# Traveling ideas: about equality and power play around 'diversity' at North West University (NWU), South Africa

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## Introduction

Universities are intersections of communication and debate that produce and reproduce knowledge. Academic research is the fruit of individual thinking, but can only flourish in a climate of critical debate. A university can stand out if it is capable of supporting academic communities to thrive and cross-fertilize. In the age of globalization and digitization, knowledge and ideas travel faster in and between research communities than ever before, which has two paradoxical consequences. First, academic communities themselves have become more diverse in their composition. Diversity reigns in many fields, such as gender, ethnicity, religion, ideology etc., and is often considered an asset for achieving academic creativity and excellence. Processes of globalization and digitization tend to foster more equal power relations through diversity. The second consequence, however, is that globalization not only meant an accelerated spread of prevailing modes of scientific research but simultaneously encouraged competition and power play between the various perspectives on academic excellence and creativity. Viewed from the center-periphery paradigm one might even maintain that Western trends in HE have become ever more dominant and have counteracted alternative, diverging, knowledge concepts.

South African higher education history provides illuminating material to demonstrate the complexity of academic development in a strongly diverse, but equally strongly segregated society. The concept has long had a rather 'peculiar' meaning and the present understanding of diversity as an encounter of equals has come a long way in South Africa's higher education. It is only since the 1990s, when democracy slowly started to return, and particularly the late 1990s when the HE sector was heavily turned around by a merger operation, that diversity received meaning outside the segregation and apartheid discourse and became a democratic policy goal, forcing former antagonist universities into a merged organizational structure. This pushed and challenged the dynamics of equality and power play inherent to diversity to the limits.

North West University (NWU) provides a highly relevant case to illustrate the paradoxical processes described above. As a merged institute it houses one of the most prominent former Apartheid campuses (Potchefstroom) next to an all-black 'Bantu campus' (Mafikeng). It is considered one of South Africa's best managed universities, which boasts of being an example of unity and equality in diversity, a place where diversity is highly valued, and given strong policy attention. It is firmly believed at NWU's top brass that the university can contribute to diminish and eventually abolish inequality, as diversity is mainly understood. At the same time there was much political unrest and upheaval in 2008 about the way 'the old Potch' supposedly tried (once again) to force its norms of 'proper science' upon its merger partner, which escalated in such a manner that the Minister of Education decided to send a national commission of inquiry to look into the matter.

By tracing back some of NWU's historical developments from an 'only-for-whites' university to a mixed institution with ambitious and straightforward diversity goals, and including in this analysis its links with international partner universities of which VU University Amsterdam was, and in some ways still is, a very prominent one, contributing to NWU's policies and choices through extensive interaction and consultancies in the post-1994 era, we hope to demonstrate how local university dynamics of power become affected by the globally traveling idea of diversity. We also point to the ambiguities that become manifest in university people's behavior when concepts with such a broad variety of meanings are molded into lean management tools.

*Context: The South African landscape of higher education before 1994*

In South Africa the Higher Education Act of 1874 recognized certain already existing university colleges and also formally legitimized that the government of the day already paid for the salaries of the professors. Nevertheless it was only in 1916, after the Union of South Africa in 1910, that the government officially footed universities in South Africa in a legal framework, with the Acts 12, 13 and 14 of that year (Sehoole 2006: 7). The acts declared three universities, the University of Cape Town, Stellenbosch University and the University of South Africa (UNISA), the latter also comprising the already six existing University Colleges and the Universiteit van die Kaap de Goede Hoop. The Potchefstroomse Universiteitskollege was also formally put under the umbrella of UNISA in 1921 (Eeden 2006: 28). In the years that follow the various universities under the umbrella of UNISA all became independent, starting with the University of the Witwatersrand in 1922 and the University of Pretoria in 1930. The Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys followed in 1951 (ibid: 29).

In 1948 the Nasionale Party rose to power in South Africa and from that date onward racial segregation became mandatory in more and more fields and spheres of life, including university campuses. From that date onward there was an ever increasing gap in terms of opportunities for education between the various racial groups in South Africa. Whites became increasingly privileged. Starting with the Bantu Education Act in 1953, higher education in South Africa became officially racially segregated and in 1959 the Extension of University Education Act (no. 45) was proclaimed prohibiting non-white students to register at established universities any longer. Instead, specific universities were created for black, coloured and Indian students. The Bantu Education Act was explained by Verwoerd at the time as: 'They [racial relations] cannot improve if the result of Native education is the creation of frustrated people who, as a result of the education they received, have expectations in life which circumstances in South Africa do not follow to be fulfilled immediately' (Verwoerd in Sparks 1991: 196). In other words, non-whites had to be taught to serve the needs of the white minority in South Africa. As a consequence '(b)lacks inevitably saw this as education for inferiority' (ibid).

The same rationale of racial segregation was followed throughout the education system, from primary to higher education. In 1983 for instance, as a result of racially segregated education, the apartheid government spent seven times more on a white pupil than on an African pupil (Feinstein 2005: 243). It 'made education one of the most explosive grievances in the black community, and it provided the spark for both the 1976 student uprising in Soweto and, to a somewhat lesser degree, the great national convulsion that shook South Africa in the 1980s' (Sparks 1991: 196). Higher education in South Africa in 1994, when Mandela came to power,

was a highly racially segregated affair, and in the South African public imagery (as in the rest of the world), Potchefstroom University for CHE was one of the icons of the scientific legitimation of apartheid, as many of its professors and other staff had been much involved both with the secretive but very powerful Afrikaner Broederbond (Eeden 2006: 493)[1] throughout the apartheid years, and the radical nationalistic Ossewa Brandwag in the 1930 and 1940s (cf. resp. on Broederbond Wilkins & Strydom 1978 and on Ossewa Brandwag Marx 1998).

At the same time the apartheid discourse at Potchefstroom University was not of a monolithic or only hegemonic sort. One example that we use here for the sake of the world wide and well-known name that is involved, is Willem de Klerk, brother of F.W. de Klerk, who as state president of South Africa released Nelson Mandela and unbanned the ANC in his famous speech to parliament on the 2nd of February 1990. His brother Willem, nick named 'Wimpie', was 'plucked out of a professorship at Potchefstroom University to take over the editorship of the National Party's official mouthpiece, *Die Transvaler*' (Sparks 1994: 79). It was known that Wimpie was 'well to the left' (ibid) of his brother, and that he partook in early secretive meetings with the ANC in the second half of the 1980s, about which he reported to his brother (cf. Sparks 1994: 79-80). The core of his message was, based on his experiences with the ANC, that it was, contrary to popular belief amongst Afrikaners, possible to negotiate with them and that they saw 'the Afrikaners as an indigenous part of the South African population' (ibid: 80). Wimpie and Sparks both think that these reports 'had an effect' (ibid) and contributed to the later 'calling' of F.W. de Klerk to end apartheid in South Africa (cf. ibid: 91-108). In order to understand this multi-vocality, maybe diversity, at Potchefstroom University already during apartheid it is necessary to have a closer look at its origins and developments.

*Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education till 2004*

The Reformed Church started a theological seminary in Burgersdorp on the 20th of May 1869. The seminary was primarily to prepare and train more ministers for the church, as there was an acute shortage of them. At the same time the Synod promoted a broader vision, not only to train ministers, but also teachers.[2] The seminary was officially opened on 29th of November 1869 (van der Schyff 2003: 9). Generally, these dates are taken as the humble beginnings of Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education. The seminary moved from Burgersdorp to Potchefstroom in 1905 (ibid: 79). Because of its origins there was right from the start a very strong influence from the church on the seminary and later the university. But at first it was not only the fact that all lecturers were also ministers at the church, but also that two of the more important ones were from the Netherlands, Jan Lion Cachet and Dirk Postma (ibid). Potch's origins and early Dutch influences explain the close links with VU University Amsterdam, as this university was founded on reformed principles by Abraham Kuyper in 1880 (cf. van Deursen 2005: 19-22). It is well-known that Kuyper was a stern supporter of his 'reformed brothers' in South Africa, to such an extent that at some stage in 1875 he even considered to emigrate to South Africa as he believed Calvinism had greater possibilities in

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[1] As many colleagues from other Afrikaans universities in South Africa (cf. Jansen 2009: 206; Smith 2009).
[2] 'dat er niet alleen predikanten aangevormd worden, maar ook jongelingen zich kunnen bekwamen tot onderwijzers der jeugd, ja dat ook jongelieden, zonder een bestemd doel te hebben, gelegenheid gegeven wordt, naar hunne vatbaarheid gebruik van de school te maken, allen onderworpen aan de regulatien der school' (Reformed Synod in van der Schyff 2003:2)

South Africa than in the Netherlands.[3] Dutch-Afrikaner (Boer) relations remained strong for a long period of time. When the Dutch ambassador to South Africa at the time, H.E. Jan van der Berg, spoke at the occasion of the new library in Potchefstroom in 1951 he said, amongst other things, that the Dutch and Africans served the same historical and spiritual ideals.[4] Schutte, however, believes that '(t)he brotherly ties between the two institutions seem to have been felt more strongly in Potchefstroom than in Amsterdam' (2010: 65).

The opening up of the theological seminary in Potchefstroom to other disciplines than theology alone was to a certain extent the result of the fact that the South African government was not prepared to finance solely church related education. A PUK internal commission at the time came to the conclusion that as long as the institution maintained its church-like character it could not apply for state support.[5] From 1913 onwards, the seminary opened up, although rather hesitantly, to other disciplines in order to be granted the much-needed state subsidies. This progressive development towards other disciplines also had implications in other fields, and in 1916 the first female student entered the Theological Seminary in Potchefstroom, Helena Petronella (Lenie) van der Walt (ibid: 171). In 1919 the theological seminary became the 'Potchefstroome Universiteits Kollege vir Kristelike Hoër Onderwys (PUK vir KHO)' (ibid: 190) and in 1951 it was officially granted the independent university status.

In its continuous search for an identity from the worldwide turbulent 1930s and 1940s onward, and later as a university under the apartheid government, the PUK was rather a key player in the historical processes in South Africa. As a nation state and for its political ideology South Africa became increasingly isolated in the world and after the Sharpville riots in 1960, even the Netherlands distanced itself from South Africa (Schutte 2010 123-169). 'The turnabout in the Dutch position on South Africa was met with surprise, disappointment and annoyance by the Afrikaners' (ibid: 126). With the general public opinion, also PUK came under increased attacks for its pro-apartheid stance and position, and especially when VU University Amsterdam awarded an honorary doctorate to the staunch anti-apartheid theologian Dr. Beyers Naudé in 1972, it became clear that the relation with Potchefstroom could not continue. '"It [VU University Amsterdam] cannot on the one hand award Dr. Beyers Naudé an honorary doctorate and on the other hand continue its close contact with fervent supporters of apartheid' (Andriessen, secretary of Kairos in ibid: 141). On 17 August 1976 VU University Amsterdam cut all official ties with PUK (ibid: 161).

Although PUK is generally considered to be among the strongest upholders of apartheid ("apartheidbakermat", Eeden: 2006: 492), this public image does not completely do justice to the counter-voices that were also raised from staff and students from within PUK (ibid: 491-494). In that sense all generalisations seem to silence relevant nuances, and this is probably also the case with PUK, as the example of Wimpie de Klerk mentioned above already made clear. Also the example of Theuns Eloff, the later rector of 'Potch' and the merged institution becoming North West University in 2004 is telling in this respect. Eloff was chairman of the student council between 1977 and 1979 and in that capacity pled that all South African universities should be opened for *all* South Africans, no matter what their colour was (ibid:

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[3] 'omdat hy op daardie tydstip 'n groter toekoms vir die Calvinisme in Suid-Afrika gesien het as in Nederland' (van Deursen 2005: 131)
[4] 'sowel die Nederlanders as die Afrikaners kragtens hulle geskiedenis in diens staan van dieselfde geestelike ideaal' (ibid: 472)
[5] "zo lang het zyn kerkelik karakter behoudt, is het, onder de bestaande regulaties niet gerechtigd op een staatstoelaag …" (in van der Schyff 2003: 127)

492). Furthermore Eloff played a significant role in the democratisation process in South Africa through his participation in and becoming the CEO of the Consultative Business Movement (CBM) which paved the way, amongst and with others, for the National Peace Accord in 1991 (Gastrow 1995:17). He was also part of the delegation that had secretive meetings with the ANC in Dakar already in 1987 (Hopkins 2006: 73-74). Therefore both apartheid and more enlightened versions of diversity policies were present in Potch, although the overall atmosphere was considered pro-apartheid, and rather politically and religiously conservative.

*The route toward transformation: from PUK to NWU*

From 1994 Nelson Mandela became South Africa's first democratically elected black president. Apartheid officially came to an end and made way for a range of far reaching policies and approaches that tried to redress the injustices and inequalities of the past. Underlying most of these approaches was the notion that South Africa, on top of all kinds of new legislation, needed active quota to redress the situations of inequality because in South Africa it is a *majority* of non-white people that have to be brought into mainstream economical processes (instead of *minorities* as if often the case with aims and objectives of diversity policies in other countries like in the US or in Europe) (cf. Spierenburg and Wels 2004). Therefore South Africa followed the route of Affirmative Action as one of its 'basic guides'[6]. In the ongoing process, the Employment Equity Act is presented in 1998 and '(b)esides the issue of equity, the Act explicitly refers to implementing policies of *affirmative action* (ibid: 8, italics added). Transforming the institutions of higher education in line with this equity legislation and requirements in South Africa was considered an important topic of South African transformation as a whole (cf. Tamminga 2004). At the beginning of the new millennium, the then Minister of Education of South Africa, Kader Asmal, announced the names of several South African universities that were to merge, officially in order 'to solve problems of duplication, fragmentation and lack of access in parts of the country and to improve the quality of education on offer'[7]. The total number of HE institutions was reduced from 36 to 23, through a process of merging and closure. Amongst the institutions that had to merge were the predominantly white PUK and the far poorer and predominantly black University of the North West in Mafikeng (UNW). Geographically Potchefstroom and Mafikeng are some 250 kilometres apart. The two institutions officially merged in 2004, together with other South African institutions like Rand Afrikaans University in Johannesburg, and the University of Natal in KwaZulu-Natal (see Kamsteeg 2008). The name for the newly merged institution became North West University.

The merger between PUK and UNW was a most remarkable one. As we have seen PUK had long been among the academic strongholds of apartheid, serving the white clientele of Transvaal, one of the most conservative areas in the country. UNW had grown out of the University of Boputhatswana (UNIBO), which served the academic interests of the under apartheid created homeland bearing the same name. This university was relatively well funded and attracted critical academics from other part of the country and even from outside the country. With the return of democracy – Bophuthatswana being one of the places strongly resisting the elections – the university was renamed in the University of the North West. It lost the financial support of the homeland government and was left somewhat marginalized by

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[6] www.labour.gov.za/ under 'basic guides', click third bullet 'Basic Guide to Affirmative Action (accessed 8 November 2010

[7] www.southafrica.info/ess_info/sa_glance/education/higheredplan.htm (accessed 8 November 2010)

the new central government which led to an exodus of academics and a further divestment of the institution, until it was finally included in the NWU merger project.

Four years down the line, in September 2008, the influential newspaper Mail & Guardian (M&G) already reported on what is generally called the 'merger mess'. An official commission was appointed that had to come up with solutions to the problems. Professor Barney Pityana, at the time Vice-Chancellor of UNISA, was one of the keynote speakers at the opening conference, whom the M&G quotes on NWU, saying that 'the new institution is unmanageable. Effectively there are still two separate universities'[8]. If this contention shows anything it is definitely that NWU university became one of the universities where the government policy of redress and affirmative action found a major challenge. However, the university itself, and particularly so its management, took "Innovation through diversity" as its main policy goal. In 2008 NWU's Institutional Plan held that "after its first three years, [it has] achieved most of the objectives set out in the Merger and Incorporation guidelines of the Department of Education" (NWU 2008: 1). These guidelines focus on the principles of university governance in terms of teaching-learning output, research output, financial viability, etc., covering all three NWU campuses (Vaal Triangle, previously a satellite campus, was separated from Potchefstroom and became an independent campus). Today, university management, through its Institutional Office, does not deny the merger still has a long way to go toward becoming a well-integrated and diverse institution, but its vice-chancellor Theuns Eloff claims that it can in many ways be considered an exemplary merger, not in the last place because of its financial successes' (NWU 2009: 3).

Disputes of merger successes and failures show that Higher Education politics in South Africa constitutes a politically sensitive issue and its assessment largely depends on the position of the writer / speaker. What some see as a major step forward is to others just a tiny gesture with little more than symbolic value. To expect that in five years the NWU merger would have reached the hoped redress and establishment of a really diverse and diversified institution, is probably unrealistic, given the ingrained inequalities between the historically all-white campus in Potchefstroom, and its Mafikeng 'counter-part'. Yet the debates about merger success, focusing on the diversity issue are hugely instructive about the organizational change that is taking place in South Africa's universities. The above cited verdict by Pityana on the approaches to diversity of NWU may be one-sided, and openly neglect the specific policies that NWU developed in order to foster a more diverse staff and student population, yet it shows the urgency of the problem, and the political priority it has in today's complex Higher Education situation in South Africa. To further illustrate this, a nuanced perspective analyzing the diverse positions and the corresponding rhetoric may show in greater depth the importance of the concept of diversity in higher education in all its contestations. We will do so by a detailed analysis of the rhetoric on the NWU merger accomplishment, because this clearly illustrates the extent to which the diversity concept is subject to (political) sensemaking. Before diving deeper into the NWU case, however, we would like to present a brief theoretical reflection on the issue of diversity and identity in relation to merger processes.

**On studying narratives of mergers and diversity**

In the wake of the world-wide stream of mergers and acquisitions of the last decades organization studies has proved prolific in the number of contributions on the theme (for an overview of the literature see Vaara 2002; Angwin & Vaara 2005). Merging as an

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[8] www.mg.co.za/article/2008-09-16-untangling-the-merger-mess (accessed 8 November 2010)

organizational change phenomenon has been studied from many angles: strategically oriented studies, human resource-oriented perspectives and cultural perspectives. An important sub-theme in the merger literature is (the level of) post-merger integration, which is often described in terms of 'success' and 'failure', but generally these studies – despite their cultural focus – pay little attention to the narratives produced by the main actors, or to the specific contexts in which actor perspectives are framed. Even in cultural perspectives, stressing the importance of the variance in norms, values, and beliefs of merging organizations often ignores the complex interplay between culture and the political manoeuvring of protagonists involved in merging processes. As Angwin & Vaara (2005) argue in a special issue of *Organization Studies*, we need more documented and embedded research that goes beyond the myopia of many of the prevailing cultural perspectives, in which culture is often predicated as either favourable or adverse to merging success.

Organizations are socially constructed spaces, inhabited by real people, who in their meaning-giving activities constantly change organizational reality (see Alvesson 2002; Bate 1997; Watson, 2001). This sensemaking always takes place in an environment where meaning has to be negotiated (Czarniawska 1997). Capturing these sensemaking processes requires a specific approach that is sensitive to these complexities. Retrieving cultural meanings on a merged institution that has drawn together a wide variety of people with experiences, identities, and expectations that are markedly varied can be fruitfully carried out by carefully reconstructing the 'narratives of change,' drawn from what John van Maanen (1988) calls 'tales from the field'. For South African higher education some of these complex 'merger tales' have been collated by Jansen (2002; Jansen et al 2000).

Acknowledging the complexity creates the opportunity for utilizing different perspectives to develop an understanding of the processes that follow from a merger. Vaara's (2003) approach, though particularly focused on business organization perspectives, can also be applied in the context of mergers of academic institutions in the tertiary sector. This approach is located in recognizing the importance of language, and Vaara relies on Cziarniawska (1997) to reflect on the role of narratives as central to an understanding of the social construction of organizational phenomena. The standard approaches in organizational theory can be typified as 'managerialist', but Vaara points out that these do not pay attention to the narratives through which the organizational outcomes of mergers are constructed, and that the the same managerialist approach does not recognize the role of these narratives in the social construction of outcomes and the decision making processes which role players adopt in post-merger integration. The narrative approach, in short, allows for a perspective that provides for a sequential account, locates intentionality, and sees discursiveness linked to subject positions and identity (Vaara 2002: 215-217). This acknowledges the identity-building processes at work for individuals, including their location within the organizational context.

Scapegoating strategies and conspiracy theories can be linked to particular discourses and one of the conclusions that Vaara's analysis makes, is that both the success and failure versions of narratives can be overly optimistic or pessimistic, depending on their slant. They reveal and exemplify "discursive elements through which these phenomena are socially constructed and through which managerial actions are legitimized and naturalized" (2002: 237). This means that actors are able to re-frame the question of failure/success, and that there is not a monolithic, fixed construction placed on their interpretations (ibid.: 239). Vaara also describes "four interrelated tendencies that illuminate why the frequent problem of slow progress during post-acquisition integration occurs", on the basis of "focusing on sensemaking processes surrounding the integration issues" (2003: 1). These tendencies are: inherent ambiguity on

integration issues; cultural confusion in social interactions and communication; organizational hypocrisy in integration decision-making; and the politicization of integration issues. Some of these become visible in the following section, which discusses two merger narratives in more detail. In presenting these we make use of a narrative and storytelling approach (Gabriel 2000; Boje 2008; Brown 2002; Czarniawska 1999). Brown and Humphreys (2003) provide a telling tale of how higher education managers try to convey epic stories of their interventionist success that are largely contradicted by the tragic tales employees relate commenting the same organizational phenomenon. Gabriel argues that the use of such rhetorical tropes in analyses reflects the poetic, interpretative story-work organizational members do on a daily basis, and that the tales to be distilled from this meaning-giving practice are sources with powerful analytic value (2000: 35). As Brown et al. note, stories "are the means by which executives manage and the disaffected resist" (2003: 325). Following on this position, we now sketch two different and rivaling narratives developed at the occasion of a government committee that visited NWU to study reported irregularities supposedly representing the lack of transformation at the institution. In response to the report of this task team, NWU management presented the success of its merger in terms of diversity as against the team's critical counter narrative (Humphrey and Brown 2002: 421ff) that assessed the merger as largely a continuation of the divide that characterized the South African HE situation before it was 'transformed' by government's initiative in 2004. We will juxtapose these 'epic' and 'tragic' narratives on 'transformation' to illustrate the contested character of diversity practice and rhetoric in South African Higher Education.

**Two rivaling narratives.**

In 2008 several critical incidents occurred on the NWU Mafikeng campus, which led to a government installed fact-finding committee visiting the university in October of that same year. The campus, located on the Botswana border in the rural Tswana hinterland of the Gauteng mining zone, was closed two times during the 2008 academic year. Students blocked the main entrance, burned tires and prohibited class attendance, upon which university management suspended classes and exams for several weeks. In the recent past of South Africa's HE history, campus unrest has not been unusual, but this was the first serious case of campus closure after the restructuration of the sector. As the Minister of Education decided to install a task team to investigate the causes of the incidents, and more broadly how the NWU merger had been doing in terms of the wider transformation, the ANC government wanted to accomplish with the restructuration, this investigation became a test case of its policy and the behavior of an important player in the field.[9] What follows is an analysis of the 'failed transformation' (tragic) narrative as we read the report of the task team to the then minister Pandor can be called[10], followed by a similar analysis of the 'defense (epic) narrative' presented in two reactions written by Theuns Eloff, NWU's vice-chancellor since 2004.

*The tragic tale.*

The Task Team (TT) report published in the Government Gazette tells a sixty page long story of the flaws of the multi-campus merger of NWU. This story was composed after "six days listening to over 387 individuals representing various constituencies in the University" (TT

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[9] In March 2008, the then Minister of Education, Mrs Naledi Pandor also announced the establishment of a Ministerial Committee to "investigate discrimination in public higher education institutions, with particular focus on racism and to make appropriate recommendations to combat discrimination and to promote social cohesion." The Committee, chaired by University of Cape Town academic, Prof Crain Soudien, The document was released for comment in November 2008, and critically dealt with in the bulletin of HESA (see Soudien 2008; HESA 2010).

[10] Including a separate report for the TT written by CHET director Nico Cloete.

2009: 59). The TT, evaluating the viability of the NWU as an institution and taking UKZN as the point of reference, concluded that the university was performing "well above national averages…. As and aggregate organizational entity…. Is doing well and seems set to play an important role in the North West Province, and has even more potential to play a greater role nationally" (ibid. 61). This judgment, based upon student success rate, staff performance, financial situation, multilingualism and governance, surprises given the grim testimonies of failure in the field of "overcoming the apartheid-induced divide between historically white and historically black institutions", next to "promoting a more equitable staff and student body" – the first two strategic goals of the merger as published in the same Government Gazette of 2003. It seems that this judgment is rather based on the set merger goals that refer to improving the university's structural efficiency policy and results, rather than the redress part of the merger process, on to which the terms of reference for the TT predominantly refer ("causes for disruptions, …… integrating policies and practices across all campuses, ……..enhancing social cohesion and a new institutional culture").  It is around these latter elements that an image is painted of a neglected black campus at Mafikeng, subjugated by the still predominantly white and dominant Potchefstroom campus where also the institutional office resides. The third campus, Vaal triangle, is portrayed as a place well underway toward the exemplary redressed university of the new era, with a "progressive campus culture that tries to inculcate a sense of oneness and an appreciation of the diversity of its student population" (ibid.: 54). The story develops on the testimony of staff, management, council, forum, and students from each campus, added with written (sometimes) anonymous letters of information. As to the Mafikeng campus the TT establishes "a generally poor staff work ethic" and a situation that "staff, and also students, … commonly and indignantly refer to as the 'Potchi(sic!)fication' of the NWU." (ibid.: 14). The local management', faced with the disruptions and campus protests, is characterized as expressing " a sense of desperation with these 'external' influences on the University… (not having a) plan or mechanism to deal with them". This image clearly contributes to the image of a 'puppet on a string' of the Potch/Insitutional management. Student and staff declarations cited also point to the "fractured relationship between management and themselves", leading to the demand for "the resignation of both the Campus Rector and the Vice-Chancellor". (ibid.: 17). "A marriage of convenience", in which the one partner Potchefstroom was 'suffocating Mafikeng' is related to the hostility to the new logo, "seen as the symbolic of the federal structure…. with Potchefstroom campus permanently on top, in a dominant position" (ibid.).

Testimonies taken by the TT at Potchefstroom campus – considerably less pages are spent to these - reveal that its management acknowledges that equity and redress still constitute a "significant challenge" and that integration is taking place during social events and sports meetings. Specific meetings with students, including representatives of the Student Representative Council (SRC), are reported as showing strong discrepancies between black and white students in terms of (cultural) in- and exclusion. The TT concludes that "white students saw their black counterparts almost as guests ("non-whites"), and not as equals." (ibid. 26; see also NWU 2007).

Concluding on the Mafikeng disruption the TT maintains that the current situation of distrust by staff and students at this campus has been a major seedbed (with distrust of management, supposed maladministration of the leaders, including the Rector) for external (political) forces to try and affect university policy and practice. Persistent lack of cooperation with the other campuses, notably Potchefstroom, is summarized in the one joint activity on curriculum equalization, or alignment, which is presented by Mafikeng academic as one-way traffic (except in one case). Here the TT hardly conceals its mistrust of the Institutional

Management's claim of real progress. It further underlines this "deep sense of inequality" by stating that "the overriding impression given was one of an astounding lack of collaboration. None of the staff present had co-taught a course at Potchefstroom or Vaal campuses, nor had anybody from Potchefstroom come to their department. The Task team was not told about any plans or funds for staff or student exchanges between the campuses". (ibid. 30). It finishes by expressing the view that the "near terminal loss of trust, common vision and even sense of decorum between management, students, organised labour and general academic and support staff at Mafikeng campus" are unlikely to be resolved by the 'legalistic' and 'security' oriented approach of management (ibid.: 33).

This rather tragic picture is further corroborated in the TT's evaluation of the multi-campus governance model when this model is named the principal reason for the failed integration as "it is not the strong problem-solving management model that is needed if unequal institutions with vastly different cultures and practices are to 'merge'" (ibid. 38). The slow and uneven program alignment, and uneven and weak results on the most important academic performance indicators – none of the scientific publications being the result of collaboration between scientists from different campuses – , next to a language policy that black staff and students regard as favouring Afrikaans speakers and a "labour relations policy that failed to develop an inclusive and functional labour relations system" are presented as so many signs of failing institutional integration. This implies that the TT is of the opinion that the merger has thus far been unable to produce a unified institutional culture, echoing an important conclusion on the role of culture in the CHE document with respect to the merged HE sector as a whole (Higgins 2007). The reader is left with a picture of a hopelessly divided university, inhabited by both demoralized and detached students and staff people, ruled by a management that is either incapable or unwilling to see this reality, lacking the policy framework to infuse diversity in the institution as an instrument of effective transformation and equity, and with no "sufficient social life and interaction among the three campuses, except for the three official days a year designated for social networking" (ibid: 58).

At the end of the TT report we read that the team had come to these conclusions within an atmosphere that can hardly be called favourable for unbiased fact-finding. It is contended that "senior management displayed doubt, lack of trust and paranoia about the intentions of the Minister in appointing the TT, regardless of the documented terms of reference", and that it team had to confront questions about its legitimacy and good faith, and a community biased by a tendentious newsletter by the Vice-Chancellor. Thus the members of the team left the institution that showed "a sense of deep mistrust … about the Minister's motives in appointing them" (ibid: 59). This mistrust can hardly have been taken away by the recommendations by the TT. In these the Mafikeng campus management is strongly discredited for being incoherent and indecisive. Even terms like 'redeployment' are being used (ibid.: 62). The Department of Education is suggested to take the lead in establishing a joint forum with the community in which the campus operates, in order to find a political solution for the permanent contestation infringing the campus. Taken together these suggestions disqualify NWU's Mafikeng campus leadership as a capable player in the field. Consequently NWU's general management is suggested to reconsider its academic project "to become a single university".  This appears to mean that the other campuses are to help the Mafikeng campus to strengthen "a selected number of strategic areas", where students would receive preparatory education to be further developed on one of the other two campuses. This degradation of the Mafikeng campus is in fact a strong verdict on the success claim of the NWU merger. There are further blows that NWU receives in these recommendations, such as the suggestion to stopping apparently non-productive social functions and spending the

money instead on substantial exchange programmes, putting real effort in turning the Potchefstroom campus more diverse, and finally inculcating a more inclusive institutional culture, especially at the Potchefstroom campus. All of this is clearly seems to be telling the message of an unfinished, even largely failing, merging project, in which diversity does not lead to innovation but rather remains a symbol of the perpetuation of the past divisions.

*The epic tale.*
One year after the report of the TT to the Minister the NWU Vice-chancellor's Newsletter to the university community reflects on the events of the year 2009. Positive outcomes of the Higher Education Quality Committee's institutional audit are predicted, NWU is remembered to have received the PriceWaterhouseCoopers reward of best corporate governed university in South Africa, and the year is characterized as one with uninterrupted academic activities and stability on all campuses. The latter refers to improvements on the Mafikeng campus as a result of better communication and relations with all stakeholders, including students. What is more, all stakeholders are said to have engaged on issues of transformation and social cohesion. Special attention is given to the progress made in the field of academic programme alignment and a small but significant header announces that "we have (finally) merged!" This assertion is supported by reference to the outcome of meetings and publications in the popular press in which NWU is lauded for being "far ahead of the sector in terms of core business, systems and processes" and "only institution that provided statistics on successes of the merger, including undergraduates pass rates, research outputs, innovation activities and financial stability. " The Minister's Merger Unit is also said to have shown itself extremely satisfied with the successes … achieved" (NWU 2009a).

These triumphant statements perfectly resemble the narrative produced almost a year earlier in relation to the Task Team report which we presented above as the tragic tale of transformation. It was then that Theuns Eloff apparently felt obliged to respond to the 'allegations' presented in the TT report and produce his story of the merger so far. In a reaction sent to the Mail and Guardian, South Africa's most authoritative newspaper, he starts by enumerating NWU's recent prices for multilingualism, governance, and innovation. Next he questions the legitimacy of ("outside of the HE Act provisions") and defective methodology used by (superficial, untested, hearsay, erroneous, without feedback) the TT. Although he announces to use the TT conclusions as a source for further introspection, he gives a list of examples demonstrating that the research on which these were based can hardly be considered serious. Particularly the allegations on the progress at Potchefstroom on the issue of diversity are contradicted. These allegations are either 'prescribed' (with regard to 'archaic initiation practices'), 'based on anonymous reports' and 'devoid of truth', or denying recent policy and practice changes (with regards to allegations of 'racism' and 'preservation of Potch as a white and Afrikaans campus'). He recognizes that staff transformation (indicating the level of change in its ethnic composition) is slow, but that the TT has not taken notice of the set targets and monitoring of this process. The distrust and miscommunication on the part of one campus (a clear reference to Mafikeng) is attributed by Eloff to "a small minority of staff and students (that) thrive on rumours and unfounded allegations. To blame this on management (as if the mistrust is their fault) is at least ingenious and at most malicious" (NWU 2009a: 3).

In a more extensive special newsletter, Eloff – backed by the university council – directed himself to the NWU community as a whole (NWU 2009b), explaining the negative publicity NWU received as a result of the TT report (made available on the NWU website). This newsletter is a well-crafted statement, telling a fully-fletched organizational story on the basis

of a distinction between (and actually playing with the concepts of) facts and fictions. In this rhetorical jewel (see our italics) he starts listing ten facts worth listing. Five of them are negatively formulated and focused on the working of the TT:

1. The appointment of the Ministerial Task Team was *not* in line with the provisions of the HE Act;
2. The TT *hardly* spent enough time at the NWU to do an in-depth investigation and analysis;
3. The report *failed* to distinguish between fact and reality on the one hand, and untested allegations, perceptions, total untruths and even malicious rumour on the other;
4. NWU was *not* allowed the opportunity to comment on the factual issues in the Report;
5. The so-called "audi alteram partem" rule was *not* adhered to.

The other five focus on the efforts made by the NWU itself:

6. NWU is *totally committed* to make our merger a success and to achieve the merger objectives;
7. Mergers are said to be long term projects and indeed NWU has *not yet* overcome *all* its challenges (here a scientific article is quoted to proof the veracity of the statement);
8. NWU is willing to treat the *relevant* aspects of the Report as a tool for ongoing introspection;
9. There is *no alternative* for the present governance and management model of the university, which the TT claims is failing (despite recognizing that it bears fruits in one of NWU's campuses);
10. NWU *deliberately* started with a focus on quality and efficiency, while *simultaneously* following a parallel route of equity transformation – and this has worked well. This statement is followed by the earlier list of achievements and prizes, adding the most recent positive result in student pass rates. It finishes with the equity targets for staff profile;

Following on these 'facts' six fictions are presented:

1. There is widespread racism at Potch campus and some at the Vaal Triangle: this is stated to be based on isolated remarks by students at Potch, which are, though undeniably wrong in their formulations, in no way representative;
2. The presumed racism is supposed to be tied to the NWU's language policy, which in the report is suggested to lead to the reintroduction of separate development [a very serious reference to the old days apartheid policies, FK/HW]. Generally positive student evaluations are denied, as well as the fact that most of the language policy is directed at promoting the understanding of English;
3. Mafikeng campus should be in a "terminal state of decline academically". Investments in improving the campus academic performance are systematically neglected, or misinterpreted by the TT. Notwithstanding progress being made, there are 'challenges' (on the research output) and 'further investment' is necessary;
4. The student unrest of 2008 should have had a reasonable basis and was mostly the result of bad management. This is plainly denied, and the disruptions are largely attributed to political maneuverings and trade union interference. Management is falsely accused of being legalistic and uncompromising – but is actually to be praised for keeping the law;
5. Restructuring and redeploying Mafikeng Campus Management is reasonable. How can this be asserted on the basis of a one hour meeting with the same management? Besides, university council has investigated student and staff complaints and found to lack substance;

6. Students are not treated equally when charged. This reference to rule offenders from Mafikeng and Potchefstroom being punished differently is said to be untested and untrue. Re-looking consistency in the NWU disciplinary code is suggested, though.

Eloff finishes his tale by expressing the hope that 'the framework of "facts" and "fictions"' will give the NWU community an idea about the approach of management of what he calls "this difficult issue", announcing faculty visits to further discuss it. He suggest that all this should "gradually put behind us", working towards new challenges, because "it is in succeeding and performing well in our core business that we will eventually silent our critics, internally, as well as externally…" This rhetorically powerful statement can indeed be seen a significant move in the politics of institutional sensemaking. The case also seems to suggest that a narrative approach to issues of sensemaking can provide a worthwhile hermeneutic tool for interpreting the various discourses presented in this case. It is an interesting coincidence and almost ironic twist that in this case Theuns Eloff seems to choose to particularly play the narrative and story card: ridiculing the 'facts' presented in the TT as stories and fictions (or not representative), while at the same time using and presenting his (success)stories as 'facts' (and of course being representative).

**Conclusion**

The idea of diversity has travelled the world and has gained in popularity ever since. It almost seems to have become a universal notion of what the future world will look like: an increasingly diverse world (cf. Shortell and Kaluzny 2006: 9). The concept of diversity has also hit South Africa hard and has become a buzz word in all sectors, including higher education. But despite its global and universal odour, wherever the ideas land, it gets a glocal (cf. Friedman 1994) flavour. Diversity in South Africa's higher education cannot be grasped without as clear sense of its colonial and apartheid past; diversity in South Africa cannot be understood without a local contextualization. No travelling idea lands and leaves again without being scratched, impregnated and altered by the local context in which it is used in socio-economic and socio-political configurations.

Which version of the NWU story on transformation and merger success is most convincing is difficult to establish. It is also difficult to determine the appeal and support both tales have within the university community. What we do have is a clearly epic story promoted by (top) management, with champions of transformation, achievement, success, mission, quest and sacrifice (Gabriel 2000: 84) to the goal of making a success out of the political merger project. There is also pride, and some postalgic (Ybema 2004) projection in turning diversity into an asset, a source of innovation. The multi-campus university is presented as well on its way toward redressing the cleavages of diversity from the past into the state of desired transformation. The counter-narrative of the tragic kind, transmitted through the government's TT report, depicts the black university community as the non-deserving victim of the Potchefstroom villain, with traumatic experiences, feelings of loss, anger, fear, and blame (ibid.).

What these tales do make clear is that the concept of diversity, closely linked to redress and transformation, is a fairly sensitive one, and subject to permanent institutional contestation. Echoes of the past, moreover, still gives the concept a somewhat bitter aftertaste, which can explain why the 'innovation through diversity' slogan rouses such ambiguous reactions. The critical incident we took to demonstrate the vicissitudes of the concept in the South African Higher Education context is indeed much more than a co-incident. It meticulously

demonstrates the heart of the social and political process SA is actually going through, including the fierce discussions and struggles over civil transformation. The higher education sector and its restructuration and merging project is, for that matter, only one of the fields in which this battle is being fought, and the NWU case as represented by two 'telling' tales hopefully makes clear that studying the politics of sensemaking can add to deepening the understanding of this complex phenomenon.

As the brief historical overview of both campuses shows, there is next to postalgia (Ybema 2004) also a strong feeling of organizational nostalgia (Gabriel 2000) for the old days of Potch and Mafikeng, not necessarily or even primarily in terms of a (political) longing for a kind of restoration of the past, but more in a sense of pride of what has been accomplished in the recent past and present. This history shows that for both Mafikeng and Potch institutional life has always been an uphill struggle, in which the government was and always will be a key-player. Although there is nos/postalgia in the narratives of both sides, they are of course of a different nature as the political loyalties and configurations have been so different. Maybe that Eloff's epic tale can be interpreted as an attempt to not only merge the institutions, but also to merge a sense of pride in what the two institutions have achieved together in dealing with the government.

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