

Towards Nourishing Universities

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Transformation
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The Ongoing Transformation Journey

- **Ultimate Goal:** Transformation is a change toward South Africa's **1996 Constitutional vision**, underpinned by **equality, freedom, and human dignity** (primus inter pares).
- 8 dimensions of transformation as articulated by Times Higher Education: transformation of the institution, of talent, of internationalisation, of teaching and learning, of the student experience, of social impact, of research and of leadership.
- **Cross-Cutting Dimension:** The **transformation of institutional culture** is a necessary, **cross-cutting dimension** that impacts all others.
- **Key Warning:** If institutional culture is not effectively addressed, transformation in other areas will be **hobbled**. This is especially true for Historically White Institutions (HWIs).

Transformation, Massification, and Historical Resistance

- **Massification's Promise:** Expansion of access has "unbolted the doors" for women, Black, working-class, and poor people, suggesting a greater **democratisation of higher education**.
- **The Elite Challenge:** This transformation runs against the **historical grain** of the university as an **elite institution**, especially for top-tier HWIs which marshal significant resources and influence.
- **Intractable Culture:** Incidents (e.g., Reitz, FMF clashes, Wilgenhof) are painful reminders of the **intractability of inherited institutional cultures**.

Institutional Cultures as Carriers of Coloniality

- **The Root Problem:** Institutional cultures spring from **colonial longevities** and are, in fact, **carriers of coloniality**.
- **Defining Coloniality:** The **persistence of colonial ways** of doing, thinking, and being, despite the official end of colonialism.
- **Exclusion:** Policy-driven transformation has **run up against institutional cultures**. Exclusion and marginalisation persist in both **access to** and routine encounters **in** universities (race, class, gender, sexuality).

The "Next Phase": Focusing on Norms and Underpinning Knowledges

- **The Challenge:** University efforts focus on combatting prejudice, changing language policies/names, and advancing non-racialism. However, deep transformation requires removing obstacles rooted in **apartheid-era legacies**.
- **New Tools Needed:** We need **sharper, contextualised tools** to understand everyday exclusions/inclusions.
- **Epistemic Decolonisation:** Transformation involves ontological (being) and **epistemological (knowing)** aspects. This means redeeming worldviews and theories not rooted in Euro-American theory.
- **Situated Knowledges:** Institutional culture is reproduced through specific, shared ways of **sense-making** and **world-making**.

The Mechanics of Institutional Norms

- **Culture as Sense-Making:** Culture is learned and shared ways of making sense of the world, which has **material effects**.
- **The Power of the Norm:** Norms are the bedrock, working **invisibly** as "taken-for-granted" prescriptions for being and doing. Breaches are subject to sanction.
- **Normalisation:** The continuous iteration and reinforcement of norms creates a "**naturalness**" ("the way we have always done things").
- **Inequality Perpetuated:** Cultural positions with **privilege** prevail, creating **normativities** that determine **who may belong, and how**.
- **Conclusion:** We must confront and overturn the spoken and unspoken norms that perpetuate **institutionalised forms of racism and heteropatriarchy**, which resist possibilities for equitable futures.

Neoliberalism: Market vs. Public Good

- **Tension:** Neoliberalism directly opposes the project of **transformation**.
- **"Counting Culture":** Neoliberal universities favour **quantifiable metrics** and bureaucratic technocracy.
- **The Problem:** This mindset dismisses institutional culture as unmeasurable.
- **Market Remake:** Higher Education has been corporatised over 40 years, driven by **financialisation** and **commercialisation**.
- **Appropriation:** Education, once a public good, now targeted for **capitalist appropriation**.

Neoliberalisation: Circumscribed Change

- **Depoliticisation:** Neoliberal focus on metrics reduces transformation to a "**tick-box exercise.**"
- **Reality Ignored:** This misses the **intangible dimensions** of power and bias—the core of colonial and apartheid **normativities.**
- **The Trap:** Numerical inclusion can be **highly circumscribed**, preventing **substantive change** to power relations.

Transforming Institutional Culture: A 4-Part Framework

- **Goal:** Enable "the next phase of holistic transformation" through cultural change.
- **The 4 Cross-Cutting Dimensions** (from our book):
 - **Historicisation** & Contextualisation (Analysis)
 - Centrality of **Lived Experience** (Situated Knowledge)
 - Diagnosing **Encumbrances** (Identifying Barriers)
 - **Activist Dimension** (Resistance and Action)

Dimension 1: Analysis

- **Historicisation**

- Draw lens wider: Cultures reproduce orders of domination inherited from the **Global North** (e.g., US university model).
- Colonial Genesis: African universities historically provided officials for the **colonial state**; goals later overtaken by nationalism/neoliberalism.

Dimension 2: Subjectivity

- **Lived Experience & Normalization**
- **Normalization:** The pivot around which institutional culture revolves.
- **Embodied Knowledge:** Lived experience is central; subjects are produced *by* and *in turn produce* culture.
- **Academic Norms:** The unspoken script prioritizes **detachment and citation**, suppressing own thought/experience.
- **Neoliberal Link:** Citation becomes **currency**; knowledge is treated as **capital**, erasing relational and human aspects.

Dimension 3: Encumbrances to Deep Change

- **Not Just Numbers:** Transformation requires deeper **structural changes**, not just improved numerical representation.
- **Resistance:** Universities are entrenched social structures, resistant to change despite diversity.
- **Adaptation Trap:** Marginalized groups often **adapt to systems** instead of institutions altering.
- **Power Reproduction:** Universities reproduce power relations, social stratification, and inequality.
- **Conformism:** Older and newer forms of power converge, imposing **conformism** despite strategic inclusion of some excluded individuals.

Dimension 4: The Way Forward (Action)

- **Goal:** Break coloniality habits and **institutionalise humanisation**.
- **Start with Self:** Change begins with **self-reflection** (personal responsibility) and challenging internal assumptions.
- **Collective Action:** Self-reflection must feed into **collective reflection** and systemic transformation.
- **Shared Intentionality:** Requires an honest, concerted institutional commitment to confront **racism** and other oppressive practices.
- **Conflict & Reimagination:** Following bell hooks, conflict can be generative if overcome through mutual accountability, creating space to **reimagine university cultures** and carve out just alternatives.