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Chapter 30

Transformation or ‘Training the Dog’? Approaches to Access Within an Historically White University in South Africa



Dina Zoe Belluigi and Gladman Thondhlana

Abstract This chapter provides insights into the intractable ethico-political nature of ‘access’ in post-colonial, post-conflict higher education (HE), through the reflections of Black academics and women academics who have lived experience of the minority-majority transitions of academic communities in post-apartheid South Africa. To address the lack of ‘diversity’ of under-represented demographics within historically white institutions, those institutions who provided access to these hand-picked academics did so requiring that they undergo rigorous professional development and socialisation programmes for the purposes of assuring their quality. Critical discourse analyses were undertaken of the qualitative responses of these academics made in response to a questionnaire on this subject, which were then confirmed and deepened within small group discussions. In this chapter we discuss how their responses revealed: (1) the mis-educational reception of *structural access* for troubling homogeneous institutional cultures; (2) the risks encountered in the politics of belonging of an individual’s *access for success*; and (3) the problematic weight of transformative expectations when conditions mitigate against empowering agents *access to challenge*. Situated within an historical narrative of academic development and the national drives in that country for an HE sector ‘transformed’ from its historical legacies of injustice and inequality, the chapter highlights the implications of these three constructions of access for disrupting the machinations of the hidden macro- and meso-curricula of power and whiteness.

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Questions of Equity in Faculty Development

Questions of access, authorship and uncertainty are appropriate for problematizing the interpretative frames of the university, as the intractable conditions of inequality and crises of representation continue to feature. Simmering below the surface of distinctions between access and equality are hidden curricula which socialize and construct participants in HE, their communities and knowledge(s) as de/legitimate or mis/recognised. This in turn impact on how such participants may be positioned as dominant or marginalised within the institutions. This study provides global readership insights from South African academics almost three decades into that country's democratization, when students and staff are continuing to actively voice disquiet about the problematics, politics and costs of having gained access to institutions with explicit legacies of exclusion – particularly, historically white universities (HWI).

In this chapter, we posit academic development as a site where national and institutional priorities, interests, and pressures for access are negotiated against what is valued for equity and justice. Characterized by rates of low participation and high attrition (Fisher & Scott, 2011), academic development in South Africa has become an active terrain of academic and professional practice (Skead, 2017). With barriers to access framed primarily in terms of *student learning*, this educational emphasis has manifested in foci on the micro-curriculum of teaching enhancement and curriculum review. As we discuss in this chapter, one of the problematics is that approaches that were utilized to address barriers to access for students marginalised within apartheid education policies and practices, have been applied to staff. Only recently has the gaze of those within this applied area of Higher Education Studies, extended to the meso- and macro-level cultures and structures which continue to privilege, legitimate and reinforce established apartheid, colonialist and cold war cultural hegemonies.

Presenting a series of narratives wherein literature and the responses of participants are interwoven to probe the reception and perception of access, in this chapter we differentiate approaches to access in this context, to expose the ways in which they have enabled the persistence of a problematic hidden curriculum. The nuanced insights of the lived experiences of academics deemed 'other' unveil the macro-aggressions enacted through the might of institutional quality assurance at an HWI, and call into question: in whose image the excellence of academic staff is constructed, and how do such aesthetics of identification operate in the quest for a transformed, equitable university?

Methodological Approach

The study involved the participation of a very particular group of heterogeneous individuals situated at various positions along the academic ladder. What binds them is their positioning as academic staff whose access to an historically white

English-medium, settler colonial institution¹ in South Africa, was made possible as recipients of various academic development programmes. These programmes aimed to address the legacies of exclusion of those academics categorised within demographic groups identified by the State and equity policies as under-represented within HWIs. As we discuss within the next section of this chapter, the apartheid regime had created an inversion of the national demographics of the majority Black populations to privileged white, male South Africans, and as such the inclusion of Black academics and of women academics in such programmes was in a bid to address the minoritisation of such ‘previously disadvantaged’ and ‘previously marginalised’ groups within HWIs particularly. Such elitist patterns of stratification are not uncommon to many postcolonial contexts.

The explicit ‘development’ purpose of the programmes was to both support career advancement and assure the quality of the academic practices of the selected Black and woman academics. In their 18 years of their piloting and implementation, programme titles have varied due to political rhetoric or aims (‘accelerated development’, ‘next generation’, ‘equity agenda’, funders et cetera). Common to all was that augmented mentorship, professional development and evaluation occurred *prior* to their selection for tenured employment, which differing to the standard employment practices. Drawing from the positive outcomes of the various iterations of these Programmes, funding shifted from external to national sources in 2015, with three centralised versions of the Staffing South Africa’s Universities Framework (SSAUF) for Black nationals and, where underrepresented, women: the ‘New Generation of Academics Programmeme’ (nGAP) for early career staff, ‘Existing Academics Capacity Enhancement Programmeme’ for mid-career staff, and ‘Higher Education Leadership & Management Programmeme’ for managerial positions. Recipients of such Programmes encouraged us to explore their differing receptions of group membership and staff evaluation, at an event when the authors presented findings of a study about societal asymmetries in student assessment dynamics (Thondhlana & Belluigi, 2016).

Both of the chapter authors have had direct experience with the national context: one author had been a programme recipient, and the other had worked within academic development. Acknowledging the inadequacy of our authoritativeness in this area, we invited our participants to embark on this study as central authorities to ensure that “those who are socially-marginalized... determine what is critical” (Berry, 2017, p. 63). Our interactions were thus characterized by critical dialogue between peers, rather than conventional researcher-respondent dynamics. Critical Discourse Analysis was utilised to differentiate between the ‘acts of narration’ of our contributors to the larger institutional and sectoral discourses which they negotiated in their everyday academic lives, and which pervade the HE sector nationally and globally. This approach allowed us to recognise the agency of these academics to resist, collude, shape, counter and call out such discourses; but also to read such

¹The study was awarded ethical approval, and policy briefs have been presented to relevant committees and authority. However, we have made concerted effort to reduce risk to the participants by removing identifiers of the particular institution and the specificity of the Programs.

larger discourses as artefacts of culture, to be explored for both their meanings and for how they operate in creating conditions within contexts. Within this, is a recognition of inherent power dynamics and the limits of critical consciousness of actors in times of rapid change.

The data generation process followed a report-and-respond approach (Stronach & Piper, 2004) to constructions of dominant institutional and national policy discourses of transformation, access, peer evaluation, and group membership. These were presented firstly in a questionnaire, followed by two small group discussions of our interpretations for member-checking and further exploration. Of the 53 recipients from 2000–2017, 27 responding positively to our invitation; 13 were not contactable; and 10 indicated their entry to the institution was too recent to be valid. Twenty-one chose to provide qualitative responses to this chapter's discussion on access and equity for academic staff (see Belluigi & Thondhlana, 2021 for a shorter meditation on this subject against concerns of racialised 'diversity' within UK HE).

The participants' reader-responses of those dominant discourses probed the misfit between the policy discourses, and their experiences of the meso-curriculum. Iterative analysis alongside these participants led to findings about the gaps between the espoused and the experienced discourses of transformation (Belluigi & Thondhlana, 2019) and intersectional insights into the politics of belonging as minoritised academics (Belluigi & Thondhlana, 2020). In this chapter, we discuss how over-arching approaches to access were categorized as (1) 'structural access', (2) 'access for success' and (3) 'access to challenge', which have shaped this chapter's structure. This grounded analysis of the participants' responses is interwoven with concepts and studies from academic literature which resonate with their problematizing of diversity and belonging. These were most often informed by Critical Race Theory (CRT), post-colonial and conflict theory, as these underpinning theoretical orientations challenge systems of racism, sexism, inequality and hegemony.

Findings and Discussion

'Window-Dressing': Participants' Reception of Structural Access

While many contexts have long grappled with massification and structural access, South African HE only began the project in the wake of its negotiated political settlement in the mid 1990s. As the vast majority of the population had been excluded from tertiary education, the issue of whom counted as 'under-represented' was not as fluid a concept as argued elsewhere (Reisberg & Watson, 2010). The concerted effort to dismantle the legacy of racial segregation and subjugation of apartheid ideologies and structures, inevitably led to a focus of affirmative action in the demographics of race and gender in national discourses, policies, and funding formula (Higher Education of South Africa, 2011; Ramrathan, 2016).

Initial emphasis was placed on structural access for student entrants at HWI, with less concerted scrutiny and pressure on the academic staff composition. As a gesture for the short-term, many HWI institutions hired non-national Black academics whose qualifications were assured elsewhere, rather than South African historical Black institutions, and who were perceived as more manageable than those who may be politically active (Sebola, 2015). A few HWIs piloted a range of development programmes, models of which were imported and funded by philanthropic organizations in the minority world of the Global North, tracing colonialist and cold war ties with democratic, capitalist leanings. Although tenured positions were the norm, these intensive development programmes offered employment on a contractual basis with significantly more scrutiny than the norms required for mainstream academic staff. They thereby assured that the altering of institutional demographics would be done in stable ways, while not relinquishing the long-held constructions of quality associated with their branding as leading national institutions.

Despite being small scale, these were billed as sustainable affirmative action pathways to eventual ‘transformation’ (Badat, 2008). One participant articulated how this rhetoric created the “disproportionate... phenomenon [where the] ‘first black’ or ‘only black’ is often treated as a major achievement” (#4). Two decades after democracy, the slow rate of change to the composition of the professoriate was described at national level as “the most glaring collective failure of the sector” (Transformation Strategy Group and Transformation Management Group, 2015, p. 11), because whites made up more than half (53.2%) of the academic staff against a national demographic of majority (79.2%) Black South Africans (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2015). Due to the persistent “poor picture” (Govinder et al., 2013, p. 5) produced from “institutional resistance to transformation” of HWIs (Booi, 2016: 78), one participant asserted that while “transformation is not just a numbers game, numbers are necessary” (#3).

In the questionnaire responses, a large majority of participants wrote about how the HWI intentionally mis-represented its stasis by parading these few selected Black staff as “window dressing” (#14) and “tokens” (#25) to “make the department look good” (#25) and “get the numbers looking good rather than changing the way in which power operates at the university” (#14). All participants indicated discomfort at being positioned as *representatives* of diversity and/or of transformation at the institution.

I merely had to be hired into a previously untransformed space, for the space to be considered transformative, and that was all the transformation they were willing to undergo (#19).

Within the small group discussions, participants spoke at length about their internal conflict from having benefited materially from such positioning while not having “signed-up” to the interests and ends it served, and being without sufficient power and networks to solidarity to resist such collusion.

Discourses of structural access were seen as mis-educational about equality. They reaffirmed perceived tensions between equity and quality, particularly because the criteria for access “implicitly assumes and implies that those staff members

(mostly white) who don't go through the programme are ready to teach in a rapidly transforming high education landscape" (#12). Participants described how this created conditions where negative associations of affirmative action were projected on participants, particularly those located on the basis of their race. Membership of the Programmes became "tantamount to 'labeling' which unintentionally creates a situation of having 'others' in the system" (#12). Emphasizing gains in numeric access retained the historic legacy of the thinking and practices of the majority, whom then continued to reproduce the whiteness hegemony characteristic of their own schooling (Belluigi, 2012; Paasche, 2006).

Globally, 'superficial inclusion' and 'visual diversity' is recognized as problematic for social justice (McDowell & Hernández, 2010). Yet few studies have recognised how affirmative action policies position and conflate heterogeneous individuals through their skills level and social locations (Fryer & Louri, 2010). Participants of this study were particularly concerned that the State's focus on staff composition (Republic of South Africa, 1998; HESA, 2011) was insufficient to address the relationships between race and class, echoing calls for racial and social quotas in other contexts in the Global South (Osorio, 2009) with fraught relationships between inequality and HE economics. The data for this study was generated against the backdrop of ongoing campus unrest due to the unresolved issue of tuition fees and educational 'access for all', with tension between the African National Congress government and the younger generation (Maserumule, 2016). Many of the participants of this study argued that intersectional lenses are required to not limit structural access, and in turn identity, to the parameters established by the apartheid and colonial gaze. As is discussed in the section titled 'chipping away', some explicitly saw decoloniality as a "confrontation with the racial, gender, and sexual hierarchies that were put in place or strengthened by European modernity as it colonized and enslaved populations through the planet" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 261).

'Training the Dog': Participants' Reception of 'Access for Success'

Recognizing that superficial notions of access would maintain disadvantage, South Africa's Council for Higher Education early on positioned 'equal opportunity' against the historical legacy of inequality (Sikhosana, 1993). Following students' structural access, high attrition rates confirmed the legacy of Bantu education in poor secondary schooling. Emphasis on equity was initially placed on additional support structures, leading to a proliferation of writing centres for those students identified as 'at risk'. Working directly with students within initiatives which soon became critiqued as functioning ghettos, 'educational developers' were positioned as marginal to the academic structures they were tasked to decode for their charges, with vulnerable employment arrangements reinforcing their reduced agency (Boughey, 2007). In countries where such individuals are in the minority, non-social

marginal models may be possible. They proved largely impractical and unsustainable in South Africa, as the majority of entrants fell within the umbrella category of 'underprepared', diagnosed into subcategories of perceived deficiency ('first generation' status, 'previously disadvantaged'), and positioned within zero-sum dichotomies (related to secondary schooling, language, literacy, rural/urban et cetera). More systemic approaches sought to infuse epistemological access (Morrow, 2009) within the curricula, theorizing equity as membership of academic discourses rather than generic academic literacy. And so 'academic development' evolved as its reach enlarged to workshops, formalised courses and centers for the development of teachers and the curricula. At the HWI of this study, educational developers utilized 'diversity' discourses to wrestle 'access for success' away from the autonomous deficit positioning of Black students, with 'inclusion' discourses valorizing the ways in which the more subtler aspects of learning cultures and inclusive dynamics might increase belonging (Hurtado et al., 2015). It took considerably longer to broaden such positively-framed 'belonging' discourses to the meso-curriculum of institutional culture and staff relations, perhaps because success-driven approaches rarely acknowledge the politics of belonging. However, beyond this national context, such discourses have been critiqued when it comes to student participation, from entry (Maunder et al., 2013) through to postgraduate study (Holley, 2013). Problematics emerge, such as conflating talent with advantage, myths of the autonomous self, and constructing the ideal knower in the image of curriculum authors. These should have acted as a warning for how academics might be similarly mis-constructed.

Approaches of 'access for success' for student educational development, were translated to the curricula of the Programmes to which the participants of this study were recipients. As staff similarly located within 'previously disadvantaged' communities, the Programmes pre-emptively satisfied the oft held critiques of affirmative action (Kravitz et al., 1997) as equality at the cost of quality. Quality assurance and professional advancement dovetailed with the national drive. Through various stop-starts, the approaches utilized for minority academics 'of color' within US HEIs were implemented, despite the contextual inversion of racial representation nor the scholarly critique that such professional socialization models emphasize "worker adaptation to the work environment [where] reproduction of organizational norms engenders the most rewards" (Sulé, 2014, pp. 432–433). As we unpack in this section, this critique was echoed within the responses of the participants of this study, who felt that in-group membership characteristics had not been disrupted from the predominant norms of the past. Those who exhibited a stronger sense of belonging had similar familial and school socialization to their white colleagues, while recipients' rejection or resistance to belonging was primarily influenced by experiences of alienation, exclusion and self-identification. White domination at the HWI was re-enforced from random acts to more enduring patterns, with micro-aggressions ranging from exclusion from departmental social media and events through to persistent administrative blunders. These created unwanted oscillations in participants' emotions between righteous anger through to self-doubt about rejection-sensitivity. Substantive access as "active inclusion" was "safeguarded" for

white staff (#11). Similar persistent patterns of tacit intentionality in the UK (Gillborn, 2005) and the US (Leonardo, 2004) were discussed at length at the small group discussion.

To be expected of individuals coming from a range of disciplines, backgrounds and positions along the academic hierarchy, participants varied in their opinions about *how* institutional culture(s) might be addressed. A minority felt it was not the institution's remit to "create the necessary space for transformation" because "the institution cannot change if the individuals within it are unable to do so" (#17). A similar situationist position was taken by the leading practitioner Badat (2009, p. 456) when he argued that "different social agents and actors acting in cooperation and/or conflict within HE and its institutions" impact on "the pace, nature and outcomes of institutional change". Such arguments fail to recognize that a central element of the Programmes' curriculum was its assessment literacy, which coerced these academics into conforming to the requirements for success. None of the mainstream academics were subjected to such evaluation nor mentorship regimes, with their academic autonomy protected by the 'collegial rationality' evaluation approach practiced in many of the country's HWIs (Lockett, 2006).

Assessment began with a strongly scrutinizing and competitive selective process, which marketed itself as ensuring only the "brightest" and most "talented" of the applicants were permitted access. Similar to what has been described as the myth of 'the supernegro' in a US study (Baldrige, 2016), hero narratives of individualist exceptionalism emerged in metaphors of being the 'poster child' (#12), where "being exceptional works to justify and historicize the ongoing racialized societal structure of land theft, human subjugation, and wealth accumulation" (Patel, 2016: 398). The deficit positioning of the communities to which the recipients were located, locked them into subservience where "I ought to be grateful for even getting my foot in the door" (#19). This liberalist ethos constructs equity as extending opportunities available to the privileged 'us' to pathologized 'others' (Burman, 2003), which one participant explained "required me to consider myself as otherwise underqualified and undeserving of the space I now occupied" (#19).

Such characterization is insulting, demeaning and in some cases dehumanizing...

How do you challenge those in power and certain ways of thinking about the meaning of transformation if you are coming from a position of inferiority? (#12).

The assessment regime continued once recipients gained access. Senior academics were empowered with formative and policing functions: to *support* access by "decoding the unsaid requirements of assimilation" (#19) within the ontological dimensions of the institutional habitus; and to *enforce* submission to such performance management parameters through their evaluations. Modelled on hierarchical master-apprentice, dominant-subordinate power dynamics (Booi, 2016), one participant described how the problematic nature of the relationship "crudely reproduced institutional hierarchies, i.e. young Black female scholars on the programme mentored by senior white males" (#16). Peer assessment was characterized on a continuum, from having "a slight undertone" (#19) of bias, to "actively silencing" the recipients through "threats of disciplinary action and/or discrimination" (#14).

While the criteria for assessment by their mentors were transparent, participants questioned the authority of

whose standards? In my opinion the access for success perspective suggests that those ‘previously disadvantaged’ entering the system, whether staff or students, are urged to “become” (and not be) more competent (#8).

Familiarity with, and performance of, institutional habitus was a requirement for both in-group membership, and for being seen to have the capacity to attain the levels of quality required. Ensuring the continuation of an “otherwise perfect system”, the top-down focus on fixing the deficit ‘mentees’ from their initial status as an “unknowledgeable ‘developmental candidate’” (#16) was not experienced as empowering: “It implies that a person is deficient and needs to be trained (as in training a dog)” (#12). Excessive evaluation led some to “regret signing up for the programme, believing that if I had applied for the job simply on the basis of my academic results I would have felt a stronger sense of self belief, and ownership over the process of my growth within the academy” (#16).

Underpinning the access for success approach is assimilation at the level of group membership. Emphasizing ‘sameness’ to reduce tension and promote harmony (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2012) is a reconciliatory position that has been adopted for stability in other post-conflict contexts (Ferguson & McKeown, 2016). Inclusion discourses of benevolent “helping relationships” (Burman, 2003: 294) often leave unacknowledged their inherent power dynamics and social account where identity pathologies difference. Participants of this study were at pains to state that these dynamics should be acknowledged.

[Such] conditions left me feeling as a newcomer that my voice could not penetrate a culture so ‘sutured’ and unchallenged by those acting as my mentors. With or without the [Programme], I know that many young black staff feel that, when transformation is pursued, the integration of black staff is problematized as opposed to the environments that they are entering into (#16).

Similar approaches to inclusion in other contexts have been found to reinforce the status quo of the dominant group, reducing recognition of unfair group-based disparities (Banfield & Dovidio, 2013). A participant within this study who recognized this dynamic, wrote about how their mentor did not feel powerful enough to raise consciousness about the politics of belonging at that HWI (#25). Identity politics perform in the interests of the group to which the individual deemed ‘diverse’ must assimilate to replicate group norms (Ryan et al., 2007; Verkuyten, 2006). ‘Diversity’ and ‘inclusion’ in assimilationist models of access have been found in the US to reap more benefits to those within the establishment than the intended recipients (Peralta, 2015). Participants highlighted the inappropriateness of assimilationist models in an HWI shaped by settler colonialism and apartheid, particularly as “assimilation allows existing oppressive ideologies to continue. X [HWI] opts for assimilation strategies rather than allowing students and staff to become active participants in transforming this space” (#14). The Transformation Strategy and Management Group (2015, p. 17) which oversees change in HE in the country, have

argued it is imperative to unearth the hidden curriculum of “who controls the material, academic, organizational and social instruments to reproduce the faculty and the university?” Participants felt that the institution’s embrace of ‘access for success’ allowed for untroubling the dynamics of meritocracy, which both reduced recipients’ power to act as agents of transformation and relinquished the institution of its responsibilities for change.

In as much as I have not internalized my role as a black academic, the institution has perhaps not internalized its role as an institution/system in a specific context. (#8).

In this section, we discussed how our participants exposed the validity of this construction of access as impoverished, because ‘success’ is predicated on privileging the very racist, gendered and classist systems which have subjugated the majority of the population of the country.

‘Chipping Away at the Rock Face’: Participants’ Reception of the Conditions for ‘Access to Challenge’

Following on from almost three decades of the access and success approach for a minority of the majority of the country, a growing intellectual mass in the country has been asking: what is the point of access to HE, if not for substantive transformation? Many argue access should be emancipatory: to dismantle the cultures and structures of apartheid, legacies of colonialism and cold war conflict, challenge the continued epistemic violence of the Eurocentric university, and to resist neoliberal interests of ‘third world’ labor and human capital for the global market place.

Frustrated with the limitations of ‘opportunities’ provided from structural access, and the pathological orientation of access for success, academic and student activists in South Africa have taken on the mantle of calling for ‘decolonizing the curriculum’ since 2015, a discourse which has rippled globally. Because of the country’s educational development’s focus on teaching-and-learning, as discussed in the previous sections, this call has often been translated as about pedagogical or disciplinary review. Discussions on access often focus at the micro-level: on the politics of representation (Okundaye, 2017), epistemologies of inclusion (Sulé, 2014), and of participation (Hall & Smyth, 2016). As indicated by critiques of the individualist approaches for success, discussed in the section above, participants recognized micro-level concepts of equity as distributive justice were limited and limiting.

With rare exception, HEIs seem to avoid direct confrontation or acknowledgment of their own complicity at the macro- or meso-level. In this study, a participant expressed this as “the elephant in our room is X [the color of the HWI’s brand identity]” (#25). Participants characterized the institutional culture as strongly replicating the macro-aggressions of its inherited, exclusionary, homogeneous past. The concept of the macro-curriculum enables unearthing the ideologies of white

race-privilege in academia (Solomona et al., 2005) and its relation to machinations of domination and macro-aggressions, from which micro-aggressions emerge (Huber & Solorzano, 2015). Macro-level considerations discern access in relation to sociological theories of power, conflict and collective action, to foreground justice in the analysis of social change. As a principle, distributive justice has informed leadership and development of HE in the Global South (McDowell & Hernández, 2010). Albeit that academic developers are often positioned as marginal, mediating and vulnerable; key players within that applied field in South Africa are informed by more critical leanings than their mainstream academic colleagues (Belluigi, 2012), encouraging pedagogies which question their complicity in reproducing privilege and marginality (Bozalek, 2011). Moreover, many within the higher education landscape share the belief, along with critical conflict theorists and critical race theorists, that the very firmament of formal education is problematic.

A number of participants raised concerns about “superficial, and dangerous assumptions” (#17) that their structural access would contribute to the national drive of “intellectual and academic decolonization, de-racialization and de-gendering of the inherited intellectual spaces of South Africa’s universities” (Higher Education of South Africa, 2011, p. 11). Visual diversity often does not equate to rupture, particularly if mental colonialisation is reinforced by assimilationist conditions which militate against recipients’ agency, where

those who have been ‘oppressed’ maintain the status quo, as their immersion in the ways of the other, propels the continuation of an oppressive history and way of thinking (#17).

Spivak (2008) positions the university’s ‘making’ of an academic as constraining the extent to which the agent is able to reject the way they are produced. Structurally reproductive agency entails choices that either reinforce the status quo or replicate prevailing social patterns, thereby diminishing transformative agency to purposefully alter social patterns (Sulé, 2014, p. 437). Participants cited aversion to the “professional risk” (#25) which the assessment literacy of the ‘access for success’ approach engendered, forcing them to act in their own self-interests to

ensure that our careers and reputations are not compromised... When challenges were made [it opened] a can of worms. I was not safe to talk to, I was shunned... I am told to be careful of career suicide and boundaries (#25).

The conditions for risk-aversion and enculturation of the institution’s meso-curriculum of access for success led many participants to choose not to align themselves with the more radical notions of ‘access to challenge’. Common-group identity, prevalent to belonging discourses, has been found to dull motivation for challenging injustices and for exposing what underlies intergroup conflict (Banfield & Dovidio, 2013). Such vulnerability tangibly constrained the recipients’ ability to challenge injustices when they or their colleagues experienced them. It also impacted on their acting in solidarity with Black students, because “How do you help when you know the very structures are set up, [so that even] you do not get

heard?” (#25). This was articulated as the “awkward position” (#8) of being “illegitimate representatives” (#1) of social justice.

Those recipients who self-identified with the approach of ‘access to challenge’ were those who experienced the greatest role conflict. Conditions at the HWI exacerbated such conflict as “the reality is uncomfortable even for those in power espousing it” (#27). Identity politics wreaked havoc with these participants’ sense of self, as they walked a “tight rope” (#8) between expectations, that they embody diversity and were responsible for transforming the institution, and crushing pressures to assimilate into the current culture and satisfy rigorous performance management targets. Rather than “disturbing the paradigm of exclusion” (Sulé, 2014, p. 437), a participant’s choice of the idiom “chipping away at that rock face” (#25) better represented the frustrations of these academics’ “futile” (#25) impact on transformation at that HWI. The myths of evolutionary progress, which underpinned theories of change within the institution, were seen to result “in a LACK of substantive change since it relies on gradual evolution, and there is no clear evolutionary path between “untransformed” and “transformed” states” (#4). Liberalist understandings of incremental change run counter to arguments that racism, in particular, requires sweeping and radical change (Ladson-Billings, 1998) through disruption (Nwadeyi, 2016). Many of these participants exhibited the psychological stress symptoms of battle fatigue (Smith et al., 2016) common to those marginalized in HE in other national contexts (Alemán & Gaytán, 2017), and those with intergenerational collective memories of discrimination and violence (Maldonado-Torres, 2007).

It is argued that such “subaltern passions [should be viewed] as political resources that challenge hegemonic conditions and formulate strategic counter-hegemonic responses” (Zembylas, 2013). This potential may be realized within larger collective projects of decolonisation across the country in time, if they are not domesticated. These participants’ narratives pointed to the insufficient conditions of their ‘access to challenge’ the cultures, social formations and knowledge formations at that HWIs. Rather, such agency was relinquished by self-preservation within the system of exchange inherent to the assessment regimes of the Programmes.

I chose to silence myself a lot of the time to avoid conflict and to integrate into the department and find some sort of sense of belonging. While I became an easier colleague to work with (as mentioned by many of my colleagues), I felt that I had compromised my own values, ethics, and beliefs. My sense of belonging increased, but my sense of self diminished (#14).

Conclusions and Implications

Whilst trans-ontological hopes of “generous interaction among subjects” may be aspired to in the decolonial project (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 260), this chapter reveals how such conditions were painfully elusive for these academics in this supposedly ‘post’-colonial, ‘post’-apartheid, ‘post’-racial context. These participants’ insights into the lived realities of institutionalized machinations of domination,

reaffirmed the “threadbare” nature of “settler narratives of linearity, progress, and mobility” (Patel, 2016: 399) which underpinned the approaches to access in this HE context. Finding themselves problematically positioned by the conservative mainstream as embodying transformation through their superficial diversity in the ‘structural access’ approach, and as agents of transformation by those committed to emancipatory visions of ‘access to challenge’, the reality of the constraining ‘access for success’ model effectively reduced the agency of these individuals to *be* or to *effect* change within the historically white institutions’ cultural expectations and norms.

Although social justice as a term abounds in the espoused, every day and scholarly discourses of South African Higher Education Studies, this study points to the significance of academic development’s blinkered focus on educational outcomes (Patel, 2016; Wuetherick & Ewert-Bauer, 2012) over moral, ethical and political obligations. Participants of this study revealed the problematic nature of the measured and conservative projects of success within the academy when the figure of focus remains individualist. Academic development requires a shift towards ‘critical academic development’ if unjust conditions are to be challenged within. Participants’ insights call for authorial accountability at the meso-level for the continuity of the macro-curriculum of the country’s exclusionary past in the present. Avoidance of accusation mimics the ways in which individualistic hero narratives (Baldrige, 2016) and white privilege discourses (Leonardo, 2004) detract readers from the important task of examining the machinations of domination and systemic oppression of global racism. The insights emerging from these reflections on the lived experiences and concerns of these potentially powerful insiders in South African HE, serve as a warning for those espousing discourses of diversity, inclusion and belonging in contexts with legacies of conflict, oppression and inequality.

This study by confirms the importance of exploring the gaps between what is espoused, by those in power, and what is experienced, by the intended beneficiaries, of what is implemented in practice. When it comes to academic development in post-conflict contexts, questions should be asked when approaches for the academic success of underrepresented students are mis-translated into staff programmes in the name of historic redress. Critical analysis of approaches to the access and participation of minoritised and marginalised academics should consider whether such inclusion has had transformative impact on mainstream hegemonic norms. This is of importance for justice, diversity, equity and inclusion policy and practice, and for the democratisation of higher education.

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