

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

This research sought to explore the nature and extent of academic staff transformation at the University of Cape Town and the University of the Witwatersrand. The rationale argued that there was a pressing need for critical scholarship that could be defined as ‘Sociology of Higher Education’. In addition there is a need for scholarship which explores the dynamics of academia as those of a workplace. Existing scholarship prioritises either structural or interpretive explanations for the state of transformation and academics’ experiences of race, gender, and class within higher education. Whilst both theoretical positions are enlightening, it was suggested that an incorporation of both structural and cultural dimensions would provide a more holistic understanding of these issues.

The research was positioned within the combined approach and utilised Bourdieu’s notion of capital as a means to bridge the apparent structural/cultural divide within existing scholarship. It also made use of Bezuidenhout’s conception of the apartheid workplace regime and the post-colonial workplace regime, in order to understand the historical segmentation of the academic labour market and the simultaneous existence of continuity and change within the workplace, in the post-apartheid era.

It was also argued that the historical similarity of UCT and Wits might subsume important differences in the contemporary period, therefore the research sought to explore points of convergence and divergence between the two institutions. Lastly, it was argued that most contemporary literature focuses on general perceptions and experiences of academics to transformation. The research hoped to move beyond this by also examining institutional transformation initiatives, in order to explore how the institution is doing in its direct attempts to orchestrate academic staff transformation.

A historical overview of the two institutions revealed that the universities’ labour forces were segmented along the lines of race, class and, gender; whilst the academic labour market, itself, was segmented along the lines of race, nationality, class, and gender. An internal labour market which fostered racialised and gendered exclusivity drove the segmentation of the academic labour market. Although both women and black academics entered the labour market, they were always in low numbers and

occupied low status, non-core, and non-threatening positions. At Wits, during World War II, women academics acted as a reserve army of labour. Once apartheid was formalised, government pressure reinforced racial exclusivity by developing separate institutions for black students and staff, and through threats of formalised job reservation when UCT tried to appoint a senior black academic. With the demise of apartheid, the new government sought to undo these decades of exclusivity within academia. This brief summary illustrates how the apartheid workplace regime took form and shape within historically 'white', English-medium institutions¹.

However, the historical review also captured the complexity within this process and suggested that the institutions' workplace history could be better captured by five distinctive periods: early institutional practice, the 'open' years, academic apartheid, anti-apartheid, and consolidated institutional change. This framework illustrated the salience of nationality, race, gender, and class within the academic labour market. Through this historical review, it became evident that the segmentation of academia through mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion went beyond simply a racialised workplace regime. It also demonstrated how interaction with or by national government sought at various times to reinforce or challenge institutional workplace practices.

The research sought to examine the salience of race, class, and gender within the academic workplace, during the contemporary period of consolidated institutional change. The findings illustrate that there is both continuity and change within the workplace regime. Both institutions have an overwhelming majority (over 75%) of academic staff who are white and they have yet to reach equity on the basis of gender (although gender disparities are much less stark than racial inequities). These demographic inequities impact upon the institutional culture which participants describe as Eurocentric and masculine. Furthermore, women and black academics experience both structural and cultural marginalization and alienation in various spheres of the institution.

Bourdieu's conception of capital proved useful in elaborating on the multiple ways in which this marginalization and alienation plays out within the institutions. Participants at both institutions discuss inequality in pay (economic capital). At UCT,

this inequality largely discriminated against women and black academics, and although it has been redressed by the 'Rate for Job' scheme, it was very much present within staff's understanding of the institution. At Wits, inequality in pay was almost absent from the data, except that senior women argued that senior men earned higher salaries, and junior women discussed how they just accepted their salaries while junior men negotiated their salary before signing their contracts. This illustrates the ways in which primarily men and women have differential access to, and experience of, economic capital.

In terms of social capital, women and black academics described exclusion from dominant networks which facilitate one's progression within the institution. Dominant networks were seen to reflect the interests of white men, and operate according to an 'old boys club'. Women and black academics described being alienated from this source of power through differential access to these networks because of different personal histories, contacts, and interests – which meant not only were they not included but they often felt actively excluded. The position and support of the vice chancellors was also questioned by participants, who felt that other figures (white men) were at the centre of these networks and could command greater support in resistance to academic staff transformation.

This reflects how access to social capital is also bifurcated along the lines of race and gender. However, emerging alternative networks were clearly evident at both institutions. Interestingly, these were often senior women networks, with the exception of the Black Caucus at UCT, which is a diverse group of proponents for race-based transformation. Clearly, in this regard, there are sites within the institution where women and black academics can access social capital in defence of transformation.

Cultural capital also serves to reify women and black academics' experience of marginality, largely through the use of 'institutional culture', which prioritises the interests of a dominant white masculinity over alternative interests. This is particularly evident where the notion of standards and excellence are invoked to exclude members of the 'previously disadvantaged'. Participants spoke of racist and

sexist assumptions, institutional racism and sexism, and rising standards as key mechanisms which served to maintain white and masculine hegemony.

To this end, participants illustrated the inter-relationship between cultural and social capital, such that: under-qualified (lacking cultural capital – in the form of degrees or publications) white and/or men had greater chances to be hired or promoted because of their position within networks (social capital), compared to women and black academics with degrees and publications but a less firm position within networks.

Lastly, symbolic capital was noted, in that women and black academics felt they received less recognition, status, and prestige than their white male counterparts – despite equal academic cultural capital. This was particularly evident in relationships with students (in addition to fellow colleagues) who showed significant disrespect for women and black academics. Therefore, Bourdieu's capital proves to be of significant use in illustrating the different experiences had by white and black academics, and men and women academics, within institutions. This reiterates what van Zyl, Steyn and Orr; Louw and Finchilescu; Ismail; and Potgieter say about the perceptions and experiences of academic staff within UCT and Wits. These aspects also reflect continuity with the apartheid workplace regime.

However, there are also other dimensions to be taken account of. Continuities do not simply remain solely because of institutional unwillingness. Other dimensions of change can have a negative effect on transformation, such as financial constraints, managerialism, and change fatigue. Johnson explains how managerialism has led to the erosion of academic leadership, the absence of which negatively impacts on the transformation agenda, as it wears down spaces for organic change within departments or schools and increasingly relies on the centre for stimulus for change. As has been demonstrated, this is anything but forthcoming and what does exist remains rhetorical. At Wits, liberalism and managerialism appear to be the two key features that stand in the way of transformation.

However, change was also evident. The findings illustrate that change is more operative at UCT compared to Wits, largely because of the movement, at UCT, from conception to action phase in the vice chancellors' transformation agenda, which has

seen the institutional status of transformation increase (in the form of decentralized report-backs on the institutional climate survey, and structural change in decision-making through the co-option of women and black academics onto senate). It is also important to note that these measures are not without their own difficulties and to some extent illustrate a continuity of procedural inequity and lack of transparency. It illustrates how, from the outside, the formalities of transformation are seen to take place but, from the inside, these can be anything but transformative and can be used as a mechanism for conservative restoration.

Perhaps the importance of this study is its detailed reflection on transformation responses. Four main responses were identified: active change, passive response, passive resistance, and active resistance. This typology allows both the strengths and the weaknesses of the institution to be seen simultaneously and also identifies individual, collective, and institutional change and resistance. Furthermore, it views 'success' from an individual and institutional transformative perspective, as opposed to narrowly conceiving of success as equity or skills measurables. None-the-less, the latter are an inherent part of transformation and are often the goals of specific transformation initiatives.

The research also explored the transformation programmes run by the institutions. Using Nimoko's framework proved a useful way to evaluate programmatic responses. Both NAPP and ERP at UCT appear to have been conceptualised from a discrimination perspective, with the exception that they look at the structural factors that impede junior academic's progress rather than women or black academics progress. As such, they concentrate on developing 'hard' teaching or research skills. In the case of ERP, there are also concrete goals that help to orient the programme and can be used as a measurement of success. Furthermore, ERP and NAPP seek to provide an environment in which the individual and his/her specific needs are taken care of. In this way, the programmes create an alternative institutional culture or context for participants. However, time will tell whether these programmes manage to influence the broader institutional culture.

Wits' programmes are very different; they explicitly target black and women academics and are located in multiple perspectives. All three programmes have

elements of difference, deficit, and discrimination (in effect if not in intent). The institution appears to have a better hold on gender-based transformation, for which it has active champions, and is creating an alternative institutional space for women academics. GooT appeared to be run as a skills development initiative, although a deficit undercurrent appeared to be evident in both the findings of this research and Larsen's research. Furthermore, the lack of engagement with institutional culture leaves this programme open to the allegation that it does not seek to disrupt white privilege within the institution.

Glass Busters appears to focus on mainly on 'soft skills' and is increasingly working with race in the context of institutional culture. However, from participants' perspective, it appears as though this is largely assimilative and rooted in the difference perspective, which leads to further institutional exclusion for those who do not buy into the institution's understanding of cultural diversity. Therefore, Wits still appears to not have a handle on race-based transformation. Lastly, transformation programmes were criticised for their use of expensive, lavish venues and the question was raised whether funds could not be better spent on substantive change activities.

Furthermore, the transformation agenda at UCT is actively pursued and criticised by an organized (although informal) academic activist group, the Black Caucus, who are committed agents for change. Such a structure is vital for inclusion as it enables negotiated reconstruction to take place². No parallel group exists at Wits. This discussion illustrates the importance of both champions and activists for transformation. Champions, who are able to effectively push through change in the structural and institutional culture dimensions; and activists, throughout the system, who are willing to balance their individual and social needs (or prioritise the collective) in favour of transformation.

This research has shown how dealing with transformation is an incredibly complicated process in academia, due to: the professional nature of the sector, the arrangements of power and importance of networks in intra-institutional mobility, and the diverse interests of the academic body as a whole. None-the-less, change is possible and is occurring where the inherent structural arrangements of power are understood as needing to be changed; where there are sufficient activists throughout

the structure; and where there are powerful champions, at the helm, to spear-head the process.

The experiences of institutional worklife reflect on the newness of change, such that its substantive nature cannot yet be adequately confirmed or refuted. However, the predominance of experiences of marginalization and alienation which reflect racialised and gendered continuities with the past, need to be seriously addressed in order for institutions of higher education to transform themselves and to contribute positively to the broader transformation process of South Africa.

Lastly, this research has provided a way to understand both structural and cultural experiences of transformation. It has illustrated the complexity of institutional transformation through the typology of transformation responses and has illustrated some continuity and change within institutions. However, there is still clearly a need for further research on this topic. For instance, there needs to be further deconstruction of experiences of transformation. Louw and Finchilescu's research illustrates how African women are the least satisfied and do not feel they benefit from transformation opportunities – more work needs to be done within this area. There is also a large gap in terms of understanding whiteness and particularly white masculinity within institutions of higher education. There is also a need for further research into transformation initiatives and their strengths and weaknesses.

Chapter Eight Endnotes

¹ Although, of course, it is crucial to note that this pattern of workplace relations has its origins in the pre-apartheid period.

² At the time of research, the Black Caucus was being institutionally sidelined for having formed on its own terms (as an informal caucus) rather than on the institution's terms (as a formal association). However, after the Hahn-Tladi incident, it has been learnt that there is increased co-operation between the institution and the Black Caucus.

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