

# **When Change Isn't Change**

## *Rethinking Transformation in African Higher Education*

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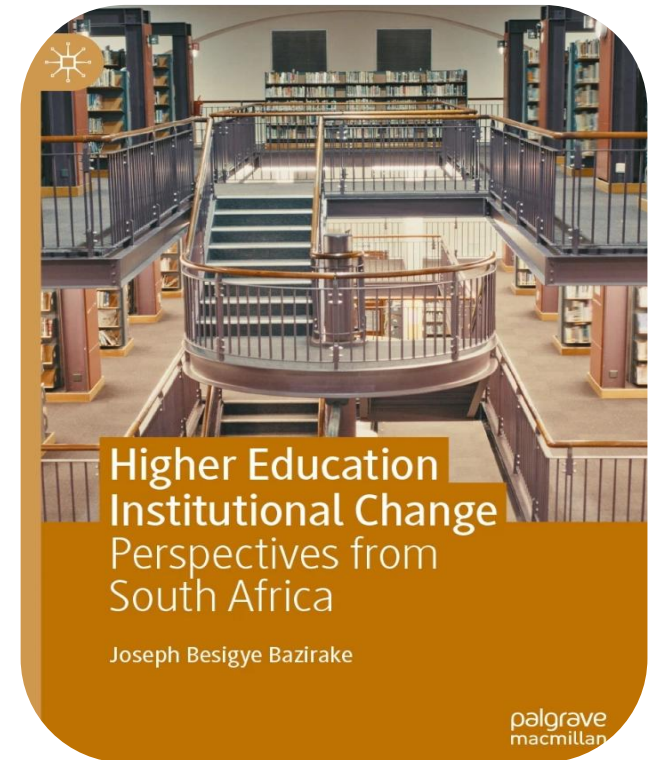
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# Introducing the contradictions...

What kinds of questions are we asking of Higher Education globally and in Africa?

- Excellence vs Transformation
- Access vs Success
- Reform vs Reproduction
- Compliance vs Commitment



# Context

African higher education at a glance:

- Colonial legacies
- Global pressures
- Local demands
- Internal structural/cultural/human dynamics

*Are we witnessing real change or its appearance?*

*What counts as evidence of change?*

# Central problem

- Expectations around [institutional] change in Higher Education are typically portrayed as a linear, coherent process, culminating in improved structures and outcomes. However, reality is often messy and remains constantly contested.

# Conceptual Shift

- Rethinking institutional change in HE, not as a linear or uniform process, but as a context-sensitive and multi-dimensional undertaking with inherent contradictions;
  - Change and continuity can coexist.
  - Progress and resistance may occur together.
  - Tensions between structure and agency are often a premise for the emergence of change.

# Proposition 1:

## **Context matters**

Institutional change cannot be imported or imposed without a deep understanding of historical and cultural specificities. Legacies and current pressures need to be navigated in ways that are locally grounded.

## Proposition 2:

# History as a resource for departure

Framing historical trajectories as *paths of departure* invites a more dynamic understanding of institutional change. Rather than treating history as a deterministic script, this perspective recognises it as a contested space from which actors can envision and enact alternative futures.

# Proposition 3: **Change is layered**

Effective transformation must attend to all levels of institutional life; policy, structure, culture, and everyday practice. Neglecting one layer risks undermining progress in another.

# Proposition 4: **Equilibrium is negotiated...** continually

Institutional stability is not a given. It is achieved (or lost) through continuous negotiation among stakeholders, and the alignment (or misalignment) between internal values and external demands.

# Key aspects of change

- Power/ 'Ownership'
- Take note of superficiality of Change (Policy compliance, symbolic inclusion)
- Policy Implications (context-sensitive policy)

# Implications

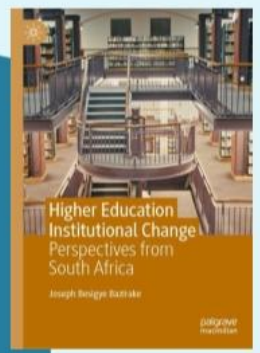
- Need longitudinal, context-rich studies.
- The need for criticality, as an openness to viable alternatives. See CUS projects at Mandela University and the ACUS-Africa network; see also the Musizi University project in Uganda and Ashesi University in Ghana.
- Space for dialogue and contestation.. beyond margins.

# Reframing Transformation

- Transformation is ongoing, contested and uneven. There is no final endpoint. It is not meant to be a checklist but acknowledged as a process.

# Final Provocations

- What is meaningful transformation?
- How do we embrace productive tension?
- Universities/pluraliversities/extraversities...are we open to different Higher Education forms?



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# Higher Education Institutional Change

Perspectives from South Africa

This book considers Higher Education institutional change as a layered process, where change is interconnected across institutional arrangements.

- Positions Higher Education institutional change within both the global context and the specific South African landscape
- Considers historical trends and recent events such as the "#Mustfall" movement and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic
- Adopts an interdisciplinary approach by weaving together historical analysis, sociopolitical context, and case studies

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- Discussion and Q&A