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Thirteen Propositions on Teaching and Learning beyond the Covid-19 Pandemic and in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution

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The Future
Reimagined

Introduction

In this paper, I draw together thoughts on teaching and learning (T&L) at universities in South Africa that have their genesis in my recent writing. First, in early 2020 I published an article 'Trepidation, longing, and belonging: Liberating the curriculum at universities in South Africa.'[1] This article built on an invited lecture in 2017 at the University of Pretoria as part of a series titled 'Curriculum Transformation Matters: The Decolonial Turn.' In the immediate aftermath of the Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall protests, I addressed four issues: the context in which the call for decolonisation of the curriculum arose in South Africa, the discourse of coloniality, the question of curriculum and the idea of curriculum decolonisation. I argued for critical reflexivity on curriculum and contended that that there was a historic opportunity for liberating the curriculum from old and pernicious orthodoxies that impeded knowledge creation, arbitrarily valued certain modes of knowledge making and particular knowledges and devalued other modes. Those orthodoxies constrained curriculum design, teaching, learning and assessment. I suggested that liberating the curriculum had to be a deliberative and participatory process that occurred simultaneously at national and institutional levels and had to draw on comparative experiences of curriculum transformation, especially in other parts of Africa and in the Global South. Liberating the curriculum was connected inextricably to transforming institutional cultures and to clarifying the purposes, goals, and roles of universities in South Africa, a society that had to pursue simultaneously (not consecutively) environmentally sustainable economic development, social equity and the deepening and extension of democracy. In a society and in universities that displayed continuities with the pre-1994 colonial and apartheid orders, curriculum decolonisation sought recognition of the humanity of the marginalized, respect for difference (except for those rooted in structural inequalities of wealth), embrace of diversity and meaningful inclusion and participation of previously excluded social classes and groups within universities. It also entailed transformation of institutional and academic cultures and rethinking of the social and education purposes and roles of universities in South Africa.

If a key question in the 1990s was about physical access and "epistemological access" for the historically disadvantaged and marginalized as part of "democratising access to knowledge"[2], the question today was access to which and whose epistemologies and knowledges, as part of the project of creating South African and African universities. Whatever were the shortcomings of universities, they were precious institutions but also fragile. The 'high road' was to address the 'organic crisis' of higher education through formative actions that courageously tackled the transformation/decolonisation of universities and especially of curriculum in all their dimensions and complexity in ways that opened new development paths for universities. This high road required a social compact among key actors predicated on clear principles. The 'low road' was the gradual decline of universities in South Africa through a combination of inadequate funding, populist demands dressed in revolutionary rhetoric, fanciful ideas about universities needing to be physically razed to create truly new universities and inertia and resistance to change.

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[1] Trepidation, longing, and belonging: Liberating the curriculum at universities in South Africa, *The MISR Review*, No. 3, May.

[2] Morrow, W. (1993) Epistemological access in the University, *AD Issues* 1, no.1, p. 3

A core function of the university curriculum, I argued, was to induct new generations into modes of making sense of the natural and social worlds that they inhabited and experienced. The greater diversity of the new generations that inhabited universities in South Africa, the challenges of the African context, and the need for more diverse and appropriate modes of sense making demanded new and dynamic curricula. Concomitantly, curriculum and universities were strongly enmeshed in wider institutional and social structural relations that shaped what modes of sense and meaning making were hegemonic and what modes were marginalized. This made curriculum and universities vital elements of processes of social and cultural re/production as well as of social and cultural transformation, processes that often occurred simultaneously. Curriculum was the terrain, the stake and the outcome of intellectual and social contestation, conflicts and struggles and would inevitably be shaped by the possibilities and constraints, paradoxes, contradictions and ambiguities of prevailing social structures and conjunctures within universities and the wider society.

I noted that in 2017 we were entering unfamiliar territory in grappling with the theory and practice of curriculum transformation, with questions of how decolonisation and/or transformation were to be conceptualised, delineated, find expression and to be implemented. How, too, were theoretical, historical, literary, artistic and other forms of expression and experiences of indigenous peoples, blacks, and Africans were to be institutionally embodied in universities and in other arenas of society. Liberation of the curriculum and the transformation of core areas of higher education would be conditioned by the wider social structure and conjuncture, institutional cultural conditions and the human agency of academics and academic leaders. As much as the call for curriculum decolonisation expressed a longing for fundamental change and had to do with belonging, it also evinced trepidation. How was this trepidation to be addressed; what were the prospects of the challenges being overcome and through what endeavours; what were the institutional capacities and individual capabilities for undertake far-reaching curriculum transformation programs and what were the implications for universities and higher education of the curriculum not being transformed. I agreed with Hendricks and Leibowitz[3] that "the journey ahead for the academy [would] be a long and unnerving one, but it had to be undertaken." The consequence of not doing so would be to continue to be complicit in the reproduction of social and cognitive injustices, to condemn students to be perpetual "consumers of knowledge" and African academics to remaining "perpetual consumers rather than creators and authors."[4] We should not, I urged, abnegate the responsibility and opportunity to dismantle the pernicious foundations of Eurocentric knowledge and to decenter Western knowledge. As part of an ethic of respect for and affirmation of difference, diversity and inclusion, academics should open themselves to other and new ways of knowing and doing than those that had denied humanity and voice to million. I called for courageous participation in the intellectual adventure of pluralizing knowledge as part of epistemic justice, cognitive justice and, ultimately, social justice.

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[3] Hendricks, C. and Leibowitz, B. (2016) "Decolonising universities isn't an easy process – but it has to happen." *The Conversation Africa*. 23 May.
[4] Hendricks and Leibowitz (2016)

In mid-2020, in an article 'The 4IR super-highway: A dangerously technocratic utopia',[5] I responded to the University of Johannesburg vice-chancellor Prof Marwala's opinion piece on the so-called fourth industrial revolution (4IR).[6] I indicated my differences with Prof Marwala's take on certain issues, some of which I cover in this paper. Thereafter, in late 2020, I turned my attention to the covid-19 pandemic and its implications for universities in South Africa in an article, 'Reproduction, transformation and public South African higher education during and beyond Covid-19.'[7] I argued that the covid-19 pandemic had created new conjunctural conditions, but the underlying unequal social structures of society and higher education in South Africa remained intact. If anything, the pandemic laid bare and exacerbated inequalities, social exclusion and injustice in all arenas of society. After 1994, universities were charged to promote social justice in and through higher education, including "political democratisation, economic reconstruction and development, and redistributive social policies aimed at equity."[8] However, as the pandemic demonstrated, higher education remained a powerful mechanism of unequal forms of social reproduction and exclusion of students from working class and rural impoverished backgrounds. The post-pandemic 'new normal' in higher education could further entrench inequalities and create new barriers to transformation in and through higher education unless a coalition of social forces organised for radical reforms within and beyond higher education in order to lay the bridgeheads to more extensive and deeper social transformation.

I contended that the discourse of the 'new normal' was a euphemism for untrammelled technocratic restructuring and consolidating capital accumulation and elite power. Universities were likely to witness intensified corporatization, managerialism, commercialisation and commodification of knowledge, with 'transformation' reduced largely to changing student and staff demographics. Deeply embedded unacceptable legacies in higher education would not dissipate post-covid because of the greater awareness of the realities of impoverished students or because "there has been a welcome renewed interest and commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion."[9] As large, complex, loosely coupled and fragile institutions, universities faced a triple challenge: to deal with the immediate challenges of covid-19 for their core functions, operations and finances, with the consequences of reduced public funding and with the big transformation issues raised by the student protests.[10] Successful higher education transformation required building strong radical student and staff organisations, alliances between those formations and coalitions with wider social forces that contested social relations in and beyond higher education. Organised radical movements could reveal the 'stakes', make 'power visible', struggle for radical reforms and "make society hear their messages and translate these messages into political decision making, while the movements maintain their autonomy."[11] However, the movements could not confine themselves purely to particularistic concerns that were unconnected with the wider

[5] Badat, S. (2020) The 4IR super-highway: A dangerously technocratic utopia, *The Daily Maverick*, 1 June.
[6] Marwala, T. (2020) Covid-19 has forced us into the fast lane of the 4IR super-highway, *The Daily Maverick*, 28 May.
[7] Reproduction, transformation and public South African higher education during and beyond Covid-19, *Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa*, No. 104, December.
[8] Department of Education (1997) 'Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education', Government Gazette No. 18207, section 1.7.
[9] Bogle, D (2020) 'How will COVID-19 affect research collaboration?', *University World News*, 5 September.
[10] Sharma, Y (2020) 'Steering universities through crisis, upheaval and protest', *University World News,* 5 September
[11] Melucci, A. (1985) 'The symbolic challenge of contemporary movements', *Social Research*, 52(4), p. 815.

political economy. This raised vital questions of how 'the particular interests of civil society are taken beyond themselves and lifted to the general interests of the state', of the "universalisation of the particular",[12] of the mechanisms that could make social movements, political parties and the state more mutually constitutive and of political power and state power. If there were four key pillars[13] to the anti-apartheid struggle, a critical issue was what were the core pillars today, given a constitutional democracy and a parliamentary road to social transformation.

The aftermath of the 2015-2016 student protests demonstrated the limits of student political action. While critical as a catalyst for reforms and transformation, deep reflection was needed on the nature and content of student political activism. There were serious illusions about universities in class societies as engines of social transformation and, despite talk of 'intersectionality', there had to be doubts about the transformative potential of focusing on personal pain, trauma and identity in ways that were unconnected with the question of political power and the material conditions required for social justice.[14] Student organisations created a new higher education terrain and agenda in 2017, but since then had exemplified little creative, consistent and concerted national and institutional-level engagement with that agenda. Institutional transformation, the strategies and tactics of change and its resourcing were all largely ceded to university administrations, the state and committed academics. New generations of student leaders had to build effective alliances among student formations and between them and other non-student class, popular and professional organisations and movements. Without achieving a confluence with other social forces, student movements were in danger of becoming characterized by 'brief brush fires and relapses into passivity by the majority' and by "frenzied ultra-left gestures."[15] If students, who had a history of initiating if not always sustaining change, were an important force, equally critical were academics, even if post-1994 they had failed to contest ideologies and administrative power that have eroded critical academic values and academic rule. The absence of strong radical academic and support staff organisations that mobilized around academic issues was a major gap and posed the questions of the consciousness and agency of academics.

In this paper, I draw on some of the thinking expressed in my 2020 publications and link the covid-19 pandemic, the so-called 4IR and T&L through 13 juxtapositions and 13 concomitant propositions to illuminate key challenges for T&L. Often, we approach juxtapositions undialectically and make recourse to what the late Wally Morrow called "simplifying manoeuvres."[16] These 'simplifying manoeuvres' result in dangerous blind spots and have adverse consequences for practice, including for T&L – for curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, for opportunity and success, for 'epistemological access' and engagement with more

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[12] Fine, R. (1992) 'Civil society theory and the politics of transition in South Africa', *Searchlight South Africa*, 3(1), p. 30

[13] Mass extra-parliamentary mobilisation and struggle, international campaigns to isolate the apartheid regime, underground organization, and armed struggle. https://omalley.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site/q/03lv02167/04lv02264/05lv02303/06lv02304/07lv02305/08lv02311.htm

[14] Kelly, R.D.G. (2016) 'Black study, black struggle', *Boston Review: A Political and Literary Forum*. http://bostonreview.net/forum/robin-d-g-kelley-black-study-black-struggle accessed on 22 October 2020.

[15] Hobsbawm, E.J. (1973) *Revolutionaries: Contemporary Essays*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, p. 265.

[16] Morrow, W. (1997) Varieties of educational tragedy. Paper presented at the Harold Wolpe Memorial Conference, University of Western Cape, April.

diverse epistemologies, for our ontological conceptions of students and so forth. We especially remember Morrow, of course, for his idea about "epistemological access."

1. Conjuncture – structure

We are in a new *conjuncture* occasioned by the covid-19 pandemic and the 4IR[17]. We must, of course, ponder and debate their implications for universities and specifically for T&L. And we must, of course, act. What we should not do is to claim that everything associated with 4IR or covid-19 is 'inevitable' and bound to sweep universities and South Africa. We are not entirely at the mercy of big social and technological forces. We humans have *agency*. There are always alternatives. We can creatively devise ways to outwit trends that threaten the integrity of universities. Claims that contemporary trajectories are *inevitable* and that there are no alternatives are not only not true but can also stifle debate and creative engagement and responses, especially when pronounced by leaders of institutions.

The new developments are grafted onto an entrenched *social structure* with its deep fissures of class, 'race,' gender and geography. They are unfolding under the hegemony of capitalism, globalisation, and the pernicious ideology of neo-liberalism. The new conjuncture does not constitute new *structural* conditions; those remain indelibly capitalist and highly inequitable, as harshly demonstrated by the differential impact of the covid-19 pandemic. Responding to Prof Marwala's contention that with the 4IR "every facet of society" will change I suggested that there was an overemphasis on the discontinuities and understatement of the continuities.Would the changes, I asked, benefit the impoverished, workers, black people, women, refugees and the Global South – the marginalised? Or would the beneficiaries be the usual ones: the rich, the middle classes, whites, men, city dwellers, the Global North. I argued that lest we imagined 4IR as the harbinger of a (technocratic) utopia, we had to confront the fact that the first three industrial revolutions did not create a just and humane world. Why did we imagine that the 4IR would do so? Some aspects of 4IR could *potentially* enrich people's lives - but *which* people, disaggregated by 'race', class, gender, disability, age, geography and nationality.

Curriculum has multiple determinants - values, epistemology, ontology, disciplines/fields, learning-related issues, history, culture, economic conditions and the like. If, as is argued, the 4IR has huge implications for the economy, it will necessarily shape curriculum and T&L. My first proposition is that as we grapple with an unfolding new conjuncture, the so-called big 'reset', the 'new normal' and its implications for T&L, we must *simultaneously* confront what will not change - social structure - and what that too means for T&L. We should abjure projected South African futures, such as the 'rainbow nation,' that confuse ideals with actual realities. What are the implications of deep structural inequalities and their related historical, cultural and epistemic inequities for T&L? Have we fully come to grips with deep structural inequalities as universities? Hardly, I submit. We are yet, as universities and the state, to come to grips fully with and to mediate effectively deep structural inequalities. Amongst other things, the Department of Higher Education and Training's tardy and inadequate support for academic

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[17] For the entry of 4IR into the 'education imaginary', see Fataar, A. (2020) The emergence of an education policy dispositif in South Africa: An analysis of educational discourses associated with the fourth industrial revolution, Journal of Education, no. 80

development activities for many years and its rejection of the Council on Higher Education's (CHE) sensible proposal for a four-year undergraduate curriculum exemplify this. Ideas like 'ethic of care' and 'humanizing pedagogy' are important, but on their own could become band aid for the fundamental systemic changes that are needed in universities and in the wider society.

2. Discontinuities - Continuities

Put differently, a new conjuncture does not mean a total, rapid and sweeping displacement of either all current conjunctural realities or the deep-seated structural realities. If there could be discontinuities, there will also be significant continuities. Proposition two is that we have to address discontinuities as well as *continuities* and address what both mean for T&L.

3. 'Decolonial turn' – 'online turn'

No sooner than the 2015-2016 student protests impelled the 'decolonial turn, covid-19 railroaded us into the 'online turn.' Those protests highlighted that post-1994 policy discourse engaged inadequately with the *purposes*, *functions* and *roles* of universities in a post-colonial society. To "know *what* the curriculum should contain requires a sense of what the contents are for." It implies having "a clear sense of the purpose".[18] of a university education, of the purpose of a university more generally and of a *South African/African* university specifically. In policy discourse, it was taken as given that universities created knowledge through research, disseminated knowledge through T&L and connected with certain publics through community engagement.

There has, however, been little *substantive*, *concerted, consistent* and *creative* engagement with the "legacies of *intellectual* colonisation and racialization".[19] and patriarchy, the epistemic inequities, the Eurocentrism and the 'colonial epistemic monoculture'.[20] that still suffuse scholarship and the curriculum at many universities in South Africa. Du Toit has noted that 'the enemy' in the form of colonial and racial discourses has been "within the gates all the time" and represents a significant threat to scholarship in its widest sense.[21] Having created a new higher education terrain and agenda, the student movement has not engaged creatively and consistently with that agenda nationally and institutionally; the pursuit of institutional transformation was surrendered to university administrations, the state and committed academics. Post-1994 students have been at least combative; academics have largely rolled over and have failed to contest ideologies and administrative power that have eroded critical academic values and academic self-rule, with grave consequences for T&L.

This poses the question of the consciousness and agency of academics, generally and in relation to T&L specifically. It suggests that one key task, in Marx's words, is to "educate the educator"

[18] Egan, K. (2003) *What is Curriculum?* Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies 1(1), 9-16, p. 14.
[19] Du Toit, A (2000) 'From autonomy to accountability: academic freedom under threat in South Africa', *Social Dynamics* 26, p. 103.
[20] Santos, B. de Sousa (2007) *Another Knowledge Is Possible: Beyond Northern Epistemologies*. London: Verso, p. xxxii.
[21] Du Toit (2000), p. 103.

as part of any transformative praxis within universities and the world more generally.[22] If the concerns are indeed social justice, long overdue and urgent are

- Ensuring meaningful opportunities for students in environments that ensure learning is an ennobling adventure rather than one that is deeply alienating.
- Curricula and texts that, among other things, take the question of *place* seriously.
- Promotion of 'epistemological access' as opposed to merely physical access,
- Providing alternative epistemologies to a universalising Eurocentric epistemology with its pretence of value-free knowing.
- Ontological conceptions of students that respect difference and appreciate their rich diversity.

The 'decolonial turn' offers great promise for our universities and especially for T&L. We ignore or disdain it at our peril. What traction the 'decolonial turn' has had at universities is unclear, as is how, in what ways and to what extent we have made progress in intellectually decolonizing, deracializing and degendering our universities and particularly T&L. If blood and flesh students stimulated the 'decolonial turn,' a virus catalyzed the 'online turn'. Despite the valiant efforts of universities, academics, and support staff, online learning has been a challenge for equity of opportunity and success, as well as for quality and epistemic justice. Yet, judging by the statements of the Minister and some university leaders, the online turn has been a great success! Where is the evidence? The online turn was "a means of enabling teaching and learning to continue and to save the academic year in response" to a crisis; it "is a form of emergency remote teaching and learning." It "does not necessarily result in 'disruptive innovation' leading to a fundamental restructuring of the curriculum and pedagogy in higher education."[23]

Despite that, "the pivot to online teaching and learning is viewed by some institutional leaders "as the future of higher education", as the 'new normal' - whether as fully online, hybrid or blended remains to be seen.[24] Some leaders "suggest that online teaching and learning will contribute to addressing some of the intractable and deep-seated challenges that confront higher education in South Africa, in particular access and success."[25] The benefits of online T&L they claim, such as "include increased access; enriched teaching and learning, which addresses the needs of disadvantaged students; better management of academic workloads; and increased income"[26] are dubious. We are told that "there is no going back. It is here to stay and will be central to the strategic direction of universities going forward."[27] Whether serious research, analysis and consultation with academics underpin these pronouncements is debatable. What is punted and their claimed benefits must be interrogated critically, given their considerable implications for T&L, for student development and for universities.

One university official observes that covid "has become a catalyst to bring about the

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[22] Marx, K (1845) *Theses on Feuerbach*. https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.pdf Retrieved on 15 October 2021.
[23] Essop, A. (2021) Covid-19: the "New normal" and the Future of Higher Education. SARChI Chair T&L Research Pape Series, No 1. Johannesburg: University of Johannesburg, p. 10.
[24] Essop, A. (2021), p. 10.
[25] Essop, A. (2021), p. 10.
[26] Essop, A. (2021), p. 10.
[27] Essop, A. (2021), p. 10.

transformation we've been talking about" – the 'new normal'! [28] The online turn seems to be also promoted ostensibly because it will "bring more income to the institution, to help finance human capacity or infrastructure development." [29] Face-to-face education is, of course, *no guarantee* of high-quality T&L; and information and communication technologies (ICT), when appropriately deployed, can undoubtedly enhance teaching, learning and quality at contact universities. However, the grand claims made for ICT must be tempered. ICT can also make what may be poor curricula and learning materials look good and leave untouched important aspects of the curriculum. Institutional digital infrastructure capacities, staff capabilities, student living conditions, their access to resources, available finance and the like all condition the efficacy of universities' online efforts. The online turn "illuminated and amplified the existing inequalities in South African society, with the poor, marginalised, precarious and under-resourced disproportionally experiencing its fallout." The reality of many students in "congested urban apartment blocks, shanty towns, small town peripheries and rural hinterlands" must temper glib celebration of digital online learning. [30]

Despite the rhetoric of access and equity, online distance learning, especially for impoverished black working class and rural students, is unlikely to yield either real opportunity or success, , especially "when students study on sporadically working laptops in unstable Wi-Fi hotspots, with power outages and in congested, noisy home environments." [31] The 'online turn' elides the sociality of learning and the psycho-social and affective aspects of learning. Online learning can provide "cognitive learning, information and credentialing but not full sociability with other students, in-place student-teacher interaction, physical facilities, the full suite of extra-curricular activities and academically nested work experience." [32] When disadvantaged students are assembled on campuses a supportive environment is possible as is "a (personal, social and physical) micro and macro environment conducive to learning." [33]

Are the 'decolonial turn' and the 'online turn' *parallel vectors*, or are they very *different trajectories* with respect to T&L and social justice in T&L. Can they intersect and reinforce each other in virtuous ways that advance social and epistemic justice? My third proposition is that we must be cautious that we do not displace and marginalise the imperatives for universities and T&L that arise from the 'decolonial turn' by too glib claims of successes of the 'online turn'. The result could be the victory of the technical over academic substance, of form over content of access over opportunity and success, mediocrity over quality and, ultimately, of the status quo over equity.

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[28] Dhaya Naidoo, chief information officer at Tshwane University of Technology, cited in South African higher education's opportunity to embrace digital transformation. New models for online learning can help reduce inequality and improve access, say experts. https://www.tut.ac.za/news-and-press/article?NID=386
[29] Essop, A. (2021), p. 10.
[30] Screiber, Bardill Moscaritolo, Perozzi and Luescher (2020).
[31] Screiber, Bardill Moscaritolo, Perozzi and Luescher (2020).
[32] Marginson, S (2020) 'Pandemic shows need for HE for the global common good', *University World News*, 25 July https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200724114218359 accessed on 17 October 2020. see also Mafolo, K (2020) 'SA's student hunger crisis – and how to address it', *Daily Maverick*, 11 September. https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-09-11-sas-student-hunger-crisis-and-how-to-address-it/ accessed on 24 October 2020, and Mathebula, M (2020) 'We asked university students to tell their own stories in photos: here's why', *The Conversation* Africa edition, 14 September https://theconversation.com/we-asked-university-students-to-tell-their-own-stories-in-photos-heres-why-143565 accessed on 24 October 2020.
[33] Screiber, Bardill Moscaritolo, Perozzi and Luescher (2020).

4. Epistemology – ontology

The 'decolonial turn' raised profound questions regarding Eurocentric epistemic monoculture, epistemological diversity and inclusion in T&L and neglected ontological issues. Proposition four: there can be no social justice in higher education and in T&L unless these issues are addressed effectively.

5. Engaged universities – Transformed/decolonized universities

Post-1994, there has been limited progress in transforming our universities, especially in creating inclusive institutional and academic cultures. If transformation is still on the agenda, seemingly it is now to be married to a new discourse - the 'engaged university.' Perhaps the 'engaged university' is intended to be the character of the transformed university in the new conjuncture.

Some thoughts. If the 'engaged university' is not more policy symbolism, what precisely does it mean for T&L? What will happen when the 'engaged university' meets the increasingly corporatist, managerialist, marketised and commercialised university? It is likely that the need of universities for greater third stream income (as opposed to declining real earmarked state subsidy income) from the state, capital and donors will principally shape the university and its engagement (with genuflections towards activist and critical scholarship). Comcomitantly, the university, overlaid with different notions of transformation and notions of being 'engaged,' 'entrepreneurial,' 'research-led,' 'research intensive' and 'Afropolitan' will be further suffused with contradictions that impact also on T&L. Proposition 5 is that T&L will need to navigate rather contradictory trajectories and impulses.

6. Private good – public good

If the 'engaged university' seeks to uphold and give effect to the public good ideals of universities, that is to be welcomed. Its contradictory impulses, however, could compromise its public good aspirations. There is little pushback from universities on the state and capital's parochial emphasis on producing graduates who have 'skills,' are entrepreneurial and 'ready' for the economy. University departments, and especially business schools of universities, already produce customized courses for their 'customers' and 'clients' - businesses and the state. What does this mean for T&L and the kind of students that are cultivated through T&L? Proposition six is that if T&L is not to parochially and entirely serve instrumental and economic ends, academics and students need to fight for wider and multifaceted notions of what T&L and universities are for.

7. Science, Engineering, Technology – Arts and Humanities

A capacious notion of the university would strive to cultivate students who are broadly educated, ethical, critical and creative graduates and would deeply appreciate what the Arts and Humanities provide universities and society. Yet, from the president of the country through to most business leaders and even university leaders that appreciation is sorely lacking. If you want evidence, look at the composition of the Presidential commission on 4IR! SET fields are undoubtedly important. But to unduly privilege them for economic reasons and to benignly

tolerate or outrightly neglect the arts and humanities is to erode the social value of universities, as Manuel Castells, the late Thandika Mkandawire and other have argued.

The competition for economic advantage has resulted in knowledge and research generated by SET fields being unduly privileged, to the detriment of the arts, humanities and, to a lesser extent, the social sciences. In emphasising the importance of "the science and technology systems" to the "new economy," Castells immediately added "including, of course, the humanities."[34] Despite that, Mkandawire rightly bemoaned that "attempts to improve Africa's prospects by focusing on scientific advances and the benefits accruing from them have all too often overlooked the important perspectives which the humanities and social sciences afford."[35] He cautioned against a 'developmentalism' in which research becomes the narrow instrument of "the developmental state" and ignores various other "aspects of our people's lives." Here, 'development' becomes "an alienating and humiliating concept for people helplessly sensing that they are to be 'developed' and made to feel that their preoccupations are retrograde."[36]

The arts and humanities interrogate critically ideas and conventional wisdoms on development, progress, democracy, equality and inequality, their meanings, and their articulation within divergent discourses. They make a critical contribution to culture and society, by investigating and interpreting human activity and history in all its rich variety, by presenting it in numerous forms and by conserving it in the form of archives. The arts and humanities "are the ground on which humanity constructs its image of and discourse about itself and in which its anchors human dignity and collective understanding. Their work must be advanced in tandem with that of the sciences if a hospitable world is to survive."[37] Proposition seven: while university T&L must engage with South Africa's, Africa's and the Global South's diverse developmental challenges, it cannot serve purely instrumental and utilitarian ends, defined parochially and reduced to economic relevance alone.

8. Skilling – democratic citizenship and cultivation of humanity

Universities, of course, must cultivate among students a range of skills. However, to realize the immense social and political value of a university education and especially if the goal is social justice, universities need to also connect T&L with the idea of democratic citizenship and the "cultivation of humanity."[38] For Nussbaum, "three capacities, above all, are essential to the cultivation of humanity."

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[34] Castells, M. (1993). *The University System: Engine of development in the new world economy*. In A. Ransom, S-M. Khoo, and V. Selvaratnam (Eds.) Improving Higher Education in Developing Countries (pp. 65-80). Washington DC: The World Bank, p. 69.

[35] Mkandawire, T. (2009). *Foreword*. In The British Academy and the Association of Commonwealth Universities, The Nairobi Report: Frameworks for Africa-UK Research Collaboration in the Social Sciences and Humanities. London: The British Academy and the Association of Commonwealth Universities, p. v.

[36] Mkandawire, T. (1994). *Social Sciences in Africa: Some lessons for South Africa*. South African Sociological Review, 6(2), 1-13. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44461266, p. 4.

[37] Lewis, P. (2011). *Unpublished mimeo*.

[38] Nussbaum, M. (2006) 'Education for Democratic Citizenship'. Institute of Social Studies Public Lecture Series No. 1. The Hague: Institute of Social Studies.

"First is the capacity for critical examination of oneself and one's traditions…Training this capacity requires developing the capacity to reason logically, to test what one reads or says for consistency of reasoning, correctness of fact, and accuracy of judgement." [39] The "cultivation of humanity" also requires students to see themselves "as human beings bound to all other human beings by ties of recognition and concern" – which necessitates knowledge and understanding of different cultures and "of differences of gender, race, and sexuality." [40] Third, it is, however, more than "factual knowledge" that is required. Also necessary is "the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person's story, and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have." [41] My eight proposition is that it is not merely 'skills' that graduates require and that universities must cultivate, but particular configurations of knowledge, expertise, competencies and skills, including that related to respect for and appreciation of difference, diversity and inclusion and democratic citizenship.

9. Research – teaching

In the seeming triumph of the discourse of 'skills', to emphasise knowledge is not necessarily to prioritise research over teaching. T&L is already neglected in favour of research because of supposed prestige or rankings or because T&L is regarded as an innate ability or 'common-sense' activity. Drawing on Antonio Gramsci, Carr points out that "the distinctive feature of common sense is not that its beliefs and assumptions *are* true but that it is a style of thinking in which the truth of these beliefs and assumptions is regarded as self-evident and taken for granted. What is commonsensical is *ipso facto* unquestionable and does not need to be justified." [42] Proposition nine is that we must jettison the misguided naturalisation of the practice of T&L, which perpetuates its neglect, and rethink the privileging of research over T&L. Moreover, approaches to T&L focused on improving 'skills' or 'tips for better teaching' are inadequate. We need a rigorously theorized approach that reflects deeply on contextual realities, that is based on research into T&L and that builds competence for research on T&L – precisely what Prof Motala's University of Johannesburg SARCHI Chair seeks to promote. Giving attention to building the T&L capabilities of new and current academics means institutional hubs with the knowledge and expertise to enhance and support T&L.

10. Anecdotes – Knowledge

Drawing on anecdotal 'evidence', one university leader claims "that our students are performing better in the online environment than face-to-face" and contends that this indicates that "we need to re-imagine how we test and assess our students' capabilities." [43] This is, indeed, anecdotal 'evidence' – an oxymoron. There are many anecdotes about the deep concerns that academics have about the online turn that strongly refute the claim. What do we imagine will happen when, as part of the new culture of performativity, academics are obliged to enter performance

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[39] Nussbaum, M. (2006), p. 5.
[40] Nussbaum, M. (2006), p. 6.
[41] Nussbaum, M. (2006), pp. 6-7.
[42] Carr, W. (1995) *For Education: Towards Critical Educational Inquiry*. Bristol: Open University Press, pages 53-54; Hoare, Q. and Smith, G. N. (eds.) (1971) *Antonio Gramsci: Selections from Prison Notebooks*. New York: International Publishers. My thanks to Dr Jo-Anne Vorster and Dr Lynne Quinn for this reference
[43] Essop (2021), p. 10

contracts that as part of their Key Performance Indicators specify that they must achieve X pass rates? Proposition ten is that we must be extremely cautious to base policies and strategies on anecdotes and think carefully about the perversities that could arise when we link performance criteria to achieving certain pass rates.

11. Precarious temporary contracts - Decent tenured jobs

I have great empathy for academics, and especially early career scholars. They experience great pressures, stress and burnout, subject as they are to Soviet-style Stakhanovite productivism and the need to respond to myriad, and at times contradictory, imperatives. The considerable growth in student numbers has not been matched by a commensurate increase in academic staff numbers. In 2017, 57% of academic staff at contact universities were temporary contract staff; including UNISA, 63% were temporary staff, the "casualisation of academic work [being] in part a response to the inadequate funding of higher education.[44] The CHE notes the consequences of casualisation: "career tracks are undermined; commitment to academia suffers; job satisfaction and personal employment security become increasingly important factors influencing career decisions; institutional memory and disciplinary expertise are harder to build up; and these together have a negative effect on the reproducibility of the academic profession overall."[45] The Minister's message at the recent USAF/CHE/DHET conference was essentially that universities would have to do more with fewer resources.

Except at a few well-endowed universities, the norm going forward could well be austerity measures, including perhaps postponing new staff appointments, fewer permanent staff and a reduction in temporary staff appointments. Proposition eleven: the dependence on contract staff has negative implications for T&L and student opportunity and success. The precarity of work could also have negative implications for academic freedom, intellectual autonomy and academic rule, already under threat in some instances.[46]

12. Symbolism – Substance

There is a surfeit of largely symbolic goals and policies and a dearth of substantive, clear material goals and policies. Symbolic goals and policies are important; they acknowledge the worth of particular goals and constitute a terrain of struggle. However, there is also much wishful thinking, with a lack of clear and explicit national goals and especially priorities accompanied by ineffectual state steering. Proposition twelve is that T&L is not facilitated by the state's inability to make hard choices and decisions, often because of political expediency or/and muddled thinking.

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[44] Essop (2020) p. 36, p. 38.
[45] Council on Higher Education (2016) *South African Higher Education Reviewed: Two Decades of Democracy* Pretoria: CHE, p. 299.
[46] On 'academic rule', see Moodie, G C (1996) 'On Justifying the Different Claims to Academic Freedom', *Minerva*, 34(2).

13. Universities in South Africa – South African/African universities

Colonialism profoundly shaped the universities and higher education system that developed in South Africa after the early nineteenth century. It implanted in South Africa universities that were largely replicas of European universities, whose institutional identities, academic organization, cultures, curricula, T&L and research were wedded to Western intellectual thought, modes of knowledge making, conventions and practices. Those universities were also associated strongly with the reproduction of the colonial and apartheid social order, rather than with contributing to an equitable and democratic order. Proposition thirteen is that universities in South Africa are yet to fully address and liberate themselves from their colonial pasts and to remake themselves as *South African* and *African* universities – and what that means for T&L.

Conclusion

Weber said about Marx that he was not taxicab that can be driven willy-nilly anywhere and everywhere. So it is too with universities. I have no affinity for ahistorical essentialist or universalist ideas regarding the purposes, functions and roles of universities. But, as we engage with the question of what the 4IR and the covid-19 pandemic means for universities and for T&L, we will do well to simultaneously think deeply about the *purposes*, *functions* and *roles* of universities in contemporary South Africa.

We need to think deeply about what universities in South Africa are *for*, what universities in South Africa *stand for* and *for whom* universities are in South Africa. Alongside passionate engagement, we need calm, cool, creative and collective thinking on these fundamental questions. Answers to these questions would provide important compasses for those who must lead and undertake T&L in universities.