears this direct responsibility and is accountable for its performance in respect of the goals to be achieved. The constitution provides for the direct monitoring of the behaviour of the state in this regard through its creation of the Section 9 institutions whose responsibility is to provide oversight and monitor the activities of the state in areas such as human rights, gender equality and the like. However, interpretations of these roles also differ because of the potential of these institutions to affect established social interests. Here too, depending on the issue, trenchant arguments can be found in support of particular interpretations of state function – for example, in regard to land restitution, gender equality, public service delivery, the privatisation of public assets and services, the ownership of

corporate wealth, affirmative action, and the like. Yet the South African Constitution, like any other charter of rights, can hardly be understood out of context. It was both an expression of the strenuous and historic struggle against oppression and exploitation and somewhat contradictorily of the need to reconcile contending interests and "to heal the wounds of the past" while at the same time entrenching a culture of human rights, social justice and democracy.

But the law and even the Constitution are not enough, as Bakan (1997) has argued in relation to the Canadian Charter of Rights. The definition of the concept of transformation needs to be reconceived more expansively so that it does not simply restate formal and legalistic definitions used in policy documents or the legislation. The meaning of concepts, he argues, must go beyond being "just words". The concept of equality, for instance, implies a positive duty – the "elimination of major disparities" in regard to material well-being, access to resources and opportunities, political and social power, and the elimination cultural, economic and social forms of exploitation and oppression. These aspirations, he argues, "are worth fighting for… to rid society of oppressive and exploitative disparities and, based on unequal social relations" (Bakan, 1997:10). Similarly, "freedom" entails the development of capacities "to determine, through deliberation, choice and action, how to live their lives … this conception of freedom encompasses negative freedom, or the protection of people from arbitrary uses of official authority and coercive power", even while it includes "positive" attributes such as resources, abilities and opportunities to exercise such freedom. "Democracy" implies more than formal democracy, or simply the participation in electoral processes. It implies active participation in determining one's future beyond a "thin" version of democracy, especially given the "disproportionate" power of particular interests and the resources wielded by them though their access to politicians, the media, industrial, real estate and other such resources. "The power of private economic actors over people's lives is further strengthened by evisceration of governmental (and thus democratic) authority through privatisation, deregulation, liberalized international trade regimes, and new communications technologies" (Bakan, 1997:10-11)

Bakan argues, therefore, that constitutional injunctions cannot of themselves solve the problems of past injustice because such injustice is produced by a multiplicity of factors "beyond the reach" of the Constitution. This requires that class and broader social analysis is necessary to conceptualise questions of social justice and the need for "an activist state".

Understanding better the nature of the historical conjuncture that confronts any particular period of transformation is also a matter of fundamental importance in theorising the content, trajectory and possible outcomes of the process of change. This implies, even more profoundly, that the idea of transformation needs to be grounded in a theorisation of change.[19] In this regard, there are also questions about structure and agency. In regard to the former, there are conflicts over how the long-developed structures and structural characteristics of apartheid could be dismantled, given the overarching quest for social stability and global respectability. In regard to the latter, serious conflicts continue over the role of states and markets – despite the recognition of the importance of both the state and of markets in change processes. Dreze and Sen (2002) criticise the "simple formulae used by different sides in the contemporary debates" and point to the need to transcend the "mantra of liberalisation":

> Rather than seeing the policy debates in terms of narrowly defined 'opposites' (pro-market versus anti-market, pro-state versus anti-state, etc.), we had tried ... to apply this broader approach to the developmental challenges faced in India (Dreze & Sen, 2002:32.

Any analysis of social change in post-apartheid South Africa would also have to theorise how the very process of constitutional negotiation bequeathed a particular character to the transformation process. Constitutionalism was forged in the cauldron of national upheaval and a paralysing crisis for the apartheid state. However, it

[19] The writer is indebted to Xola Ngonini of the CEPD, for making this important observation after reviewing an earlier draft of this article.

was also a period of calculated compromise and conciliation between the architects of the past and those sensing an opportunity for statehood. This reality has had critical effects on what was the relentless social momentum characteristic of the immediate past and explains, in part, why the incessant voices of "socialist" transformation of the late 1980s and early 1990s were subdued and mollified.[20] These realities are obfuscated by the more defensive and recent declarations about the "inevitability" of the present path of reform assiduously fostered by an orientation proclaiming that there are no realistic alternatives to the dominant global forms of political and economic hegemony.

Transformation therefore implies a clear view of history and how the present has been carved out of the recent past. The policies of the national government of South Africa in regard to the process of transformation must be judged in the context of its historical "negotiated settlement". That settlement required that the Constitution itself should endeavour to "heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights" (RSA, 1996a: Preamble). Given the negotiated settlement, there is a need to recognise that the idea of seeking consensus was critical to that settlement. However, such a consensus has been severely tested by the pervasive conflict of interest evidenced by each struggle over social policy, and especially when dealing with such contradictory interests as those of rich and poor, urban and rural, men and women, socially powerful and weak, and other such social dichotomies.

Moreover, there is little to be gained by obscuring the reality of the seemingly intractable contradictions of this society. Only through their public, honest and frank acceptance and recognition, can meaningful solutions be found. In South Africa, given its

[20] An analysis of the debates at the time – at least in the democratic movement and especially in the structures of the organised working class – will show that they were constructed in a conjuncture in which ideas of "socialist transformation" were very relevant. The trade union movement, for instance, continuously reiterated its commitment to socialist policies, which remain its policies to this day.

extraordinary history in struggle, in public mobilisation and debate, such participation should be nurtured as a national heritage and as an indispensable attribute of the culture of change.

Any such analytical exercise invokes the need for an associated theory of change in which to situate the debates about transformation. Such a theory might deal not only with the historical antecedents describing change processes in South Africa and worldwide, but also situate such descriptions in an analytical framework about how social change is described and theorised. How indeed do the major social theorists who have written about these conceive of the great social transformations and upheavals of the past? In the sphere of Western epistemologies alone, this could conceivably deal with ideas from Plato (and other Hellenic thinkers), to medieval scholars, through the enlightenment and nineteenth century critique of such enlightenment, and indeed to the critique of such critique. For the last two millennia alone, it would have to reckon with the works of diverse thinkers and writers representing the views of liberal humanists, classical and neo-classical economists, Hegelians, Marxists and Leninists, Gramscians, anarchists, existentialists and "critical social theorists", modernists and "post-modernists, all of whom (and many others) have posited important conceptions of social change.

And of course in the field of education, the writings of Freire and other critical commentators would provide important insights into how change might be conceived. More recently, Sen has entered this terrain, especially through his use of concepts such as "opportunity", "participation", "unfreedom" and the like.

These would have to be situated in particular histories – from the Greek polis, to the imperial slavery of pre-feudal societies, to serfdom and the rise of mercantilist trading societies, to early capitalist forms of accumulation and industrial capitalism, to the Soviet model and its decline, and indeed to the "information societies" in what some regard as the era of triumphal market capitalism. In all of these, questions are raised about the critical "agents" for change, such as mass political and other movements, the "intelligentsia", "spontaneous" development, individuals and even

"crowds". In the more scholarly writings referred to above, the authors would have had to point to such a theory, even if not expansively, so that it becomes possible to understand their particular orientation to the question of change in an historical sense. Some of the authors referred to have provided important glimpses of how they conceive of change, but others do so only tangentially, if at all.

It should by now be obvious from our argument that it is impossible to harness the concept of transformation to the engine of education alone, since transformation itself is driven by a considerable array of forces – global and national, political, cultural, economic and social – all of which are in a dynamic and even contradictory relation to each other. The goals of educational (and social) change are more often frustrated than facilitated by the conflicting forces that are often not reconcilable despite the best intentions of policy makers. South Africa, like any other nation state, is beset by pervasive contradictions which arise from the deepest and most enduring structures of society, the extremely unequal relations of power and access to resources, the tenacious defence of privilege, the monumental edifice of ideas constructed to rationalise such privilege and the differing social and individual opportunities that persist after apartheid despite valiant attempts to "outlaw" the practices of the past. It is for this reason that the state, especially in transforming societies, plays a potentially authoritative and humanising role. Only such a role can claim real legitimacy in a democratic state and provide the necessary leadership in shaping, pursuing, arguing and defending the widest objectives of transformation in and for society.

Recognising the importance of the state also implies an analysis of the nature of the state at all its levels and of the critical role it could play in the co-ordination and allocation of public resources. Motala and Pampallis (2002) refer in particular to the weaknesses of extant analysis about the relationship between state formation and the process of educational reform. They aver that the failure to explore more directly the relationship between educational policy intervention and the post-apartheid state would produce little meaning for understanding the limitations and advances of educational reform

and even less for understanding the nature of the post-apartheid state itself. Their argument is that

> A great deal of the writing about educational reform in the period after 1994 is characterised by a weak theorisation of the state, even where it is obvious that such a theorisation is intrinsic to the analysis being presented. The post-apartheid state has itself been a site of social contestation between conservative and radical social policies and by divergent social and class interests even if these are defined in purely racial terms. Educational reform policies are an expression of these contestations. Writings about the process of educational reform have paid little attention to how these contestations have unfolded and their effect on the state's ability to pursue its agenda for reform (Motala & Pampallis, 2002:2).

Such an analysis would go beyond the attention to symptomatic issues as those manifesting themselves in the interruption, weaknesses, or breakdown of educational services, and would recognise that while such analyses are extremely important in their own right, they are inadequate to explain the context of state formation within which such interventions have occurred. For that reason, analysis needs to reckon with the role of the state in relation to the protection of national sovereignty within an encompassing framework of international relations and the global environment.

This brief excursus into the debate about social change in South Africa has also shown that the most abiding conflicts of interpretation about transformation are unquestionably about economic matters – both about the public ownership of wealth and about the distribution of income. In some ways this conflict is as enduring as the system of capitalism itself, and there are clearly structural limits to what might be transformed other than through a "gradualist" approach to systemic change. However, the patent difficulty with such gradualist notions of change is that they rarely, if at all, effect more fundamental reorganisations of the distribution and ownership of wealth and income in society. In South Africa this would signal a desultory

approach to transformation and the abandonment of any hope of real change adequate to the claims of its history.

President Mbeki's (2004b) recent pronouncements have endeavoured to deal with the continued "dualism" that characterises society by reference, *inter alia*, to high levels of unemployment and job losses in the formal sector and the phenomenon of joblessness affecting especially youth – "low growth; low savings and low levels of investment; continued mass poverty and deep inequalities based on class, race, gender and religion". He specifically refers to government's commitment to build a strong and stable economy "that is responsive to the needs of the majority" and the "plan to bridge the divide" between rich and poor. He says in particular:

> In recent years we have experienced resistance from some areas of the private sector in embracing transformation that seeks to shift investment patterns towards the underdeveloped areas and empowering the so-called informal sector (Mbeki, 2004b).

This plan is the "strategic thrust" of the ANC, based on its mandate, and argues that "our experience over the past decade has taught us that state intervention is necessary in a number of areas if we are to achieve the objectives outlined in our manifesto" (Mbeki, 2004b).

Remarkably, however, we have seen that it is precisely this mandate that is the subject of strident criticisms by those who remain unconvinced about the ANC's orientation to "neo-liberalism". What does this mean? Can it be simply a question of different discursive styles, or are these conflicting approaches indicative of fundamental divergences in their orientation to the issues raised by transformation?

In the present debate about the trajectory of state policies it would be difficult to argue that there are no fundamental differences in the orientations to such policies and their consequences. And these differences go to the root of interpretations about what is possible within the boundaries of a nation state given the unrelenting pressures of corporate globalisation and all that is associated with it.

It implies a deeper analysis of the limits of sovereignty, of the possibilities of genuine internationalism in defence of sustainable development, and a concerted strategy for the reduction of the power of unaccountable global regimes. It is now clear that the debate about the form and content of change is hardly resolved by *ex cathedra* pronouncements, but has to be evaluated in the light of concrete practice.

7. Conclusion

Transformation is a complex and multi-faceted concept affected by history and context. It refers to a wide range of systemic and structural and ideological (value-based) interventions in state policy, regulation and practice. It seeks to affect the behaviour of individuals, institutions and whole societies. It requires considerable change in the behaviour of both the public and private sectors and these are in turn subject to the vagaries of global change. A change of the descriptive label for transformation simply does not help to elucidate the concept further and often represents nothing more than tautologous, muddled thinking, especially when the absence of any substantive orientation to the conditions, histories and contexts of policy and practice leave us no wiser than we were at the start of such an enquiry about transformation. What is implied by "transformation", "transition", "revolution" or any other descriptor of social change? The answer can only be gleaned from knowing more concretely the purposes and aim of its objectives, its modalities for achieving them and the social endpoints it anticipates.

Very important for the practices associated with transformation and its modalities are the questions of who participates in the processes unleashed by transformation, how they participate, through what capacity for doing so, and for what ends. What indeed are the intended outcomes of transformation in relation to society as a whole, and, especially in South Africa, for those who have been marginalised by its woeful and tempestuous history?

That is why transformation also begs questions about what and whose epistemologies are used in the effort to understand the content of change. In this regard, the question of how language

issues are dealt with is critical, because if they are not, real access to social rights remains a chimera and genuine political participation is seriously constrained.

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