



## ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

In the analysis that follows, the discourses activated in individual utterances are separated into the four “social arenas” to which they make primary reference. This is an important conceptual step as discourses are not free-floating, but embodied in social institutions (schools, universities, families, markets, etc.) and their characteristic practices, values and behaviour. The primary arena most relevant to this study is obviously the higher education institutions themselves (universities and technikons), but three secondary areas that intersect with the higher education sector can be identified. These are the labour market, the private sphere (personal interests, family commitments) and the political sphere. Dividing up and analysing responses in relation to these four areas involves an inevitable level of abstraction from the rich interplay of meanings in individual utterances, but it is necessary and justified for clarity of analysis, with the proviso that these discourses must be understood to interact and overlap at many points.

The reader should also be aware that this study has a limited focus on the responses of black academics “on the move” and does not explore interpretations for these movements that might have been offered by the heads of departments or other colleagues with whom the interviewees worked, or the senior administrators of institutions that appear to have “bled” a large number of black academics. Such an expanded discursive terrain did not fall within the scope of this study but could have revealed an interesting play of different, contending meanings. However, one needs to note that a comparative study is not necessarily needed for participants viewpoints to be “accepted” and should be treated as valuable discourse “which stands on its own”.

## | Higher Education Institutions

Within higher education institutions, the interviewees focused primarily on two sets of practices: the first set was identified as being racist in its effects, and the second as signifying poor leadership and management.

### ***Institutional racism***

Practices interpreted as forms of institutional racism emerged as prominent reasons for staff leaving both historically liberal (English-medium) and historically Afrikaans-medium universities. Here, a racial discourse is employed as the primary interpretive grid for understanding a lack of institutional change at a general level, and for attitudes, actions and values manifest in particular experiences. The interviewees identify racist discourses and their attendant practices operating in the institutional environment and articulate a counter-discourse of non-racism. In the resulting interplay of language, “racist” becomes the primary meaning attached to certain institutional behaviours.

The academics who were leaving or who had left historically white universities felt that there was a lack of commitment to transformation and that white staff were still “in control”. They saw the few key black appointees (in senior management) as unable to deal with the racism at the level of departmental experience:

*Yes, at University X they have appointed some key black people at the rectorate level. But this has not contributed to any changes, or very little change in the departments. The racism is so sophisticated, it is almost difficult to say it is happening ... this has led some of us who are black to think we are being paranoid or seeing racism when it is not so.*

Another interviewee commented that:

*... others and I were fighting a losing battle. My first choice is to be an intellectual who hopefully contributes to change in my teaching and research ... but it seems that this is not to happen in my generation. Apartheid is still alive and well in these white institutions.*

### ***Racism under the guise of liberalism***

*University X made me realise that there is nothing like a transformation agenda ... a liberal [agenda] is not to transform but to create the idea of transformation.*

Many participants seemed to have bad experiences at the liberal English-medium universities:

*X University is not a place that I want to be ... [there is] still a lot of racism ... . At Technikon Y, there are very clear transformation policies that they have bought into ... X University has very subtle racism in the Department of Mechanical Engineering ... .*

Liberalism is seen as disguising what one participant termed covert racism. In this interpretation, the institution is viewed as hiding behind its historical reputation for principled opposition to apartheid to avoid examining current practices that could be seen as racist. The kind of practices identified by interviewees included:

- Being discriminated against through being seen as “inferior”, not being “heard”, being anonymous or even invisible.

*“I worked there as a researcher ... they were not sure who I was. [There were] issues like, why was I using the photocopy machine? [The] assumption [was made] that anybody who is black is a third class citizen and cannot be a good academic. Then they turn around and say we have equity. Yes, in the Department of African Studies ... but not in Mechanical Engineering ... . [I] will not accept a post at that university ... because of racism.”*

*“Whenever we raised a problem it was ignored or it was said that policies will take care of it” or, “... it is being addressed by so and so commission of enquiry or something like that ... . I would then be in the lift with the person who I had addressed the issue with and they would not even recognise me or maybe also have forgotten about my grievance.”*

- Being overlooked for appointment.

*“[There was] ... not one black staff member ... . Last year [they] appointed two junior members [white] ... . I applied*

*there for positions and was not interviewed ... [even] with a Masters and a PhD."*

- Being a "token" appointee.

*Another reason advanced for leaving historically white institutions was that interviewees found that they were the only black members of staff in their respective departments. One respondent said, "This made us feel like tokens and that they were responding to the government's equity plan and doing us a favour." To the interviewees, there seemed to be an unspoken view that transformation and equity goals were achieved now that "the department had one black member of staff".*

While participants occupying positions higher up the scale – at professorial or senior management levels – did not share this view, it was clear that black academics at lower levels also saw these senior appointees as examples of tokenism that created the "idea of transformation" and blocked real change at other levels.

Linda Greene (1997) comments on this in the context of African-American faculty in the US:

*One of the most important factors in our professional lives is tokenism. Tokenism masks racism and sexism by admitting a small number of previously excluded individuals to institutions. At the same time, a system of tokenism maintains barriers of entry to others. (p.89)*

Greene goes on to say that the appointment of a limited number of black women professors is used to demonstrate universities' commitment to equality while illustrating the overall inferiority of black women as a group. Individuals appointed to positions become the exception to the rule. This was echoed by some of the participants:

*One day one of the senior members of staff visited my office and passed what she thought was a compliment, and said: you conduct yourself like a real scholar and not an African one.*

### ***Racism in evaluation and expectations***

A number of black academics at historically white institutions felt that they had to meet unrealistic levels of performance, failing which

they would become the scapegoats for anything that went wrong. In order to succeed, black appointees had to be “super human beings” who never made mistakes, who excelled academically, were good teachers, counsellors to black students and made all the necessary adaptations to fit into the institutional and cultural milieu. One interviewee recalled that after being disciplined because of students’ complaints, the issue of “diversity appointments” was discussed at a staff meeting. The discussion at the meeting centred on black appointments from a diversity fund and the concerns raised were that:

*Those appointed should not only be excellent academically, they must be good teachers, and want not only to teach but to write as well, and they must also be able to fit into the cultural milieu, especially of our students – we cannot alienate our [white] students.*

Interviewees felt that the other side to this coin was an expectation that black staff (unlike their white colleagues) would make huge mistakes, and if they did, the response was a kind of “I told you so” attitude.

Further to this, interviewees thought that they, as black members of staff, were made to carry a disproportionate amount of blame for any problems that occurred. When things went wrong, it was their fault, not the fault of the students nor attributable to any other circumstances. This often led to academics questioning or doubting themselves:

*I had to stop myself thinking maybe I am the problem. Yes, maybe the dean of a faculty is ok or even the head of department ... but some colleagues who I had to work with on a daily basis were very problematic, and when students had problems with my course, I was blamed and never given a hearing.*

Others echoed this sentiment:

*If students complained about a mark or a reading which they could not find in the library, I was called to the head of department's office and given a dressing down – that students are our clients and as an inexperienced lecturer I needed to be aware of this.*

Another lecturer said:

*When students complained that my marks were not available one week after an assignment was handed in, the course co-ordinator and the head of department said that I was working with white students and joked that they did not work on African time ... . I was so taken aback I could not say anything but these are the kinds of incidents that led me to pack my bags, resign and now leave my family to take a government post in another province.*

### ***Racism in the form of black “essentialism”***

Respondents identified another discourse operating in the institutional environment that may be called “black essentialism”. Here, the racial category “black” is brought into a mutually defining relationship with “experience” that creates the sense that this arena of knowledge or experience is not only exclusive of “whites”, but inclusive of all “blacks”. In this discourse, black experience is homogenised and is therefore seemingly accessible to, and “shared” by, all blacks no matter what other differences they may exhibit – for example, of age, social class, locality or political and religious affiliation. Interviewees saw it played out in a number of ways, particularly in the curriculum, when they were given all the courses to teach that had anything to do with “blacks”, or were given the role of counselling black students.

A woman who was teaching at an historically English-medium university said:

*It would often happen with post-grad students: they would come in and say they were looking to do something in African literature, if they want to do course work rather than just an MA ... and he (the head of dept) would direct the person to me ... even if I was not teaching a course in that, as though if it was anything African, if they said African or Indian or black or anything ... he would send them to me.*

Mamdani (1999) identifies this as racialised knowledge: “When I came to the University of Cape Town in 1996, I was startled to find that there was a clear institutional distinction between kinds of

knowledge. If a student wanted to study the white experience, he or she went to one of the disciplinary departments like political studies or history or sociology. If that student wanted to study the native experience, they came to the centre for African Studies. *The Centre for African Studies was actually a Centre for Bantu Studies* [our emphasis].” (p.132)

At the Afrikaans-medium universities, black essentialism played itself out in a different way through black academics being given a counselling role. Here, black academics were assumed to understand all aspects of the experience and “problems” of black students:

*As a lecturer who is black I am supposed to deal with all the issues which students have because they are black. Black students who I do not even teach are sent to me by white lecturers, as I would understand their problems, whether they be financial, housing, or transport. What I found very often is that these students are dealing with academic difficulties but because they are black, the problems are labelled differently. I am then there to play the mother figure to black students. I know that this happens to my black male colleagues as well. We thus end up spending hours of what could be research or admin time trying to sort out ‘black problems’. This counselling role, which is given to us, is not taken into account for promotion or when work-loads are assigned. Frustration is thus the name of the game. And it led to burn-out.*

Academics saw themselves as being stereotyped by others, or their interests pigeon-holed in particular ways because they were black. Counter to this, they articulated a discourse of individual difference and heterogeneity – the desire to gain experience in other areas that were of interest to them and that would give them the opportunity to “develop”.

### **Poor management or leadership**

Many interviewees identified problems at the level of institutional leadership as the basis for their decisions to leave institutions. These issues were raised by participants from both historically white and

black institutions and took radically different forms but may be interpreted as activating two primary kinds of discourse. The first overlaps significantly with the identification of institutional racism (see above) and with a political discourse focused on transformation. The second relates to conflicting views about the core functions, professionalism and responsiveness of institutions in the contemporary context.

### ***Contestation about transformation***

Participants indicated that many historically black universities seemed to be unaware that they too needed to transform:

*They think that they are not racist, or sexist and that we are working under perfect democratic conditions except that we have a resource problem.*

Women from HBUs in particular felt that they were the victims of sexism, and one person commented that:

*The place has become a joke ... it is the only university where white men get appointed and they do not have an affirmative action policy. No, in their minds they are beyond that.*

Another in the focus group said, "Any Tom, Dick or Harry is being made a professor ... that is, the Toms, Dicks and Harrys that are part of a particular clique."

Rather than work under these conditions, many interviewees had chosen to move to historically Afrikaans-medium institutions and one particular HBU, as a consequence, was perceived as having lost some of its best staff. There was a sense that at the Afrikaans institutions staff "knew they had supported apartheid and were racist and made some effort to change behaviour".

For others, it was contestation around the meaning and content given to transformation that led to disillusionment with management. The following sentiment expressed by a senior member of staff of an HBU, who has since moved to an historically Afrikaans-medium university, illustrates how frustration with leadership and voicing this publicly contributed (very directly) to him leaving:

*But after Rector X left and a new rector was appointed, I became uneasy because I thought that the university*

*was losing focus in terms of what it aspired to and what mission and vision it had. It had become sort of visionless, in a sense. You could not really identify a substantive new vision. And my sense was that in 1994–1995 it was well poised to be launched.*

The participant also indicated how, what he called stakeholder politics, without strong leadership, led to disillusionment and frustration with management:

*And my sense at that point was also that stakeholder politics became quite involved in campus politics ... . I in fact wrote a document before Rector X left, on my sense of democratisation.*

One problem which stood out for him was that “the best candidates were not being appointed to positions ... . I had seen good candidates not even making the short list ... and to me this became increasingly worrying.”

He continues: “then the new rector was appointed ... . I have said that I experienced a lack of substance in terms of whatever the university was aspiring to. And gradually I think management discretion and authority became dissipated to a large extent.”

### ***Lack of professionalism***

What seems to have driven many individuals out of black universities and technikons was the sense that staff grievances were not dealt with professionally. One person said, “It was like being in a family, but a dysfunctional one.” The consequence was that issues became highly personalised. This was a dominant theme in the focus group and the following excerpts illuminate the problem:

*In my particular case I got into a number of problems with heads of departments, academics, and administration and so on ... this built up over a period of time ... so by the time I left I had just had it, and I had a number of offers on the table. (A man who left an HBU at the level of associate professor.)*

*So after enormous fights with the likes of Prof Y and others ... he said it, he actually said it to me, ‘Why do you not just resign? You know, ultimately you will be doing yourself a favour and everybody else here’ ... I*

*thought it was my prerogative to resign ... but it was getting so ugly ... that it was difficult for me just to be there. (A black woman who left an HBU after completing a PhD at Harvard and not getting promotion.)*

While black academics leaving HBUs felt that relationships were over-personalised, which meant that conflicts and grievances were not handled professionally, black academics leaving HWUs thought the system was over-bureaucratised and so impersonal that their identities were lost.

For one participant, professionalism was the basis for being sought out by another institution despite perceived differences of approach:

*As fate would have it I was approached by the head of dept at Y. At that time the head of dept and I had a very professional relationship and I thought it quite strange that he approached me ... from previous meetings I got the feeling that he saw me as quite radical in the profession.*

### ***Responding to the new environment***

A number of participants who were leaving historically Afrikaans-medium universities activated a traditional discourse of scholarly academic pursuits as the core function of a university as a counter to the incursion of entrepreneurial, managerial discourses that construct the university as a business.

*The university was not scholarly but run like a big capitalist organisation ... I left because they kept talking about our clients, how productive we are, how we have to be teachers and fundraisers and how we are all academic entrepreneurs. I then decided to look around for other work ... if I wanted to be a capitalist I could go and work for a big company ... like Anglo.*

It seems as if the historically Afrikaans-medium universities had risen to the entrepreneurial challenge and the black staff was not happy. Yet black staff at an HBU were leaving because of the lack of this entrepreneurial culture and lack of vision on the part of senior management. They felt that the university was “not moving with the times”. The institution lacked the leadership that could respond adequately to the new demands of the current environment.

*I left because the university did not have a group of visionary leaders who could manage ... . In my opinion they were a group of administrators and bad ones at that and definitely not managers to steer the university into the new millennium.*

Another commented:

*The university did not understand the importance of outside fundraising. I had raised millions for the university but somehow this did not count and I or the unit was not given recognition and ultimately I lost interest in continuing. For them you were only given a pat on the back when you managed to get a NRF grant ... . Yes, this is important, but in this day and age a varied funding community is important. I thus left for the private sector.*

A response from someone leaving a technikon introduced an interesting new dimension to this debate by arguing that the institution was unable to respond adequately to new demands because of its limited academic foundation:

*The nature of academics of that institution is one where they emanated from a background of teachers at schools or technical colleges and inherently they are not qualified for the level which the new system demanded. I was seen as a threat, and even now the new demands are seen as a threat by these academics ... . The type of people who are employed there ... are people who have backgrounds as artisans, then get national diplomas and become lecturers ... I had the ridiculous situation where all my post-graduate students were more qualified than the staff in the dept. There's a saying there that the good leave, the bad ones stay behind. There are people who are not passionate about academia. Then you become the problem because they are not clear what you want to do. I would not want to be seen as a member of an institution that has no future ... . In 1999 in the faculty of engineering, there was only one person in management (me) with a PhD ... . My resignation was a big blow to the dean who depended a lot on my input, depended a lot on me to drive research.*

The following was not a response offered as a counter to the discourse of entrepreneurialism, but in support of it. The respondent was arguing, in line with Burton Clark (1998), that a strong academic heartland was precisely the precondition for an entrepreneurial approach, an approach that was seen as threatening by weak academics:

*The whole notion of research and development and eventually contracting your research out and commercialising some of your research was an arena not recognised. I was questioned by subordinates about running a business ... . As late as 99 ... I never got adequate support from management and questioned their ability to manage a business of this nature.*

For this next respondent, academic weakness was compounded by inadequate management and leadership to respond adequately to the demands of the new environment:

*I am not sure whether the institution has the management and ability to develop policy and implement strategy. People are moved up the ladder not as specialists. Even if you look at how the rector moved up ... . People in these critical positions have evolved and have been at the right place at the right time ... . They have never brought in specialists that can turn the place around. I doubt whether they have the people at the institution to turn the place around and that brings me back to my decision. I do not see this place making an impression in the academic arena in future years and I would not want to be seen as retiring from an institution like this.*

Burton Clark (1998) identifies a strengthened core of leaders who have the “ability to steer the institution”, a diversified funding base, which generates capital from varied sources, and a strong academic heartland as three of four “key pathways” that contributed to five European entrepreneurial universities being successful.

## **| The Political Sphere**

Some respondents gave reasons for moving between institutions that related to their commitment to a larger national agenda of political transformation. In this view, the conservative history of some

institutions was not a disincentive, but a positive challenge. People said that if historically Afrikaans- and English-medium institutions were to change, “they needed to be infiltrated by people with a transformation agenda and history”.

*Historically I had been dead against University X as a student, and as a lecturer. Contact had been minimal. So I had to make peace with myself in terms of how I viewed it and how I viewed my own position, my political position especially. But then I started saying to myself, well, this is university is a national institution. And it needs to change and, well, it probably won't change unless people who are differently minded come in and work towards and contribute to transformation.*

Another person who had also joined an historically Afrikaans-medium institution from an HBU, almost exactly echoed the participant quoted above:

*Because as much as we would all like to come and point fingers . . . University X is a national asset and if we want change, then we have to be willing to sacrifice and become the catalyst for that, and I guess with those kinds of thoughts and also the political role . . . . I was given the opportunity and I was ready for a blank slate . . . . So I made the decision . . . [to join the new institution].*

These respondents viewed their movement and resignation as being good for the “new” institution and this in a sense seemed to help them deal with the rejection and lack of support they were receiving from their previous places of work. Many who had left HBUs were frustrated by levels of nepotism, sexism and political complacency, and joined historically white institutions, justifying their departure by saying that if these bastions of apartheid were going to change, they needed people who were serious about change to join the academic staff. Political perceptions thus operated negatively to induce people to leave institutions that they thought had stagnated or were too complacent to acknowledge that there was any need for transformation; and operated positively to attract people to institutions that needed to change and seemed to be open to change.

## | The Private Sphere

An issue frequently raised as a reason for moving between institutions was family commitments. This is one that has not often been cited in literature. Interestingly, it was not women who were following their partners in their careers but both men and women moving to areas where they grew up to take care of elderly relatives or to be with children who had grown up with relatives while they (the parents) were given the opportunities to study:

*I did not have a problem with my institution ... but I moved to Y, another liberal institution, as it is closer to Welkom where I grew up and where my aged parents and my school-going child live. Yes, it was a difficult decision but here I succumb to the cultural thing and put family above career. However, my getting this post means that I can look after my family and work my way up the career ladder.*

Another also moved for family reasons but was not so positive about the career ladder:

*I decided to resign and then took a contract post at this university. I thought it best to look after my father in the township. Yes, I thought about my career but I was not going anywhere at that university and it is the same here, but at least one goal is accomplished and it gives me personal satisfaction ... I am here to care for my father in his last years.*

Other personal reasons offered for moving to other institutions or out of the academic world altogether included better career options, such as promotion or a clear career trajectory, and higher remuneration. These are explored in more detail in the following section.

## | The Labour Market and Funding

The functioning of the labour market, particularly the academic labour market, emerged as a significant theme in individual responses. Respondents linked high academic qualifications and credibility to choice and mobility within the academic labour market and beyond, whereas low qualifications were thought to trap people

in their positions, whether they were happy or not. The active recruitment of black staff by some institutions was also a powerful inducement to leave their current institutions and move to where they thought they would be more highly valued. Low academic salaries was also cited as a reason for leaving in conjunction with high levels of competition for research funding.

### ***Marketability and mobility***

Certain academics felt that they should move on, not because they were necessarily unhappy but because they “needed to test their marketability”. This held true for those who had moved to other institutions as well as those who had moved to government and the private sector. Some respondents moved out of academia because of the absence of a clear career path:

*I thought when I had a doctorate I would know where I was heading, I would have a career path. Now I have no career path and I am not even sure why I headed this way in the first place ... .*

At an historically black technikon, however, there was very little movement. One respondent suggested that this was not because people were especially happy in their work situation, but that without doctorates or, in some cases, without Masters degrees, they did not have any options.

*We will not get mass movement between black technikons. I can take you back and point you to people who were there when I first joined the institution in 1985. They have marginally bettered their qualifications ... . [There is] now pressure to upgrade their degrees. People with engineering degrees are now doing postgraduate degrees in education or business – what, in engineering, we see as ‘soft options’. The rector wants all to have Masters’ degrees by 2004.*

### ***Active recruitment***

Being head-hunted by institutions within the context of clear indications of institutional change, provided a strong inducement to move:

*And the fact that I have been approached might be reflective of a sense in this institution that they in fact do want to change and that they do want to supplement with whatever skills and experience I have ... [and] a few months before I was approached the university also approved a new strategic framework.*

This was particularly true for respondents who felt that their careers had stalled at one institution, but that another offered positive opportunities for advancement:

*I actually came to the department to withdraw [my application] but a very crucial thing happened in the way the head of department responded ... . When I shared my circumstances he said look you can't make a decision now ... . And we want you for the position, why don't you take up to January the following year to decide? And that gestured a lot of things to me – that the department really wanted me and that they were willing to make a lot of concessions for me ... . About that time I told [my institution] about the offer and got no response and I told them I needed a reply by Feb. 28. On the morning of the 28 I got a call from the acting vice-rector, and he says to me, look we have not met but we need to talk ... and we went into negotiations about offers and counter offers. I said I wished this had come at an earlier stage as it could have been very reaffirming for me because I gave a lot of energy to X ... and this would have kept me [at the institution] ... The fact that I had applied on three occasions for an associate professorship [but was not promoted], made me wonder if this was just a response [to the offer] ... .*

This kind of experience was exclusive to the male respondents. None of the women interviewed, including those with doctorates, had been asked to apply for positions.

### **Salaries and research funding**

A range of participants spoke about the low remuneration in academic careers and the fact that universities were moving to

“clamp down” on private or outside work. Many suggested that although they felt academia to be a calling, they also had to “live”.

*I am leaving, going to the corporate world where at least I will have money in my bank account.*

An interesting perception from some interviewees was that white academics came from wealthy families and were therefore not solely dependent on their salaries to “live”. It was also said that a professor earns less than a director or even a deputy director in government. Certain of the interviewees had in fact taken positions as directors in government.

Another concern was with the fierce competition for research grants. Academics with numerous publications could raise research grants and this made academic life easier. But many respondents were working on doctorates, had very little time to publish and also did not have research money. This led them to leaving both HBUs and HWUs. Some who had left HBUs found that they now had greater funding problems than before, because, at an HWU they had to compete with experienced researchers who knew the system. This was an oft-cited reason for leaving HWUs.