

Title

Academising Academia: Academics' Conceptions of their Labour in the Context of Managerialism at The University Of the Witwatersrand.

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Abstract

With the advent of neoliberalism, higher education began to appropriate quasi-market strategies from the business sector. In what Strathern (2000) has termed “audit culture”, universities began to implement managerialism – a corporate mechanism designed to enforce top-down management of academics with the ultimate goal of excelling in a globally competitive academic environment (Johnson, 2005; Strathern, 2000; Giri, 2000; Shore and Wright, 2000). The University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) began this journey of competitive behaviour in 1999 (Johnson, 2005), and in 2013, with the inauguration of new Vice-Chancellor Adam Habib, the pressure on academics to produce publications as the major token of merit has reorganised activities that hold value within the University management’s gaze. Among the many informal but desperate complaints relayed to me over the course of the year by academics about their burdensome workloads, I began to hypothesise about a deeper story behind the surface narrative of a top-down process that has been enforced upon them as a feature of the tide of global changes in academia that has swept South Africa. This is story about how academic labour is conceptualised by academics at Wits within a contextually-borne discourse of managerialism. Through anthropological methods, this proposed research seeks to answer its central question: How do academics at the University of the Witwatersrand conceptualise the value of their labour within a context that is commonly referred to as “managerialist” and how can this information be situated within anthropological theory?

Keywords

Managerialism; academic labour; value; alienation; South Africa, University of the
Witwatersrand; liminality; audit culture; anthropological methodology