Thank you, Faculty of Humanities, for hosting me and for arranging this very special event. This is, in many ways the culmination of our efforts with the book that began more than six years ago. Our book was released in September last year; we have sold a few hundred books including internationally, and have had more than 1000 e-book downloads, so our work is out there. I have given several talks nationally. We have had good feedback, and I wish to thank many of you for your support.

I would like to recognise Prof John van den Berg in the audience, who is a professor of mathematics at UP, a fellow comrade and friend. Like me, John is amongst many UKZN exiles who have found a happy home here at the UP. John fought an honourable battle for the sanctity of the UKZN senate as described in Chapters 9 and 10 of our book.

The recent difficulties at the UCT and elsewhere show that even some of our established universities are still grappling with very fundamental questions about their purpose in post-1994 South Africa. UCT, as you will recall, was not impacted by the mergers of a decade ago. UCT has been paying a watchful eye on developments at UKZN, as it should be. I was very grateful when the UCT Academic Freedom Committee intervened on our behalf during the difficulties that John van den Berg and I faced in 2008. Subsequently, I was invited to deliver the 2009 TB Davie Academic Freedom Lecture, and in November last year participated in a seminar with Prof John Higgins at the English Dept on academic freedom.

UCT’s approach, post-1994, was to strive to being a world-class university. UCT has been able to attract world-class academics, including world-class black African academics, not many of whom are South African. The overall student population is low, a little over 20
thousand, the classes are therefore small, and they have been able to attract the best students across all disciplines from across the country and continent. Their academic structures appear to be solid. They have a functional senate, and an intelligent vice chancellor, one who is committed to South African development.

UCT is paying attention to transformation. There are programmes to affirm black African academics, and there is strong support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. So, why the crisis? What is UCT missing? While UCT should be the envy for many other universities in the country, why is that institution facing difficulties?

I will try to answer this question at the end.

We have sold most of our books in the Western Cape, which is revealing. I think that UCT folk have correctly concluded that the issues that we have written about in our book are not a matter that only concerns a university a thousand miles away, but if left unchecked these problems could spread to our other major universities in South Africa, and already there are some rumblings along these lines.

UKZN is an important national asset. And while many of us should be angry at what has happened to our university, we cannot and should not stand by the wayside and watch things disintegrate. We all have an obligation to support the efforts of getting that institution back on even keel again. The job is going to be a tough one for the new VC, with the institution facing an enormous deficit.

But, that is not the worst problem. I think that that the deep racial divisions that have been sown, the pursuit of transformation along narrow racist lines, the rise of the disciplinary university, the politicisation of the Council, the weakening of the Senate, the flight of excellent academics, the clumsy university structure that has done away with faculties, the ineffectual and politicised SRC, and so on are only some of the legacies of the Makgoba administration, that will impact for many years into the future. Financial woes pale in
comparison to the erosion of the very idea of a university. The university might not recover
to everything that it could have achieved post-merger.

The Human and Social Sciences have a vital role to play in leading social discourse in South
Africa. During the heady days of Apartheid, some of the greatest thinkers about a future
free South Africa came from your disciplines. However, the humanities have been weakened
during the formative years of our democracy, a matter that deserves academic scrutiny.
Perhaps we let our guard down too quickly? After years of struggling for a free and
democratic South Africa we all felt we needed to get back to a life of normalcy. We thought
the job was done. But, alas, our book shows what happens if we are not sufficiently vigilant
in democratic South Africa.

I am sorry that Christopher Merrett could not be here today. This brief presentation is being
done jointly by Christopher and me. This book was conceived and largely written five years
ago. Since we are dealing with big personalities in our book, we spent a considerable effort
getting our work vetted through a reputable human rights law firm in Johannesburg, and at
a cost.

The book’s purpose is to document and analyse the immediate aftermath of the creation of
the merged University of KwaZulu-Natal. It strives to make sense of much that was
inexplicable and seemed perverse; and was written as a salute to many people who strove
to maintain the ethos of a university whether they left the institution or stayed.

The book is not about any particular personality or individuals. Ours is a brief glimpse during
a critical period in the history of the merged institution. We report on events up to about
the time when Christopher and I were forced to leave the institution, as it turns out under
different circumstances. It is not my intention to report in any detail what we have written
in our book. I hope that you will buy the book and read first-hand accounts of grave
violations of what I refer to as the idea of the university. As John Higgins’ has pointed out,
ours is a practical case study of the undermining of academic freedom at a South African
institution.
Instead, I would like to present some of the ideas of the university that we hold dear, and these notions take on a new relevance given the current crisis that our universities across the land are experiencing. Let us discuss these at the end.

The **fundamental purpose** of a university is the enabling of critical, thoughtful and eloquent people: citizens who are equipped to speak truth to power whatever its complexion. Its training of accountants, lawyers, physicists, pharmacists and a host of other specialists is a secondary matter. The best graduates are able to apply reason and judgement to contemporary problems and interrogate the way power is exercised. This is particularly crucial in the light of South Africa’s history of intellectual conformism inherited from colonialism and apartheid.

The **academic process** occupies a unique, specially created space in which ideas and the freedom to articulate them are sovereign and guarded by specific conventions. The status of a well-researched and -argued case is greater than any particular office in the institution. There is a responsibility to objective truth, and to reject sloganeering, in the contestation of ideas, which (like music) has international conventions. The university belongs to all its members, including dissidents, and ceases to exist should these basic definitions of the academic process be abandoned. As Jonathan Jansen has observed, a university is defined solely by its intellectual project. Our experience at the UKZN, as we have reported in our book, was that the opposite was true.

**Academic rule** is the extension of academic freedom to matters of internal university governance. It provides logical and natural authority within an academic community and institution of higher education rooted in its guild origins. Both the Unesco recommendations and the Kampala Declaration support the concept of academic self-government with a democratic atmosphere and critical voices (John Higgins correctly refers to a horizontal democracy.) This highlights the importance of collegiality (but by no means rules out disagreement). Shared responsibility is particularly suited to an intellectual community: commitment to cerebral values, loyalty, mutual respect, and a collective and co-operative
approach. Elected deans once epitomised legitimate authority in the academy. Academic rule seems particularly appropriate to a relatively new constitutional democracy such as ours.

Both academic freedom and academic rule require a stable environment. Universities are national assets deserving of careful custodianship, not places for fashionable institutional experimentation, as we have experienced at UKZN. Universities are intensely political places, but should not be open to political expediency. They cannot be tied to specific political objectives that by definition constrain free thought and debate. Universities are structurally conservative places whose administrations provide an enabling environment for considered thought and the circulation of ideas. They have their own organic structure and do not need visionaries and messiahs: they are not churches, armies or businesses; but collectives.

The Constitution protects academic freedom. However, universities are no longer statutory bodies but subject to regulation by a government department as shown by the mergers of ten years ago. Legislation has enhanced the powers of Councils and effectively diminished those of Senates, which constitutes a threat to university autonomy. Authority has been transferred away from the world of reason and debate to people with a multiplicity of extraneous agendas as we experienced at UKZN. The Secrecy Bill also poses a threat to academia.

The greatest concern is the hold and influence of a global trend of managerialism imported from the commercial world. It has the potential to turn universities into academic factories dominated by contracted executives with short-term careerist or ideological agendas who believe they are the equivalent of CEOs, backed by a phalanx of managers and a hierarchy of lesser enforcers. Managerialism has also led to enormous salary disparities to the benefit of those giving orders. The resultant mindset is that of power and obedience, legalism, line management and a silo mentality, all foreign to a real university.
Consequently universities have become places of **bureaucracy** obsessed by measured outputs, rankings and what can be quantified (research units rather than inspired teaching, for instance). Elaborate systems have been erected to **prevent the exception**, and management has become negative work, for academics as well as admin staff. The system has attracted notably anti-intellectual personalities in many places who should be an anathema to the academy. Dissidence and contrary viewpoints are equated with insubordination and rapidly escalated to disciplinary status with accusations of bringing the institution into disrepute, a common theme that we have reported in our book.

Students are cast as customers and staff as **deployable human resources** subject to labour law within an instrumental view of higher education. The most innocuous documents are classified confidential, legalism reigns and meetings of the Senate are closed to observers at UKZN. Staff is rendered a fearful crowd of serfs demoralised by what appear, in the context of a university, to be irrational decisions. I have referred to this in my 2009 TB Davie Academic Freedom Lecture as ‘the emergence of the blue collar university’.

This type of university regime is backed up by a bloated **public relations and publicity** operation. However, Universities are judged by and gain their reputation from intellectual achievement (the quality of their graduating students, research, and contribution to communities) not on the strength of slogans, symbols, logos and glossy publications.

Amidst deep conflict over administrative attitudes and methods is the issue of **transformation**. This is our great South African story, the weight that we must carry from the past so that future generations can be freer.

However, in driving transformation along narrow racist lines, the transformational process has been undermined at UKZN. As Jane Duncan, former Director of the FXI, puts it in the Foreword that she very kindly wrote for us:

*Those who are genuinely committed to emancipatory academic work need to develop a language and set of practices that allow universities to become more reflective of the*
societies in which they operate, and contribute to the betterment of these societies, without falling into the trap of visionaries imposing a single line of march on these institutions to achieve these objectives. If this book offers one lesson, it is that UKZN management did not get this formula right: on the contrary, its strangling of basic democratic rights and freedoms set true transformation back many years. As a result, the project of developing a ‘democratising transformation’ as an alternative to ‘transformative managerialism’ remains as urgent and compelling as ever.

End quote.

Our experiences at the UKZN is that the demographic card is vigorously played employing methods that are reminiscent of apartheid by powerful people choosing to continue to portray themselves as victims. The outcome can be extreme divisiveness rather than the diversity demanded of a university; and the targeting of supposed enemies and obstacles that inevitably leads to the de-legitimisation of certain voices and the creation of an artificial crises. At UKZN, transformation encompassed constant change as a means of control.

I believe that we need to bring this discourse back ... more into the mainstream, rather than have this hijacked by opportunists and extremists as we have had at UKZN. I call for a new movement, a new civil rights movement for our universities that seeks to re-establish the foundations of our institutions of higher learning in democratic South Africa. This discourse should be led by academics. In order for this to happen, our academics need to be at the very forefront in leading society in addressing societal challenges.

We need to return to some basic principles that govern transformation:

- Our first obligation at universities is to produce quality research and quality thinking graduates for society. In the context of transformation, this means that we must produce more quality black African graduates for mainstream society.
- Transformation at our universities also means that we need to affirm individuals who are under-represented in our university system, and create a supportive and enabling environment for success. This is a deep seated moral requirement given our divided history.
• However, we need to desist from using racist means to achieve a non-racial ideal. This calls for intelligent stewardship of our universities, and the creation of a psychologically safe environment for these negotiations to take place. We need to pay attention to the language that we use in this discourse.

• We cannot destroy the idea of the university in this process, for universities are fragile places. Once broken, it is hard to fix as the UKZN will find out.

I give you an acid test for the validity of any discussion on race in South Africa today: if you role the clock back say 30 years and turn black into white, and white into black in your argument, then ask yourself whether PW Botha would have been proud of what it is that you are saying. If yes, then clearly we have a problem.

A successful leader will inspire people to greater heights, not bludgeon people to get out desired results. We need to think about this as we approach the subject of change in our higher education system.

Racism exists in South African society, and certainly at our universities as the Craine Soudine Report showed. We have had the despicable incidents of racism at the Reitz Residence at the University of the Free State a few years ago, and more latterly at the University of Pretoria, and several other places. However, UKZN has shown an increase in what is often, but incorrectly, referred to as reverse racism.

In Chapter 5 of our book, for instance, we describe the tragic incident that involved the rape of an international student at the Mabel Palmer residence at the Howard College campus, which unfortunately became a highly charged racial affair. Rather than rallying around the student who was violated, the Black African Academic Forum was critical of the mostly white staff who apparently only concerned themselves with the welfare of the student who was not black.

Unfounded claims of racism, often used to obscure rational debate, are also acts of racism. Racism is racism no matter the colour of the perpetrator.
So, let me come back to the issue at the UCT. UCT has strong liberal traditions and has staked its claims very highly on academic excellence. This is bound to come under political fire in the future. My strongest recommendation is that UCT must stand its ground very firmly in terms of its commitment to the ideals of the university in the face of increased political pressure and expediency.

There is, however, cultural alienation that black staff and students are clearly feeling that needs to be recognised and addressed, and this needs to be given attention. We all want a sense of belonging but we do also need to be careful of those who use cultural precepts for advantage, a matter that the Afrikaner nationalists used to great effect and ultimately to their downfall.

I have outlined a number of principled points that Christopher and I thought of when we wrote our book. You will need to read our work to find many concrete examples, each carefully researched, of how the idea of the university was severely eroded at UKZN.

Is there any hope? What advice can we give to academics?

Be proactive, actively engage in academic matters at your institution, support the establishment of an academic freedom committee at your institution, a matter that John van den Berg and I were centrally involved in promoting and which ultimately led to our downfall; academic freedom committees are now just as relevant as they were during apartheid; become more visible publicly, the broad society needs to understand the importance of the academy and this can only happen with academics being more engaging with the public and with government. Write, speak publicly. Get involved in commentating in impartial, objective ways on matters that are important for society. Distinguish very carefully between political-rhetoric and academic dialogue, the latter being well founded on evidence-based research, on logic, on principles, on precedent, on learning from history, respect for other view points, debate, consensus, and so on. Think about the role that you
should be playing in strengthening your academic structures, especially the Senate. We need more academic activism at our universities.

I would like to see the end of the professional university manager. We need to re-tread our senior university managers back into the academic trenches. I would suggest that some of these folk will not be able to comply with the intellectually offensive rules and regulations that they often impose on their academic colleagues, whom they often despise and simply see as workers.

In this discourse, one must ask ‘where are the critical black voices?’ To answer this question, I would once again like to roll the clock backwards by about 30 years – my 30 year rule – when those who stood to gain from the system were silent in their complicity as they did not want to rock the boat, or be labelled a traitor, or a sell-out ... and there were all sorts of derogatory words for this. It was convenient to be silent. Well, I believe the same applies today, only the complexion has changed.

My greatest fear is by the time mainstream society wakes up to the importance of a critical academy we could well have destroyed the idea of the university.

*A Luta Continua*  
The struggle continues. It never ended.