**“What do you profess, professor?” Transformation, policy studies and identity in education**

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**Abstract**

Using South Africa as an example, this article discusses the scholarly and public roles of academics as they relate to policy studies and the research I have conducted. I shall review the history of policy studies and the history of qualitative methods. A theme in policy since the Second World War and which is still evident today has been to look at the world from the top down. I argue in favour of a research agenda, informed by postcolonial perspectives, in which policy is examined from the grassroots and structure is engaged from the bottom up. This has epistemological and methodological implications for analysing the social world of the colonial other. Instead of looking to the North, to Northern publications and the glitterati of the Northern academy, we should develop research agenda rooted in the global South and ask what substantive and independent contributions to knowledge we can make to the existing literatures. These are issues of identity, of who we as academics are, who we seek to be, and what work we do in the present political juncture at tertiary institutions. I suggest ways in which we can become more socially active: as education and cultural activists in civil society; as public intellectuals in the formulation of public policy; as supporters, without losing our independence and our critical perspectives, of state departments such as the South African Department of Education; and through curriculum transformation in teaching and learning. We can thus better serve the common good of the societies within which universities are located and play greater roles as agents of social change.

1. **Introduction**

The history of the professoriate is closely associated with the history of the clergy in Western Europe and North America. Today, many of the rituals and traditions of the church have survived in the academy and in Africa, colonial and post-colonial; for example the ceremonies, garb, names of degrees, inscriptions in Greek and Latin. I have used, like reverends of the cloth might do in places of Christian worship, a text to guide the articulation of my thoughts. It is the well-known, hoary question: “What do you profess, professor?”

The text has been suggested to me by one of the outstanding features of the protests in higher education in recent years and up to now in South Africa: the loud public revolts by students and the silence and invisibility of their teachers. In other parts of Africa, universities have been shut down by academics to the dismay of many of their students. In the United States and in Europe, academics played crucial roles during the revolts against the Vietnam War during the 1960s and 1970s. The great French Revolution of 1789 was based on the ideas of the *philosophes* that preceded it. Those ideas, like “democracy”, freedom of the press and of expression have survived into the modern period. After the Second World War, the nationalist struggles across Africa were led by the black educated classes of the continent, many of whom had studied at Fort Hare University in South Africa, or at leading universities in the metropoles. It was not uncommon for these Africans to be imprisoned or killed for their activism. This image of the academic is in stark contrast to the a-political scholar, preoccupied with a career and getting on in the world, and cut-off from the struggles of their time - while Rome burns! The historical record also shows that intellectuals have served the status quo. One thinks of all those African elites who speak English or French and look to London and Paris as home, rather than their own countries and societies. Or of the scientists in Nazi Germany who carried out experiments and torture on Jews as they listened to Beethoven. And you will recall that Verwoerd was a university professor, and that prominent black intellectuals served the apartheid regime rather well (for further discussion, see for example, Badat, 1999; Davidson, 2014; Fanon, 1986; Hobsbawm, 1996; Lispet, 1979; Nkomo, 1984). In sum, my text was suggested to me by observations about contemporary developments in higher education and the dual social and historical role intellectuals have played. The duality of opposites prompts us into making inquiries and conducting further investigations.

My purpose is to engage with transformation in respect of the politics of identity formation and the evolution of education policy. I shall focus on comparative and international education, my fields of study. What we collectively and as individuals profess might be esoteric, but it is also social and political. The problems that arise and which are posed are intertwined. We live in deeply troubling times. What academics say, choose not to say, the degree of their visibility and silence, speaks to those times. Hamlet was driven to the edge of madness and suicide as he struggled “to be or not to be” - to act or dither with the cowardice of his conscience and the voice of his reason. These are quintessentially questions of identity.

During the tumultuous anti-apartheid rebellions of the 1980s and 1990s, I taught at a high school in the working-class townships of Retreat, Lavender Hill and Steenberg, Cape Town. As teachers we were, willy-nilly, confronted with many issues. We often did not agree with one another and fought among ourselves and with our students more than we fought against the hated regime. We were forced to make decisions - to think. *Our thinking did not take place in the library or in accredited journals*. During this time, I was asked to lecture part-time at the University of Cape Town (UCT) on education policy. The field had started to take-off in South Africa. Scholars were interested in the reforms of the apartheid government and later the changes introduced by the new government. As I prepared the UCT lectures I found myself caught between the world of the high school and township community in which I worked and the crises with which we were confronted, and the almost all-white ivory tower of academia. They were very, very different (Weber, 2007). Since then, I have grappled with this problem, and its relationship to how knowledge is created and how we conduct research, more or less throughout my academic career. The contradiction between the politics of transformation and the abstractions in the field of policy is embedded in the study of identity. I bring in the anecdotal here because I wish to explain the relevance of the experiential to my way of thinking. At times it is of greater importance than *a priori* epistemologies or conceptual frameworks I might be said to profess. The erasure of personal experience at UCT was, fundamentally, social and historical. Generations of blacks went to UCT to obtain degrees, but we lived out our social, political *and intellectual* lives outside UCT, amongst our communities on the Cape Flats.

1. **Macro policy studies and a research agenda from below**

In policy studies, a great deal of instructive and generative work has been done at the macro and systemic level. The value of the field of international and comparative education lies in the fact that it places national policy change in relation to developments in other parts of the world. This is especially the case under globalisation and has special significance to South Africans who tend to think, as a result of their separation from other countries under apartheid, that our problems are national and that there are national solutions to them. This is simply not the case in today’s world. Scholars of international education and anyone who has attended the conferences of the Comparative and International Education Society will be familiar with the views expressed in Verger, Novelli and Altinyelken (2018, p. 3) who talk about “a common set of education policy jargon are being applied … in locations that are incredibly diverse … to the point that they have acquired the status of ‘global education policies’ (GEP).”

These observations about policy measures and policy discourse raise the question of the power of rich countries and an array of international agencies to impose policies designed in rich countries and often critiqued there, onto poor countries, with different histories and cultures. One size supposedly fits all. The literature has surveyed the question well. I wish to examine a specific example concerning the knowledge economy to underline the point. Powell and Snellman (2004, p. 199) write:

We define the knowledge economy as production and services based on knowledge-intensive activities that contribute to an accelerated pace of technical and scientific advance, as well as rapid obsolescence. The key component of a knowledge economy is a greater reliance on intellectual capabilities than on physical inputs or natural resources. We provide evidence … to document an upsurge in knowledge production and show that this expansion is driven by the emergence of new industries.

Knowledge has become an internationally traded commodity. It crosses national borders and regional boundaries at speeds greater than capital, people and the products manufactured in factories and farms. Knowledge has become the driver of growth in the industrialised countries of the North and important middle-income countries in the South. Knowledge is applied to the production of goods and services and forms the basis for human resource development. Universities deal in knowledge. Governments and industry expect universities to create new knowledge through research. The knowledge economy has been promoted by international organisations such as the World Trade Organisation, the World Bank, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Two international policies, the General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS) and the Bologna Process have provided the required policy frameworks. These are examples of specific policies in the internationalisation of higher education within the broader processes of globalisation that have migrated to and/or been imposed on the South. Since their adoption in the 1990s almost all African countries have sought to implement the Bologna model and GATS. In 2009, an African Quality Assurance Network was established with the support of the World Bank and the United Nations Education and Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). Today almost all African countries have established statutory bodies whose goals are to set minimum standards for programmes in higher education and to monitor and evaluate institutions such as universities. And almost all of these countries have faced challenges in their implementation (see Hazelkorn, Coates, & McCormick, 2018). These observations raise important questions. First, one could greatly expand these analyses, but still focus on the macro and on developments at the systemic level nationally, regionally and internationally. Second, the key policies, as I have stated, were developed in industrialised countries and are being grafted by international organisations and Western governments, onto widely different and diverse historical, social, and cultural contexts. These organisations and governments do not always operate in concert but often they do. Third, the obvious research questions revolve around how the street bureaucrats and constituencies on the ground, such as university administrators, academics and students, will respond to the policy changes that have sought to promote and strengthen the knowledge economy. Fourth, what will these policies look like as the hoi polloi and the fragile state in poor countries engage with them? States are forced to make difficult choices and manage an array of demands, yet in the end appear to implement these policy initiatives usually with limited financial and human resources which in themselves determine the implementation process and the outcomes.

Ball’s idea of “policy enactment” as opposed to policy implementation is relevant to this discussion. He makes the point that official policy as text is “reconstructed and recreated in relation to context” and that it is “local, contingent and sometimes fragile”. In the process of enactment, policies as written texts are revised. “…[E]nactment is [also] … produced discursively, that the possibilities of acting towards, thinking about, speaking about policy are actually articulated within the limits of certain discursive possibilities.” (Avelar, 2016) Ball sees this as a “creative” process in which local agents have autonomy. We should nevertheless point out that policies, for all their “recontexualisation”, also leave definitive footprints, as stipulated in texts, in reality. They tend to be enforced politically and coercively through top-down structures of power (Engebretsen and Heggen, 2012). However, formal policy can also be seen to “enter” complex, localised relations of power, reconfiguring them. “Policy analysis requires … [understanding] the changing relationships between constraint and agency” (Ball,1993, pp. 13-14; see also Ball, 2015). This is to view the relations of power as constitutive of policy in the way Ball does *institutionally* (see also Ball, Maguire and Braun, 2012). Below I shall argue that “localised relations of power” can be viewed historically. Several years ago, Fagerland and Saha (1989) spoke about educational systems in terms of a country’s “national development”. Context, in this sense, has a far wider meaning than what transpires at institutions such as schools and universities. Fagerland and Saha looked at education as reciprocally determining and being determined by the nation’s development. Nowadays, writers will be quick to place it all within global change.

The purpose of these schematic notes is to illustrate what I have professed in the research into policy studies: What we can learn by studying the world from below, from the perspectives and world views of the people who, on a daily basis, have to struggle with policies for educational change imposed upon them from the top? A feature of the “global education policies” cited above revolves around this power interplay, between countries and regions and within countries and, as Ball writes, within institutions. It is also, fundamentally, a question of attempting to give voice to perspectives and understandings about the world of ordinary folk that have been silenced. The circumstances under which these policy processes occur and are played out, and the diversity of voice repressed are the subject of great complexity and intersectionality. Development, change, transformation and contradiction compound the complexities and pose challenges in the analyses of empirical material. Postcolonial writing has been characterised by attempts by different authors to place the epistemological focus on the South and on the ground.

This [postcolonial] re-narrativisation displaces the “story” of capitalist modernity from

its European centring to its dispersed global peripheries; from peaceful evolution to

imposed violence; from the transition from feudalism to capitalism (which played such

a talismanic role in for example, Western Marxism) to the formation of the world market

(Hall, 1996, p. 250, cited in Crossley & Tikly, 2004, p. 148).

There is thus a “… commitment [in postcolonial writing] to reconsider the colonial encounter and its continuing impact from the perspective of formerly colonized countries … within the context of contemporary globalization” (Crossley & Tikly, 2004, p. 148).

Authors like Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, and Perraton (1999) have contributed to our understanding of the meaning and meanings of globalisation. In contrast to modernity’s essentialised approaches, the use of words and concepts to describe globalisation more recently has been discursively generative: “process” rather than definitive form and shape, “networks”, “interconnectedness”, “intensity”, “velocity”, “cultural hybridity”, world-wide, cross-border “flows”, etc. Within these discourses have been important ideas about power and the hegemony of the United States since World War 2 and, more recently, the rise of neo-liberalism and managerialism in higher education. Held and his colleagues acknowledge that they have analysed the South through primarily Northern epistemological lenses. We could study the diversity of opposition to macro globalisation from the perspectives of the South (see, for example, Studies in Higher Education, 2014) and theoretically develop concepts that might dissect the general notions of power and hegemony in greater detail. This implies taking local, national and regional contexts seriously, not only in an empirical sense of using the Southern other as sites for data collection, but also epistemologically in talking back at the existing literature conceptually. This could entail revising and *re-telling* what we know about globalisation, rather than abandoning current debates in their entirety. It would also entail casting our analyses beyond specific institutional sites. In southern Africa, as I shall argue below and probably elsewhere too, it means bringing in history and the notion of national development.

1. **Research methods**

What methodology is appropriate to research on quality assurance and the knowledge economy? How can we work with method critically, as opposed to technically, procedurally and instrumentally? How do research methods articulate with the subject of our discussion and the problem of the macro and its interplay with the micro? Grounding the study of policy at the level of the grassroots geographically within communities or schools, for example, poses a series of problems in respect of method.

Qualitative research is rooted in liberal humanism, interpretivism and constructivism and is based upon several principles: research is conducted with and about people; reality is socially and historically determined; different people see the world differently more often than not; investigators are empathetic towards project participants. The task of the researcher is to unravel all of this within, the point is usually stressed, the naturalistic contexts in which they occur.

… [I]nterpretivist researchers recognize that they are part of, rather than separate from, the research topics they investigate. Not only does their work impact upon research

participants but participants impact upon researchers … the core task is to view research

participants as research subjects and to explore the “meanings” of events and phenomena

from the subjects’ perspectives (Morrison, 2012, p. 20).

Interpretivism has informed the work of many theorists ranging from the early phenomenologists like Schütz (1967), the well-known “symbolic interactionists” like Blumer (1969), before them the famous Mead (1934), and, more recently it has been revised by feminists, and critical and postmodern theorists concerned with social justice. Pre-dating these writers was the era of colonial ethnography and cultural anthropology during which

European ethnographers studied Africans, Asians and other Third World peoples of

color. Early American ethnographers studied the American Indian from the perspective of the conqueror, who saw the lifeworld of the primitive as a window of the prehistoric past. The Calvinist mission to save the Indian was soon transferred to the mission of saving

the “hordes” of immigrants who entered the United States with the beginnings of

industrialization (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 19).

Today, the fact that qualitative research has attempted to portray and understand the cultural world of the subaltern Other has been critically considered by scholars. There has been implicit and explicit critique of liberal pretentions to portray and understand usually subordinate cultures. The unequal power dynamics between the researcher and those she researches has been problematised in several ways in the literature. For example, gender relations between interviewer and interviewee (see Fontana & Frey, 2008) mean that the relationship between the “subject” of study and its “object” cannot be separated as one might when conducting experiments on rats in a laboratory, or when number-crunching. In qualitative research the relationship between interviewer and respondent is different. Action research claims to have made this question central to a conscious attempt to democratise the research process (see especially Cordeiro, Soares, & Rittenmeyer, 2017). Nind (2017, p. 277) writes, “The concept of inclusive research epitomizes the transformation away from research on people, to research with them”. Looking at the issue somewhat differently, Bengtsson and Fynbo (2018, p. 19) “analyze how silence functions as an interviewee’s resistance against being categorized as ‘social deviant’, how an interviewer may use silence strategically, and how silence stemming from an interviewer’s perplexity constructs significant data”. Who controls the data collection and what “power [is] at play”? And what do respondents have to say about the experience of participation in research projects? Blakely and Moles (2017) talk about interviewing in terms of its “disruptiveness” and the problems that arise from such experiences (see also Silverman, 2017). “[Q]ualitative research may be viewed as soft science, journalism, ethnography, bricolage, quilt making, or montage. The researcher … may be seen as *bricoleur*, as a maker of quits, or, as in filmmaking, a person who assembles images into montages” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 5). One might ask somewhat bluntly, so what? Why should we care about quilt making and the like? An interesting contribution in this regard has been the development by Winter (2017) in conversation with Denzin’s “call to arms” in which the empowerment of research subjects in qualitative enquiry is tied to ideals of social justice and of politics (see also Farias, Rudman, Magalhaes & Gestaldo, 2017). Scholars of qualitative studies will be familiar with studies that caution the student to avoid bias like the plague and explain how this might be achieved. The image of the uncommitted “objective” scholar-scientist is evoked, one who has commendably succeeded in distancing herself from her work and the struggles of her times. Others have advised that researchers rather acknowledge their paradigms and theoretical points of departure and openly work with and within them. I cannot embark upon an extended discussion here, except to draw attention to a recent publication: “Militant ethnography is a burgeoning, deliberately politicised approach to qualitative research that helps activist-researchers engage with the cultural logic and practices underpinning contemporary anti-authoritarian social movements” (Apoifis, 2017, p. 3). For another take on “the relationships between activism, research, identity and power”, see Kara (2017). Hopefully enough has been said to illustrate that interviewing as a means of *modernist* data collection is far from straightforward or procedural.

I have furthermore tried to show that the history of qualitative research and one of its contemporary themes revolve around how to research and ontologically portray the other. I wish to return to the postcolonial question of what knowledge can be generated in and of the *subaltern* South. What *independent* contribution can we in this part of the world and in Africa make to the wider, international scholarship on policy, largely dominated and controlled by Northern writers, publishing in the North? (see Weber, 2017, for how I worked with similar ideas in a different research project). The micro can thus be interpreted methodologically as well as epistemologically. Colonialism and its postcolonial legacies are unequal and hegemonic. This applies to research epistemology and research methods.

1. **Politics, history and policy**

As we have seen, the dialectic of the macro and the micro can be viewed from the point of view of what we study and it can be viewed, relatedly, from the point of view of how we study it. It furthermore pertains to the evolution of the field of policy studies. And there are, *additionally*, strong parallels with the history of South (and southern) Africa and its location and often absence within the scholarship of policy.

Historically, policy in education in South Africa was formulated by the apartheid government, as well as, from below, as part of the struggles for national liberation. When apartheid education was introduced in the 1950s, the opposition to it was spearheaded by black teachers. In South Africa, following the banning of anti-apartheid organisations in the 1960s and the repression which followed, public opposition was driven underground. We do not know enough about the opposition against apartheid education inside schools and universities during this period of repression (see the publications of the Teachers’ League of South Africa in their *Educational Journal* during this period). The Soweto revolt of 1976 ushered in a new era of mass rebellion. Teachers in schools and academics at universities participated, but during this period, unlike the 1950s, the revolts were led by students. These mass struggles in education, together with the resistance movements of civic organisations in the townships, and of trade unions were, in the main, responsible for the demise of legal apartheid and culminated in the first democratic elections in 1994 (see Kallaway, 2002). In education policy, the new government set itself two immediate objectives: changing curricula so that the more racist content was removed and dismantling the different apartheid departments of education and replacing them with a single, national department.

The development of policy studies as an academic discipline highlights the micro-macro interconnection differently. After the Second World War, governments in the liberal democracies started looking to the social sciences to help them formulate public policy. Today, governments employ policy experts to inform and justify their programmes but back then, “Policy studies … largely addressed the needs of the state, helping it develop its priorities and programmes and determin[ing] ways of ensuring their efficiency and effectiveness” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 1). There developed what has been called the “rationalist” approach to policy. Government had to address social problems through increased state spending and based on the implementation of defined programmes and following prescribed steps. It looked to experts to provide it with the required information and research. And one proceeded in a linear fashion by defining the problem, stating goals and objectives, and weighing up options often using cost-benefit analyses; plotting a course of action and appropriate strategies and then evaluating the policy and possibility adapting it in the light of the evaluation. All this presupposed that politics and values in public life did not matter or were not that important (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). There were objective and technical ways of viewing, formulating and implementing public policy.

[A]n emphasis on conclusions, on findings, on definitive accounting of the world, of accounting in a literal sense: numbers. Social scientists would then provide a basis for

the work of the state, for policy solutions, the development of institutions and organizations that would identify, define and solve social problems (Ball in Avelar, 2016).

In reality, policy is contested, negotiated and interpreted by multiple actors. The state and its bureaucratic structures, charged with the implementation of policy, is not a monolithic entity and policies have to be interpreted by administrators on a day-to-day basis (see, for example, Maluleke, Sehoole, & Weber, 2017) “before” they reach the local levels. By the 1980s, the rationalist conceptualisations of policy were widely criticised because they did not produce the dependable, promised outcomes of economic growth and greater social equality. Positivist approaches in the social sciences were questioned. From the left of the political spectrum a range of alternative theories such as feminism, critical theory, post-structuralism and post-colonialism was developed and became more popular. These theories particularly attacked positivism’s claims to neutrality. From the right the post-War Keynesianism was replaced by the neo-liberalism of Margret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Since the 1980s, we have seen in most parts of the world cuts in social spending, the hegemony of the ideologies of the market, the small state, and privatisation. The liberal social democracy of the post-War years has since been in decline. Public policies used to be the prerogative of nation states, “but are now also located within a global ‘system’. While national governments continue to have the ultimate authority to develop their own policies, the nature of this authority is … significantly affected by … [for example] the global economy … [and] global political relations (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010, p. 2).

Many of the early features of policy studies have remained today, despite the different critiques such as feminism, which originated in social movements and universities in the West. Governments, now joined by consulting firms and international agencies that fund and implement education programmes in developing countries, often use statistics as objective, “scientific” data to form the basis for change in public policy. A feature of the early years in policy studies and the rationalist approach, and which should be of interest to us in southern Africa, is that it is and was essentially a-historical. This is not the case in South Africa as our little survey above of the history of education in South Africa tried to show. The struggles in our schools and universities have been inseparable from the struggles for national liberation in the wider society. Secondly, policy and educational change have not, as so much of the literature pre-supposes, been determined by the state, or by the programmes initiated by international organisations such as the World Bank, or by focusing on analysing systemic change, or by dissecting institutional politics at the local level. The 2015 #FeesMustFall rebellion underlines the point that change - fundamental change - can be generated in the streets and from below. This has far-reaching implications for the way we conceptualise policy, how we analyse it, how we portrait it, and how we conduct research into it. There is a growing number of studies in higher education in South Africa and internationally that discuss student identity and the protest movements of recent times. This field of study and research is proliferating since the new wave of student protests in the 2000s. We have barely begun to theorise these South African, Latin American and international mass student movements and social struggles in relation to how, conceptually, they challenge existing understandings of globalisation, and the cross-border multinational politics that appear to be emerging (see *Studies in Higher Education*, 2014).

1. **How can we profess?**

Some writers are sympathetic towards the student movement because it has agitated for social justice, greater access to higher education, democratic institutional governance and so on. The difficulty with these descriptions is the uncritical narrative and the assumption that because it comes from below and because what it represents are progressive, anti-establishment social projects, it is beyond critique. The point was made earlier that, hitherto, few academics have joined the student movements as activists. One way we might break the silence is to raise the level of the debate and discussion in civil society. This has the potential to deepen and strengthen democracy. Large sections of the student movement in South Africa lack the political understanding that can inform their actions and make them better. Singing and shouting is not without its advantages, but it is not enough unless the action is informed and decision-making is democratic. Against those who assign objective meanings to race, or use it as a concept in social science; against the racist slogans used during #FeesMustFall, below is a quote from one of Africa’s great intellectuals, Amilcar Cabral, who was also the leader of an anti-colonial guerrilla movement; he speaks to how in the course of struggle, *national unity* was forged:

Ten years ago, we were Fula, Mandjak, Pepel, and others. Now we are a nation of

Guineans. Tribal divisions were one reason the Portuguese thought it would not be

possible for us to fight … today we can see that there is a new man and a new woman,

born with our nation, and because of our fight … Today’s fight is a continuation of

the fight to defend our dignity, our right to have an identity – our own identity

(quoted in Sizwe, 1979, pp. 178-179).

Research and education can play roles in shaping (broadly as opposed to narrowly or, in a sectarian manner, determining) the political consciousness of young people. There is a real problem for academics here: the greater the degree of intellectual profundity (not perhaps in and of itself a bad thing), the greater the tendency to stay outside of the crises and social tumult. In Cape Town, during the 1980s and 90s, many anti-apartheid protests took place at St George’s Cathedral situated at the top of Adderley Street and at the bottom of the Gardens. People used to park cars at the top of Adderley Street and walk through the Gardens to the Cathedral. One day as I was walking towards the Cathedral I saw one of my history professors coming out the South African Library in the Gardens. I presumed that he had been conducting archival research at the library. He was walking away from the Cathedral, away from the site of struggle, away from history.

The state in South Africa has limited research capacity and it often appeals to the academy, to us, for assistance in the development, implementation and evaluation of education policy. As noted it is not the only actor or even the best-resourced in terms finance and research capacity in determining and developing public policy. In the age of globalization, the number of policy developers, local and overseas, has increased. And as stated, they do not necessarily agree with one another. The World Bank and UNESCO do not see eye to eye regarding what they think must happen here, to us in poor and middle-income countries. Arguing in favour of closer ties with the state and/or government does not necessarily mean that academics will lose their independence or cannot continue with their more esoteric pursuits. Rather, it provides the opportunity to influence public policy in a critical manner at the level of practice. This entails forging closer ties with the research agenda of provincial and national Departments of Education. And this moreover helps to bridge the divide between the ivory tower and the real world.

A counter-hegemonic curriculum can take on crude forms by substituting one version of what is correct and true with another, for instance substituting “white history” with “black history”. Academics can make a difference to curriculum transformation theoretically and practically in designing courses, and teaching and learning materials, as well as in lecture halls. Much of the discussion on curriculum change at this university has been influenced by writing on postcolonialism (see University of Pretoria, 2016). It is sometimes presumed that this is a unified body of knowledge when it is, in fact, diverse. Apart from postcolonialism the other field that is relevant to curriculum renewal is the writings of Freire and particularly a new generation of scholar-activists the most prolific of which is probably Henry Giroux (see, for example, Giroux, 2011, 2015), in the United States that have been influenced by Freire’s work. In African education the contributions of Julius Nyerere have been noteworthy (Mulenga, 2001).

The interconnectedness of the different roles academics might play is important in respect of their linkages to social development and social movements beyond the precincts of the ivory tower. The impulses for many of the leading postcolonial writers’ “theories” have been the social and political conditions and crises of the countries in which they originated. For many of them abstract insight arose almost fortuitously and incidentally during the course of and experiences in political and revolutionary struggle.

1. **Conclusion**

I have considered structure, agency and the dynamics of the grassroots from the point of view of what one could study, the research problems one might formulate, and the consequent methodological implications. The argument has been made that the relationship between structure and locality has been central to the evolution of qualitative methods and to the development of policy studies. I have used the knowledge economy and quality assurance as exemplars and windows into an exploration of these discussions. Bologna and GATS are well-known throughout Africa. Crucially the experiences and voices from below at the institutional and national levels have been silenced in various narratives and analyses of policy. Many academic studies that analyse and speak to locality such as schools within the context of broader structure abstract it from history and from national development. In southern Africa, by contrast, history is crucial. It is woven into contemporary national and educational development. The historical experience of southern Africa and South Africa **is** erased from policy approaches based on modernity thinking, research design and practice, as they currently are under neoliberalism and managerialism in education. The struggles for national liberation and anti-colonialism in all of southern Africa, as reflected in higher education over the decades, do not appear anywhere in GATS or Bologna. Quantitative computations of what constitutes excellence in teaching, learning and research tell us very little about the unequal and oppressive social relations they constitute and enforce (Lynch, 2015). Foucault (1995) avers that modern regimes of power technologies are based upon the *knowledge and fear of surveillance* as much as the actual mechanisms of control. The governed are complicit in their own oppression as they self-govern themselves, internalize structural power relations, and what is required of them. Compliance in higher education offers career rewards for silence. These concepts require further investigations and an engagement with empirical, comparative research.

My focus has been on the social as it relates to policy studies within the context of the social sciences. It is in thissense that I wish to conclude by considering what will influence the future roles that intellectuals in South Africa (and elsewhere) are likely to play. What might determine our becoming and the call to greater social activism in public life?

I have spoken about the dual political role that the professoriate has played historically.Globalisation is the epitome of the frantic pace with which change and integration have taken place over the last 50 years or so. Educational change has become an established field of policy studies and research. The intensification and content of change influence how we relate to one another and how we think about ourselves and our world. It applies to us all, including the professional and political identities of the professoriate and their colleagues. The fact that we are faced with choices and that what we profess might appear contradictory should not imply that this state of affairs is static. The dynamics of transformation are embedded within contradictoriness. It is likely to develop – for better or worse – as a result of the profound social developments currently under way all around us. What transpires in society, the events and happenings in the world, shape our consciousness, our identities and our becoming. They also determine our actions and inactions, including the present apparent apathy of the academe. What is novel under globalization, as others have pointed out, is that we are more acutely aware today of events unfolding in distant lands than was the case in the past. Put another way, the answers one might provide to questions like, “What do you profess?” are not cast in stone. There is movement and transformation. Such questions might have moral or individual significance, but they are fundamentally social and contingent on national and international development within and beyond the academy. And against the cultures of competitiveness and individualism of today’s academy, we should profess that creating knowledge is essentially a collective and social endeavour,best attained through collegiality, co-operation and critique. Not for the market or personal glory – for the common good.

I wish to conclude with a few random lines of a poem, “Ulysses”, by Alfred Lord Tennyson. I first encountered them at high school and they have stuck in my memory. They speak to the creation of knowledge, to transformation - and to politics as well.

I cannot rest from travel;

I will drink life to the lees …

Yet all experience is an arch

wherethro' gleams that untravell'd world whose

margin fades forever and forever when I move.

…

To follow knowledge like a sinking star,

Beyond the utmost bounds of human thought.

…

*To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.*

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