Castells in Africa

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Preface

In addition to publishing three seminal contributions made by Manuel Castells during his time in South Africa, this volume brings together new and previously published insights on how Castells has shaped research and thinking on higher education and development in Africa.

What was previously published has been edited and, in some cases, substantially reworked to fit the ambit of the collection.

The new material is to be found in Chapters 1 and 2, as well as in the concluding chapter. Chapter 1 traces the trajectory of Manuel Castells’s association with Africa, mediated in the main by the Centre for Higher Education Trust (CHET) since 1998. The chapter also provides the reasoning behind the publication of this volume. Chapter 2 focuses on a few key Castellian concepts to show how, when brought together, they might shine some light on how universities function in the present time, particularly in relation to development. The chapter brings into relief what Castells augured globalisation would mean for higher education (and development) – trends to which most policy-makers, analysts and researchers simply did not pay sufficient attention.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 present Castells’s own thinking on the role of higher education globally and in Africa. Chapter 3 was first published in 2001 in Challenges of Globalisation: South African debates with Manuel Castells. It is republished in this volume with minor corrections. Chapters 4 and 5 are transcripts of two public
lectures delivered by Manuel Castells in South Africa. The first lecture, ‘The Role of Universities in Development, the Economy and Society’, was delivered on 7 August 2009 at the University of the Western Cape in Cape Town. The second public lecture, ‘Reconceptualising Development in the Global Information Age’, was delivered at the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (STIAS) at Stellenbosch University on 5 June 2014. Both chapters are edited transcripts of these lectures.

The remaining chapters are versions of previously published chapters, edited to speak more directly to the ideas and concepts that emerged from Castells’s lectures and his interactions with higher education scholars in South Africa.

Chapter 6 is an edited version of ‘Chapter 1: The Roles of Universities in the African Context’, originally published in Knowledge Production and Contradictory Functions in African Higher Education (see Cloete & Maassen 2015). The chapter traces how African universities have been grappling with the Castellian functions by situating them in the historical context in which African universities were established and steered.

Chapter 7 comprises edited excerpts from the first two chapters of the publication Universities and Economic Development in Africa (see Cloete et al. 2011). The chapter draws on empirical evidence to establish what the predominant notions of the roles of African universities are – both at institutional and government levels. It shows that the notions are mixed and often not in alignment within higher education systems, and even if there is a strong notion of the development role of the university as knowledge producer and/or system-level alignment, the knowledge production aspirations are not matched by the realities at the coal-face.

Chapter 8 includes selected sections on the role of research in African universities from several chapters in Knowledge Production and Contradictory Functions in African Higher Education (see Cloete et al. 2015). The chapter has been updated to include previously unpublished data, and draws on the empirical evidence to explore how universities are managing their contradictory functions, particularly as a group of elite African universities aspire to elevate
the role of research. It provides a more in-depth analysis of the research policies and processes at African universities, and brings to the fore the need for system-level differentiation to ameliorate the tensions inherent in single universities – traditionally orientated towards training – attempting to strengthen research.

Chapter 9 was originally published as the chapter ‘University Engagement as Interconnectedness: Indicators and insights’ in Knowledge Production and Contradictory Functions in African Higher Education (see Van Schalkwyk 2015). The substantially rewritten version of the chapter in this collection examines how current project-based research activities are failing to strengthen the knowledge production function of African universities, in so doing, curtailing their ability to participate in globalised knowledge networks. Unlike preceding chapters that honed in on the relationship between the university’s function as knowledge producer and its contribution to development, Chapter 9 explores the university in Africa in the context of Castells’s network society.

Chapter 10 provides a synthesis of the empirically-focused Chapters 6 to 9, and concludes that universities in Africa are struggling to balance the contradictory Castellian functions; all the more so when they are expected to emphasise research. The chapter explores who should shoulder the blame for the slow pace of progress towards research-led universities in Africa. And rather than concluding on a sombre note, the chapter reminds us to keep putting Castells to work in order to better understand the systemic and structural impediments hampering the transformation of African higher education.

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