

Narratives of Transformation.

University Change in post-apartheid South Africa

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Introduction: narratives in South African higher education

World-wide, higher education is increasingly characterized by diversity (Paradeise & Thoenig 2013). While this diversity has the potential of enriching the academic community and, in a broader sense, society as a whole, the underlying processes are often far from unproblematic. Some institutions of higher education tend to stress the benefits of diversity for their organizations, pointing to their potential of safe spaces for reflection (Roux 2012). Yet the very concept of diversity often suggests difference, and difference often is the source of contradiction, inequality and exclusion. Thus, diversity can challenge the ideal of a cohesive academic community, and actually, it often does. The ways in which universities - as traditional academic communities – and other higher education institutes deal with the challenge of diversity, poses interesting questions for social and organizational scientists. This paper gives testimony of how higher education in South Africa is reshaped in political unsettled times. More particularly, it presents stories of students from a former all-white and Afrikaans medium university that is going through a critical transition phase. The paper illustrates that stories and narratives are key to a critical understanding of the complexity of organized and not so organized change (Brown, Gabriel, Gherardi, 2009: 324). As narratives are almost by definition multi-faceted, ambiguous and even liable to power play (Brown 2006), they are valuable building-blocks for deciphering complex change processes, which themselves are seldom as straightforward and self-evident as change agents – supported by many a business school ally – often suggest (Thomas & Hardy 2011; Thomas, Sargent & Hardy 2011). In order to shed light on how this long-term organizational change process affects daily life of those who are directly concerned, the paper recounts a number of narratives of students from one of the many South African universities that are presently involved in a process that is labeled transformation. What makes this educational change project special is that it belongs to the broader educational redress mission governing the post-apartheid political and societal transition the post-apartheid African National Congress government started after rising to power in 1994.

Narratives modes of interpretation have little claims of truth, but rather suggest verisimilitude, endowing experience with meaning through the careful association of concrete (bottom-up) stories which are historically contextualized (Boje 1995; Brown, Gabriel & Gherardi 2009; Czarniawska 1997; Gabriel 2000; Tsoukas & Hatch 2001: 983). In this view people in organizations lead storied lives, meaning that organizational actors present their stories/narratives as accounts of meaningful events “with plots that weave together complex occurrences into unified wholes that reveal significant instances of organizing, or organizational becoming” (Brown, Gabriel & Gherardi 2009: 325).

Organizations are socially constructed spaces where meaning-giving actors constantly change organizational reality (Bate 1997; van Maanen 2010). This sensemaking always takes place in an environment where meaning has constantly to be negotiated (Czarniawska 1997). Capturing the process of sensemaking in an institution that is in transition can be fruitfully carried out by reconstructing the ‘narratives of change’ (Berendse, Duijnhoven & Veenswijk 2007) drawn from what John van Maanen (1988) calls ‘tales from the field’. The complexity of transformation processes, particularly in academic institutions, shows itself in the language used by the actors involved. Vaara (2002; 2003; see also Risberg, Tienari & Vaara 2003) has stressed the role of narratives as central to an understanding of the social construction of organizational phenomena. Like Tsoukas & Hatch, he shows that narrative analysis allows locating intentionality in sequential accounts and enables linking discursiveness to diverse subject positions and identities (Vaara 2002: 215-217). In his view, both success and failure versions of narratives can be either overly optimistic or deeply pessimistic, as meaning-giving actors are constantly framing and reframing the question of failure and success (ibid.: 239).

Brown and Humphreys (2003) provide some good examples of such discursive framing in their discussion of the way British higher education managers tell ‘epic’ stories of their interventionist

successes in merging organizations to produce what they regard as culturally coherent and effective new institutions. What makes their analysis convincing is that these managerial stories are strongly contradicted by what they call 'tragic' tales of fragmentation and conflict that faculty and other employees relate in their comments on the same organizational phenomenon. Brown and Humphreys build their analysis on the type of storytelling approach advanced by Gabriel (2000) who has argued that the use of rhetorical tropes is part of the poetic, interpretative story-work that organizational members do on a daily basis. His claim is that an analysis of these tales can produce powerful insights into the various coping strategies organizational actors deploy in the battlefield of meaning production (see also Boje 2008; Beech & MacIntosh 2012).

In the South African context Janssen a.o. (2002) have similarly collated contrasting educational narratives and counter-narratives produced by managers and faculty over a complex institutional merger in the higher education sector of the Eastern Cape. Their presentation of the stories by the various institutional groups subjected to the consequent organizational change displays a discursive struggle characterizing identity-work at the university (2002: 421ff). Similarly to Walker's account of race narratives among post-apartheid university students at another South Africa university (2005), the present study locates student narratives into a layered perspective that contextualizes these stories of self by placing them into – and in a way representing – a wider organizational and societal arena in which the struggle over (the meaning of) change and transformation is played out. Thus my explorative study aims to make a contribution to a long-term research project into the cultural effects of South African educational politics and the identity transformation of the country's higher education institutions and its inhabitants (Kamsteeg 2011, 2012).

South Africa's higher education and post-apartheid transition and transformation

Except for a relatively quiet period in the early twentieth century, South Africa's higher education history has been a turbulent one, particularly so in the period of official apartheid from 1948 onwards. During this period, higher education developed into a system of inequality, with disproportionately scattered institutions varying a great deal in size, student enrolment, research capacity, funding, quality of management, etc. The major divide was between historically advantaged (white) institutions (HAIs) and historically disadvantaged (black) institutions (HDIs) as a result of the regime's interventionist policies to establish racial separation in tertiary education as elsewhere in society. Since 1994 the government and its successive Ministers of Education have viewed (higher) education as a vehicle for effecting societal transformation and redressing the legacy of apartheid. The National Commission on Higher Education, instituted by the government in 1996, initiated a programme of policy change that year and, by 1997, this culminated in a White Paper on Higher Education (1997; see also CHE 2007; Jansen et al. 2002; Jansen 2003).

From the outset in 1994, the ANC government adopted an interventionist approach to educational change. It was the driving force behind the 1997 White Paper which gave the government comprehensive power to plan, control and fund the entire sector. The White Paper defined the 'size and shape' of the new system, emphasized programme-based planning and stressed a need for institutional collaboration. Quality assessment by a proposed Council on Higher Education (CHE) was meant to provide a sound basis for decisions on structural rearrangements. Mergers were hardly mentioned in the document or in the previous National Commission on Higher Education report (Jansen 2003: 3). The issue came to fore only two years later when a new Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, was appointed in 1999. The CHE's (2000) report, *Towards a New Higher Education Landscape: Meeting the Equity, Quality and Social Development Imperatives of South Africa in the 21st Century*, proclaims that 'bedrock' teaching universities should be distinguished from

comprehensive research universities, and it promised the end of the binary system based primarily on race. The idea of linking institutional restructuring of the system and social redress gained new purchase and force in 2002 with the Department of Education's (DoE's) report, *The Restructuring of the Higher Education System in South Africa*, which proposed a far-reaching programme of mergers as an appropriate mechanism to bring about transformation, equity, sustainability and productivity (Balintulo 2003: 457). The same document also provided concrete merger goals and a list of institutions that had to be merged.

Subsequent policy documents developed the idea of institutional mergers as the principle means to reach the desired goals of reorganization: social development, equity, and quality. Close reading of the DoE's 2002 document shows that, in addition to enhancing access and equity for staff and students, and the building of new institutional cultures and identities beyond the racial and ethnic past, efficiency and manageability goals were equally important (Jansen 2003: 9; see also Higgins 2007). Both the HAIs and the HDIs protested against the Ministry's top-down approach but, in 2004, the government-mandated merger programme had effectively reduced 36 institutions of higher education to 23: eleven traditional universities (offering theory-oriented degrees), six universities of technology (offering vocational diplomas and degrees) and six comprehensive universities (offering a combination of both qualifications). In this operation the former fifteen institutions of tertiary education offering vocational training, called *technikons*, disappeared. They were either merged into one of the comprehensive universities, or transformed into universities of technology.

The merger project meant a breach in what had been – at least structurally – a fairly stable system for about twenty years, tertiary education in post-apartheid South Africa entered a new and fairly indeterminate phase in which, according to Jansen (2003: 157-159), four major transitions were meant to be made: the eradication of racial inequalities (among staff and students); bringing the HDIs' severe governance and management crisis to an end; reversing declining student enrolment rates; and diminishing the chronic fragmentation and huge imbalances caused by the apartheid government's goals and strategies in relation to higher education. The policy measures introduced during the Asmal administration were intended to reduce inequality and foster internationalisation in one single operation. Yet they underestimated the social and cultural effects of the past, and the extent to which particular groups and institutions had vested interests to defend. Moreover it was to be expected, after so many years in which the government's explicit steering role had been the organization of separation, that a change towards deliberate transformation through merging would produce resistance. The university we are turning to now is an interesting case in point.

Transformation at the UFS

The UFS was established in 1904 as the Grey University College with 6 students. It is one of the older universities in the country, serving as a practically all-white student and staff institution during the apartheid era. When in 1993 the university introduced a parallel medium language policy, the introduction of English caused a significant increase of the enrollment of black students. Yet integration was still far from achieved. Afrikaans students took (and take) their classes in Afrikaans, whereas black students prefer (red) the English version of the lectures. Campus life also remained divided with black and white residences. Still in 2005 the rector acknowledged that the main campus actually consisted of two spaces, dividing the student population along racial lines.

By 2007 the student population had grown to 27.000, and today the number has grown to 33.000, divided over three campuses. In 2003 the university merged with the Qwaqwa Campus – a former Bantu institute situated in the Eastern Free State – and in 2004 the South Campus was added to the broader institution. With these two campuses added to the main city campus, UFS complied with the

SA government's higher education policy following the 1997 White paper. By now it is a middle-range university with over 4.000 faculty and support staff, working in 7 faculties and more than 100 departments. Like all other South African universities the institute tries to conform to the national transformation agenda of higher education, a process that is still far from being concluded, and in fact is strongly contested.

In an analysis of the first ten years of the transformation Jonathan Jansen, since 2009 the UFS rector, concluded that transformation transcends the visible and publicized material of how far South Africa has come, and that its road was packed with difficulties (Jansen 2004). One of the problems Jansen mentioned was the lack of consciousness regarding the ways in which schools were organized and how instruction was given. The most important observation that he made was that universities have been successful at racial desegregation but have been less successful in achieving the ideal of institutional culture integration, a culture that still fails to really include, accommodate and affirm racial diversity and differences (ibid.: 122).

The problems of transformation in the HE system in South Africa were addressed in a Higher Education Transformation colloquium held in Bloemfontein in 2013. Vice-chancellors of different South African universities, professors and students discussed the future of the South African HE system. Their preliminary conclusion was that universities face a persistently high dropout rate among first year students, suffer from a lack of adequate funding as well as poor preparation at the high school level, still share diversity-hostile institutional culture, and finally struggle with rigid curricula and lack of academic discipline amongst its students. Much like what Jansen had already concluded in 2004, the colloquium's conclusion regarding the transformation of the HE system particularly held the adverse campus culture responsible for low participation rates and underperformance of black students. The colloquium was hosted by the UFS, which under the leadership of Jonathan Jansen considers itself as one of the leading universities in the process of transformation striving to attain '*excellence in academic achievement and in human reconciliation*' (UFS, 2013). This means, among other things, that the university has explicitly set itself the task to transform the historically white university into a non-racial environment.

Key to understanding the symbolic role the Bloemfontein university fulfills in the overall university transformation process in South Africa is the racist incident that took place at UFS in 2008. The so called 'Reitz incident' took place during the initiation period in one of the main campus' traditional student residences. Three black workers were humiliated in what the three white male student perpetrators considered a practical joke. The case was blown up when the students showed their acts on *Youtube*, thus causing a major outrage in the university and in fact the whole country. The incident showed the 14 years after the end of Apartheid, racial differences in South Africa's Higher Education were still alive. With Jonathan Jansen as Vice-Chancellor, the UFS in 2010 implemented several initiatives to support the transformation process. Jansen, himself appointed after the Reitz incident, in one of his public appearances declared that he didn't want to talk about the Reitz four, but "about the Reitz in all of us." In order to tackle the deeper problems he considered Reitz to represent, he took a number of decisions. The first was the establishment of an interdisciplinary Institute of Reconciliation and Social Justice, to coordinate research and public debate on institutional transformation and human rights. The other initiative was the F1 Leadership for Change Program, a "study abroad programme of short duration available to students of all ethnicities, enabling them to personally experience models of integration across lines of culture, colour and language" (UFS, 2014). This latter programme, targeted at 75 students per year, is exposing a group of selected student to a training programme, culminating in a two week study abroad experience in an overseas university offering a programme bringing them the 'Global Diversity Experience' as the academic package offered in Amsterdam is called. It is predominantly students who took part in the F1 (Amsterdam) programme who provide the narratives that I will now present as testimony of where UFS educational transformation now stands, as an example of the complexity of South African

cultural transition process. In view of re-presenting the complex trajectory of South-Africa’s macro social formation, I recount a number of local student narratives of self in the post-apartheid experience, framed in the situated activity of the F-1 programme, and located within the broader UFS institutional setting.

Transformation narratives: students talk diversity

In this section I present a number of narratives together giving a nuanced picture of how UFS students make sense of the changes the university is going through since the mid 1990s, and more precisely since 2009 under the leadership of the present rector Jonathan Jansen. These narratives essentially concern changes in the campus culture of the university in Bloemfontein and I try to make sense of their sensemaking efforts (Brown, Patrick, & Nandhakumar 2008). Student narratives are particularly important, I believe, for studying campus culture, because they ‘predict’ in a way the future of the university. Of course present staff and faculty are also, and to some extent probably even stronger, bearers of campus culture, but they are less explicitly targeted as change agents by the university leadership, which is perhaps one of the reason for its slow change path (Higgins 2007).

My research for this study is based on ethnographic fieldwork and interviewing among students over the years 2012-2014. I am doing this project from a research perspective, that includes social engagement to the UFS transformation project. VU university Amsterdam has committed itself, through a number of bilateral agreements with South African universities, to foster mutual academic advancement, societal responsibility, and engaged scholarship (v.d. Ven 2007). Student exchange, including a UFS F1 group visiting Amsterdam in 2012 en 2014, is one of the visible foci of collaboration, but a joint research project under the broad label of “comparative diversity studies in higher education” is another. Since 2013 I am a regular visitor UFS, where I am hosted by the UFS transformation spearhead IRSJ, gathering data myself or supervising Master’s students from Amsterdam who conduct fieldwork at the UFS campus. In 2012 one student particularly researched the post-F1 student experience; and in 2014 another student explored UFS student residence life. Both students lived on campus and actively participated in student campus life. For this paper, I partly draw on the student narratives these students gathered, but the main part of the material I present has been recorded by myself during study visits I spent at the IRSJ. At some stages in the following section a draw parallels with Donna Bryson’s recent book *It’s a black and white thing* (2014) which recounts personal stories of the first UFS F1 students during their foreign (Texan) experience in 2010.

Diverse Narratives of transformation

In this second, strongly empirical part, I present the narratives of seven UFS students, from various disciplines and backgrounds, who have all participated in the F1 leadership programme. As the table below already shows, the stories are fairly diverse and reflect different views on transformation and the way the students’ identities have been affected by their involvement on campus and particularly the by the experience they had by taking part in the F1 programme.

Student¹, discipline	Type of narrative
Hendrick, coloured, theology	The spirited, self-proclaimed leader
Driekie, white, drama	The hesitant artist struggling with her Afrikaner tradition

¹ Although the use of such concepts as race, ethnicity and especially colour are highly contested since 1994, it is part of everyday life and very difficult to avoid, both by observers/researchers and people in daily colloquial speech exchange. Apparently race/colour does matter in South Africa for how people define their identities, despite the fact that non-racialism has become the official ideology and policy in the country (McDonald 2006).

Bonolo, black, industrial psychology	The critical outsider
Florence, white, law	The English speaking minority
John, white, law	The reflective politician
Dino, black, economics	The born leader
Anisha black, accounting	The career driven women

A SPIRITED NARRATIVE FROM THE FISH HOUSE

I spoke to Hendrick in the kitchen of the oldest student residence of the UFS campus, the Fish House, called after a famous Bloemfontein lawyer, Abraham Fisher, whose grandson was to defend Nelson Mandela in the Rivonia Trial in which he was sentenced to life imprisonment. He is a coloured theology student and rugby player in a traditional res², that is now slowly being transformed into an ethnically mixed residence. He is from a poor family in the Eastern Cape, and told me I was the first whom he shared his future plans with.

“I’m planning to do my thesis on anthropology and theology thesis, because I have discovered that the bible has some great stories of cultural diversity. My ambitions are pretty big, a would really like to combine anthropology and theology like it has never been done before. It is going to take a lot of me, a lot of time, but I feel I gonna give lectures, talks, and become a lecturer in academia, as I can convey a message pretty clearly. To realize this I will go again to Europe, come back to Bloemfontein and give these talks.”

Where did he get these ideas? He links them directly to his leadership of the F1 group that visited Amsterdam in January 2014. He refers to his mother who once told him to “strive to have a lot of people to look up to you and follow your example.” In the preparation period before travelling to Amsterdam he was voted to take the leader position of the group after a number of dialogue sessions. He semi-jokingly tells that they deliberately send him to Amsterdam:

“ They send us to places where we would be most productive. Why Amsterdam? Well, I don’t know why, perhaps they thought this guy is a theologian, let’s see how he will handle as a theologian in Amsterdam with all the challenges, the red light district, bi-sexuals, etc. I must say I now think I was blessed to be thrown in the deep, to learn about student life, what they (in Amsterdam, FK) thought about one’s virginity, about getting wasted every week-end. This does not happen here, on campus, you are not allowed to drink. At the time it felt weird, but now that I have been there, I have started to think that it maybe isn’t that bad. In the red light district, how do you raise your child there? Yet, it is actually safe, I found that out. I don’t know if I would have grown more when they had send me to Cleveland, which is way more conservative that Europe.”

He strongly believes that this whole F1 experience has helped him grow.

“It has made me think differently. I was already mentally in the Netherlands before I went and when I got back, the reflections we had together helped me to develop cognitively and emotionally, to have a different view from what I was used to. I now know that people have different opinions and respect that. I also act differently, because I feel that I need to be more informed, I did not know enough before. I learned much from those kids (in Amsterdam, FK), they know so much. You know, knowledge is power, now it feels like I need to get that knowledge, to get to know people. That is how I have changed. I have also learned to put myself in uncomfortable positions, get the culture shock, absorb it, and make an analysis. I didn’t do that before, I take myself more out of my comfort zone. Like e.g. going into townships, learn from the

² Student residences are commonly called ‘res’.

blacks, how they do their trade. I went to Lesotho recently, did not have that desire before. It was an outreach, we build houses, played with kids, it made me feel differently.”

The clearest reference Hendrick makes to the transformation concept is when he asks me about John Coetzee’s novel *Disgrace*. He had read this book in Amsterdam, where it was read by his international fellow students as Big Book. He is eager to explain how reading this book changed his ideas about black and white in South Africa:

“It was such intense reading, because of the deep hidden message in that book about South Africa. I immediately thought of it this way, the father (a UCT professor, FK) he was close to his daughter and then grew apart. She couldn’t bear it anymore that he didn’t take care of her. When it went bad with him, he went back to his daughter and wanted her to accept him again as if nothing had happened. But this was not easy, because he was wrong. The father represents the apartheid government and the daughter the black people in South Africa. He could have prevented it from going wrong, and we could have prevented apartheid, but like he, we didn’t. He knew that what he did was wrong, apartheid people knew they were wrong. The daughter she accepted what happened, but had to pay a price (in the book she was raped by a black man, FK). Like Mandela did, but he eventually accepted FW de Klerk in the end. You know, what is so amazing is that I am still in contact with Donna, the Amsterdam student, about the book and the interpretation”.

He immediately goes on to tell that since he is back his life has changed, his focus is different.

“South Africa has been a disgrace, but what we are experiencing now it is ‘amazing grace’, how Mandela acted the way he did, disgrace is now slowly eliminated and I am part of it, by talking to other students, taking part in the F1, going into communities, that helps a lot, it is about you and your commitment. Pastor Wahl, my Pentecostal pastor, and responsible for the F1, the work he does is so important. How he teaches us that traditions are of value, but not if they refer to something wrong. I now see that e.g. some residence names, with names of old apartheid defenders, have to be changed. The UFS needs to uphold the image, can’t have things on campus that are wrong. There are a lot of things wrong still, but we are growing as a university. As *Kovsies* we are faced with a lot of challenges at UFS, and that is good..”

So he ends telling me he has learned that he should make a contribution to the transformation process, take his responsibility for the campus culture, which he does as member of the student committee at the Fish house, and, who knows, once as the kind of academic leader the F1 programme is so explicitly teaching its students.

AN UNFINISHED TRANSFORMATION NARRATIVE

Driekie is a third year drama student from Afrikaner background who went to Amsterdam as part of the F1 exchange in January 2014. As a creative student she felt greatly at ease in Amsterdam where students are encouraged to critically discuss any issue they want, on an equal footing. This she had also learned at her university.

“They actually made me think differently, accept people as they are – I suppose that is what transformation is about. Now when I hear someone talking racism, I stand up and say it. I would not have done that before.”

This included talking about race. Yet, she continues:

“But race will never not be a problem in South Africa. Cultural differences, how we see things, people don’t talk about these things, when talking racism people immediately shut the doors. Here at the university we started talking about it, but not to a point that we are getting any

better. It is not as bad as in Potchefstroom, Pretoria, or Stellenbosch (three formerly white Afrikaner universities). Here, because all the problems we have had, the Reitz hostel incident, it has opened the doors, and we can't close them anymore, the keys have been thrown away. I have so many black friends now, the hostels they have become black and white. We have no issues."

But then the first cracks in her story appear.

"The top management does something, e.g. wanting to change the name of a student residence (bearing the name of a former Apartheid hero, FK) and everything is blown up again. And then they decide black and white should go together in the res, and that they are going to chose your roommate for you. People start to protest."

Asked whether this affects her, she says:

"Well, the two can't really function together, because as people we are different. It's ok if we can choose, but when you are forced, actually I could not do it. That is, I have done it, for two or three weeks, but there are differences. And that girl I lived with, she could speak Afrikaans, she was more white than black, because she spoke our language. I don't think I would.. (with someone who doesn't speak Afrikaans). It's not racist, it's just my preference...."

She tries to put this issue of 'forced' versus incremental transformation in a broader context, referring to the upheaval caused by a provocative theatre piece, *WOZA Andries?*, in which Jezus returned to Apartheid reigned South Africa.

"This *Andries* piece, it was not a good production, especially not for first years. How can I phrase this, swearwords, bad metaphors, it is more for people educated in the drama field, not for first years. That is my opinion. I don't understand top management to organize this. It is about apartheid, but not the healing type of thing, rather confrontational. They wanted to make a statement. And now the parents (of the first years, FK) associate UFS with this thing. A lot of students left, especially first years. They live in the residences, and come from the small towns in the Vrijstaat (she uses the Afrikaans word for the Free State province, FK), the Cape, where you don't deal with confrontation, you are not raised with it. They were shocked to death; shocking is good, but not for first years. Only for people who have opened their minds."

This narrative shows us an open-minded student, who is nevertheless strongly affected by her Afrikaner '*Knowledge in the blood*' (Jansen 2009) transmitted to her by her background in the Afrikaner tradition. She is hesitant to admit that her transformation has not yet fully matured, but is more outspoken in that the radical transformation she encounters at university is often aiming a bridge too far. The UFS has become more enlightened in its way towards transformation, but the (Afrikaner) environment is still lagging behind, as she herself is hesitantly prepared to admit.

TRANSFORMATION THE ENGLISH WAY

Transformation is often regarded as bringing black and white together, yet since the days of the Anglo-Boer war differences between English speaking people and Afrikaners has remained quite noticeable. Ethnicity and colour do not necessarily coincide then. This becomes clear in the story of Florence, a 22 year old law student. Her school background gave her a position strongly diverging from her Afrikaner compatriots:

"I think because I went to an English school, my class was very diversified so I am used to racial differences. I now attend classes in English, which means that I have classes with black people as well, whereas my Afrikaans friends only go to class with Afrikaans people, which are mostly white."

Florence was well aware of the role language played in the residences. She hasn't been in any specific leadership course, but has nevertheless taken up a position in her residence:

“We realized we definitely had to change it. At first we asked some black girls that I knew in the residence committee, so that we would be able to attract other black people. For we had to make another change, to change our mind-set. If you walk in the house you cannot only talk Afrikaans the whole time. You have to start thinking, oh but this girl does not understand this, so you will start talking English. In our house meetings we now only speak English and with our committee meetings we speak English as well. So it has been a whole process of changing our routine actually”.

Florence also touches upon another diversity issue, notably the distance between on and off-campus living students. Much of the university policies are focused on the 5000 students living on-campus, but the large majority, some 20,000, live elsewhere in the city. She points out that the strong focus on the residences is regrettable in her opinion. A considerable group of students live off-campus and those students are not really involved in the change. She thinks that they will never be a part of the transformation process, because they do not know about the challenges that are going on. She gives an example:

“The other day I had attended a Student Representative Council (the body representing all residences) dialogue session where all off campus students were invited as well, and from the more than 20,000 UFS off campus students only around 100 students were present. They think student activity is not for them, and they never hear about what we are discussing on-campus.”

This brief story make clear that diversity issues at UFS, and in the whole of South Africa for that matter, are multi-faceted. Ethnicity, or race as it is generally called, colour, language, but also gender plays a role, as we will see in the next narrative.

A CRITICAL NARRATIVE

Bonolo is a third year Sotho speaking industrial psychology student who is very active in one of the two day residences on campus. She lives herself lives off-campus, with her mom. Residences are the places where undergraduates spend years of their life, but since 2013 there is a place where off-campus people can gather between and after classes. She is one of the leaders in this Imperium residence, which in her opinion is one of most diverse:

“We are proud to have a fully mixed residence; you will find everything here: black, white, boys, girls, English, Afrikaans, Zulu, gays, lesbians, etc. That we are the most diverse, and tolerant, was clear when this first year theatre play was given at the opening of the year (the same *Andries* piece Driekie talked about above, FK). From our residence hardly any students left during the play, whereas many others found it was too shocking, because it showed Jesus as a homosexual, being harassed in South Africa. Most of our first years stayed. I'm glad I stayed. Those who left didn't get the message. Those who left were first year girls.”

Bonolo came to Amsterdam with the F1 group led by Hendrick. In her opinion he was a good leader, but she believes more female leadership in the F1 programme should be stimulated. During the group activities in Amsterdam, she often stood up to speak for the group.

“Yes, more girls should stand up. There are sufficient leaders but they don't dare to run against a boy, particularly not if it is for an SRC position. But from my F1 group there are now several who go for the residence committees. I myself am the secretary of Imperium now. I would not go for the SRC either, but that is because these boys are too conservative . For me it is not worth it, because..... you can't really make changes at the university. Much I would like to change is policy

related and in the SRC you can't do anything about it. It doesn't really do much for students then. I want to broaden my horizon, like Antjie Krog (famous white anti-apartheid writer and poet), and perhaps study anthropology. My ambition is to go abroad and do an international master and then return and change the university. There is so much to change: the language policy – we must speak Afrikaans – imagine, I have never been taught by a black guy! You can apply only if you speak Afrikaans. So students stay deprived from the best people, we compromise on education, it is a shame. The U has transformed somewhat, but blacks are not in the critical positions yet.”

Bonolo ironically remarks that transformation is the first word that you learn at the university these days, but that it is often used in a rhetorical sense:

“Now I've heard they gonna pay us to tell transformation stories. I wish I had a proper story, I just don't have one. I want true transformation. I miss Amsterdam”.

A POLITICAL NARRATIVE

John is an English speaking Law student who participated in the F1 in 2011, and has recently been elected in the SRC of the university, holding the transformation portfolio. He also works at the IRSJ. For him the F1 experience has played a decisive role in his university career so far. He tells how F1 raised his consciousness about university transformation:

“It has made me think about the subconsciousness of discrimination around us. I've learned to think before saying something. And I started taking things out of classes, something I had never thought of before. You must do things with your F1, if you don't, it is waste of your F1, but many just move back into their comfort zone. My motivation to participate was to give myself more resources to realize the ideas I had. In New York State University we learned about LGBT and race, widening our horizon beyond UFS. It really opened my eyes.”

Upon his return to Bloemfontein he started his leadership career:

“You come back to campus, and you are comfortable again. We started making it a bit more uncomfortable on campus. The on-campus residences do not try to consciously include everyone. There is diversity in the ratio and diversity in mentality. One example I always take is the house meetings. First years are completely separated, meetings are done in Afrikaans, there is no diversity in the mentality, some house meetings start with prayer. In action you are not as diverse. That is how we do it, it may isolate you very much. That is why I started leading a day residence, which took a lot of time. I only started to work at the Institute (IRSJ, FK) 1,5 years after my F-1. There are other examples of it, of F1 people moving to leadership positions. Not officially sometimes, but sometimes in their group they do take up a role. It is difficult to put yourself out for an official position. You may also loose. That is why others simply return and concentrate on their studies.”

He has some outspoken ideas about the diversity within the F1 programme. Although it is explicitly a programme that targets black and female leadership, it is predominantly white males that emerge during and after the programme:

“My group was pretty 50/50, 50 % was from Qwaqwa (the all-black UFS satellite campus North of Lesotho, FK). Why do black students not apply? It is a cultural issue; for them it is big thing to travel, leaving your parents. Something that is perhaps not as much present in black culture as it is in white culture. Within the groups it seems also that blacks seeks blacks, and whites seeks whites. One of the reasons is that you meet each other only one or two times before leaving, you are not used to meeting each other before.”

This last remark about black and white meeting for the first time via a programme like F1 is illustrative about the separation of black and whites cultures. Bryson's book on the first steps of the UFS transformation project, bearing the ambiguous title *It's a Black and White thing*, is hopeful about the future, but very clearly about deeply rooted identities when she quotes a white student telling that "I'm more comfortable in my own skin" (2014:81). Yet this same student suggest that the F1 programme at least broadened his horizon.

John is emphatic when asked about the contribution F1 makes:

"Does it make a contribution to transformation then? For me it does, I'm an example. It is an amazing programme, because it is about learning new ideas. And it is these ideas that helped me take op leadership positions. Now I'm in the SRC where I have to defend the F1, because the programme is contested. It's costing a lot much money for relatively few students; the money could be used for other purposes. Present SRC leaders don't value the long-term investment, because they give priority to solving short-term problems they encounter. It is my job to politically defend the programme, and help refine it."

A LEADERSHIP NARRATIVE

Dino is one of the politicized economy students (now doing an honours programme), from the black residence called Kayalami, who after taking part in the F-1 leadership programme became a student leader, with political ambitions. First he entered the residence council, but soon he was elected in the SRC, where he is now vice-president next to his residence mate, the president. Like John, Dino is combining his studies with volunteer work at the IRSJ, amongst others preparing a study on how the idea and practice of transformation has developed over subsequent generations of students leaders:

"For this study we selected people who were leaders before 2010, when Jansen's transformation policy became effective; then we have a group of student leaders who became active in the years 2010-2012, the formative years of 'leadership for transformation'; and finally a group of leaders who are now operating with the consolidated knowledge generated in the previous two years. We consider leaders to be those who take positions in the residence councils, in the student associations, and in the SRC.

For Dino, like many of the student leaders an active ANC member, the political and academic route go together in a quest for personal development, creating fan groups by organizing events and manifesting himself actively on social media such as Facebook (like many of the former F1 students do). Moreover, he is actively seeking to improve his knowledge and skills by applying for funded courses and training programmes nationally and internationally.

"For me transformation takes the political route, next to the academic path through the defense of student rights, and against those sectors in the university that are defending traditional and vested (white) interests. I'd say you grow from one position to another. Together with my friend who is our president (of the SRC, FK). We stay in the same residence, we served in the same committees. We took the decision to go for it together."

He maintains that the path he is taken now is destined for him, and that the Amsterdam experience as a F1 group leader prepared him for his present tasks:

For me it's another thing coming back and using what you learned. As a leader I have still a long way to go. So much to be tackled. There are so many senior students, staff, lecturers who are here from before JJ (rector Jonathan Jansen, who is viewed a transformative leader, FK). They are from before the transformation agenda. We as F1's have learned that this must change, but many others are not yet there. They do resist transformation. Senior students, staff, some do

not see the need for transformation. White students, and others, that other part of the campus is still neglected.”

His ideas on transformation are rather encompassing:

“It is not only race, or gender, it is about the whole outlook of the university, e.g. the residences. Interaction is limited, teaching is in different languages, which is not good for interaction. One medium of instruction would help. In social life it means there is no interaction. How to bridge the gap? There is still part of that like the Reitz ideas (the residence incident mentioned earlier, FK). We must focus on the first years, and make them grow and move”.

He is not fully positive about the F1 programme, however, as it serves only a small part of the first years:

“It has created an us them situation. Coming back you must have a significant impact, if you don’t see that so, you should not be in the program. It is an investment. Not everybody does that, that is where the critics come in. One part is active, but others spoil the opportunity. The F1s should do more. I suggested people to improve the programme, through the dean of students. We should work more on getting to the white community on campus. Some of it is still very Afrikaans and conservative. When you preach transformation to these students, it does not make sense to him.”

But his only experience in Amsterdam has helped him to develop his ideas about himself, his identity and his future:

“We saw a lot of diversity in Amsterdam, unlike others who went to Japan, or China. We were privileged to conduct research in that diversity field, that was an experience. We were sent into the field, the neighborhoods. You could choose a research theme such as race, class, religion. Studying race in the Netherlands, that is of significance. I want to bring this experience further.”

And off he goes to a next meeting with his friends in the SRC. In the evening he is sending out political messages on his cell phone: vote ANC (in the presidential elections of May 2014, FK).

A CAREER NARRATIVE

Not all F1 student take what they learned through the programme as the start of a leadership career. Anisha, a 21-year-old accounting student, has taken it first and foremost as an encouragement to become successful in society by pursuing a career with her university training. Yet she has also taken a lot from her participation:

“I have become a more open-minded person as a result of participating the program. In the two weeks that I was in Amsterdam I have seen homosexuals are people like herself. Because I was raised as a Christian, I was a little bit of a homophobe. I talked to my neighboring student in Amsterdam, who was raised by two mothers, which made a huge impact on me. It feels like a personal transformation, it really is. Before I categorized people in different groups as ‘birds of a feather who flock together’. Now I see people just as people. I had a lot of friends that had the same mind set as myself, but after my trip I told them that the people in Amsterdam are like this and like that, you walk around and you see new things like this. Now I think that a lot of my friends also started to adopt this mentality of open mindedness. That is how I believe I can make a change in the smallest way.”

Another eye-opener for her was how the lectures were given in Amsterdam:

“We are all students, the same, but still all different. Student cultures are way different, I discovered when I saw students from different studies really interacting with each other. That made me think that our world [in Bloemfontein] is a bit closed. Back at the university I tried to expand my circle with people from other backgrounds. Yet, we are here at the university all from different backgrounds as well. How we behave depends more on how we are raised, you bring it from home. This is also clear in my residence, I lived in *Soetdoring*, which is very Afrikaans. Especially in the res (the informal way of denoting your residence, FK) you transform in someone who wants to be popular. But even there I see some transformation going on, it is slowly changing for the good.”

Yet leadership is not her cup-of-tea. She is in accounting and very determined to go for a career in banking, or investment management. Her studies, in combination with the broader horizon F1 gave her, has stimulated her career ambitions:

“I just don’t have the time. I am going to Johannesburg, I am a bit tired of the Free State, I go to Monash [a private university, FK]. I was in the first year committee before going to Amsterdam, working under the SRC, but I moved out of the res, preferring the academic and professional encounter on campus. I didn’t see how I could benefit from SRC in my field of work. Leadership in our field of accounting is different, task oriented. This is how I feel. Most of the F1’s, coming back from the abroad tend to go for the leadership positions, e.g. in the residence council and they build up a sort of a fan base, which then helps for the SRC, yet they hardly partake in leadership outside of campus. That is where I will grow and become a successful professional. I am prepared to work hard for it, like so many other students from more impoverished backgrounds working even harder than people like me.”

Some concluding thoughts

By implication the concept of diversity is broad and indistinct; it has analytical as well as normative connotations, which is no doubt partly due to the fact that it has been employed as much by policy makers as by researchers. The same holds for the concepts of change and transformation that have been used so frequently by the students I presented above. Diversity, change, transformation are all very closely linked to the concept of identity. Identity is about mutual definitions of self and others (Jenkins 2008), defining what is central, distinctive and enduring about groups, organizations, institutions (Albert & Whetten 1985). How these definitions are being produced, used, and reconstructed in daily life and in specific contexts is what is called identity work (Watson 2008). In this paper we have heard how this identity work is being done by seven students from a formerly white and traditional South Africa university. They all relate to their institutional environment and societal context via the ‘situated activity’ (Layder 1993) of a specific organizational change and leadership programme offered to them by the university. The university developed this programme in an explicit attempt to give substance to, and make a contribution to the transformation project of building South Africa’s post-apartheid society. By presenting the various narratives of the students who are part of this ambitious plan I have tried to give an impression of the complexity this project given its all-pervasive implications. It also shows how individual actors make different choices within their organizational environment and how they give sense to the diverse options that they come across. The semi-biographies presented also show that the university is a crucial place where identity work and subject positioning takes place in a permanent articulation and collision of narratives. It also shows that identities are constantly re-constructed, despite underlying, essentializing tendencies.

It is hoped at the university that this process will bring forth ever more inclusive identities, and turn the institution into a more mature, diverse place. This diversity concept is slowly becoming considered an asset in (higher) education, in South Africa, where it has for so long had such different

connotations (Brink 2010; seen also Cross 2004), as well as elsewhere, including The Netherlands, where the F1 students claim to have found their inspiration to work on transformation.

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