



## ANNEXURE 10

### Institutional Cultures/ Environments

Briefing paper prepared for the second national  
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**André Keet<sup>1</sup>**

#### **Preliminary remarks**

1. This was not an easy assignment, especially since the major concepts at play, *institutional culture* and *transformation*, are generally regarded as slippery and their over-proximity in our everyday talk about the sector give it the appearance of floating signifiers. Those who shy away from it probably know the *material* stakes that are carried by these concepts. Such wariness has become a discourse in itself, aimed at certain ends. For others, that which is invoked when these concepts are used is more important than its ‘attached’ meanings. And then there are those who are aware that our concepts are of necessity fragile, since they are sometimes called upon to stand proxy for that which is not yet cognisable<sup>2</sup>. I attempt to take these different positions into account.
2. The ‘racialised’ categories used in this paper are inevitable and do not undercut my broader political understanding of *Black*. Similarly, the use of institutional categorisations do not confirm an unsophisticated, naive adherence to such hierarchies; they are simply employed to make my arguments more intelligible in the morass of ‘race’ and ‘orders’ in which we find ourselves. I also work with broad generalisations; my apologies. This is not to discount the varieties of contexts

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<sup>1</sup> Prof André Keet is Director: Institute for Reconciliation and Social Justice Advisor to the Rector and Vice-Chancellor University of the Free State, South Africa [keeta@ufs.ac.za](mailto:keeta@ufs.ac.za) ;

[andrekeet@gmail.com](mailto:andrekeet@gmail.com)<<mailto:andrekeet@gmail.com>> <http://institute.ufs.ac.za/>

<sup>2</sup> I borrow here from Lyotard’s *The Differend* (1988).

and histories which the limits of a paper such as this precludes pursuing. Micro-institutional cultures and dispositions can thus not feature in my analysis. I also include myself as an institutional and sector agent throughout the analyses in this briefing paper. In addition, my style is speculatively analytical, and *political*; something for which I make no apology.

3. I have worked on these ideas in various capacities: as a member of the Transformation Oversight Committee (TOC); as a role-player in the transformation work of Universities South Africa<sup>3</sup>; my work on Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation; and my daily engagements with friends and colleagues. This needs to be acknowledged alongside my gratitude to so many students who freely invite me into their space, are hospitable when I invite myself, and willingly share their experiences.
4. Higher education, nationally, regionally and globally, is faced with an infinite number of challenges. These range from those related to globalisation and the predation of neo-liberal logics, to matters of access, throughput and participation rates, research, teaching and learning, internationalisation, differentiation, diversifications, funding, student aid, and its responsiveness to societal challenges. This briefing paper does *not* focus on these, though it may become clear how some of these challenges are intertwined with what we call *institutional culture*. In addition, I take for granted that universities and the social realities of the societies and communities within which they are located, mirror each other to a large extent. I am *not* dwelling on this truism.
5. Two other types of analyses with import for reflecting on *institutional cultures* need to be flagged here, though they do not feature in any substance in this briefing paper. First, the discourse on contradictions and tensions within the higher education sector, with certain conceptions of excellence and quality in tow, has a profound impact on how we think and do transformation. This particular understanding of transformation as demanding trade-offs between equity and quality; redress and efficiency; and change and development have already been explored by others (Cloete *et al.* 2002; Cloete and Moja, 2007 and Cloete, 2014). Second, the interplay between the mission, mandates and roles of higher education has consistently been explored by Badat's writings (2006; 2007; 2010; 2013)<sup>4</sup> as a useful reminder of the larger purposes of the sector.

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<sup>3</sup> This paper draws on work done with Derrick Swartz, the Vice Chancellor of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University for Universities South Africa, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> See Badat, 2007: The role of higher education must necessarily intersect and effectively engage with the economic and social challenges of local, national, regional, continental and global contexts. These challenges include the imperatives of economic growth and development; the ability to compete globally; job creation and the reduction/elimination of unemployment and poverty; the effective delivery of social services and the threat of HIV/AIDS and other diseases. The challenges also encompass the imperatives of equity and redress; social justice; the democratisation of state and society, the building of a culture of human rights, creating a vibrant civil society, and promoting a culture of vigorous and critical intellectual public discourse. At the same time, in playing its role, higher education must also be guided by and embody specific *principles* and *values*. These include: equity and redress, quality, development, democratisation, academic freedom, institutional autonomy, effectiveness and efficiency, and public accountability'. He identified five roles for higher education (Badat, 2013:5-6): (i). 'to produce *graduates* that possess values, knowledge, attitudes and skills acquired through thoughtfully designed and implemented formative and professional teaching and learning programmes that engage simultaneously with disciplinary, historical, ethical, cultural, economic and learning issues; (ii) to undertake *critical social and scientific inquiry* and imaginative and rigorous scholarship – of discovery, integration, application and teaching - that serves diverse intellectual, economic and social goals and the greatest public good; (iii) to contribute to forging a *critical and democratic citizenship*. Vibrant and dynamic societies require graduates who are not just capable professionals, but also thoughtful intellectuals and critical citizens that respect and promote human rights; (iv) to *proactively engage with our societies* at the intellectual and, more

## Introduction – provisional definitional frameworks?

6. Five operative concepts are evident in this briefing paper: institution, institutional culture, institutional environments, higher education and transformation. Simplistically speaking, the concept of *institution* refers to ‘complex social forms that reproduce themselves, such as governments, the family, human languages, universities, hospitals, business corporations, and legal systems’<sup>5</sup>; it refers to ‘regular patterns of behaviour that are regulated by norms and sanctions into which individuals are socialized. Institutions are thus an ensemble of social roles’ (Turner, 2006: 300).
7. *Institutional environment*, for the purposes of this paper, refers to a ‘relatively enduring quality of the organisation which is experienced by its members’ (Burton, 1999). *Higher education*, here, designates the 26 public universities; located in a system that has shifted, in substantive respects, from a fragmented and structurally racialised system of 36 public and more than 300 private institutions in 1994, to a relatively more integrated, ‘system-like’ formation of 26 public universities (traditional, comprehensive and universities of technology)<sup>6</sup> and 95 private higher education institutions in 2015 (see Blom, 2015)<sup>7</sup>. This paper focuses on public higher education institutions.
8. *Institutional culture*, to align with its conventional understandings and misunderstandings, refers to ‘the deeply embedded patterns of organisational behaviour and the shared values, assumptions, beliefs, or ideologies that members have about their organisation or its work’ (Peterson & Spencer, 1991: 142). It has, over the past 20 years, become an area of keen interest for studies in higher education (Tierney, 1988; Sporn, 1996, Higgins, 2007; Jacobs, 2014). Jacobs (2014: 466), in the South African higher education context, aims at constructing constitutive meanings of *institutional culture*, based on a literature review. ‘This review revealed a large set of constitutive meanings, which was narrowed down to the four most frequently recurring meanings, namely: (1) shared values and beliefs; (2) language; (3) symbols; and (4) knowledge production’ (*ibid*). Jacobs’s work (*ibid*) also brings *language* as a constitutive meaning of *institutional culture* into

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generally, cultural level. This requires universities to not just transmit knowledge to people in the wider society, but to have a two-way engagement with the wider society; a reflexive communication if you like; (v) to *actively engage with their wider contexts and societal conditions*. Our universities must engage effectively with the economic and social challenges of our local, national, regional, continental and global contexts; with the tasks of economic development and the ability to compete globally; job creation and the elimination of unemployment and poverty; the effective delivery of social services and the threat of HIV/AIDS and other diseases’.

<sup>5</sup> Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/social-institutions/> [accessed 12 January 2013; and 15 April 2015]. For a comprehensive analysis of the various meanings of social institutions, see Joao De Pina-Cabral (2011).

<sup>6</sup> These are: Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), Central University of Technology (CUT), Durban University of Technology (DUT), Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT), Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU), North-West University (NWU), Rhodes University (RU), Sol Plaatje University (SPU), Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU), Stellenbosch University (SU), Tshwane University of Technology (TUT), University of Cape Town (UCT), University of Fort Hare (UFH), University of Johannesburg (UJ), University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), University of Limpopo (UL), University of Mpumalanga (UM), University of Pretoria (UP), University of South Africa (UNISA), University of the Free State (UFS), University of the Western Cape (UWC), University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), University of Venda (UV), University of Zululand (UZ), Vaal University of Technology (VUT), and Walter Sisulu University (WSU).

<sup>7</sup> Nine-hundred-and-ninety thousand (990 000) students are enrolled in the public higher education sector, and 120 000 in private institutions in the same sector, according to the 2013 statistics (DHET, 2013).

sharper focus; something that has significance for our current debates that relate to certain types of higher education institutions.

9. Putting Higgins's (2007) implosion of the concept aside for now, *institutional culture*, for the most part in this piece, denotes the totality of regimes of praxes within universities that normalise *the productions and distributions of patterns*<sup>8</sup> of recognitions and misrecognitions according to norms that construct subjectivities, without these norms themselves being subjected to scrutiny<sup>9</sup>. These subjectivities carry cultural identities that are determined by various categories: race, class, religion, sexuality, gender, ability, ethnicity, etc. Following Odora-Hoppers (2009) usage of Kwenda's work (2003), the concept of *institutional culture* also signifies the assemblage of university practices that disallows us to suspend 'that which is taken for granted' (*ibid*) in our daily professional life.
10. The last operative concept for this briefing paper is *transformation*. Reflections on higher education transformation in South Africa generally choose the policy starting-points reflected in the report (1996) of the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE); the White Paper on Higher Education (1997); the Higher Education Act (1997); the National Plan for Higher Education (2001); the Report of the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions (2008); the Declaration of the Higher Education Summit (2010); the National Development Plan (2012); the terms of reference of the Ministerial Oversight Committee on Transformation in South African Public Universities (2013); and the White Paper for Post-school Education and Training (2014)<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> These patterns can be challenged by focusing on the following areas that constitute them in the first place: *Institutional culture* (governance and management; professionalisation of 'transformation' work; the social structure of the academy; and language and symbols); *Equity and redress* (access and success – staff and students; race, gender, disability and other categories; and the heterogeneity of difference); *Research, scholarship and post-graduate studies* (knowledge transformations; diversity and inclusivity; recognised research on 'race', 'gender', 'disability' and social justice); *Leadership, relations with external stakeholders, and community engagement* (diversity, training, development and professional growth, transformational leadership; and socially just, diverse, and inclusive community engagement); *Teaching, learning and curriculum* (enrolment planning for inclusivity; critical pedagogies; transformed curricula and diversity competencies) (see Keet and Swartz, 2015: A Transformation Barometer for South African Universities, Universities South Africa). Another way of putting this is via Mbembe's *Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive* (2015): the patterns of *misrecognitions* can be confronted by *demythologizing whiteness*, including its iconography; the *decolonization of buildings and of public spaces*; the *democratization of access*; the *decommissioning of a lot of what passes for knowledge in our teaching*; the *decolonization of the systems of management insofar as they have turned higher education into a marketable product bought and sold by standard units*; and the *decolonization both of knowledge and of the university as an institution*.

<sup>9</sup> I rely here on Bulter's work in *Frames of War* (2010) and my use of 'recognition' includes conceptions of 'redistribution' and 'representation' (See Honneth and Fraser exchange, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> The draft social inclusion policy framework of the Department of Higher Education and Training includes a comprehensive list that constitutes the South African post-school legal and policy architecture as it relates to transformation: Department of Education, National Education Policy Act (Act no. 27 of 1996); Department of Education, White Paper 3 on the Transformation of the Higher Education System, 1997; Department of Education, Education White Paper 4 – A Programme for Transformation of Further Education and Training, 1998; National Student Financial Aid Scheme Act, 1999, and subsequent amendments; National Policy on HIV/AIDS, for learners and educators in public schools, and students in Further Education and Training Institutions (1999); Department of Education, National Plan for Higher Education, 2001; Department of Education, White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System, 2001; Department of Education, *Report of the Working Group on Values Education, 2001*; Department of Education, Values Manifesto, 2001; Department of Education, Bill of Responsibilities for the Youth of South Africa, 2008; Department of Higher Education and Training, Higher Education Laws Amendment, Act 26 of

11. Transformation of higher education is generally conceptualised around the following principles, as expressed in the White Paper on Higher Education and Training of 1997: equity and redress; democratisation; development; quality; effectiveness and efficiency; academic freedom; institutional autonomy; and public accountability. Work within the sector with the Transformation Managers' Forum suggests that the following themes are central to transformation: institutional culture; curriculum and research; teaching and learning; equity and redress; diversity; social cohesion and social inclusion; and community engagement. Recent demands for 'transformation' come from a wide range of quarters and are articulated in varied forms, but do not appear to be fundamentally different in substance and style from similar calls made at various periods over the past 20 years. These demands usually include the 'Africanisation'<sup>11</sup> of universities; the 'decolonisation' of knowledge and curricula reform; equality of access and success; better facilities and better support systems; demographic representation at all levels of the academy, and across university structures; democratic and inclusive institutional cultures; and universities being more responsive to the vast developmental needs and challenges of their environments, and society in general.

## The System – varieties of categorisations

12. Apart from the formal policy differentiations<sup>12</sup> of traditional universities, comprehensive universities and universities of technologies, other typologies are taking root<sup>13</sup>. The inevitable,

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2010; Department of Higher Education and Training, Adult Education Act (Act 52 of 2000) as amended by the Higher Education and Training Amendment Act of 2010; Department of Higher Education and Training, Skills Development Act, 2010; Department of Higher Education and Training, Formal Further Education and Training College Programmes at levels 2 to 4 on the National Qualification Framework, 2011; Department of Higher Education and Training, National Skills Development Strategy 111 (2011); Department of Higher Education and Training, the Green Paper for Post-School Education and Training, 2012; Department of Higher Education and Training, the White Paper on Post-School Education and Training, 2013; Further Education and Training Colleges Amendment Act, 2012 (Act no. 3 of 2012).

Strategic Documents and Reports include the following: Department of Education, *The Ministerial Report on the Elimination of Discrimination and Promotion of Social Cohesion in Higher Education Institutions* (Soudien Report, November, 2008); Department of Higher Education and Training, Council on Higher Education (CHE) Report on student engagement (2010); Department of Higher Education and Training, National Skills Development Strategy 111; Department of Higher Education and Training, Human Resource Development Strategy for South Africa (HRD-SA) 2010-2030, (2010); Outcome 5 of Government's 12 performance outcomes: "A skilled and capable workforce to support an inclusive growth path" (2010); Department of Higher Education and Training, *Report on the Charter of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2011 (HSS Report); Framework for co-operation in the provision of career development (information, advice and guidance), 2012; Presidency, National Planning Commission, The National Development Plan, Vision 2030, 2011.

<sup>11</sup>For discussions, debate and critique of 'Africanisation' see for instance wa Thiongo; Garuba; Nymnjoh; Mbembe; and Ntsebeza.

<sup>12</sup>The official differentiation is as follows: 11 universities (RU, NWU, UCT, UFS, UFH, UKZN, UL, UP, SU, UWC, Wits); 6 universities of technology (TUT, CUT, CPUT, MUT, DUT, VUT) and 9 comprehensive universities (UJ, NMMU, UNISA, UV, UZ, WSU, SMU, MU, SPU). MU and SPU opened their doors in 2014, whilst SMU 'opened its doors in January 2015. (a) *Universities*: offer basic formative degrees such as BA & BSc, and professional undergraduate degrees such as BScEng and MBChB.; at postgraduate level offer honours degrees, and range of masters and doctoral degrees. (b) *Universities of technology*: offer mainly vocational or career-focused undergraduate diplomas, and BTech which serves as a capping qualification for diploma graduates offers a limited number of masters and doctoral programmes. (c) *Comprehensive universities*: offer programmes typical of university, as well as programmes typical of a university of technology' (Cloete, 2010).

<sup>13</sup>Cloete (2014: 1356-7) presents 3 categories: high, medium, and low knowledge producing groups. Unsurprisingly, 'it shows the universities of Cape Town, Rhodes and Stellenbosch in the high knowledge-producing category, while all the other universities (with the exception of Walter Sisulu and Limpopo) are in the

and needed, differentiation within the system produces a variety of institutional cultures and environments; so historically determined, imported into the present, and projected into the future. It further adds to the massive complexities that are associated with universities and the efforts to transform them in socially-just directions. The question that should be raised here has less to do with differentiation *per se*; rather, it has more to do with the violent expression of institutional hierarchies that circulate recognitions and misrecognitions along ‘race’, gender, class and other lines; and how it discursively produced ahistorical and monolingual notions of ‘excellence’ and ‘quality’. Differentiation is thus not performed as an inclusivity of *differences* and contexts; but as an adjudicatory tool that frames students and institutions alike, with the framers ‘preparing and structuring [...] public [and institutional] understanding’<sup>14</sup> as an ideology masquerading as non-ideological. In essence, these hierarchies in the higher education system in South Africa, come to determine the norms that produce student and other institutional subjectivities that are worthy of recognition on a national and institutional scale. This inevitably yields the categories of misrecognition directed at those individuals and institutions who are not eligible for and who remain outside of the realm of such recognition.

## Institutional Culture

13. Higgins (2007: 107) in *Managing Meaning: the constitutive contradictions of institutional culture* suggests that ‘as it has come to be understood in South Africa, institutional culture refers to the dimension of social and pedagogic communication as it operates both formally and informally, in both teaching and more generally in student life on South African university campuses. In particular, it has come to refer specifically to the forms of cultural and intellectual capital that come together in much critical thinking as whiteness’. As the concept emerged via organisational studies to name the underlying assumptions and institutional behaviours ‘ready’ to be manipulated instrumentally to serve transformation imperatives, its instrumental promise ‘gives way to a

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medium category, and all the universities of technology are in the low knowledge-producing grouping’. When one puts aside the *politics* of this kind of categorisation and the limited way in which knowledge is being perceived here, these analyses confirm the historical-reproductive impulses of the system. Cooper (2015: 239), suggests a different form of higher education institution categorisation based on ‘research-intensity; [...] this yields five ‘upper band’ universities, seven ‘middle band’ universities’ and eleven ‘lower band’ universities’<sup>13</sup> within which the race-class nexus is expressed; The upper band consists of UCT, UKZN, SU, UP, and Wits; the middle band is made up of NWU, UJ, UNISA, UFS, NMMU, UWC and RU; and the lower band includes UL, CPUT, TUT, UZ, UFH, CUT, DUT, VUT, UV, WSU and MUT. Again, the imitative force of the system is verified. Nevertheless, Cooper’s (*ibid*: 258-259) analyses contain instructive insights. First amongst these is that since 2012, within the upper band, a slower intake of South African *African* students (except Wits and UKZN) is occurring and a limited number of students of all racial groups from working-class or even lower-middle-class backgrounds are enrolling at UCT, and probably others as well. Furthermore, the middle band, though they had close to a 100% white student population in the 1980s, have a majority South African *African* students (except UWC). The student body in the lower band institutions is almost fully *African*, and the majority come from poor family backgrounds. In this band there is also an ‘absence of any substantial entry of white students (or other non-african students)’ (*ibid*). My apologies for having to use the concept of *African* in this way: *Black Africans* excludes ‘*Coloured*’ *Africans* and ‘*Indian*’ *Africans* to make clearer the arguments Cooper is forwarding. He, himself uses it a specific way (Cooper, 2015: 238): ‘The category black’ will refer collectively to the historically oppressed groups consisting of individuals classified under apartheid as African, Coloured or Indian; this usage of the term ‘black’ was the one adopted by the anti-apartheid liberation movements. It should be noted as well however, that the use of these socially constructed race categories in the discussion does not imply acceptance of their validity or value as classificatory terms.

<sup>14</sup> Butler (2010: xv).

nuanced and inevitable realisation of the real difficulties of intervening in the complex reality that organisational culture names' (*ibid*: 110).

14. Understandably, acknowledging institutional culture as a hard-to-define phenomenon (Jansen, 2004) and a slippery notion (Ensor, 2002) has become in itself a discursive (Van Wyk, 2009; Vincent, 2015) trend; in part drawing from the productive analysis that Higgins offers. The 'complex reality of organisational culture' (Higgins, 2007: 110) has nevertheless been highly successful in one aspect of transformation: 'the administrative attack on and undermining of academic culture [...] as the new global common-sense of the neo-liberal redefinition of the aims of higher education' (*ibid*: 122).
15. Vincent (2015: 24) has a point when she says that 'one way of understanding institutional culture [...] [is] through the stories we tell about it and ourselves and ourselves in relation to it – and indeed the stories that the institution itself, *qua* institution tells, authorises, negates, suppresses, circulates and propagates'. Institutional culture, in short, can be understood as something that is narrated'; and at times it is critical that such narrations emerge through lived experience; in other words, institutional culture is structural and material. This can also be applied to Jansen's analyses in *Knowledge in the Blood* (2009) on the University of Pretoria, and *Leading for Change: Race, intimacy and leadership on divided university campuses* (2015) in relation to the University of the Free State.
16. The deeply embedded patterns of organisational behaviour and the shared values, assumptions and beliefs that float as the definitional markers of *institutional culture* are resident within all types of universities in South Africa, to make an obvious point. *Institutional cultures* are historically produced and are chiefly disclosed by the ways in which the key functions of the university are executed *and* not executed; teaching and learning, research and community engagement. If, as Higgins (2007) argues, *institutional culture* has become a buzzword, the question to be asked is: What is the process of becoming a buzzword trying to disclose? I would suggest that it wants to reveal the perversion of the system at its core. Within the very process of *institutional culture* becoming a buzzword resides the experiences of students and staff doomed, for now, to use a deficient register of articulation; a lack that is now being addressed by the new student movements. In the absence of a sharper idiom, it emerges as the most 'usable' concept to capture a variety of challenges<sup>15</sup>.
17. But, it would be a mistake to limit our analyses to *institutional culture* as the generator of alienation and the *misrecognitions* of *Blacks* on historically white university campuses. *Institutional cultures*, as it steers forms of doing, also results in governance breakdowns<sup>16</sup>,

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<sup>15</sup> The Minster (May, 2015) captures the challenges as follows: 'There remains an urgent need to radically change the demographics of our professoriate; transform the curriculum and research agendas; cultivate greater awareness of Africa; eliminate racism, sexism and all other forms of unjust discrimination; improve academic success rates; and expand student support'<sup>15</sup>. Other demands include the 'Africanisation<sup>15</sup>' of universities; 'decolonisation' of knowledge and curricula reform; equality of access and success; better facilities and better support systems; demographic representation on all levels of the academy, and across university structures; democratic and inclusive institutional cultures; better responses to academic and financial exclusions and universities being more responsive to the vast developmental needs and challenges of their environments.

<sup>16</sup> In addition, we have not yet 'managed to discover why HDIs have failed to come out of the vicious circle of poor governance and management' (with associated poor quality of teaching and learning) which bedevil the life chances of millions of our young people (attributed to an observer who cannot be named here). Studying HDIs through the lens of these six economies may provide answers; the reasoning behind the six economies is

maladministration and the near collapse of institutions (see Lange and Luescher-Mamashela, forthcoming). These are described as follows: ‘Factional councils that have failed to exercise their fiduciary responsibility; a lack of leadership and absence of efficient administrative systems; academic matters often involving weak, marginalized or dysfunctional senates; maladministration, corruption and financial crises’ (*ibid*).<sup>17</sup> Mohammedbhai (2015) argues that corruption has become widespread in African universities - endemic; and one may argue, it has become part of the *institutional culture* of universities. Governance problems, dishonesty amongst students, dishonesty amongst staff, admissions, fake degrees and degree mills across university types are highlighted in his analysis. In addition, to be brutally truthful, we have to acknowledge that a big segment of the system in Cooper’s lower band (2015) which serves almost entirely *African* student bodies represents a big risk to the sector and scuttles the aspirations of our students and the development of the country. The quality of the educational experience and student life, together with questionable academic and administrative cultures, suggest an urgent need for systemic interventions. Needless to say, historical inequities that have been carried through to the present are a key contributing factor.

18. Another common mistake is to lock our understanding of ‘dysfunction’ into an audit, management and governance discourse. Despite wobbly conditions across the sector, one has to ask why conceptions of ‘dysfunction’ are limited to governance and management. However, if the notions of ‘dysfunction’, ‘corruption’ and ‘maladministration’ are widened to include various closed and self-interest driven networks, then all universities across the three bands are soaked in it. Networks around contracts, council complexes, academic buddy-systems, intellectual cabals, research-cliques and publications gangs are endemic to the entire system as an expression of the nature of the sector globally and regionally. Different institutions and types of institutions use different formulas, but similar logics. Taylor (2015: 208-210) gives us a sense of how this institutional corruption diminishes the capacity of universities to achieve their purposes in his contemplations on *Philosophy*; this analysis may be applicable across various disciplines. Networks are, of course, central to academic, intellectual and social projects. It is when they turn cabalistic, self-serving and chauvinistic that they serve exclusionary purposes along various fault lines such as ‘race’, gender, language, episteme, culture according to the steering power of money, credentials, prestige and privilege. A caution here, that for us working in and for higher education transformation, is not to generate *alternative dogmas* as the opposites of that which we work against; we are called upon, via sharper categories of self-understanding to resist new chauvinistic tendencies in favour of inclusive, progressive academic communities that serve our students better.
19. One way to introduce sharper and more critical forms of self-understanding into the academy, is to view *institutional culture*, partly, as the collective expression of at least six *economies*<sup>18</sup> operating within the academy and university administration that produce and reproduce the social structure of the academy<sup>19</sup>. Let me hasten to say: the six-economies-analysis is not meant as a totalizing

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applicable across Cooper’s three bands of universities. Of course the contexts and histories differ, but to a large extent, the operations of the six economies vary only in terms of the size of budgets, financial reserves, skin pigmentations and cultural self-understandings.

<sup>17</sup> Between 1994 and 2012 the Minister appointed 14 assessors to deal with public higher education institutions in crisis;

<sup>18</sup> See Keet and Swartz for Universities South Africa, 2015.

<sup>19</sup> As an example: Nazeema Mohamed’s quarterly review for Universities South Africa (September, 2015: 3) captures the convergence of material and epistemic economies in the following way: ‘Some black academics have argued that merit and skill is not the real issue and that there are many suitably qualified black scholars who find it difficult to enter academia.’

critique of the academy. Rather, it should be viewed as an interpretive scheme for de-familiarising our ways of seeing and doing that have become normative preconditions for participating in academic and university life and as such are drawing the contours of our moral and other considerations as knowledge and teaching practitioners within university spaces. We seldom have access to the implications of our participation within these economies in the ways that it co-constitutes *institutional culture*.

20. The social structure of the academy, though embedded, is disclosed in equity patterns, promotions, privileges; the way in which scientific authority is distributed and transferred; and the constitution of university committees, such as disciplinary, ethics and research committees. *Management* economies distribute the variety of codes by which institutions operate; it includes its social organisations, the templates on which various decisions are made, and the variety of decision-making platforms that are demanded by the pragmatics of university management. The *administrative* economy refers to the circulation and distribution of administrative and regulatory power and control; access to systems and the codes and rules by which these systems operate. In the case of *material* economies, privileges and benefits, financial and otherwise, are circulated within established networks that reaffirm the *power-positions* of those *already* on the grid. *Socio-cultural* economies ensure the flow of beliefs, customs and behaviours that affirm the status quo; in, for instance, the way in which the social myth of ‘white excellence’ became *the* standard. *Affective* economies circulate collective emotions and affect. For instance, the case in which the ‘white subject’ ‘is presented as endangered by imagined others whose proximity threatens not only to take something away from the subject (jobs, security, wealth), but to take the place of the subject’<sup>20</sup>, is a case in point. Another example relates to intellectual entrepreneurs around black suffering, as well as the emotions that are politically mobilised around the language debates within our universities. *Intellectual* and *epistemic* economies safeguard the movement and pre-determined transfer of scholarly authority and credentialisation according to established institutional and sector-based rules that reproduce the social structure of the academy, by regulating who has access to the ‘games’ that set up the ‘rules’. Similarly, Taylor (2015: 204) argues that universities’ orientations are in part shaped by epistemic cultures. *Political* economies here refer to the circulation of political beliefs and ideologies, *and* to the ‘social relations, particularly power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources’ [...]; social relations organised around power or the ability to control other people, processes, and things, even in the face of resistance’<sup>21</sup>. These economies are linked into extra- and semi-attached university outfits, centres and networks, and sometimes permeate entire university operations.
21. It does not necessarily follow that all these economies always expressed themselves in negative, undesirable or damaging ways. On the contrary, they may be, and sometimes are, appropriate, necessary and productive. At issues here is whether we apply them as critical interpretive schemes for making sense of how we understand ourselves and how we do our work; *and*, in what ways we examine them as partly constitutive of the social structure of the academy and the culture of our institutions. They do feature in various formulations for calls to shift *institutional cultures* as ways to counter estrangements and discriminations, but they seldom co-star in our reflections on our own praxes. Nevertheless, they are instrumental in steering our conscious and unconscious

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These academics believe that their failure to enter academia is more about an old guard wanting to preserve the status quo and positions of white privilege’.

<sup>20</sup> Ahmed, 2004.

<sup>21</sup> Mosco, 2009.

mental structures that are converted into social practices from where symbolic and other forms of violence stem, corporeally and materially felt as such. It should thus, at least figure in our own categories self-understanding. Here, again, we should not limit our scrutiny to the usual 'discursive' suspects of 'white' institutional culture, important as they may be, but rather cast our analytical nets across the entire sector.

22. Another, probably one of most crucial, aspects of *institutional culture* relates to knowledge, its disciplines and its disciples. How knowledge is produced, organised and adjudicated as knowledge *always* holds the prospects, often expressed in action, to generate patterns of exclusion on the basis of a variety of discriminatory categories. Racism, sexism and other discriminations as constituting agents (with concomitant social practices) of the disciplining of knowledge within, for instance, philosophy, anthropology and other humanities and social science disciplines are nowadays an accepted fact, supported by years of research and analyses. Moreover, the disciplining of knowledge in medicine, health, engineering, natural- and agricultural sciences within which academic subjectivities are organised, seem to produce professional dispositions that support exclusionary institutional cultures. These disciplines, apart from the circulation of scientific racisms within them, are thus implicated in the discriminations we experience on our campuses and elsewhere as 'the ideological functioning of sciences', not simply because on the level of the ideal structure patterns of *inclusions and exclusions* or patterns of *recognitions and misrecognitions* are observable. Neither only because at the level of their technical use in society these patterns play themselves out. 'Nor simply at the level of the consciousness of the subjects that built' these sciences'; they are *always already* implicated where ideology takes hold of scientific discourse at the very point 'where science is articulated upon knowledge' (Foucault, 1969: 141-142). Teaching and learning, curricula choices, and research and assessment that are not carefully reflected upon, tend to foster uncritical dispositions that advance the ideological functions of the sciences. This is another motivation for the academy to develop more accurate categories of self-understanding because higher education in South Africa and on our continent suffers a profound constraint: the western disciplining of knowledge. Here one can summon Ndlovu-Gatsheni's<sup>22</sup> argument that 'the worst form of colonization [...] on the continent is the epistemological one (colonization of imagination and the mind) that is hidden in institutions and discourses that govern the modern globe'.

## Implications

23. The *six economies* influentially steer institutional cultures. They more often than not give rise to unethical, self-interest driven and embedded networks that startlingly have become normalised as academic practice and here, as in the entire briefing paper, I include myself. Sometimes operating as sanctioned and legalised corruption, they can only frame students by the norms which govern the logic of the six economies. That is, behind the *regimes of recognition and misrecognition* of student subjectivities that are produced and distributed by *institutional culture*, varieties of combinations of economies rule, sufficiently powerful for academic agents to 'preserve their view of themselves as moral agents whilst inflicting harm on others' (Bandura, 2002). In essence, academics, by and large, lack honest, objective, and accurate categories of self-understandings,

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<sup>22</sup> Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J., 2013. *Coloniality of Power in Postcolonial Africa: Myths of Decolonisation*. [e-book] Dakar: Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa. Available at: [http://www.codesria.org/IMG/pdf/2-Coloniality\\_of\\_Power\\_Ndlovu\\_Chapter\\_2.pdf](http://www.codesria.org/IMG/pdf/2-Coloniality_of_Power_Ndlovu_Chapter_2.pdf) [Accessed on 20 November 2013], p.63.

both about themselves as professionals and the institutions to which they are attached; a fact that may explain the docility of academics amidst progressive student movements . *Not because they are inherently bad people, far from it.* Rather, it is because they are caught up in legitimating practices that must ensure the active presence of past privileges within the academy; a point equally applicable to academics from all backgrounds in post-1994 South Africa. They are, by a variety of constraining and steering factors called upon to convert these privileges into rights so as to normalise their exercise (an insight from Bourdieu, 2014). ‘Bourdieu believed that an analysis of the social structures of the academy would disclose the categories of its self-understanding and the social derivation of thought that it employs (*ibid*: xii). Only on this basis can it (the academy) expect to make decisive progress’ (Keet, 2014: 105). In mirrors held up to the academy by the new student movements, we can see the demands to develop more accurate categories of self-understandings, not about what we think we do, but about what we *actually do*; this is a disruptive, but not a bad space to be in at all.

24. Students and staff are processed and framed by *institutional culture*, conventionally understood *and* when viewed as being bolstered by its operating economies; it is an inescapable matter of fact. As this framing actively produces selective versions of social reality (what is excellence? who and what count as recognisable? etc.)<sup>23</sup>, it also discards other alternative versions: ‘making a rubbish heap whose animated debris provides the potential resources for resistance’ (Butler, 2010: xiii). From this debris, the university-based social movements are emerging. They may source their energy from the desire to fight financial exclusion, cultural injustice, epistemic violence, or other forms of misrecognition, but they here, and they are real. We are, across the system and across our various subjectivities, recruited into this frame (*ibid*: xii). Within the various types of higher education institutions, the frame initiates conceptions of students (and some staff) as unequal; non-adults who are interdicted from real participation in the daily discourse of university life. Thus, it attempts to set the rules of engagement with its own debris. However, students’ substantive strategies have shifted to such an extent that they resist re-conscription, contesting the frame and its efforts of annexing them. The unfortunate, and sometimes violent bypassing of formalised structures (such as SRCs etc.) is, at its core, not a statement of disrespect for these structures as part of democratic policy. Rather, it is a refusal to be recruited into the very frame that generates the institutional culture which they have as a target; a matter that will require ‘new’ policy thinking. The trick here, again, is not to think of an agency that can, at all times resist this framing; it is about categories of self-understanding that will reveal our complicity, so that we can be reminded, where and how to work at de-ratifying any totalising frames, even if they implode the

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<sup>23</sup> A brilliant formulation of this framing is found in Shose Kessi’s (25 September 2015) analyses. In higher education discourses, similar ideas about black students and black staff as lacking in competencies are presented as given, without an analysis of the institutional structures and cultures, as well as the social, historical, and material contexts that continue to exclude and devalue the contribution of black scholarship. The social movements sweeping across the higher education landscape in South Africa are, however, very different from these apolitical versions of black suffering. At the University of Cape Town (UCT) for example, the Black Academic Caucus, a group of over 80 black academics representing all faculties, is engaging in institution-wide conversations and actions to address the exclusion of black experiences and scholarship in the areas of curriculum, research, staff recruitment and development, and institutional culture. The fundamental logic is that black scholarship prioritises the needs and aspirations of the majority of people in this country and continent. These initiatives are not separate from our social and historical context, in particular the material, symbolic and structural conditions brought about by colonisation and apartheid. On the contrary, these initiatives are a direct result of our affective and bodily experiences as black scholars and as black people in this country and continent. The fall of Rhodes was symbolic of the need to dismantle the racist, masculinist culture of our institution (city, country and continent) and has led to many critical debates about dismantling whiteness and patriarchy in the lived experiences of black staff and students. [accessed 26 September 2015 <http://thoughtleader.co.za/blackacademiccaucus/2015/09/25/of-black-pain-animal-rights-and-the-politics-of-the-belly/>].

economies within which we are located. Those who work with qualitative data and engage with students on a regular basis will know how management, administrative, material, socio-cultural, affective, intellectual, and political economies operate as integrated wholes at various levels of our universities; *producing and distributing orders of recognitions and misrecognitions*, to the benefit of some, and to the pain and anger of others.

25. Accurate forms of self-understanding that can make lucid to ourselves, our locations within *institutional culture* will require courageous objectifications because we are generally incapable of ‘providing [ourselves] with a representation of the reality in which [we] are immersed’ (Boltanski, 2009: 60); a point confirmed by critical sociological studies. Deafness and ignorance (learned unknowledge) are functions of this lack of self-understanding, demonstrated with force in the puerile responses from within the higher education sector to the Soudien Report (2008). The report is littered with cautions and references in relation to *institutional culture*, something that most of the HEQC audits also highlight. The Soudien report suggests that ‘transformation could be reduced to three critical elements, namely policy and regulatory compliance; epistemological change, at the centre of which is the curriculum; and institutional culture and the need for social inclusion in particular’ (2008: 36). The report recounts many painful stories that demonstrate how staff and students are dislocated and misrecognised within university spaces; a trend confirmed by the articulations from the Rhodes Must Fall Movement, Open Stellenbosch, TransformWits, the Black Students Movements, and student formations on most of our historically ‘white’ campuses. Though protests at HDIs since 2009 have mainly focused on student finances and academic exclusions, the quality of academic staff and the quality of the academic experience are increasingly verbalised; a trend that connects student voices across the sector. It will be foolhardy to think that the protests in HDIs and other ‘types’ of universities are totally delinked from one another. They may differ in many respects, but the conjunction of subject-formation and the discursive privileging of the white western subject in our teaching, curricula and research across all ‘types’ of universities, is bringing student voices together in its heterogeneity. Safety and security on one campus, financial exclusions on another, survivalist battles here, and cultural and epistemic injustice there, are all placed on a grid of *misrecognition*, with connections, shifts and disconnections of all kinds. Amidst these, students make careful choices on how to formulate demands based on contexts, timing and strategy, thus placing the entire system under analytical student-driven surveillance.
26. Universities as institutions are powerful and *institutional cultures* are compelling and create patterns of consistency and regularity. These patterns are brought into question at moments of disputes, such as the many instances we now experience on our campuses; these are educational moments to embrace.

## Redirections

27. Higgins’s (2007) caution that *institutional cultures* as a concept and instrument for transformation defeating its own logic, has some measure of truth, only if we wholly subscribe to the development of its meaning via organisational studies. Nevertheless, the self-destruction of the concept (*ibid*) can, in fact, be an ally in our efforts of naming that which is referred to when the notion of *institutional culture* is invoked. Many contributions in *Being at Home: Race, Institutional culture and Transformation at Higher Education Institutions in South Africa*

(Tabensky and Matthews, 2015) attempt to do so. The notion of *institutional culture* invokes a sense of tradition, and mobilises a logic of common sense, comfort, cosiness and security. This not only makes its implosion helpful but also steers us to abandon any romantic notion of *institutional* inclusivity as allowing ‘something’ into a space that belongs. Such belonging, common sense and cosiness should not be even close to any discussion on the nature of the university. Common sense, as Boltanski (2013: 55) argues, too rapidly reduces *radical uncertainty* and an *unease* which haunts real social life on a daily basis. This haunting is ever-present and brought to life by our daily disputes; a form of thinking that would have better prepared us to make sense of contemporary student movements and protests.

28. New kinds of sociological research that accept Higgins’s implosion of the concept of *institutional culture* are required. In the wake of its collapse as a meaning-making frame, perhaps we should start thinking along the lines of *socially-just institutional orientations*; a concept that favours a politics (and suffering) of the present<sup>24</sup> where the dead can ‘nevertheless play a highly active and productive role’ (see Boltanski, 2011: 60). If we can tie the notion of *socially-just institutional orientations* to a politics of the present, we may be able to judge *institutional culture* not on the basis of its traditions, embedded common sense, and taken-for-granted assumptions, but on the way it, in the present, *produces and distributes regimes of recognitions and misrecognitions* along the fault lines of race, gender, sexuality, class ethnicity, etc.
29. Innovative understandings and interpretive schemes that can de-familiarise that which is taken for granted should be forged. Not only because our students deserve better, but also because de-familiarisation should be a crucial element of any scholarly disposition. We have to challenge the institutional cultures of HDIs that normalise fragile conceptions of quality and service and apply the same energy to challenge warped and self-referential conceptions of quality and excellence in other types of institutions. In addition, we have to defy institutional cultures rooted in traditions, culture and forms of doing that are incapable of reading the present and future differences and heterogeneities amongst students, knowledges and staff that are presented to it.
30. In the articulations of students over the past few months through an infinite number of radio interviews, meetings, protests, memoranda, television debates, and social media discussions, we got a clearer glimpse of their humiliating experiences at the nexus between self and structure; between their subjectivities and the culture of the institutions which they attend. They are adept at formulating their captivity within institutions which provide them with a fleeting picture of the structural ‘imprisonment’ of all, including university managements who by default *must* emerge, not as targets, but as important holding spaces for student experiences. Students are not blind to the constraints that weigh in on the entire sector and its actors. Nevertheless, they demand a form of cultural and cognitive justice in the actions of managers and academics that have not yet taken shape in the way universities ‘see’ and ‘cognise’ students. A reasonable demand, by all counts. Nevertheless, students will be challenged, as university transformations attempt to play

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<sup>24</sup> Boltanski (2004: 192): ‘[T]here is room also for a *politics of the present* which, without seeking support from an accusation turned towards the past or from a justification of the future consequences of its actions, would be orientated entirely towards present suffering and *present victims*. Is it not true that there is often confusion between these three *political orders* which have supported criticisms arising from the use of the argument from pity in politics, with, in particular, a denunciation of those in power who exploit past victims in order to take possession of the future while ignoring present suffering? On the other hand, without leaving the framework of a politics of pity which has been unsurpassable for two centuries, by focusing on the present the humanitarian movement can even so stay closest to compassion, one of whose principal features is, as we saw at the start of this book, the *presence* of that which arouses it. To be concerned with the present is no small matter. For over the past, ever gone by, and over the future, still non-existent, the present has an overwhelming privilege: that of being real.’

itself out in the future, not to generate new dogmas and new forms of unproductive violences. Rather, as they have proven to a large extent, novel forms of a politics of solidarity and proximity across various divides are shaping a rational social and intellectual project across our campuses.

31. Even as the robustness of student engagements grow, they sense, as some research has shown, the power of *institutional culture* and its structuring impulses on students, university leadership and academics alike. The elements of what we ‘dislike’ about the ‘new’ students politics, is a call for us ‘to get over ourselves’; to put it bluntly. In rejecting the violence and destruction of property as we should, we must nevertheless resist the employment of an idea of decorum and politeness that, in most instances, result in the co-option of the student voice and practices. Instead, we should read what we observe on our campuses as an expression of the limits of regulatory-consensus politics. What is emerging is an *agonistic politics* that is infinitely more capable of creating the conditions of the vibrant the democracy for which we all yearn; one that can shift the social structure of the academy and open its epistemic prisons to free us all. This may, by all accounts, assist with sharpening the quality of *the political*, institutionally and nationally.
32. Though the battles on our campuses speak to much wider and deeper issues, there are elements of party political jostling being imported into university spaces in very morbid and counter-productive ways. This particular trend needs to be examined by students and stakeholders themselves if we want a fighting chance for inclusive *and* heterogeneous narratives of change to be conceptualised and performed within university environments. Mbembe (20 September, 2015) is right in linking the developments on campuses to our national political discourse, and the demands emanating from the everyday survivalist struggles of communities who still aspire to the idea that post 1994 should be “better” for all. Though party politics seems to creep in from time to time, *the political* (the everyday struggle for social justice) seems to eclipse the *Political* (actions in alignment with party political discourses) at least as far as the broad conglomerate of student mobilising forces are concerned. The *socially-just institutional orientation* we refer to would require a *just* inclination in process, strategy and substance in which we can have consensus on key ethico-political democratic principles whose meanings are open to interpretations and dissent; a conflictual consensus as Mouffe (2013: 8) would say. If nothing else, this is what we should value from emerging student movements. The pragmatic coordination required to make the university ‘work’ according to its taken-for-granted understandings of itself does not need the flattening of dissent and antagonism. In fact, it is precisely this dissent that will contribute to more sophisticated types of self-comprehension; pragmatics and antagonisms can jointly coordinate and enrich the conditions required to run massive and complex institutions.
33. In the dissent that presents itself as antagonisms resides an instructive proposition for how we view *institutional cultures*. Subjects and their subjectivities not only enter institutions that already operate on pre-determined templates. They enter with an expectation to be part of a ‘dynamic social process’ within which they want to re/ negotiate the terms of *their* recognition, on which basis they can be part of an ongoing social exchange of constitution and reconstitution; antagonism can be lived within and among subjects as a dynamic and productive political force (see Butler, 2010: 140-114). We have to abandon the pre-determined templates as forms of non-thinking that want ‘to secure a judgment, even if the [template] is clearly false’ (*ibid*: 144). Our social processes must see and foresee an explosion of existing and emerging *differences* that demand the right to own social spaces that is a public, common good (see Mbembe, 2015: 5). When these come together as ‘animated fields of difference’ within the student social movements of our times, they do so on the basis of political opposition to certain practices ‘that effect

exclusions, abjections, partially or fully suspended citizenship, subordination, debasement, and the like' (Butler, 2010: 147). *Socially-just institutional orientations* will be expressive of these antagonisms; not as an impasse, but as progressive movements that will better serve the core mandates of the university.

34. Institutional cultures are also functions of, *and*, constitutive of structural captivities and a range of 'impossibilities'. It should be abundantly clear that our vice-chancellors and university senior leadership are caught up in various dilemmas which are now, not for the first time, partially being disclosed by student movements. What is also clear is that the majority of our university leaderships are competent and proficient in many respects and committed to university transformation; the DHET is emerging as a key and capable driver of change; communities of practice are operating productively in various university spaces; and the quality of most of our students' analyses and mobilising practices are growing in substance and strategy. At issue here is how 'one plays the game' and at the same time 'change its rules' without imploding the system, whilst simultaneously creating the conditions for self-generative and organic student movements to emerge with their own modes of articulation, their own idioms, regimes and practices.

## Key Questions

- a. In what ways can we rethink the limits of the idea of *institutional culture* to make way for working towards *socially-just institutional orientations*?
- b. How can *institutional culture* advance recognitive justice (based on recognition, redistribution and representation) and cultural justice (the equal responsibility to suspend that which is culturally taken for granted)?
- c. How can we employ the insights and challenges placed before us by student voices to rethink the nature of the university in relation to Africanising institutional culture and the decolonisation of the university?
- d. To develop inclusive and non-alienating academic practices, how do we shovel in ways to reveal how the social structure of the academy co-constitutes *institutional culture* for our research and teaching and learning to shift in socially-just directions?
- e. How do we think *institutional culture* as a challenge across the different types of universities; as a sort of demand for collective responsibility and joint accountability for 'quality' university education across the sector?
- f. What would an *institutional culture* do that is not only inclusive by making space for various 'existing' subjectivities, but provides the mechanisms and space for students and staff to continuously renegotiate the terms of inclusion and recognition as ways to disrupt the frames imposed on them?
- g. How can *institutional culture*, in our minds, become a standard focus of analyses that challenge gender-based discrimination, ethnicism, chauvinism, ableism, sexual violence, as well discrimination based on sexual orientation, class and social status?

End  
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