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The Tricameral Academy: Personal Reflections on Universities and History Departments in “Post-Apartheid” South Africa

William H. Worger

In 1983 I spent the latter half of the year undertaking historical research in South Africa, my second visit to that country. It was a time when then-president, P. W. Botha, argued that he intended to bring about major reforms in South Africa and sought approval of his proposed constitutional changes with a referendum among whites only. With two thirds of the country’s two million white voters (the only people among South Africa’s 29 million residents with the right to vote) supporting his plans, Botha introduced the Tricameral Parliament. This consisted of three separate houses, with separate bathrooms and dining areas and meeting rooms, one house for Whites, one for Coloureds, and one for Asians (in the terminology of the time). Each house could debate its “own” issues, that is, subjects that pertained solely to the category of people of which the house was composed, but national issues would be subject to the purview of the president’s office and of the white members of parliament who, through constitutional measures, would always have a majority of the votes. Since under apartheid Africans (71.3% of the population then) were considered aliens in South Africa, there would be no vote for them, no house of parliament, and no participation whatsoever in the decision-making in the country.

Since that time, of course, South Africa has undergone a political transformation, with the country’s first majority-elected government taking office under Nelson Mandela as president in 1994. But has that transformation extended to higher education and especially to that part of the universities with which I am most familiar, history and history departments?

My answer is no, for reasons that I will explain below. South African universities in 2014, twenty years after the election of Mandela, thirty years after Botha’s attempt to cement white rule by trying, without success, to divide the black opponents of apartheid, remain in fundamental ways—money and power—much like the Tricameral Parliament, controlled by whites, and with even less

inclusion of underrepresented parts of the population than the Parliament had had. History departments and their faculties have, in particular, chosen a path of irrelevancy, irrelevancy to higher education, and irrelevancy to society at large.

South African higher education made the news recently with a story in the *New York Times* about the limits to integration in universities post apartheid. The author, Eve Fairbanks, who spent time from 2010 to 2013 “on a historically white South African campus to write its post-apartheid history . . . discovered what appeared to me to be a peculiar paradox: As black students’ access to the school had grown, so had their dissatisfaction with it.”¹ This development was not, she continues, unique to South Africa but can also be found in the United States, where as universities increase their admission of students still commonly called minorities, though more accurately referred to as coming from underrepresented communities, these students feel alienated and uncomfortable. The source of such discomfort, in the American experience as well in the South African, emanates especially from the continuing exclusion of these underrepresented groups from the dominant power structures on campus. This aspect of alienation was captured particularly well by a South African faculty member at the University of Cape Town (UCT), an institution that describes itself as an “Afropolitan”² university and as the highest ranked university in Africa. Xolela Mangcu, an associate professor of Sociology at UCT, in his answer to a question by Ms. Fairbanks as to “what he thought would make the biggest difference at the University of Cape Town . . . said many more black academics must direct the research ‘at the highest level of the professoriate.’”³

Mangcu had written an opinion piece for the South African *Sunday Times* in July 2014 entitled, “Ripping the Veil off UCT’s Whiter Shades of Pale.” In his article he pointed out that UCT’s number of black academics amounted to only 3%, 48 out of a total of 1,405 teaching staff, and had only grown by two people in the previous five years. Moreover, blacks (among whom he included South African Africans, not foreign born, Coloureds, and Indians), accounted for only 12% of the full professors at UCT, whites for 85%: “The parallels with the *Land Act* of 1913 could not be more striking.”⁴

The Vice Chancellor and head of UCT, Max Price, responded that Mangcu had identified a major problem that was well known to university administrators, but that Mangcu did not understand

either the causes of or the possible solutions to the problem. “There is no disagreement between us on the lamentable lack of demographic transformation amongst senior academic staff,” but Mangcu needed “to understand the challenges of employment equity in academia.” It was “a superficial argument that simply blames historic endemic racism at UCT as the root-cause of failed transformation particularly given much greater degrees of racism and collusion with apartheid at most other universities and technikons.” Rather, the failure to transform had to do with history and with choice. “It generally takes more than 20 years from getting a PhD to becoming a professor. The pool of South African black academics available for appointment to a professorship in 2014 is a proportion of the pool of black PhD graduates in 1994. Given our history, this was a very small pool. Few in that small pool chose academic careers over offers from the new government, civil service and corporates, all desperate to recruit highly skilled black professionals.”⁵

Nor was the failure to transform UCT’s alone—“it is a national university sector problem”—as Price demonstrated with a table depicting “South African Black and Coloured” full-time professors (but not Indian, with no explanation for the omission given) throughout the country as of 2012.

What was Price’s solution to this lack of transformation? “We are not lowering the standard for appointment or promotion as professor for people of colour. This would reinforce racial stereotypes and sets transformation back. . . . We nevertheless have a strenuous employment equity policy. . . . When we encounter a candidate from the designated groups for whom we do not have a post, we have a special fund to employ that candidate, to provide a development opportunity for competing in the future . . . We have special programmes to accelerate academic careers. . . . What UCT has achieved in quality and global excellence is not a trade-off against transformation, but rather the consequence of the right sort of transformation—one which taps into the much larger and more diverse pool of talent now available to us, and builds that talent slowly and incrementally, takes no short cuts, does not compromise on quality in the short term but takes the long term view.” “We remain frustrated at the slow progress but foresee a future with a majority of academic staff being black—as is already the case with non-academic staff (72% black).”⁶

Permanent, full-time professors (South African Black and Coloured only) 2012

Institution	African		African Total	Coloured		Coloured Total
	Female	Male		Female	Male	
Cape Peninsula UoT	1		1		1	1
Central UoT		2	2			
NMMU	1		1		1	1
North West University		6	6	1	1	2
Rhodes		1	1			
UCT	1	5	6	1	4	5
Fort Hare	1	10	11		1	1
UJ	2	9	11	2	4	6
UKZN	5	10	15		1	1
University of Limpopo	7	32	39		1	1
UP	1	13	14	1	4	5
UNISA	6	28	34		4	4
Stellenbosch				6	8	14
Free State	1	2	3		3	3
University of Venda	1	3	4			
UWC	3	13	16	16	30	46
Wits	1	4	5	2	2	4
University of Zululand		11	11			
Walter Sisulu University	3	11	14			
Total	34	159	193	29	65	94

Source: Hemis data, DHET, <http://www.heda.co.za/pds/>

Given Mangcu’s accounting—just two black academic members of staff added in five years—and whatever the reasons for the slowness of “transformation,” it is impossible not to be reminded of Steve Biko’s powerful lines written to the presidents of the white student representative councils in 1978 protesting their *acquiescence* to apartheid policies even as they claimed to oppose the system of white power: “The blacks are tired of standing at the touchlines to witness a game that they should be playing. They want to do things for themselves and all by themselves.”⁷

History

How did we get to this point? Let me start with a document written by white academics at UCT just as apartheid was crumbling in the late 1980s, an essay entitled “Rethinking U.C.T.: The Debate Over Africanisation and the Position of Women” and published

by the UCT Centre for African Studies in 1989. The authors, G. Goosen, M. Hall, and C. White, began by quoting from a speech made by Stuart Saunders on the occasion of his inauguration as Vice Chancellor of UCT in 1981. UCT saw itself at that time as a liberal critic of apartheid and an "open university," one that despite racially exclusionary laws aimed theoretically to welcome all, irrespective of race, even if it did not do so in practice. (In what follows Saunders was himself quoting, approvingly, the words of another academic administrator, Marshall Murphree): "By Africanisation is meant not merely the indigenization of the staff of African universities, although this is, of course, an important aspect of the process, or even the adaptation of curricula to African cultural and social contexts. The search for Africanisation is a more embracing quest which lays upon the African university the task of assembling the entire gamut of African heritage and ensuring its continuity by analysis and pedagogy, which gives it a contemporary relevance to the needs and aspirations of the modern African nation states."⁸

Ten years after Saunders's speech Goosen et al. did not think much had been accomplished. "Africanisation is, for UCT, part of the University's ideology rather than a programme for practical action: a set of statements which disguise the fact that UCT has, in recent years, changed very little in the way it works. Thus it is not surprising that there are no policies for affirmative action in student enrollments or staff appointments, or little evidence for curriculum development or major community service programmes." In particular, the exercise of power within the institution had not changed. "The 'whiteness' or 'blackness' of a university is not decided by the proportion of white to black in the student body, but by the proportion of whites to blacks in the power structure of the university, all the way from University Council to Rector, to the lowest lecturer of each department . . . [at UCT] power is very unevenly distributed. Authority is located in the core structure and key committees, to which only a small constituency have access, and in the headships of academic departments which have a large degree of autonomy." The authors warned that "continuing exclusion of the majority of the university community from power will, we suggest, lead to continuing confrontation within the campus. This, in turn, will provide the legitimation for direct state interference."⁹

Another decade later, the issue of the role of Africans and, by implication, Africanization arose again at UCT when Mahmood Mamdani, appointed the director of the UCT Centre for African Studies in 1997, was suspended at the end of the year from teaching when he sought to introduce a new curriculum for entering students in African Studies. Mamdani captured the essence of this controversy as follows: First, in arguing for a focus on Africa that stretched north of the Limpopo and incorporated study of South Africa into study of the rest of the continent, he stressed the issue of choice in who was hired and what was taught, referring to “a key weakness of the History Department at UCT. That department has made choices over the past decade, so that it has no one with a research focus on equatorial Africa.” Second, in relation to curriculum—the heart of the matter—he wrote that the persistence of “race is not absent from this issue, but this is not a question that pits black against white. Broadly, it is a question about curriculum reform, and about who should be making those decisions. Narrowly, it is a question about how Africa is to be taught in the post-apartheid academy . . . Students are being taught a curriculum which presumes that Africa begins at the Limpopo, and that this Africa has no intelligentsia worth reading.” And third, he emphasized the role of Africans as producers of knowledge, not just people to be used as informants by white academics. “The idea that Africans can only be informants and not intellectuals, is part of an old imperial tradition. It is part of the imperial conviction that natives cannot think for themselves; they need tutelage . . . That this notion should have found fertile ground in apartheid South Africa with its project of bantu education cannot be surprising. But why should it flourish unchecked in a post-apartheid academy whose ambition is to be a world-class African university?”¹⁰

In a commentary on the debate, Jonathan Jansen, in his aptly entitled essay, “But Our Natives Are Different! Race, Knowledge and Power in the Academy,” well captured the tone and the heart of the opposition to Mamdani and his proposed curriculum. The critics, he wrote, were “white and English,” who framed the problem of the syllabus as that of the “‘disadvantaged student,’ shorthand for avoiding the more appropriate label, black student,” and who saw that student as needing remedial education.

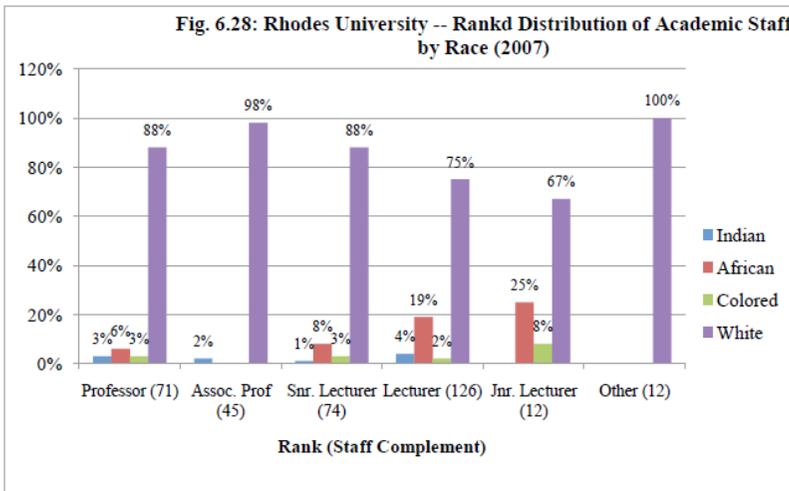
The tone of their comments were, “with few exceptions, sarcastic, dismissive, and unyielding. . . . Such distracting, negative references suggest that what Mamdani may have done was to touch a raw nerve in the post-apartheid curriculum debate: the colonial fingerprints of the curriculum-makers, their own prejudices and histories, passed on to unsuspecting black students as tried and tested truth. He questions not only the geography of Africa, but also those who defined it: white, tribal, privileged, powerful. For Mamdani, curriculum is identity, and this crucial point is missed by his detractors.”¹¹

Academic Staffing

Mamdani left UCT in 1998, and his white critics taught their alternative syllabus. So where are we now, almost two decades later? Let’s take a look at the History Department at UCT, an institution I first visited as a foreigner in 1977 when I spent a year doing research for my Yale doctoral degree on South African economic and social history. In thinking back to that visit, three things strike me now: First, when I visited the UCT History Department in 1977 it had one full professor (the late Colin Webb), as it had had since its establishment in a British-influenced university in which departments were always stratified and hierarchical, generally with only one full professor as HOD (head of department), whereas now it has six, three times as many as any other history department in South Africa. Second, many of the people teaching at or affiliated with the UCT History Department in 1977 are still there, all now senior members of the faculty. Indeed, looking through the current list of staff, at fifteen academic faculty the largest history department in South Africa, I know a third of them from the 1970s, all white, all male, all specialists on South African history. Third, the department has not changed much in its representation of South Africa’s population: twelve of the fifteen academic staff in 2014 are white, two Coloured, one African.

Starting with my last impression first, the History Department’s underrepresentation is typical of that of South African universities in general, particularly of those that had previously been restricted to whites only by apartheid laws. Wisdom Tettey made this clear in a 2010 report for the Partnership for Higher

Education in Africa. Though neither UCT nor Wits provided him with data on the racial composition of their academic staff, the tables that he constructed for Rhodes and Stellenbosch universities illustrate core features of higher education in South Africa. These features are the same ones that Xolela Mangcu identified and that Max Price stressed were a national issue: that whites occupy the vast majority of academic posts, and that any increase in academic appointments of candidates from under-represented groups has been miniscule. Some are a bit better at incorporation, especially what were the formerly black universities, and some like the University of KwaZulu Natal, where white composition of the academic staff is now down to just over 50%, and some worse, like Stellenbosch, which still does not have a single African full professor on staff. The impact of these variations is captured nationally in the third table below, taken from a 2008 South African government report on transformation and the elimination of discrimination in higher education.¹²



Source: Rhodes University (2008b)

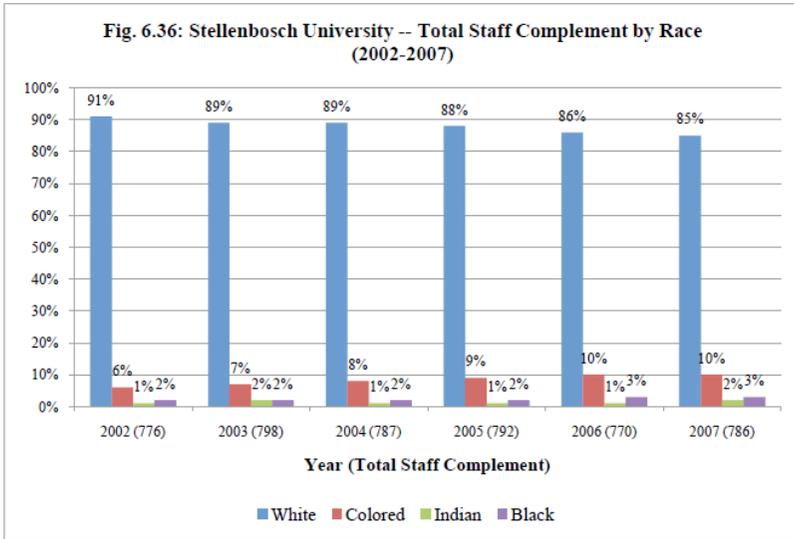


Table 11: Headcount of Full Time (Permanent & Temporary) Instruction/Research Staff by Race and Gender

Race & Gender	2003		2004		2005		2006		2007		Average Annual increase
	Headcount	%									
African	4476	23%	4378	23%	4188	24%	4832	24%	4854	25%	2.00%
Coloured	1011	5%	1018	5%	1003	6%	1077	5%	1163	6%	3.60%
Indian	1642	8%	1658	9%	1355	8%	1790	9%	1614	8%	-0.40%
White	12371	62%	12047	63%	10911	62%	11999	60%	11535	59%	-1.70%
Unknown	343	2%	145	1%	105	1%	161	1%	318	2%	-1.90%
TOTAL	19843	100%	19247	100%	17562	100%	19859	100%	19484	100%	-0.50%
Female	8261	42%	8000	42%	7376	42%	8540	43%	8392	43%	0.40%
Male	11581	58%	11245	58%	10186	58%	11319	57%	11092	57%	-1.10%

Note: Percentages may not always add up to 100, due to rounding off, and/or race/gender unknown.

In addressing my second impression of the UCT History Department between 1977 and 2014—that the faculty consists primarily of white men who specialize in South African history, many of whom I first met almost forty years ago—Mamdani’s point about *choice* comes to mind. Faculty appointments don’t just happen, they are the result of many decisions made over many years, oftentimes taking advantage of chance opportunities to hire someone when growth in general has been limited, especially over the past few decades, for universities worldwide. Mamdani criticized the UCT History Department in 1997 for not having hired anyone with expertise on the history of any country in Africa outside South Africa. Two decades later the department still does not have a single faculty member trained to teach the history of Africa north of the Limpopo River. In the past three years the department has hired three new faculty members, one a specialist on the history of South and Southeast Asia, the second trained in Early Modern European history, the third on the economic history of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Genoa; before that all the hires had been in South African history.

But UCT is no exception to the South African pattern of hiring almost only people with training in the history of South Africa. As the table below shows, 90% of history faculty members specialize in the history of their own country. There are a few—three or four—who work on other countries in southern Africa, but in the entire country there is only one person, a senior lecturer at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), whose doctoral training is in the history of an African country outside southern Africa!

History faculty in South Africa, 2014

	Total staff	South Africa focus
Fort Hare	6	6
NWU (Potchefstroom)	4	4
Pretoria	6	5
Rhodes, c.7,000 students	8	7
Stellenbosch	5	5
UCT, 25,500 students	15	12
UFS	5	5

	Total staff	South Africa focus
UJ (RAU)	8	8
UKZN	6	6
UNISA	8	7
UWC	10	8
Wits, 30,833 students	5	4
Total History faculty	86	77
% specializing in South African history		90%

Let me take my own institution as an example of how choices could be made differently. The University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) is a little bigger than most South African universities—we have 42,163 students—but not disproportionately so for the comparison to apply. It is relatively young, having been founded in 1919 (almost a hundred years after UCT, and twenty after Wits), with most of its growth taking place in the 1960s and 1970s. With 76 faculty members the UCLA History Department is large by South African standards; indeed, this is almost as many as are listed in the table above. The relatively large size of the history faculty, not unusual in an American institution, reflects a combination of serendipity in hiring opportunities but more fundamentally the fact that at UCLA, as at most American universities, history fulfills part of the general education classes required for all graduating students. In the 2013-14 academic year, members of the UCLA History Department taught 9,740 students, nearly five times the number taught by the history faculty at UCT (1,904).

The range of expertise, however, demonstrates the choices that have been made over many decades, choices that one can see reflected in much the same way in other history departments with which I am familiar such as Yale, Michigan, Stanford, and UC Berkeley. At UCLA our 76 faculty members have expertise in thirteen broadly defined fields of study, most of them geographically defined, others not so: Africa 3, United States 20, Ancient 2, Europe 23, China 3, Japan 2, Jewish 4, Latin America 4, Medieval 4, Middle East 4, Science 9, South and Southeast Asia 5, and World 5.¹³

As Mamdani and Jansen noted, choices in hiring affect choices in curriculum, because ultimately what is taught reflects

the expertise of the faculty who have been hired to teach, and also what they choose to teach. My wife and I were astonished three years ago at a dinner with two senior members of the UCT History Department, both of them trained as South Africanists, when they told us that UCT would not be able to offer South African history the following year since there were no faculty members available to teach the classes despite the fact that every member of the department at that time was trained as a South African history specialist.

Curriculum

So what does UCT teach its incoming students, especially those enrolled in their first year? The department offers a set of classes in world history, “Worlds in Contact” which “examines the characteristics of, and the contacts between, the divergent societies of the world between the early centuries of the Common Era and the onset of global imperialism in the nineteenth century,” and “Worlds in Collision,” which “examines upheavals in world history between the nineteenth century and the near present and their impact on political, social and cultural forces.”¹⁴ These courses seem much like UCLA’s offerings to lower-division undergraduates (our term for students in classes aimed at first and second-year students), though we also offer surveys in European, U.S., Latin American, Middle Eastern, Chinese, Japanese, and African history, as well as in the history of science. But UCT does appear to offer a more coherent program of study than, say, the offerings at Rhodes—a two-course sequence that tackles “the origins of the modern world crisis,” especially “the total crisis affecting and threatening humans today.” “Throughout, the question is asked: when and how did humans ‘go off the rails’? How can we survive physically and live tolerable lives amidst this knowledge? This is history flying high in which the critical issues of the contemporary human experience are brought into sharper focus.”¹⁵ Or those at Wits, with its miscellany of History 1002, “Living with the USA (A),” including sections on “the Soviet challenge and collapse: an outline,” and “the beginning of American global dominance”; History 1008, “Topics in Medieval European History”; History 1003, “Living with the USA (B),” with sections on “the Middle East” and “African popular culture,” which “explores the genesis,

developments and outcomes of cultural interactions between sub-Saharan Africa and the supposedly ‘hegemonic’ West, primarily the United States of America”; History 1004, Renaissance Europe; and History 1010, a social history of technology.¹⁶

In none of these universities do students get to the history of their own country until their second year, that is, if they still want to pursue history, and most do not since history enrollments in South African universities plummet in second and subsequent years of study. Here again, a problem noted by Mamdani resurfaces—the failure to study South Africa as part of Africa, and the persistence of apartheid-era approaches to the history of South Africa. At UCT, second-year students can take a class on “Themes in African History,” covering the period from c.1500-1960, or one of two classes offered on South African history, one up to 1900, the second since 1900. The instructor of the “Themes” class, the only African in the department, aims to “provide insights into the complex African pasts and in particular transcend the South African-African and North African sub-Saharan divide.” The classes on South African history have course descriptions that make no mention of tackling the extent to which the history of South Africa reflects themes in the history of the rest of the continent. At Wits—renowned during the 1970s and 1980s for its energetic radical historians and the History Workshop, with its focus on studying the black working class—the 2014 course description of “History 2005: South Africa before 1880” sounds more like something that would have been offered at UCT during the apartheid era. The class focuses on the Cape and white settlement, with Europeans and Africans alike described as migrating “at the same time,” wording eerily reminiscent, even if not intended to be so, of the “empty land” thesis whereby white South Africans justified their governance of South Africa by claiming it was devoid of indigenous inhabitants when whites first arrived:

The unit starts with the pre-colonial period and examines what is known of the origins of the South African populations and the relations between them. It deals with the following issues: the beginning of the European settlement, the introduction of slaves, the expansion of the Cape Colony and the effects of these events upon first the Khoisan and then the Nguni, and the changes that took place in the Cape following the annexation by

Britain. The unit then considers the important changes that were occurring beyond the borders of the Cape Colony. Larger African states were coming into existence, and there were also waves of migration from what is now KwaZulu-Natal into the interior. At the same time there were also waves of migration from the Cape Colony into the interior, culminating in the “Great Trek” of the 1830s. This section examines the causes and effects of these developments, the nature of the subsequent relations between black and white in the interior and the response of the British authorities in the Cape and in Britain to the new situation that these developments created.¹⁷

This is not the history that Steve Biko wanted to learn. “We do not want to be reminded that it is we, the indigenous people, who are poor and exploited in the land of our birth. These are concepts which the Black Consciousness approach wishes to eradicate from the black man’s mind before our society is driven to chaos by irresponsible people from Coca-cola and hamburger cultural backgrounds.”¹⁸

Money

Let’s talk about money, because academics, whether in South Africa or the United States or worldwide are always complaining of their lack of it. Max Price suggested that black PhDs, apart from being small in number, chose better-paying jobs in industry and government. That may well be true, especially judging from the tables above that show that Africans are overwhelmingly employed, when hired, in entry-level positions, usually at the rank of junior lecturer or lecturer.

Academic staff members in South Africa, according to an Association of Commonwealth Universities salary study in 2010, are the second highest-paid in the Commonwealth, out-earned only by faculty members in Australian universities and earning more in terms of purchasing power than academics in Britain and Canada. Moreover, their rate of pay has been increasing: “The differences in average salaries between the countries has reduced, pointing to increased international competition for academic staff, as well as efforts within individual countries to improve academic salary levels . . . South Africa saw the highest rate of growth, at 51 per cent since 2006-2007.”¹⁹

Where do these salaries place academics within the overall income structure of South Africa—in the middle class? For some idea of comparative pay, we can turn to what I might term the belly of the beast of finance capital, Goldman Sachs, which published in November 2013 a report on South Africa entitled, *Two Decades of Freedom: What South Africa Is Doing With It, And What Now Needs To Be Done?* The authors of the report noted in particular one of the fundamental features of the post-apartheid economy. Though the “African middle class has more than doubled from 1993 to 2008 . . . the stark reality is that 85% of Africans still remain poor . . . while 87% of white South Africans are in the middle to upper class categories.”²⁰ The class categories adopted by Goldman Sachs (figures as of 2008) were as follows:

Goldman Sachs South African class categories, 2008

Lower class below the poverty line	less than R515 per month
Lower class above the poverty line	R515-R1,399 per month
Middle class	R1,400-R10,000 per month
Upper class	R10,000 and up per month

When we read these figures together with the payroll figures of the UCT History Department, itself a microcosm of the university as a whole, we can get an indication of the practical ways in which the lack of transformation has played out financially for people in “post-apartheid” South Africa. In the table below, the salary figures, taken from UCT’s Human Resources website, are not those for particular individuals but rather reflect what UCT terms the “Standard Academic Salary Package (SASP),” excluding medical staff, for the respective positions of professor, associate professor, senior lecturer, and lecturer as of 2013 staffing and salary levels (which have since been increased).²¹

UCT History Department Estimated Payroll, 2013

Rank	Number	Standard salary for rank	Total expenditure
Professor	6	837,169	5,023,014
Associate Professor	4	663,359	2,653,436
Senior Lecturer	1	562,173	562,173
Lecturer	3	457,223	1,371,669
Total			9,610,292

The six full professors, all white males, receive over half the academic payroll of the department; the lone African member, at the lecturer level, receives 5% of the payroll. If we add the two Coloured members of staff, both associate professors, then at best, the three black academics receive 19% of the payroll.

To get a sense of what these salaries mean in practice, let's take a typical academic gripe, the high cost of books, something of great importance to students as well as to lower-paid staff, especially those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. In this example I am taking four books that reflect certain canons in South African history and scholarship: the white English-speaking liberal tradition (what I would call the "it was all the fault of the Afrikaner" interpretation), the Afrikaner apologist ("apartheid was idealistic in concept but went wrong in practice"), and the postmodern (the "it is all much more complicated than that" line of interpretation). The pricing is that of Exclusive Books, the bookstore chain of choice for the South African intelligentsia.

Reading list

David Welsh, *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid* (2010), R253

Herman Giliomee, *New History of South Africa* (2007), R493

Premesh Lalu, *The Deaths of Hintsa: Post-Apartheid South Africa and the Shape of Recurring Pasts* (2008), R193

Sarah Nuttall, *Entanglement: Literary and Cultural Reflections on Post-Apartheid* (2008), R230.

These four books purchased today (November 3, 2014 pricing and exchange rate) would cost a total of R1,169 (or USD \$105). What would this amount to as a proportionate share of their monthly income for the members of the classes identified by Goldman Sachs?

Cost to keep abreast of current scholarship

	Monthly income	Books as % of income
Professor	R74,033	1.6%
Marikana miner	R5,000	23.4%
Low end of middle class	R1,400	83.5%
Lower class		Impossible

But if this cost accounting seems peripheral to those in the upper class, there is another aspect of money that affects profoundly the composition of academia in South Africa, which is at the heart of Max Price's statements that "it generally takes more than twenty years from getting a PhD to becoming a professor," and the "pool of South African black academics available for appointment to professorship in 2014 is a proportion of the pool of black PhD graduates in 1994." In part, his statement is true. It does indeed take quite a while to move up the ranks in academia, though unlike the U.S. system there are generally only a finite number of full professorships available in the still-hierarchical, British-model South African university system. But Price's benchmark figure of twenty years is incorrect. None of the six professors in the UCT History Department took that long from award of the PhD to promotion to full professor.

Moreover, with regard to Price's discussion of the limited pool of black PhD graduates, we are back to the matter of choice, and money. Because hiring black faculty is not simply a matter of finding some "pool," like a modern-day academic safari guide. And in 1994 the likelihood of there being many black PhD graduates was miniscule. Only four years earlier Africans had been excluded almost without exception—as they had been since the 1959 passage of the Orwellian-named *Extension of University Education Act*—from the white universities like UCT, which offered the only doctoral training in the country. In hiring larger numbers of underrepresented faculty, what needs to be done is to develop a pool, not chance on finding one, and here we come to the issue of recruitment and training of a new professoriate. On this issue I want to take just one example, because it connects UCT and the United States, and it links the history of universities in the apartheid and the "post-apartheid" era: grants made by the Mellon Foundation. Beginning in 1988, the Mellon Foundation has given an extraordinary amount of money to facilitate the development of higher education in South Africa. Most of it has been given to grant applicants from just three universities, UCT, Wits, and Rhodes. Of the awards made since 2010, for example, 71% of the near-37 million dollars allocated has been given to these three institutions, and over half of the 71% to UCT alone.

Mellon funding for higher education in South Africa, 1988 to the present

1988	\$2.25 million
1990-1999	\$23.29 million
2000-2009	\$70.03 million
2010-present	\$36.87 million
Total to date	\$132.44 million

Almost none of the funding has been requested to recruit and train a new generation of scholars, especially those identified among the 91% of the population underrepresented in UCT's existing faculty. Of the \$14,503,313 received by UCT since 2010, it has spent 6.35% on programs targeted at "diversity," all of that for African American students in the U.S.-based Mellon Mays program, some of whom spend part of their multi-year program at UCT. Another 8% has been spent for the training of MA and PhD students (none of these funds appear to be designated specifically to attract and assist students from underrepresented groups).

Given that the grants funded reflect choices made at UCT as to what faculty want supported, the choices made do not appear to show any interest in developing a pool. Perhaps here again we have what Mamdani and Jansen identified as the continuing influence of the paternalistic, English-speaking, white liberal academic tradition of UCT, especially since the person in charge of Mellon funding for South Africa for the past two decades (right up until this year) has been Stuart Saunders, the man quoted at the beginning of this essay, when he spoke of a certain type of "Africanisation," on the occasion of his inauguration as Vice Chancellor of UCT in 1981, as a process that did not mean "merely the indigenization of the staff of African universities."²² Not merely? Practically not at all?

That different choices can be made is demonstrated by looking at the funding applications of two other universities, the University of the Western Cape (UWC), designated a Coloured university under apartheid but with strong anti-apartheid leadership from the early 1980s onward, and the University of the Free State (UFS), formerly designated a white university but since 2009 under the energetic leadership of Jonathan Jansen, who took up his position as Vice Chancellor only a year after Max Price

became the Vice Chancellor of UCT. Since 2010, of the \$3,014,820 UWC has received from Mellon, it has spent 43% on graduate fellowships. At UFS, of the relatively paltry sum of \$600,000 received in 2014 from Mellon—the first grants ever in the history of the university and a direct result of the leadership of Jansen in transforming the institution—83% went to support graduate and postdoctoral training. Clearly there is a very different set of priorities at work in those two universities compared with UCT and their other peers in South Africa.

Amandla! Awethu! Power to the People, or Not

I want to turn now to a crucial issue identified by the 1989 report on UCT, as well as by Mamdani and Jansen, the exercise of power in the university, and here to move away from the history department as an object of study to that of the whole institution—the Tricameral Academy, as I have called it for reasons which should become clear below.

Two institutions of academic governance have particular importance in universities developed on the British model, the University Council and the University Senate. The former, much akin to U.S. boards of trustees or supervisors, *governs the university*. The thirty-member Council at UCT “consists of the executive officers, other employees of the institution, students and persons not members of staff or students of the institution (who must be at least 60% of the total membership), appointed by a wide range of parties.”²³

The second, as in many US universities, *controls all academic matters* though, unlike the American situation, in the South African university system only full professors have membership and voting rights, as is the case in university governance in Australia and New Zealand as well. Senior university administrators and heads of departments can be members of the Senate, as well as representatives elected by academic staff who are not full professors (85% of the faculty in the case of UCT).

These are the bodies in which, as Goosen et al. noted in their 1989 essay, practically all power resides. And these bodies remain overwhelmingly white even as the structure of South Africa’s politics has completely transformed.

University Council membership, 2014

UCT	16 White, 8 African, 6 Coloured ²⁰
Wits	17 White, 8 African, 4 Coloured or Indian, 3 vacant ²¹
Rhodes	20 White, 8 African, 1 Indian, 1 vacant ²²

UCT University Senate membership, 2014

Senior administrators and heads of department	82
Elected by nonprofessorial academic staff	12
Elected by nonacademic staff	4
Appointed by SRC	6
Appointed by Council	2
Coopted ex officio	7
Coopted to increase diversity	20
Full professors	262
Total Senate membership	346

Note the total is higher because some administrators are also full professors.

Taking Max Price's figures of African full professors at UCT at six (Mangu has five) and of Coloured at five (Mangu counts eight), and adding the eleven Indian full professors listed by Mangu, we end up with a total of 22-24, giving white members of the Senate 94.5% of the *professorial* vote (which in turn comprises three quarters of the total vote) on academic matters in the university.

Given Price's comments about the slowness of transformation, and the statistics of Tettey and the South African government, which suggest that transformation is almost imperceptible when it comes to the addition of academic faculty from underrepresented groups in South Africa, it is difficult to see when—in a matter of decades, or centuries—things might change if they go along as they do now.

Returning for a moment to the example of history, given that there is not in South Africa in 2014 a single African (from South Africa) full professor of history in the country, that means that not a single African historian has a vote on academic matters in a university senate. That is a very long way from what Biko anticipated happening in the academy when he wrote that “they [blacks] want to do things for themselves and all by themselves.”²⁷ Even by Botha's Tricameral figures, which gave whites 58% of the vote,

Coloureds 26%, Asians 15%, and Africans none, the statistics for the academic Tricameral Academy are far more exclusionary and extreme, especially when whites only make up half the proportion of the national population in 2014 that they did in 1984, whereas all the other groups identified in government statistics have stayed the same proportionately or, in the case of Africans, grown.

Conclusion

I am sure that faculty members in South African history departments will be only too ready to tell me that it is much more complicated than this. But that would be myopic of them. Historians in South Africa have, by protecting their privileged space and hiring from within, made themselves and their discipline irrelevant, especially to the majority of the population who want to find out about their history and can't in the university.

As two of my African colleagues in South Africa, both historians employed outside of the academy, have commented to me, there has never been any sustained effort in the past by South African history departments to recruit and financially support students from underrepresented communities. Nor do many young people from those communities think now of pursuing study in a discipline that has acted as though it is oblivious of them, and has no intellectual excitement or attraction to people interested in transformation in their lifetime.

Perhaps an appropriate way to end this essay is with a reference to Nelson Mandela, not to the rainbow-nation Mandela quoted on public occasions as the supporter of multiracialism in South Africa or to the great reconciler, but to the young revolutionary, and the old man who always felt that more needed to be done, and *now*. Here is Mandela speaking on the occasion of his election to the presidency of the African National Congress Youth League in December 1951:

Yes, the common man who for generations has been the tool of insane politicians and governments, who has suffered privations and sorrow in wars that were of profit to tiny privileged groups, is today rising from being the object of history [to] becoming the subject of history. For the ordinary men and women in the world, the oppressed all over the world are becoming the conscious

creators of their own history. They are pledged to carve their destiny and not to leave it in the hands of tiny ruling circles—or classes.²⁸

The Mandela of 2005 did not disagree. In one of his last formal public speeches, an address to the faculty and students of Amherst College in May 2005, he pointed to the central significance of education as a public right open to all: “In South Africa, in America, in all the world—we must provide education, not as a privilege, but as a right; not for some, but for all. Let the doors of learning open.”²⁹

And let the doors be open to ALL.

Endnotes

¹ Eve Fairbanks, “A Paradox of Integration,” *New York Times*, October 17, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/19/opinion/sunday/a-paradox-of-integration.html?_r=0.

² See the explanation of this term by UCT’s vice chancellor, Dr. Max Price: “The ‘Afro’, he explained, is obviously a reference to the university’s focus on the continent. ‘Politan’ signifies ‘that it is not a retrospective look, a sort of naive subsidy economy, safari economy view of the continent, but rather a cosmopolitan and metropolitan view of a continent that is developing fast and is involved with the future.’” *University World News*, November 12, 2012. <http://www.universityworld-news.com/article.php?story=20121124180508500>. On the ranking see the May 8, 2013 news release by UCT regarding its 2013 ranking in the QS World University Rankings, “Regarded as one of Africa’s leading universities, UCT’s consistent performance in world ranking systems speaks to the university’s commitment to quality research as well as first-rate higher education.” (<http://www.uct.ac.za/dailynews/?id=8442>)

³ Eve Fairbanks, “A Paradox of Integration,” *New York Times*, October 17, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/19/opinion/sunday/a-paradox-of-integration.html?_r=0.

⁴ Xolela Mangcu, “Ripping the Veil off UCT’s Whiter Shades of Pale,” *Sunday Times*, July 6, 2014, <https://www.uct.ac.za/usr/news/2014/Ripping%20the%20veil%20off%20UCTs%20whiter%20shades%20of%20pale.pdf>.

⁵ Max Price, “The Challenges of EE in Academia,” *Politicsweb*, July 20, 2014, <http://www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page71656?oid=651310&sn=Detail&pid=71656>.

⁶ Max Price, “The Challenges of EE in Academia,” *Politicsweb*, July 20, 2014, <http://www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page71656?oid=651310&sn=Detail&pid=71656>.

- ⁷ Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like* (1978), <http://sbf.org.za/biko-through-his-quotes.php>.
- ⁸ G. Goosen, M. Hall, and C. White, *Rethinking U.C.T.: The Debate Over Africanisation And The Position of Women* (UCT Centre for African Studies, 1989), p.1.
- ⁹ Goosen, Hall, and White, *Rethinking U.C.T.*, pp. 84, 85.
- ¹⁰ Mamdani, "Is African Studies to Be Turned into a New Home for Bantu Education at UCT?" April 22, 1998, full text at <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/30/136.html>, and published in a fuller form with documents and syllabi included as "Teaching Africa at the Post-Apartheid University of Cape Town: A Critical View of the 'Introduction to Africa' Core Course in the Social Science and Humanities Faculty's Foundation Semester," *Social Dynamics* 24:2 (1998), pp. 1-32.
- ¹¹ *Social Dynamics*, 24:2 (1998), pp. 106-16; also available in full text at <http://repository.up.ac.za/handle/2263/2008?show=full>.
- ¹² Wisdom, J. Tettey, "Deficits in Academic Staff Capacity in Africa and Challenges of Developing and Retaining the Next Generation of Academics," (Partnership for Higher Education in Africa, December 2010), http://www.foundation-partnership.org/pubs/pdf/tettey_deficits.pdf, and http://carnegie.org/fileadmin/Media/Publications/phea_tettey_NGA_Indicators_Dec2009.pdf. For the third table see "Report of the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions," (Soudien Report), November 30, 2008, https://www.cput.ac.za/storage/services/transformation/ministerial_report_transformation_social_cohesion.pdf.
- ¹³ The fields add up to more than 76 because of some overlapping specializations.
- ¹⁴ UCT History website: <http://www.historicalstudies.uct.ac.za/>.
- ¹⁵ Rhodes first year, <http://www.ru.ac.za/history/studying/undergraduatestudies/history1/>.
- ¹⁶ Wits first year, http://www.wits.ac.za/academic/humanities/socialsciences/history/undergraduate/8201/level_1000_courses.html.
- ¹⁷ Wits second year, http://www.wits.ac.za/academic/humanities/socialsciences/history/undergraduate/8202/level_2000_courses.html.
- ¹⁸ Biko, "The Quest for a True Humanity," *I Write What I like* (1978), <http://sbf.org.za/biko-through-his-quotes.php>.
- ¹⁹ See the salary study undertaken by the Association of Commonwealth Universities released in December 2010, <https://www.acu.ac.uk/news-events/press-releases/australia-south-africa-staff-salaries>.
- ²⁰ <http://www.goldmansachs.com/our-thinking/outlook/colin-coleman-south-africa/20-yrs-of-freedom.pdf>
- ²¹ Staffing numbers (not actual remuneration) are from the *UCT Research Report, 2013-14*, pp. 572-73, <http://research2013.uct.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Output-Faculty-of-Humanities.pdf>; remuneration information is from UCT's Human Resources website, http://hr.uct.ac.za/benefits/remuneration/coe_ranges/academic/.

²² See the Mellon Foundation Grants Database, <http://www.mellon.org/grants/grants-database/>. Emphasis added. As of March 2014, Saleem Badat, the former vice chancellor of Rhodes University (and its first black VC), was appointed by the Mellon Foundation as its new program director for International Higher Education and Strategic Projects.

²³ <https://www.uct.ac.za/about/governance/council/>. The “parties” that chose the 30 Council members at UCT include Ministerial appointees (3), Members elected by Convocation (6), Academic (all ranks below full professor) and PASS (Permanent Administrative Staff) elected members (2), Ex Officio (5), Members elected by Senate (3), Members elected by donors (2), City Council’s nominee (1), Premier’s nominee (1), Appointments Committee appointees (5), SRC (Student Representative Council) appointed members (2).

²⁴ <https://www.uct.ac.za/about/governance/council/>.

²⁵ <http://www.wits.ac.za/aboutwits/3054/governance.html>.

²⁶ <http://www.ru.ac.za/vice-chancellor/governingstructures/council/>.

²⁷ *I Write What I Like* (1978).

²⁸ Nelson Mandela, Presidential Address at the Annual Conference of the African National Congress Youth League, http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub_view.asp?pg=item&ItemID=NMS001&txtstr=Dates:%201950%20-%201960.

²⁹ Nelson Mandela, Address to Amherst College, 12 May 2005, http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub_view.asp?pg=item&ItemID=NMS1138&txtstr=amherst.