

Editorial

This special issue has its roots in a long-term collaborative relationship between scholars at the Universities of Hyderabad (UoH) and Johannesburg (UJ). In an effort to foster exchanges and research synergies between Indian and South African scholars, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the managements of these two universities (UoH and UJ), the purpose of which was to create, sustain, and renew intellectual work of common interest and create opportunities for south-south theorising and empirical projects. As a result of this, two books focusing on citizenship, social capital and political transitions in India and South Africa have been published (co-edited by Sujata Patel and Tina Uys, both in 2012) and a number of other sub-projects have been initiated between staff at the two institutions.

A new *Student Communities Project* was launched in 2011 embracing primarily surveys and comparable questionnaires in India and South Africa. Although a different project, the core ideas marking the earlier work of the Indian and South African scholars centred around the politics of ‘institutional transitions’, is retained. The current emphasis of our joint research is to consider universities as spaces in which numerous and multi-levelled struggles are currently being waged. Hence our title: *Youth, Diverse Student Communities, and Institutional Transitions in India and South Africa*. Whilst recognising the contextual specificities, the special issue reveals connecting threads and commonalities. Young Indians and South Africans face various challenges today with respect to demands for educational resources, secure employment, personal security, equal access, and freedom of expression, amongst other issues. The articles solicited touch on these issues embedded within a select number of central themes.

The twelve papers in this special issue offer original research that reflects in different ways on *the university* as a place in which identities are socially constructed and resisted, a site where citizens actively seek redress and accessible higher education, as enclaves encouraging select social networks and class mobility, as a facilitator of social justice discourses, and as a context wrestling with revisions and reinventions of curricula.

In the first article, *Seeking Barriers to the Development of Knowledge Transgressivity Potential: Lessons from a Postgraduate Student Survey at the University of Johannesburg*, Dworzanowski-Venter and Chagonda, focus on the differentiation of universities in South Africa, and specifically the tensions between ‘research-focused’ and ‘teaching-focused’ institutions against the background of historical and structural inequalities. They argue in favour of efforts towards long-term institutional integration and interinstitutional ‘knowledge transgressivity potential’ which could be developed amongst postgraduates at UJ and other South African institutions. In the second article, *Profiling Disadvantaged Undergraduate Students at a Major Higher Education Institution in South Africa*, Mpofu addresses the academic progress of South African students by differentiating them in terms of what is referred to as ‘the quintile system’. He uses a sustainable livelihoods approach to frame his research. His results reveal why low quintile students take longer to achieve a degree than high quintile students, and consequently the difficulties they face in breaking through the barriers of disadvantage in contemporary South African tertiary institutions. The first two articles thus focus on the need for levelling the playing fields in the post-apartheid South African tertiary sector.

In the third article, *The Idea of a University: A Sociological Study of Diversity and Inclusion of a Central University in India*, Gundemeda offers sociohistorical insights and empirical analysis to examine the emergence and prevailing constitution of the modern Indian university. He sets out to build understanding of the perceptual factors driving the expansion of education in India, and highlights the role of ascribed and achieved markers in conditioning students’ aspirations and ideologies. Some of the macro-level concerns are picked up later in the fourth article, Sen and Gundemeda’s piece, on what happens in classrooms in present-day knowledge societies. In the *Classroom as a Site of Learning: A Sociological Analysis of Students’ Opinion of the Culture of Learning of a University In India*, they probe the epistemology of learning through a study of the tools of learning, patterns of learning and core social relationships.

The findings speak to key debates in Indian higher education on why the nexus of student, professor and classroom matter for intrinsic learning and successful holistic development.

In *Youth and Marriage: A Study of Changing Marital Choices among the University Students in India*, Ramsheena and Gundemeda reiterate that marital choices are constrained by normative and value systems, and by the vestiges of caste and religion. Higher Education can potentially engage these regulated decision-making processes, given progressive social spaces allowing for multicultural interactions. The data shows, however, that marital choices remain inhibited by prevailing sociocultural factors. There are similar sentiments expressed in Smuts, Doods and Reijer's paper on *Perceptions of Sexuality and Gendered Sexual Roles among Students at a South African University: Exploring Heteronormativity on Campus*. In probing possible heteronormative and normative gendered views, they found some evidence of homophobia and the prevalence of heteronormative views held by South African students. Religion and family are key in shaping views on the topic as well as the fields of study pursued. In both these articles, the fifth and sixth, the university is found to be insufficiently transformative and counteractive of conventional ideas and practices.

The connecting threads of the seventh, eighth and ninth articles, speak to the place of trust, the enhancement of interpersonal solidarities and personal acumen in the South African tertiary sector. The empirical work on diverse student groupings, role models and the prospect of emigration, has strong relevance for the Indian context as well. Binikos and Rugunanan focus on *Racial Integration among Students at the University of Johannesburg*. They argue that while much effort has been placed on the macro-level structural transformation of the higher education sector, far less attention has been given to the pace and nature of integration amongst students. They reveal mainstream and contradictory attitudes that need to be better understood. In the article entitled, *The Selection of Academic Role Models by First Year University Students*, Kaziboni and Uys found that undergraduate students at UJ went beyond socially ascribed statuses in selecting candidates of standing as role models for themselves. This study's findings challenge those of many oth-

ers, which suggests that role models can only be sought from within demographic groups resembling that of students. Uys and Senekal address a contemporary concern about emigration of young, skilled people out of South Africa. In *'Do We Stay or Do We Leave?' The Role of Trust and Engagement in Students Deciding Whether to remain in South Africa*, they use a typology to assess responses to real or perceived threats given varying levels of trust in the government's ability to protect their interests as citizens. Four possible responses are discerned: Trusting engagement, trusting disengagement, distrusting engagement and distrusting disengagement. The authors reflect on the implications of the four responses for South Africa's youth.

The identification of constraints and efforts to assert rights are reflected in the last three articles, tenth to twelfth, referred to here. Raj and Gundemeda analyse the views of Hyderabad University students on the controversial topic of reservation policy. In their article, *The Idea of Social Justice: A Sociological Analysis of the University Students' Reflections on the Reservation Policy in India*, they show that much disagreement exists on the question of affirming students on the basis of caste, religion and gender, but support is witnessed for disabled students. Beneficiaries tend to be stigmatised, which leads to the negation of their rights. Nyundu, Naidoo and Chagonda look at *'Getting Involved on Campus: Student Identities, Student Politics, and Perceptions of the SRC'*. Here they argue that students at UJ are interested in politics and active citizenry. They draw on Rational Choice Theory to explain levels of student participation in politics, and show that race and class remain differentiating forces, whilst gender is less significantly so. Playing a role at the SRC level may result in students gaining confidence to participate later in national politics. In the last article on *Social Background Factors Affecting the Academic Success of First Year Sociology Students at UJ*, Van Zyl-Schalekamp and Mthombeni, show the intervening effects of language, school attended, being a first-generation student, type of accommodation and household structure, on the ultimate success of students.

Universities are transforming – but how rapidly and towards what end? The articles in this special issue hint at the fact that social background continues to matter, both in India and South Africa, configuring advantages for some

and disadvantages for others. Stigmatisation, homophobia, discrimination and the slow pace of integration pose 'risks' and threats to the emancipatory and intellectual project of universities. In an environment of insecurity and a lack of trust, structures operate in a technicist, pragmatic fashion with few efforts at building colle-

gial and connected social relationships. Herein lies some of the key challenges in constructing truly democratic student communities and institutional transitions in our two countries.

The authors invite feedback from readers and the guest editors would like to thank the editors of the JSSA for this special issue opportunity.

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Guest Editors