

Chapter 1

Castells in South Africa

Nico Cloete & François van Schalkwyk

One can seldom say precisely when or where an intellectual thread started. An elusive starting point certainly applies to the idea of bringing Manuel Castells to South Africa. Most likely, it was one of the first policy acts of the post-apartheid Department of Education that triggered the idea to invite Castells.

Soon after the first democratic elections of April 1994, the Department announced its intention to establish a National Commission on Higher Education (or the ‘NCHE’ as it is commonly referred to in South Africa). The NCHE, established by a proclamation of then president Nelson Mandela in December 1994, was charged with advising the government of national unity on issues concerning the restructuring of higher education by undertaking a situation analysis, formulating a vision for higher education, and putting forward policy proposals designed to ensure the development of a well-planned, integrated, high-quality system of higher education in South Africa. Nico Cloete was Director of Research for the NCHE and was to become the director of the Centre for Higher Education Transformation (CHET) which was established when the NCHE had fulfilled its duties.

The terms of reference of the NCHE stated that restructuring South African higher education should address the inequalities and inefficiencies inherited from the apartheid era, as well as respond to the social, cultural and economic demands of a

globalising world. The extent to which these two worthy aims were in tension was quite unrecognised at the time.

The challenge for the NCHE was that the ‘system’ as it was then, was fragmented and modelled on an outdated version of the post-school education system in the United Kingdom (UK). This model had by then been radically revised and massified in the UK. This is, of course, a frequent dual problem in post-colonial societies: both the irrelevance of the ‘borrowed’ model and its obsolescence back in the ‘mother country’ (Cloete & Muller 1998).

There was a tension in the NCHE; some NCHE commissioners saw the main problem as redressing apartheid’s inequality, while a minority regarded a fundamental restructuring of the system as the main task. This tension was never fully resolved.

The NCHE report of 1996 proposed three principles for a transformation framework. The first was increased participation, specifically, to increase the size of the system with a primary focus on equity. This was a proposal for massification which the government rejected. Instead it opted for the Department of Education’s planned growth strategy. The second principle was heightened responsiveness within higher education to societal needs; namely, a shift from a closed to a more open system. The third principle was increased cooperation and partnerships in governance structures. The NCHE framework focused heavily on equity and democratisation, while paying virtually no attention to development, to research and to innovation.

A major problem with the transformation discourse in South Africa at the time, including that of the NCHE, was that the single-minded focus was on equity and democracy as counters to the social damage done by apartheid. But the legacy of apartheid was only one major problem, the other being that the transformation discourse needed to be connected to development – particularly the globalising knowledge economy and South Africa’s participation in it. But it wasn’t. The NCHE and subsequent policy papers did not take as their point of departure reflections on the roles and functions of a higher education system to propose a new tertiary education system that would include equity, democratisation

and development as key principles. Knowledge production and innovation, and the key role that higher education could play in economic development, were largely ignored.

After the publication of the final report of the NCHE in September 1996, the newly-formed Centre for Higher Education Transformation, aware of some of the key issues not addressed by the NCHE, resolved to strengthen the knowledge base on the role and functions of higher education in South Africa and in Africa by combining traditional higher education studies with more general scholarly reflections on the change dynamics of higher education. The first foray in this direction led to a series of seminars and presentations by prominent scholars such as Kwame Anthony Appiah, Mahmood Mamdani, Peter Scott and Carol Schneider, and by practitioners such as Malegepuru Makgoba, Ahmed Bawa and Donald Ekong. The series of seminars resulted in the book *Knowledge, Identity and Curriculum Transformation in Africa* (see Cloete et al. 1997).

The book addressed two key challenges facing post-apartheid South Africa, namely, knowledge and identity. In the concluding chapter, ‘Citizenship and Curriculum’, Johan Muller identified the citizenship skills required as political (mediatory and democratic), cultural (navigating difference) and economic (productive and problem-solving). While the main focus of the project was to discuss knowledge and citizenship skills for a revised curriculum (the NCHE had decided not to address curriculum transformation directly), the chapter that had considerable influence on the direction of CHET’s future work was by Peter Scott: ‘Changes in Knowledge Production and Dissemination in the Context of Globalisation’.

Scott had come to the attention of the NCHE via two of his books – *The New Production of Knowledge* (with Gibbons, Nowotny and others in 1994) and *The Meaning of Mass Higher Education* (1995) – both of which arrived in South Africa in photocopied form. These texts directly influenced the NCHE’s proposal on massification. However, neither the government nor the NCHE grasped the importance of his analysis that massification and

knowledge production in a context of globalisation was not simply more students and staff, but a radical restructuring of higher education that accompanied changes in managerialism and marketisation, as well as the production of knowledge itself in terms of consumption, circulation and conservation; exponential growth of information and communications technology; the shift away from knowledge that is academic, disciplinary, homogeneous and hierarchic to knowledge that is applied, transdisciplinary, reflexive and horizontal; the demise of the enlightenment model of knowledge as coherent, autonomous and self-referential; and the simultaneous globalisation and fragmentation of academic disciplines, so that disciplinary expertise is no longer unitary and cohesive but diffuse, fluid and opaque. Some of these prognostications remain contentious.

In his chapter in the book *Knowledge, Identity and Curriculum Transformation in Africa*, Scott refers to a number of theorists reflecting on globalisation, including Beck, Eagleton and Fukuyama. While these authors all had interesting things to say, what triggered our interest was the discovery, via Jamil Salmi, then senior fellow in the World Bank higher education division, of a paper that Manuel Castells had presented at a World Bank Seminar on Higher Education and Development in Kuala Lumpur in June 1991.

The paper, ‘The University System: Engine of development in the new world economy’, approached higher education via sociology in a very different way to the other theorists. In 1998, Johan Muller and Nico Cloete met with Martin Carnoy, one of the world’s foremost comparative education economists and as one of Castells’s long-time friends and intellectual collaborators, Carnoy introduced the pair to the ‘trilogy’ – *The Rise of the Network Society* (1996), *The Power of Identity* (1997) and *End of Millennium* (1998). Carnoy suggested that if CHET wanted to understand the relationships between globalisation, higher education and development, it should invite Castells who, according to Carnoy, was very interested in Africa, but had paid little attention to our continent in the trilogy owing to an absence of reliable data. We

received an enthusiastic response to our invitation letter, but were informed that due to the interest around the trilogy, Castells's diary was full until June 2000.

The delay turned out to be a blessing – CHET was better prepared in 2001 than it would have been in 1998. By 2000, Castells was one of the five most cited social scientists in the world. Even South Africa's President Mbeki was familiar with the trilogy and announced to his Cabinet that Castells was the Karl Marx of the 21st century. Castells regarded this as a huge compliment, and a huge misunderstanding.

CHET coordinated Castells's first visit in collaboration with representatives from the National Economic Development and Labour Council, the Council on Higher Education, the Development Bank of Southern Africa, the Human Sciences Research Council, the Universities of the Witwatersrand, Natal and Cape Town, and the Presidency. Castells was accompanied by Carnoy and the visit consisted of six seminars in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town, and two meetings with President Mbeki. In addition to academics and students, there were participants and presenters from government, business councils and trade unions, and the public meetings were well-attended. Much to Castells's irritation, many participants kept regarding him as a promoter of globalisation, instead of an analyst of globalisation.

Such was his resonance at the time, that Castells was being referenced by politicians in parliament. Ben Turok, in a debate in the National Assembly on financing for development and a new paradigm of economic and social development designed to eradicate poverty (19 September 2000) commented: 'Only a few weeks ago, Manuel Castells, the very distinguished Spanish professor who visited South Africa, said to us – and he met the President – "Either South Africa sinks or swims." You either swim in the tide of technology or you sink as a country. He went on to say [...] that the world brand of capitalism is implacable and cruel. Globalisation is sundering the world into two groups: One, with dynamic information-based economies and the other with the vast deteriorating old economies dominated by informal and

survivalist activities, and Africa is the latter case. He said that if we – Africa and South Africa – do not join this new technological [sic] age we will be obliterated.' And the Minister for the Public Service and Administration in the National Council of Provinces (26 September 2002) declared: 'Prof. Manuel Castells, a world-renowned sociologist, is part of this Council and he was present last year. He said – and has done so in various lectures – that the availability and use of information and communication technology is a prerequisite for economic and social development in our world. It is the functional equivalent of electricity in the industrial era.'

While the higher education community had latched onto Castells's unique and compelling approach to the role of the university, his early interactions with the Mbeki government were centred on the importance of information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure as a determinant of the country's ability to participate in the global networked economy.

After one scheduled meeting, Mbeki insisted on a second day with Castells, from which emerged the decision to form the Presidential Information and Communications Technology Advisory Council, established with remarkable speed in October 2001. Its main aim was to accelerate efforts to establish South Africa as an advanced information-based society which would be the engine for a knowledge economy, moving South Africa away from its endemic dependency on mined resources.¹

The new Council was a high-powered group consisting of chief executives from global companies such as Oracle's Larry Ellison, Carly Fiorina of Hewlett Packard, Thierry de Beaucé of Vivendi Universal, Rajendra Pawar of NIIT Technologies, Esther Dyson of Edventure, Reza Mahdavi of Cisco Systems, Sten Fornell of Ericsson, Veli Sundback of Nokia and Valentin Chaperon of Siemens. It also included Mark Shuttleworth (South Africa's IT billionaire) and, from government's side, Mbeki himself plus a number of ministers and directors-general. Manuel Castells was the only academic on the Advisory Council.

1 <http://www.dirco.gov.za/docs/2002/ict1004.htm>

The group did have some influence on the establishment of the Presidential National Commission on Information Society and Development which was tasked to develop a government policy framework for ICT, strategies to make government a model user of ICT, and the preferred models for creating an information society.²

By 2006 the Commission fragmented with Cisco withdrawing due to possible conflicts of interest because they were advising and doing business with government.³ There were also rumours about lack of implementation and that Mbeki had lost interest as conflicts within the ANC, particularly with Deputy President Zuma, escalated. At a workshop with Castells at STIAS in 2011, the previous head of policy and government communications responded to a question about the failure of the grand ICT ambitions by saying that the HIV/Aids fiasco had had a negative effect on Castells's visit. Mbeki had, as he had done in the case of ICT, established a Presidential Advisory Aids Panel.⁴ The Aids Panel included denialists such as Peter Duesberg, incidentally also from the University of California. Considering how this debacle had embarrassed the government, many Cabinet members were apparently deeply sceptical about the 'information society', which they saw as another Mbeki folly with Californian advisors.

Many authors have highlighted the importance of the state in developing countries if countries are to realise the potential of ICTs for development (Grace et al. 2001; Heeks 2002).⁵ Notably, Castells provides an historical analysis of the changing role of the state in a globalised world and explores its ability both to constrain and enable agencies. In his seminal three volumes on the *Information Age: Economy, society and culture*, Castells (1996; 1997; 1998) does this in relation to technology and innovation.

Castells's consideration of the reconfiguring of the nature and

2 http://www.gov.za/sites/www.gov.za/files/23107_0.pdf

3 <http://www.balancingact-africa.com/news/telecoms-en/4158/cisco-withdraws-from-mbekis-international-technology-advisory-group>

4 http://www.csicop.org/si/show/aids_denialism_vs._science

5 This section draws extensively on the work of Gilwald (2009).

role of the state as a result of global pressures from the nation state in the industrial era to what he calls the ‘networked state’ in the informational era provides a backdrop for understanding the impact of globalisation on the state and society, and the necessity for countries to develop their information infrastructure and human capital to meet the challenges arising from this.

The unevenness of this global development, according to Castells (1996; 1997; 1998), reflects the relative ability of social institutions, such as the state, to enable the mastery of strategic technology. This, he argues, can propel a society into the new economy. He sees the changes in the mode of production as revolutionary technological developments distinguishing this informational era from the previous industrial era. Castells (1996: 7) contends that while knowledge and information have been central to the process of production in previous eras, it is only in the informational mode of development that the ‘action of knowledge upon knowledge itself’ is the main source of productivity. In this epoch, knowledge generation, processing and transmission become the fundamental sources of productivity and power.

While originating in the productive process, the technology and its associated relationships, according to Castells (1996; 1997; 1998), spread throughout society, so influencing the concentration and distribution of power. It is not that technology *per se* determines historical evolution and social change, but the technology (or lack of it) that embodies the capacity of societies to transform themselves as well as the uses to which societies decide to put their technological potential. It is for this reason that Castells (1996; 1997; 1998) contends that the state should play a central role in developing a forceful supply-side policy through investment in education – critical to the citizens’ ability to adjust to change brought about by technological innovation – and in the necessary infrastructure such as telecommunications.

Despite being tarred by the vagaries of South African politics, by the time Castells left Africa for the first time, he had put firmly on the national policy agenda the following: the increasing centrality

of knowledge and information to production and development in a globalising world; the key role of societal learning, or ‘learning to learn’, in keeping these productive goods vital in the social body; and the deep influence the network society would have on our senses of personal and collective identity. This took the debate several leagues beyond the NCHE.

For higher education in particular, his chapter ‘Universities as Dynamic Systems of Contradictory Functions’ (Castells 2001) drew on the 1991 ‘engine of development’ paper in terms of the four functions of universities, and added new insights and reflections on higher education and development policy in the third world (particularly in Africa and Latin America). One important insight, which started to affect South African higher education by 2015, was that ‘the demand for higher education has reached the status of a social need, regardless of the actual functional requirements of the economy or of the institutions’ (Castells 2001: 211). The tension that Castells was pointing to, between ‘social needs’ and ‘functional requirements’, was not visible to South Africans at the time of Castells’s first visit.

Three strands of the work that CHET pursued post-Castells 2000 are captured in subheadings of Castells’s (2001) ‘Universities as Dynamic Systems of Contradictory Functions’ published in *Challenges of Globalisation: South African debates with Manuel Castells* (Muller et al. 2001): (1) ‘Universities in the Third World: From dependency to development’, (2) ‘Higher education as development policy: The new frontier of international aid’, and (3) ‘Universities at the crossroads of a new international order’.

The first direct intellectual contribution of Castells to this work was realised in the book *Transformation in Higher Education: Global pressures and local realities* (published in South Africa in 2002 and by Springer for the international market in 2006). The subtitle comes from Castells’s chapter in *Challenges of Globalisation* titled ‘Think Local, Act Global’. The conclusion of this review of transformation in South Africa focused on new international trends and responses by the South African government and other social institutions. A major novelty was a deeper understanding of

the limits of policy, bracketed by both local and global realities. Castells's theory that universities cannot specialise in only one function, and that in order to combine and make compatible various (sometimes contradictory) functions, both academic and governance capacities were needed, shaped the work of CHET for years to come in terms of institutional performance and differentiation.

The second thread related to international development aid and led to the publication of a report on the topic as it relates to higher education in Africa (Maassen et al. 2007) as well as in a follow-up chapter (Maassen & Cloete 2009) on the disconnectedness of the university as a policy issue in development cooperation in a book titled *International Organisations and Higher Education Policy: Thinking globally, acting locally* (Basset & Maldonado-Maldonado 2009).

The third thread, with funding from NORAD and the newly-formed US Foundation Partnership for Higher Education in Africa (which was part of the study on development aid), was to support the establishment of the Higher Education Research and Advocacy Network in Africa (HERANA). HERANA drew on Castells's network notions, his assertion that the recruitment of elites and professional training had been the main functions of universities in third world countries, and that in order to move from dependency to development, a greater focus on the research and knowledge production function is needed in African universities. The important advice to development aid agencies and governments was the need for 'selective aid, either concentrating resources in the best of the existing academic centres and/or creating new universities supported by national governments, private firms and international institutions' (Castells 2001: 217).

Castells returned to South Africa in 2009, this time hosted by the Stellenbosch Institute of Advanced Studies (STIAS). During his 2000 visit, Castells was impressed by the larger Cape Town metropole's combination of natural beauty, winelands and the sophistication of its four universities within a radius of 50km. He proposed a Princeton-type Advanced Studies Institute to be shared

by the universities. The leadership at the Universities of Cape Town and the Western Cape showed no interest, but Stellenbosch University had already started to talk about such an institute, and in 2005 the Stellenbosch Institute of Advanced Studies (STIAS) was established with the support of the Marianne and Marcus Wallenberg Foundation.⁶ STIAS is now well-established and has hosted a number of Nobel prize winners as fellows. Castells is counted among the Institute's enthusiastic fellows, and he spent time there during 2009, 2011 and 2014.

During his 2009 visit Castells delivered a special lecture on higher education at the University of the Western Cape. In this lecture, he combined the four main functions with the NCHE's proposals about equity, responsiveness and citizenship formation.

Castells's third visit was in 2011 to host, in collaboration with STIAS and CHET, a seminar series on informational development. The topic signals strong links with the arguments presented in 2000, particularly those on identity and the critical contribution of education in informational development. The seminars were a precursor to the book *Reconceptualising Development in the Information Age*, edited by Manuel Castells and Pekka Himanen (2014), that includes a chapter on South Africa co-authored by Nico Cloete and Alison Gilwald (Cloete & Gilwald 2014).

Soon after this visit, the HERANA project, which included eight flagship universities in sub-Saharan Africa, published the book *Universities and Economic Development in Africa* (Cloete et al. 2011). The main findings of this project provided empirical support for Castells's assertion that the focus of African universities had been on elite formation and training, and that 'research production at seven of the eight institutions (University of Cape Town excluded) was not strong enough to enable them to build on their traditional undergraduate teaching roles to make a sustainable, comprehensive contribution to development via new knowledge production' (Cloete et al. 2011: 165). The book concluded that in none of the countries was there a coordinated

6 <http://stias.ac.za/about-us/overview/>

effort between government, external stakeholders and the universities to systematically strengthen the contribution higher education can make to development, as was happening at the time in near-East countries like South Korea and Singapore.

HERANA Phase 3, launched in 2012, aimed at promoting data-informed planning at the eight 'flagship' African universities, and improving knowledge production in support of the continent's development challenges. The focus shifted to a set of indicators that dealt with postgraduate production, staff capacity and research output. The major output from this project was the publication of *Knowledge Production and Contradictory Functions in African Higher Education* (Cloete et al. 2015).

The launch of *Knowledge Production and Contradictory Functions in African Higher Education* at the Africa Higher Education Summit in Dakar in March 2015 was the only contribution that was based on empirical research at African universities. The book also made a significant contribution to the formation of the African Research Universities Alliance, a tangible demonstration that there is an emerging interest in Africa strengthening knowledge production as a core university function. Castells commented that the book 'demonstrate[s] the essential role of higher education in the development of Africa and of the world at large' (on the cover of Cloete et al. 2015).

In 2014, Castells returned to South Africa for a fourth time to host another seminar and, this time, to launch *Reconceptualising Development* (Castells & Himanen 2014). On 5 June 2014, in the lead up to the seminar, Castells delivered his third public lecture in South Africa. The lecture focused on the need to reconceptualise development, acknowledging the role of universities in a new development paradigm.

In 2002, not long after Castells's first visit to South Africa, CHET transformed from a typical, increasingly bureaucratic non-governmental organisation located in Pretoria into a much leaner

networked organisation, and relocated to Cape Town. CHET became an organisation with only one full-time employee; all the other expertise and skills required, including for doing research, were contracted in as and when required. The administrative, accounting, communications and event management functions were also outsourced to a network of expert service providers.

The Pretoria CHET bears little resemblance to Cape Town CHET but three striking strategic consistencies remain. The first is CHET's ability to organise forums for linking academic researchers to higher education policy-makers. The second is the ongoing pursuit to bolster empirically the argument for the role of knowledge and, by implication, the role of the university in development, while always acknowledging the tensions between the four functions of universities brought to CHET's attention by Castells. The third is CHET's continued commitment to publishing its research.

CHET has self-published many of its reports and books, but it has also partnered with local publishers – with Maskew Miller Longman and Juta in the early days and, more recently, with open access academic publisher African Minds. Castells's first contribution was published as five chapters alongside commentaries by Martin Carnoy and others in the edited volume *Challenges of Globalisation: South African debates with Manuel Castells* (Muller et al. 2001). CHET produced transcripts of his 2009 and 2014 lectures, and published them on its website. This frustrated many scholars eager to locate these contributions on the content-saturated world wide web and ready to reference Castells's contribution to their work appropriately. Adding to the frustration, *Challenges of Globalisation* went out of print some years ago, and the electronic files could not be recovered to publish the book online as an ebook.

Alert to the ongoing interest in Castells's work by scholars of higher education studies and others, and to the limited access to his contributions, African Minds undertook to publish the out-of-print chapter and the two public lectures. Initially, the plan was to publish the three contributions 'as is' without an introduction

or any accompanying commentary. However, in discussions with Nico Cloete (CHET) and with Johan Muller, two of the editors of the first Castells publication, it was agreed that the publication presented an opportunity not only to make Castells's contribution to higher education more widely accessible but also to showcase the contribution that Castells has made to higher education research and thinking in Africa fifteen years after his first visit to South Africa.

While the starting point of Castells's visits to South Africa may be shrouded by fading (and ageing) memories, it is hoped that by publishing his three seminal contributions on the university, and by supplementing them with chapters that make explicit how Castells has shaped the research agenda, the effects of bringing his big-picture thinking to bear on the university in Africa will remain indelible.