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Jonathan D. Jansen. *Corrupted: A Study of Chronic Dysfunction in South African Universities*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2023; 310 pp. ISBN: 978-1-77614-796-0 (eBook). Price: \$ 30.00.

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Jonathan D. Jansen's book, *Corrupted: A Study of Chronic Dysfunction in South African Universities*, draws largely from interviews and the author's personal experiences in universities to deliver an 'insider' exposé of the challenges which characterise everyday life within South African universities. In *Chapter 1: A Study of Chronic Dysfunction in Universities*, Jansen discusses attitudes towards institutional dysfunctionalities, aptly conceptualised as the "frustration experienced when we struggle to explain why a university has a high turnover of vice-chancellors, why university councils regularly collapse, and why there is constant campus turmoil or shutdowns because of conflicts, protests and disruptions" (1).

This chapter outlines the book's goal: to go beyond existing reportage on university dysfunctionalities and expose the "deep, chronic dysfunction in universities," well-articulated by the question: "what explains the persistent instability of a subset of universities in South Africa?" (2). From proposing the "origins and histories of these institutions and their evolution over time" (4) as a possible solution, to "capacity or of integrity" (5), to apartheid history (6), this book makes a sound case for "ruthless competition for scarce resources" and "corruption" as a crosscutting concern in South African universities (ibid). The chapter also engages with important concepts and its addresses macropolitical and micropolitical factors which influence universities and institutional responses.

Chapter 2, that evaluates the *Historical Roots of Dysfunction: Shaping the South African University*, offers a rich historical account of the establishment of universities in South Africa. Tracing the influence of race politics and apartheid policy in the sector, collectively termed as "ideological machinations" (21), the chapter's key discussions focus on post-apartheid university mergers, historically embedded inequalities, deliberate sabotages, British imperialism, and contiguity of instabilities. Further discussions on the basic structure of South African universities

and the “potential and actual lines of conflict and disrepair” within these structures is most informative about entrenched institutional conflicts.

In *Chapter 3 Dysfunctionality in Universities: A Political Economy Perspective*, Jansen discusses the “nexus between power and resources inside higher education institutions” (29) and its influences on the micropolitics of universities. The ensuing discussions of the latent power tussle in the appropriation and abuse of funds and the culture of corruption. Perspectives on macro factors nested to this arrangement are the different actors competing for university resources, and the “contests, conflicts, compromises and contradictions that bring rival groups into competition for authority” (42). Some of the crucial discussions of chapter 3 include a commitment to academic projects or lack thereof, dynamics of institutional power, utilisation of the institution’s diverse resources (material, political, symbolic, and cultural), and policies for corrective funding.

In *Chapter 4 A Personal Journey Through the Political Economy of Universities*, Jansen recounts personal experiences to contrast “routines of administration” and the “true essence of a university” (6). Juxtaposing the authoritarian rule of his predecessor, the blatant malpractices of the university’s senior management, and the connection between university leadership and external powers, Jansen maps out the various elements of dysfunctionality from a leader’s perspective. Specifically, he provides very informative case discussions of the abandonment of the academic project in South African universities, and, in its place, the nurturing of chaos as strategy for power struggle. The author recounts the entanglement between universities and external politics, and manipulative effects—offering an in-depth critique of what he labels as pathologies of stability as actuated through, 1) the political transition of the 1990s and 2) its impact on the cross-over of senior labour within universities.

Chapter 5 Casting Long Shadows: How History Shapes the Politics of Universities In South Africa examines the strategies of coping within the interregnum between apartheid and post-apartheid. It explores “the roots of the ongoing crises at the sample of universities studied in this book lie within the history of these institutions and the kind of politics they brought into the highly unstable transition of the early 1990s” (90). The author presents a very compelling critique of resistance, activism, revolt, and protests within universities after the 1990s. Jansen further points out the nexus between changing enrolment demographics, institutional material capacities, racial and spatial politics between Bantustan and urban universities, historicity of students’ power and resistance, and the politics of institutional forums. The most persuasive takeaway of this chapter is the distinction between “the corrosive effects of past politics on contemporary governance” and the

adoption of anti-apartheid resistance tactics to occasion a “ruinousness of anti-institutional protests” (114).

Chapter 6 The University as a Concentrated and Exploitable Resource raises the important question of the corruptibility of institutional check mechanisms and the free-for-all approach to public funds mismanagement within universities, which is increasingly seen as a funds reservoir. Inequalities in funds accumulation, Jansen argues, not only mimic historical disadvantages between Whites and Bantustan universities, but also actuate an inverse relationship between “university’s public or private income and the degree of corruption or dysfunctionality within it” (118). The political economy of funds distribution through legitimate spending such as student and staff expenditure, or through corrupt malpractices in tendering, council remuneration, research funding, and student residence has a bearing on an institution’s dysfunctionality.

In *Chapter 7 The University as a Criminal Enterprise*, Jansen unravels the institutionalised corruption of the universities’ academic enterprise. The corrupt practices refer to the collusion between rogue leadership and external parties; one example that highlights internal collusion is the role of certain the council members and some rogue elements among interested parties such as the transport sector. The narration of tactics of intimidating virtuous university leaders who apply corrective measures bespeaks of the normalcy of embedded criminality within university management and the political class enabling not only corruption, but also bulldozing its way through any possible interventions. Consequently, such criminality disables the academic agenda.

Chapter 8 The Micropolitics of Corruption in Universities discusses institutional capture as concurrently a political process which promotes institutional thuggery against ethical leaders. The chapter incisively “makes visible in finer detail the micropolitics of corruption in South Africa’s dysfunctional universities—how and why it happens, by and for whom, and with what consequences for higher education institutions” (168). Terming these the micropolitics of corruption, the author discusses “circumstances in which individuals or groups use their influence or authority for corrupt ends” (169), and the resulting cartel-mentality which thrives in dysfunctionality. More informative is the author’s discussion of various micro-actions that promote dysfunctionality: subversion of the institutional rules, abuse of the disciplinary function, promise of rewards, wilful mismanagement of meeting administration, manipulation of meeting records, tripping-up of those with integrity, malicious rumours, threat of violence, opposing factions, and control of staffing resources. Through these, dysfunctionality is broadly understood as a composite of sabotages of the university’s academic aims by selfish administrations keen on personal material accumulation.

Chapter 9 The Twin Roots of Chronic Dysfunctionality in Universities discusses the significance of institutional integrity among universities' top leadership, foundation failure and post-apartheid expectations, collective integrity, and academic values. It also illustrates how breaching these enables dysfunctionality and produces institutional incapacities "as a political end" (213). Jansen explains the detailed characterization of incapacitated universities, the nexus between integrity, leadership, and institutional capacity, and the resulting "thinking that leads to social and emotional detachment from the plight of students" (219). Chapter 9 argues that the collective disowning of the university by administration, academics, and students furthers the distancing of the university from those under whose care it resides.

In *Chapter 10 Rethinking and Rebuilding Dysfunctional South African Universities*, Jansen contemplates the possibilities for redeeming dysfunctional universities. Starting with the problem of over-admission and the resulting economic deficits, to the diversion of vital resources from the academic project, this chapter maps out the general scenario of dysfunctionality from a collective position. It also proposes some possible explanations for chronic dysfunctionality: historical imprint, ingrained culture of disruptive conflict, emergence of informal institutions, institutional dissociation, politicisation of the everyday, problematic student financing, and demise of the academic project. The chapter notes the catastrophe of the intensified relationship between politics and university resources, and the role of human agency in facilitating the collapse of institutional structures of governance, and, inevitably, its academic project.

In conclusion, it is not often that one may find such intensity of knowledge, truth, and aptitude for information delivery as achieved in this book. Specifically, this work's direct approach to dysfunctionality, one of the lingering systemic issues in institutional management in the new South Africa, is highly commendable. More appreciable is Jansen's courage to highlight individual and communal culpability, or acts of redemption. Whether the mechanisms suggested for disrupting such a process would bear fruits or not, Jansen's concern with unlearning "knowledge of corruption" (251) establish a new starting point for reconsidering the meaning and essence of university beyond the South African context.

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