

**The academic staff profile of Geographers at higher education institutions (HEIs) in
South Africa: The challenges of transformation**

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Abstract

South Africa's first national democratic elections in 1994 marked a turning point in the history of the country. Since democracy much of the focus of African National Congress (ANC)-led government has been on redress and transformation across all spheres of society, including higher education. This paper examines one important aspect inherent in transforming higher education; that is, changing the academic staffing profile of its institutions to more accurately reflect the demographics of the country. Specifically, we examine the academic staffing profiles (gender, race, and rank) of Geographers employed at higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa and compare these statistics to national academic staffing trends. Results indicate that Geographers in South Africa are most often white and male although these findings mirror national percentages. We also found a paucity of black African Geographers at more senior academic positions as well as a lack of black African female Geographers. Racial inequities in the distribution of academic staff were noted with white male Geographers disproportionately located at historically white institutions while black African Geographers are disproportionately located at historically black institutions. We discuss these, and other results, in the broader context of the transformation of the discipline of Geography in South Africa.

Keywords

South Africa; transformation; higher education institutions (HEIs); geography; academic staff

Introduction

Over the past 25 years South Africa has experienced significant changes since its first democratically-elected government took office under the presidency of Nelson Mandela. Since the end of apartheid, redress and transformation have been the focus of law and policy-makers with the overarching aim of providing social equity across all spheres of society. While the meaning, measurement and interpretation of transformation remains open to debate (see Badat & Sayed, 2014; Cloete, 2014; Dunne, 2014; Worger, 2014) the general consensus is that the interests of historically disadvantaged individuals¹ (HDIs) should be advanced. Despite several legislative actions having been made in this regard, notably the Employment Equity Act, No. 55 of 1998, the pace of transformation throughout a number of sectors throughout the country has been slow, most notably in higher education (Govinder, Zondo, & Makgoba, 2013; Soudien et al., 2008). Transformation in this context refers to undoing the historical injustices that the majority black African population suffered in terms of access, availability and representation in the higher education sector of the country (Breetzke & Hedding, 2018). Indeed, under apartheid, South African universities were “creatures of colonialism” (Sadiq, Barnes, Price, Gumedze, & Morrell., 2019, p. 426) and were used to propagate ‘separate development’ most often by placing white, former National-party supporting males in positions of authority. Frustration over the lack of transformation of the higher education sector in the post-apartheid era led, in part, to large-scale and violent student protests in 2015 and 2016 under the so-called #FeesMustFall hashtag (Mutekwe, 2017). The antecedent to these protests was student dissatisfaction over the rising costs of higher education in the country’s now desegregated higher education institutions (HEIs) but soon mushroomed to include calls to ‘decolonise’ university curricula (Kamanzi, 2016) and address the lack of transformation of, among others, the academic staff body at the countries then 25 HEIs (Msila, 2016). Regarding the latter, a number of studies have previously examined the transformation of academic staff at HEIs

throughout the country since the mid-2000s (see Breetzke & Hedding, 2018; Govinder et al., 2013) and have most often found that academic staff transformation is occurring in South Africa, albeit slowly. The observed trends shown in these previous studies are, however, based on aggregated data which may mask discipline-specific trends. It could be that while the overall academic staff profile of the country is becoming more representative of the national demography, certain academic disciplines lag behind in terms of their representativeness.

In this study we examine the current demographic profile of Geographers employed at HEIs throughout the country. More specifically, we examine the demographic profile of Geography¹ academic staff at South African HEIs in terms of gender, race and rank. We first chart the gender, racial and rank profile of Geography academics and compare these data with national academic staffing body statistics to determine the progress, or lack thereof, in terms of the transformational goals set for higher education in various government policies since democracy (see Department of Education, 1997; Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), 2014; National Planning Commission (NPC), 2012). We then disaggregate HEIs in the country by historical antecedent (i.e., historically black African; historically white; and ‘new and merged’) and briefly examine whether the profile of Geography academic staff occurs uniformly throughout all HEIs or is skewed to a certain type of institution. Finally, we contrast the profile of Geography academics against another discipline (Philosophy) to provide added context. In contrast to much previous work, we use existing empirical data to examine the profile of Geography academics and begin to ascribe tentative explanations for the statistics observed. Geography is one of the oldest academic disciplines in South Africa and is one of a few to have remained relatively unchanged both in name and purpose since its formalisation in the early 1900s. These factors combined with the fact that Geographers pride themselves on

¹ By Geography we refer to the study of places and the relationships between people and their environments (National Geographic, 2020). Geographers teach about the physical properties of the Earth’s surface and/or the human societies that are spread across it.

their ability to see the world from a ‘big picture’ perspective makes the discipline perfect to examine the nuances of transformation, however defined, in a unique socio-historical setting. Whilst we are naturally weary of conflating transformation with race; and realize that transformation of the higher education sector in South Africa entails more than simply changing the demographic profile of the academic staff body, we are also cognisant of the historical and contemporary inequities that exist in South African HEIs, defined primarily by race.

Geography and transformation in higher education in South Africa

In 2016 the Society of South African Geographers (SSAG) celebrated a century of geography in South Africa at its 10th biennial conference held in Stellenbosch. The SSAG was formed in 1994 through a merger between the South African Geographical Society (SAGS) and the Society for Geography. The former was founded in 1917 by James Hutcheon, the first South African university lecturer in geography (at the then South African School of Mines and Technology (now the University of the Witwatersrand)) and was tasked primarily with advancing the status of Geography as an academic discipline while the latter was founded forty years later by mainly Afrikaans-speaking geography teachers and lecturers from the Cape. The merger was an historic event in the history of Geography in South Africa as it unified and solidified the now-centralised mandate to advance South African Geography as a discipline throughout the country. Twenty-five years on from the historic event and Geography is currently housed within 17 academic departments throughout the country’s now 26 universities. In many instances, however, Geography is included with other disciplines in combined academic departments (such as the Department of Geography, Geoinformatics and Meteorology at the University of Pretoria) or in combined Schools (such as the School of Geography, Archaeology and Environmental Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand).

Regardless, specific fields of specialisation in the discipline are taught at each institution interlinking the fields of human geography, physical geography and geographical information technology.

As a major discipline within institutions of higher learning, Geography has, similar to other academic disciplines, experienced a number of challenges since democracy in 1994. Chief among these are rapid massification (Visser, Donaldson, & Seethal, 2016); high attrition rates (Zewotir & North, 2015); growing internationalization (Rensburg, David, & Motala, 2015); and the need to decolonise (Knight, 2018) and transform the curriculum (Long, Dalu, Lembani, & Gunter, 2019). Another more recent challenge that has taken precedence among HEIs and research institutions more broadly in the country is the need to transform the student and staff body to more accurately represent the demographics of the country. Indeed, racial disparities persist at universities throughout South Africa both in terms of the staff and student profiles. Of the 766,812 students who enrolled in HEIs in 2016 in South Africa, 66% were black African, 19% were white, 8% were Indian/Asian, and 7% Coloured³ (Statistics South Africa (SSA), 2016). These national statistics, however, mask more worrying trends which indicate that just over 3% of black Africans aged between 18 and 29 attended university in 2016, compared to more than 17% of whites. From a staffing perspective these racial inequalities are exacerbated. A study by Breetzke and Hedding (2016) found that black Africans are under-represented at every academic rank at the country's HEIs with the inequalities most pronounced at the professorial rank where 62% of professors are white compared with 27% for Black African. A later study by the researchers found that whilst the overall academic staffing bodies in the country are predominantly male and white, the distribution is changing, albeit slowly (Breetzke & Hedding, 2018).

Of course, the pressure to transform the staff body at HEIs throughout the country lies mainly with managers at various levels of seniority (including heads, directors and deans

among others). Whilst broader institutional transformation goals or ‘targets’ trickle down to all levels of operation, it is the line manager who is most often held accountable for the transformation, or lack thereof, of their respective department, faculty or school. Indeed, annual key performance indicators (KPI) for managers at various levels of administration at HEIs in South Africa most often include a transformation KPI which assesses the degree to which the manager was able to achieve a transformation target regarding the racial composition of their staff component. For example, at the broader institutional level, the 2019-2021 employment equity plan for the University of Cape Town (UCT) indicates that at least 33.5% of employees at senior levels should be from under-represented designated groups by the end of 2020 (UCT, 2020). This places tremendous pressure on managers to not only lead their respective departments but to achieve certain staff transformation targets, which are often largely beyond their control.

One possible reason that limits the ability of line managers to transform their respective departments, particularly at the junior level, is the lack of doctoral graduates who can potentially fill academic staff positions. This is particularly problematic in South Africa where there are still disproportionately fewer black Africans doctoral graduates than whites, although this is changing (see Mouton et al., 2019). In terms of Geography specifically, the graduation rate at the doctoral level is low (Fairhurst et al., 2003; Meadows, 2012) but it is improving at a rapid rate. Indeed, according to Higher Education Data Analyser (HEDA) (2019) the number of black Africans who graduated with a doctoral degree in ‘Geography and Cartography’ almost doubled from 2010 to 2018, although admittedly from a low base. Of increasing concern, however, is the fact that the majority of these geography doctoral candidates are registered at historically white universities while the number of geography doctoral candidates at historically black African universities is relatively stagnant (Ramutsindela, 2015). This could possibly be used to explain why the proportion of full-time academic staff in Geography

departments throughout the country with doctoral degrees is significantly smaller at historically black African universities than at the more advantaged and well-resourced historically white universities, as previously observed by Fairhurst *et al.* (2003).

In this study we sought to position Geography within this national discourse by providing a transformational ‘snapshot’ of the discipline in South Africa by examining the demographic profile of its academic staffing body and compare the results of our analysis with national academic staffing statistics. We also stratify our findings by type of institution to determine whether the initial trends we observe occur uniformly throughout all Geography departments in the country.

Data and method

An edited book celebrating the history of academic Geography in South Africa over the past 100 years (see Visser *et al.*, 2016) formed the basis of the data used to analyse the demography of Geography academic staff at universities throughout South Africa. Each chapter in the book provides an illustration of how Geography emerged at each individual university in the country as well as recent staff profiles. An exhaustive search of university departmental, school, and faculty websites was then undertaken to verify the information and provide new data if new staff additions had occurred since the publication of the book. Academic staff are defined as professionals who hold the rank of junior lecturer, lecturer, senior lecturer, associate professor and professor and who are involved in instructional and research activities at universities. The data we obtained included the gender, racial and ranking breakdown of Geography academic staff for all 26 universities in South Africa (see Table 1). The highest qualification of each staff member was also captured. We readily acknowledge that there are a few uncertainties in sourcing data in this manner. Academic departments are fluid in terms of their staff bodies (retirements, resignations) and that a number of academics may also consider themselves

‘Geographers’ even though they may be housed in outside departments such as Tourism or Environmental Science. It is difficult to estimate this dark number. We are also sensitive to related issues of gender and race. As a result, the data shown here may not represent the exact demographic breakdown of Geography academic staff throughout the country, but we are confident that the data we sourced broadly approximates its true and current profile. Besides there were no viable alternatives to consider and we felt a study investigating the current state of transformation of Geography academic staff was important given the current discourse in the country despite potential data limitations. National statistics of academic staffing bodies were obtained from the South African Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) (2017).

We first graphed the gender, race and rank of Geography academic staff across universities in South Africa and then compared these statistics with national academic staff bodies. We then disaggregated the data by race and graphed the gender and rank of academic staff by racial grouping: black African, white, Coloured, and Indian. It is important to note that foreign academic staff were included in the analysis as the data we had access too does not provide an indication of whether the academic staff member was born outside the country. While this may have some impact on the descriptive results, less than 3% of academic staff in South Africa are classified as foreign so the impact is minimal.

Finally, we disaggregated our data by institution-type (i.e., historically white; historically black African; and ‘new or merged’ institutions)² and graphed the gender, race and rank of Geography academic staff versus national academic staff per institution-type (see Bunting (2006) for broad classification criteria). It could be, for example, that the profiles we generate occur uniformly throughout all HEIs in the country or there could be non-uniformity in the demographic and racial distribution of Geography academic staff in institutions stratified by

type. Prior research has shown how the biggest ‘gains’ in terms of non-white academic staff representation has been made at historically black African universities such as the University of Limpopo while historically white universities such as the University of Cape Town have remained relatively stagnant in terms of academic staff transformation (see Breetzke & Hedding, 2018); we were interested in determining whether this applied to Geography as well.

Table 1: The 26 South African universities examined in this study

University	Abbreviation
Cape Peninsula of Technology	CPUT
University of Cape Town	UCT
Central University of Technology	CUT
Durban University of Technology	DUT
University of Fort Hare	UFH
University of the Free State	UFS
University of Johannesburg	UJ
University of KwaZulu-Natal	UKZN
University of Limpopo	UL
Nelson Mandela University	NMMU
North West University	NWU
University of Pretoria	UP
Rhodes University	Rhodes
University of South Africa	UNISA
University of Stellenbosch	US
Tshwane University of Technology	TUT
University of Venda	UV
Vaal University of Technology	VUT
Walter Sisulu University	WSU
University of Western Cape	UWC
University of Witwatersrand	WITS
University of Zululand	UZ
Sol Plaatjie University	SPU
University of Mpumalanga	UM
Mangosuthu University of Technology	MUT
Sefako Makgatho Health Science University	SMHS

Results

The demographic and rank profile of Geography academic staff yields a number of interesting results. First, Geography academics in South Africa are mostly male (see Figure 1). The percentage of male academics (58%) is closely aligned to the national representation of academics which stands at 53% male. Interestingly, female Geography academics (42%) are somewhat under-represented when compared to the national statistics (48% female). Just under 56% of Geography academics in South Africa are white compared with 37% who are black African (see Figure 2). These statistics lie in slight contrast with national percentages which indicate that 44% of academics are white and 38% are black African. The percent Indian and Coloured are also under-represented when compared to the national statistics (see Figure 2).

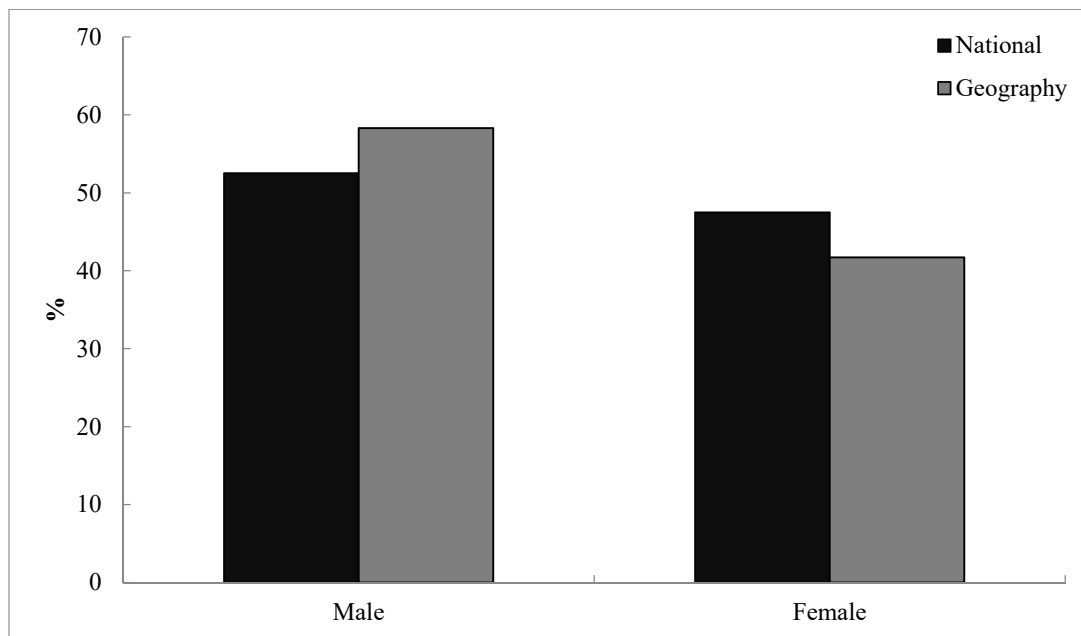


Figure 1: Gender of Geography academic staff at HEIs in South Africa

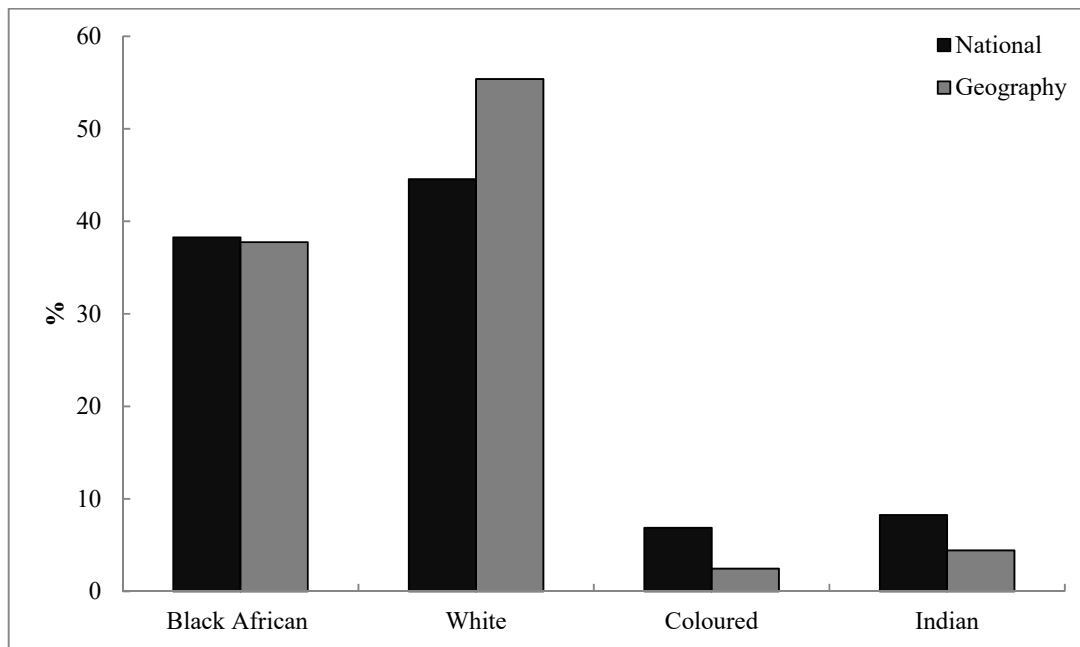


Figure 2: Race of Geography academic staff at HEIs in South Africa

In terms of ranking, just under half of all Geography academics in the country are lecturers (49%) followed by senior lecturers (22%), professors (13%), associate professors (11%) and junior lecturers (4%) (see Figure 3). When compared to the national percentages, the results are broadly similar with a slight over-representation of Geography academics at the lecturer rank and a slight under-representation of Geography at the senior lecturer **ranking**. Regarding the highest qualification obtained the results are encouraging with 64% of Geography academics holding a doctoral qualification compared with 53% nationally (see Figure 4) although interestingly a larger percentage of academic staff nationally hold a Masters qualification (39%) compared to Geography academics (31%) which possibly suggests an aging cohort of geographers throughout the country.

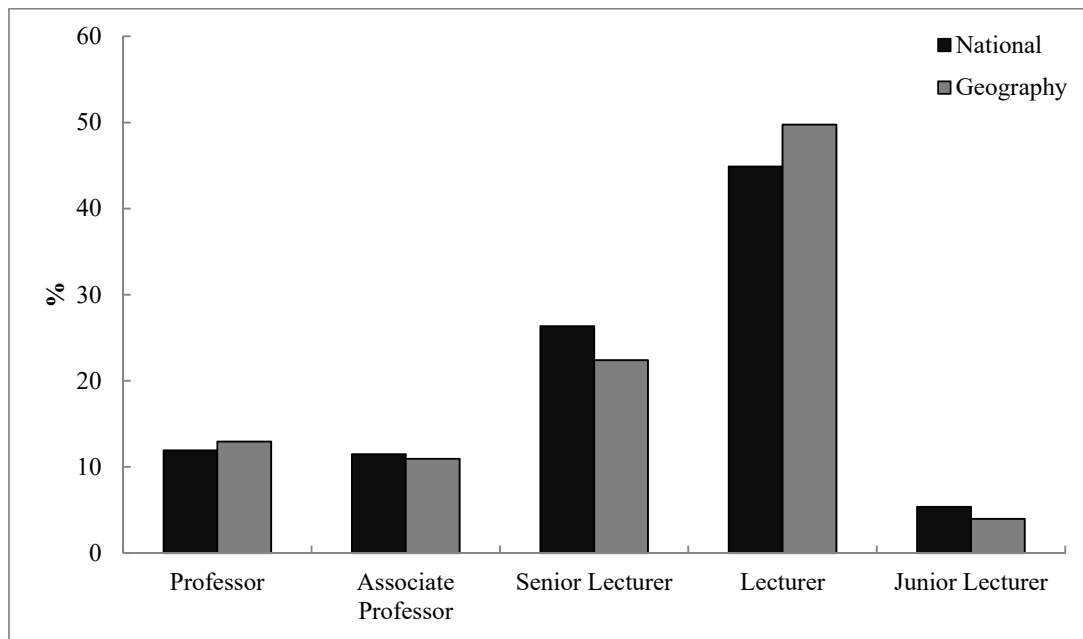


Figure 3: Rank of Geography academic staff at HEIs in South Africa

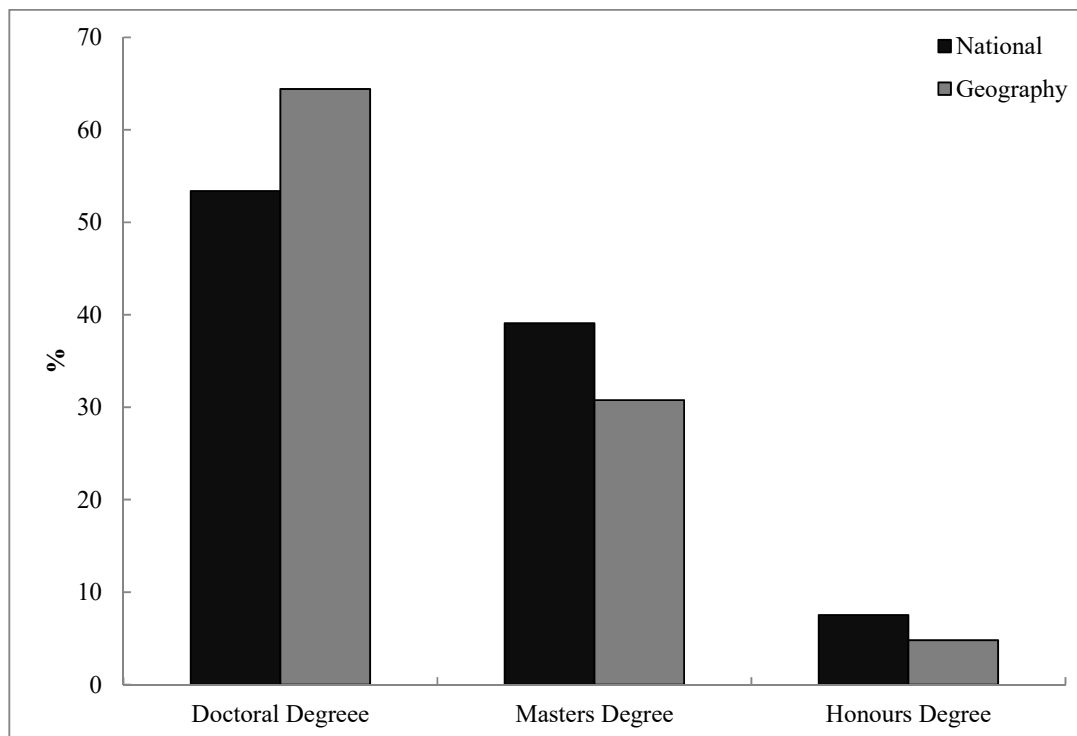


Figure 4: Highest degree obtained of Geography academic staff at HEIs in South Africa

The gender and rank profile of academic staff by racial grouping is shown in Figures 5 and 6. A number of results warrant attention. First, in terms of gender, the majority of male Geographers are white (29%) (see Figure 5). The next biggest cohort of Geographers are black African males (26%) followed by white females (25%). The biggest differences between the racial groups and gender compared to the national percentages is between white male, and black African females academics. In terms of the former, 29% of Geographers are white males compared with 22% nationally; whilst 11% of Geographers are black African females compared with 16% nationally. Second, in terms of ranking, Geography as a discipline ‘over-achieves’ in a number of categories (see Figure 6). For example, roughly 21% of professors nationally are black African compared with 29% in Geography; likewise, 7% of professors nationally in South Africa are Indian professors compared with 29% in Geography. It should be noted however that the actual counts are still extremely low.

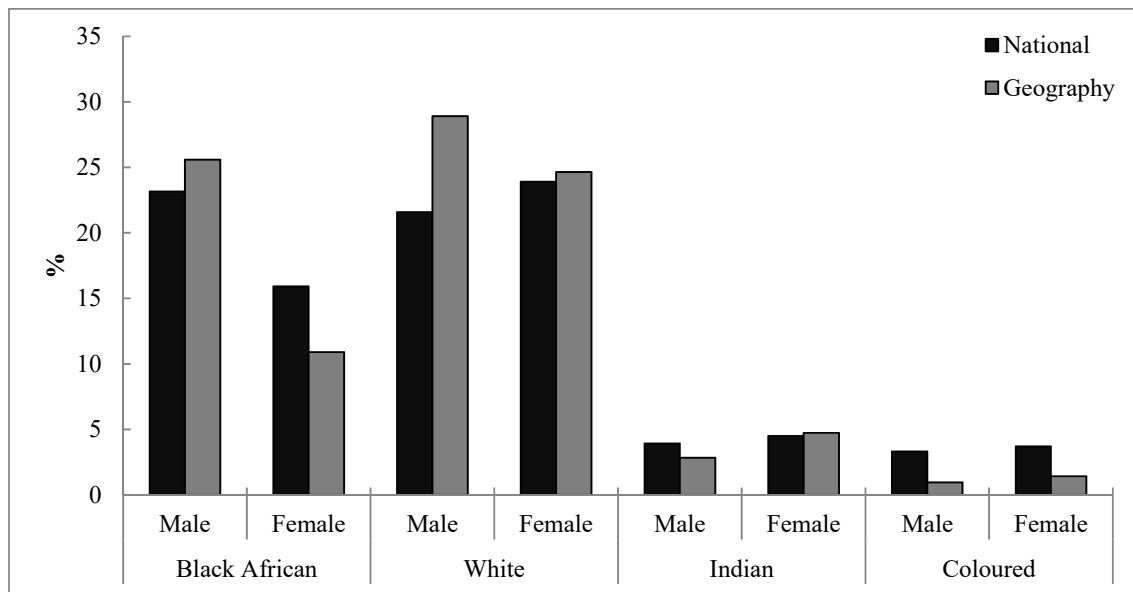


Figure 5: Race-gender breakdown of Geography academic staff at HEIs in South Africa

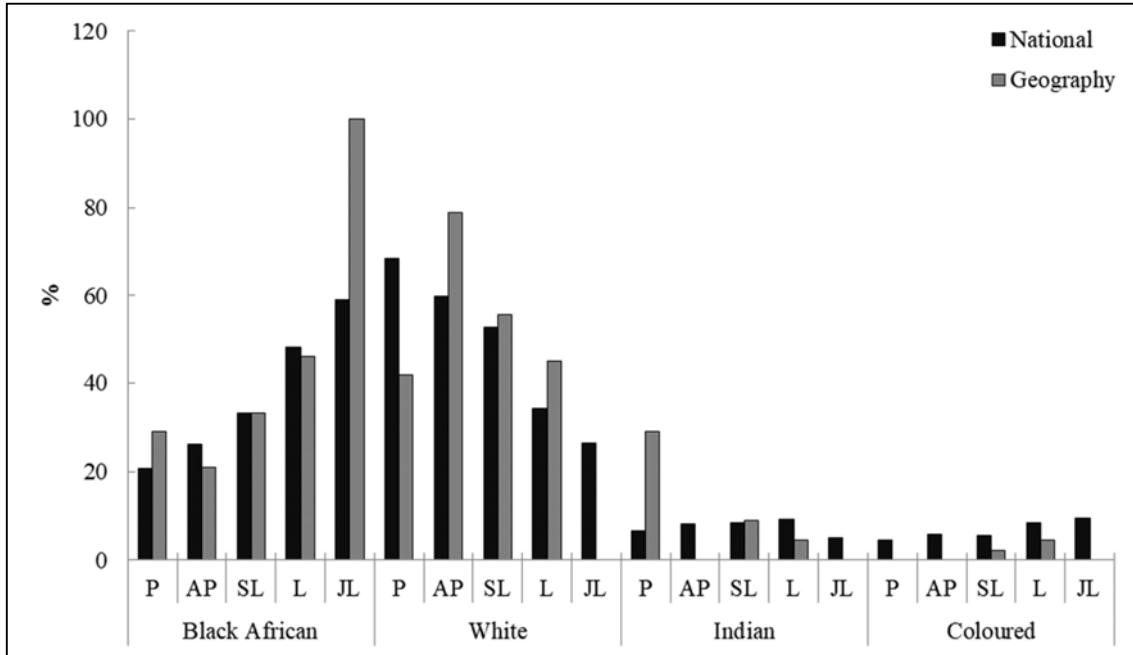


Figure 6: Race-rank breakdown of Geography academic staff at HEIs in South Africa

Table 2 shows the Geography academic staff profiles of institutions stratified by race. When our data is disaggregated by institution a number of interesting trends emerge. First, the vast majority of white Geography academics are employed at historically white universities. In fact almost 75% of white Geography academics are employed at historically white universities while only 36% of black African Geographers are employed at historically white universities. Second, almost half of all black African Geographers are employed at historically black African universities (45%) while 18% are employed at ‘new and merged’ institutions. Interestingly, when the data are stratified by university category (see Table 3), white Geography academics are also over-represented (14.9%) at historically black African universities. This suggests a lack of transformation in Geography departments occurring not only at historically white universities but also at historically black African universities and ‘new and merged’ universities, which require more black African Geographers to more closely align their departments with national demographics. Due to space constraints we are unable to

provide results of this disaggregation by gender, rank and highest qualification obtained but an initial examination of these data also indicate that Geography academics employed at historically white universities are disproportionately white males who hold a doctoral degree. This illustrates the continued racial and spatially skewed distribution of academics in the country.

Table 2: Geography academic staff profiles of institutions stratified by race (in percentage)

	Historically white (<i>n</i> = 10)	Historically black African (<i>n</i> = 8)	'New and merged' (<i>n</i> = 8)
Black African (76.4) ^a	36.4	45.4	18.2
Coloured (8.9)	20	40	40
Indian (2.5)	66.7	33.3	0
White (9.1)	74.3	6.2	19.5

^a National demographic statistics from the 2011 National Census are presented in the brackets for each racial group

Table 3: Geography academic staff profiles of institutions stratified by university category (in percentage)

	Historically white (<i>n</i> = 10)	Historically black African (<i>n</i> = 8)	'New and merged' (<i>n</i> = 8)
Black African (76.4) ^a	23.5	74.5	36.8
Coloured (8.9)	0.9	4.2	5.3
Indian (2.5)	5.0	6.4	0
White (9.1)	70.6	14.9	57.9

^a National demographic statistics from the 2011 National Census are presented in the brackets for each racial group

Discussion

The transformation debate in South Africa is topical and pervades most sectors of society. In a country in which socio-spatial inequalities are defined primarily by race it is natural that the racial composition of any workforce will draw attention. Indeed, staffing bodies are most often the shop-front of both the private and public sector and concomitantly provide the South

African government with a yard-stick by which to measure overall demographic transformation throughout all sectors of the country. The higher education sector is no different. Since democracy in 1994 there has been increasing political pressure on HEIs to transform their staffing structures both in terms of gender and race (Visser et al., 2016). Already in its 1997 Education White Paper the South African government sought to improve the “proportion of blacks and women on academic and executive staff of institutions” (Cloete & Bunting, 2000: p. 75). We do not intend to delve specifically into the transformation debate here but rather, by proxy, seek to examine the current demographic profile of Geography academic staff at South African HEIs and make inferences regarding the national call for transformation more generally. In doing so, we were also interested in identifying whether the trends we observe for Geography match national statistics and whether there was any non-uniformity in the extent to which Geography academic staff are located across universities stratified by type. Not only did the results of our research outline the current racial profile of Geography academic staff across all HEIs in South Africa, but we also identified some discrepancies in the racial distribution of Geographers across various types of institutions. In terms of the former, Geography academic staff in South Africa are most often white and male although these findings largely mirror national percentages. Like many other disciplines in South Africa, Geography departments have historically been staffed predominantly by white males (Visser et al., 2016). This trend appears to be continuing in the post-apartheid era although the profile is slowly changing and beginning to more accurately represent the national demographics. In fact, Geography as a discipline ‘overachieves’ across most categories of gender, race and rank when compared nationally. In terms of the latter, we note that despite their overall over-representation in HEIs throughout South Africa white male Geographers are disproportionately located at historically white institutions while black African Geographers are disproportionately located at historically black institutions. This finding exemplifies the complexities and inequalities that

permeate the South African academe. Overall however the demographic profile of Geographers at HEIs in South Africa broadly approximates national academic staffing bodies with the biggest differences found in the racial group where whites are over-represented (in Geography) and in the highest qualification obtained where a much greater percentage of Geography academic staff members had a doctoral degree when compared nationally. There are also some minor differences in the race-gender profile of academics where white males are over-represented and black African females are under-represented.

In amongst all these results, there are two sets of statistics that are of concern. The first relates to rank where the percentage of black African Geography academics at the professorial level is extremely low albeit higher than national academic staffing bodies. Moreover, at the associate professorial level Geography falls behind the ‘transformational curve’ with less black African representation than nationally. The paucity of black Africans in the upper echelons of academia in South Africa, including Geography, has been the focus of much recent debate. Indeed, while there has been a three-fold increase in the number of black African academic staff, from 2817 (in 2000) to 7500 (in 2017) (Higher Education Data Analyser, 2017) most are clustered in the lower ranks of the academic hierarchy. The fact that academic hierarchies in South Africa are not demographically representative have led to accusations of bias and discrimination against ‘blacks’ in the promotion process at some HEIs in the country, notably the University of Cape Town (Nordling, 2019); an accusation recently empirically dispelled by Sadiq et al. (2019). Others bemoan the divisive legacy of colonialism at South Africa’s top research institutions (Long et al., 2019; **Daya, 2020**) which limit the ability of black staff in particular to forge their own path in academia without kowtowing to ‘Western’ hegemony. Regardless, the racial disparities in terms of staff composition and ranking in particular has resulted in a number of employment and promotion strategies being implemented in HEIs throughout the country as a measure of redress. In terms of staff composition, rigorous

employment criteria have been implemented for new academic positions with emphasis placed on candidates who were historically disadvantaged. In terms of ranking, strategies include stringent equity distribution guidelines for the provision of funding (bursaries, scholarships) for permanent and temporary academics at the country's HEIs aimed at promoting academic progression (see National Research Foundation (NRF), 2019). Other strategies have been more direct with one institution, the University of South Africa recently drafting proposals to delineate different promotion criteria depending on the race of the applicant (Jansen, 2019; Somdyala, 2019). The notion is to fast-track certain 'designated groups' such as black Africans, women and people with disabilities into more senior academic positions until the broader staffing body more accurately reflects the national demographics. Whilst the latter affirmative action plan has been described as being contrary to the objectives and provisions in the Employment Equity Act (Labuschagne, 2019), strategies such as these will most likely continue unabated due to the pressure HEIs are increasingly faced to not only address employment equity but to become relevant in local and national political debates.

Of course, the risk of fast-tracking 'designated groups' into senior academic positions in the name of transformation threatens not only South Africa's credibility on the world stage but also, ironically, seeks to mimic the actions of the Afrikaner establishment under apartheid wherein mainly white male Afrikaansers were elevated to senior academic positions on the flimsiest of academic criteria and loyalty to the Afrikaner cause (Jansen, 2019). Geography must not fall into this trap.

The second concern relates to the dearth of black African female Geographers in the country. Just over 10% of Geographers in the country are black African females despite this cohort representing over 40% of the national demographic. In fact, one of the biggest discrepancies between Geography and national staff profiles were for black African female academic staff. It is important to note that the paucity of black African academic staff is not a

uniquely South African issue. Countries such as the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US) have long grappled with addressing racial and gender inequities inherent in their academic staff profiles. Rollock (2019) notes that black women make up just 0.1% of active professors in the UK compared with the 68% who are white men. Indeed, white female and black male academics in the UK are three times more likely to be professors compared with their black female peers, while white male academics are six times more likely to occupy this role compared with their black female colleagues. More worryingly, researchers also note how black female academics routinely experience bullying, stereotyping and institutional neglect by their respective institution in the UK (Rollock, 2019) which limits opportunities for promotion to more senior academic positions. In the US only 6% of full-time faculty in degree-granting post-secondary institutions are African American compared with 77% of fulltime faculty who are white (Kena et al., 2016). Similar to the UK experience, researchers have also noted how black faculty members in US higher education institutions tend to be systematically and significantly disadvantaged on a variety of measures including opportunity structure, resources, academic and non-academic demands relative to whites (see Allen, Epps, Guillory, Suh, & Bonous-Hammarth, 2000). Locally, Phakeng (2015) argues that black African females in South Africa have been historically marginalised by the ‘masculinity of power inherent in HEIs as well as the assertions of ‘Africanness’ which valorises patriarchal practices. She further argues that women have to be much better than men to land top jobs in academia and have to work doubly hard to be promoted. Whilst a number of programmes have been outlined in the Staffing South Africa’s Universities (SSAUF) framework aimed specifically at increasing the representation and employment of black African female academics at HEIs throughout the country (see Nzimande 2015), the challenges outlined by Phakeng suggest that more structural and organisational changes are required at higher levels of university governance in order for this cohort to be adequately represented.

The reasons for why the transformation of academic staff at Geography departments in South Africa is slow are myriad but could possibly be related to two main issues. First, black African students across all disciplines face significant financial pressure to exit higher education upon the completion of their degrees in order to find employment, and in doing so, support their extended families – the so-called ‘black tax’ (Mangoma & Wilson-Prangley, 2019). These graduates are typically first, or second generation graduates whose families most often do not have the financial means to fund extended studies. In addition, post-graduate bursaries are also extremely limited in South Africa and typically do not cover all costs associated studying further. Moreover, there is also increasing evidence that post-graduate students (regardless of race) may leave academia for higher-paying jobs available in the private or public sector (Breetzke & Hedding, 2018) where the differences in salaries are most stark at the more juniors ranks (see Higher Education South Africa (HESA), 2014). Second, we believe that white academic staff in Geography departments across the country are limited in terms of their ability to move either ‘sideways’ or ‘upwards’ across universities due to affirmative action legislation outlined earlier. This also pertains to career moves outside of academia in general. As a result, a number of white academic staff members remain at the same department until retirement age which restricts new academic appointments and concomitantly slows the drive for transformation.

These issues notwithstanding it is important to note that the profile of Geography academic staff at the 26 HEIs in South Africa *is* slowly beginning to more closely reflect the national demography. When compared with the national statistics, Geography as a discipline ‘overachieves’ across most categories. Moreover, when one compares the current academic staff profile of Geographers in the country with other disciplines within higher education, it is apparent that Geography has made equivalent, if not greater strides towards overall equity. For example, just under 72% of Philosophy academics at South African HEIs are male compared

with 58% in Geography (see Table 4)⁴. From a racial perspective, approximately 38% of Geography academics being black African compared with 22% of Philosophy academics. Last, in terms of ranking, results across most levels are broadly similar with there being a slightly higher percentage of Philosophy academics at the higher rankings and a slightly higher percentage of Geography academics at the lower rankings. These relatively crude comparative statistics are encouraging and suggest that academic staff transformation within Geography is occurring at a faster pace than at least one other major discipline taught at most HEIs in the country, although a much larger sample of disciplines would provide a more accurate reflection of its current status.

Table 4: Geography and Philosophy academic staff profiles of institutions stratified by race

	%M	%F	%BA	%C	%I	%W	%P	%AP	%SL	%L	%JL
Geography	58.3	41.7	37.7	2.5	4.4	55.4	12.9	11.0	22.4	49.7	4.0
Philosophy	70.9	29.1	22.4	1.9	2.9	72.8	14.0	16.3	22.1	44.1	3.5

*% M: % Male; % F: % Female; % BA: % Black African; % C: % Coloured; % I: % Indian; % W: % White; % P: % Professors; % AP: % Associate Professors; %SL: % Senior Lecturers; % L: % Lecturers; % JL: % Junior Lecturers

For some, however, the transformation of the academic staff profile at HEIs throughout South Africa is not taking place at a fast enough pace (see Govinder et al., 2013; Mangcu, 2014) despite evidence to the contrary (see Breetzke & Hedding, 2018). There is also increasing evidence that the research enterprise in South Africa is becoming more inclusive and representative (see Mouton et al., 2019). For example, the proportion of black-authored papers has increased from 16% in 2005 to 31% in 2016; while the proportion of black grant holders has also increased substantially from 13% in 2002 to 31% in 2015. From a student perspective, transformation in terms of race is even more dramatic. The average proportion of black enrolments at HEIs throughout the country has increased from 32% in 2000 to 55% in 2015 while the average proportion of black graduates nearly doubled from 25% in 2000 to 47% in

2015. These shifts are evident across all science fields including Geography. These statistics – coupled with the results of this research - suggest that the human resource base of higher education is becoming more transformed and inclusive with increased participation of more black African and female researchers at almost every level of the research system although challenges still remain particularly within Geography to increase representativeness among certain groups.

Finally, it should be noted that there are already a number of structural mechanisms currently in place at HEIs (and Geography departments) throughout the country to transform their academic staff profiles. Driven by the DHET's Staffing South Africa's Universities Framework (SSAUF) - which is a structural response to the challenge of 'size, composition and capacity of academic staff' (DHET, 2015) - a number of actions have been implemented to attract and retain predominantly black African academic staff. One more recent and prominent programme is the New Generation of Academics Programme (nGAP) implemented in 2016. The programme is designed to support the recruitment, development and retention of early career academics (DHET, 2015), specifically black Africans and women². This is done by drawing from promising current senior post-graduate students or past students who hold appropriate post-graduate degrees and have ambitions or can be attracted to become academics. The South African government carries the full cost of the post for the first three years of the six year programme, with cost-sharing mechanisms between government and the appointing university from the fourth year of the programme. HEIs are required to bear the full employment costs for the academic post after six years.

It is too early to say whether programmes such as these will transform the racial profile of academic staffing bodies (including Geography) in South Africa - the first induction of 125

² In fact, at least 80% of the positions must be allocated to black African and/or women South African citizens

students only took place in 2016 – but initial indications are that the programme is progressing satisfactorily (see Hlengwa, 2019). Of concern for Geography specifically is the fact that of the 101 nGAP posts made available to HEIs for 2019 only *one* post loosely aligned with Geography (i.e., a post for Water Resources Management and Environment Geohydrology at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology) (Universities South Africa, 2019). This suggests that much more can be done by Departments of Geography throughout the country to tap into existing government resources to bring about change.

Aside from these government-initiated programmes, Geography departments could, and should, think more broadly about ways in which they can diversify their academic staff profiles. For example, key geographic organisations such as the SSAG could partner with equity serving institutions to provide increased funding for HDIs both at the undergraduate and post-graduate level. This funding could be used to assist in payment for tuition (through bursaries and/or scholarships) as well as allow these students to attend local and international conferences, and symposiums. Exposure to these types of forums would serve to not only promote careers and opportunities in Geography but hopefully allow a transitional pathway to be developed through which promising post-graduate students see academia as a possible career option. There is also the possibility of these geographic organisations partnering with other training institutions and/or colleges as a strategic tool to drive transformation. A final option could be for Geography departments to make their undergraduate offerings more appealing for HDIs. Previous efforts to increase diversity among geoscience faculties in the United States have primarily been focused on feeding the pipeline in schools and at the undergraduate level (see Bernard & Cooperdock, 2020). While much has been made of the recent call to ‘decolonize’ the academic curricula more broadly at HEIs throughout the country (see De Roubaix, 2016; Knight, 2018) a potential consequence of such a course of action for Geography could be

attracting a greater diversity of students, leading to a more diverse graduate profile and ultimately staff profile.

Conclusion

Higher education in general and Geography specifically lies at a cross-roads in South Africa. Either kowtow to political pressure to transform academic staffing bodies by fast-tracking academic appointments and/or promotions or allow the progression to academic staff equity occur naturally over time. By choosing the former, higher education in South Africa and indeed Geography as a discipline risks losing its global credibility; choosing the latter allows the higher education sector to be the true vanguard of transformation in the country. In his book *As by Fire* Jansen (2017) warns of a number of dangers as he gloomily predicts the terminal decline of universities in South Africa. Chief among the dangers identified is the loss of autonomy of universities through government intervention. This danger is particularly pertinent as it infers interference in the governance and management of HEIs which has major implications for the future of Geography in the country. South Africa has a long and rich tradition in scientific research that is reflected in the existence of strong research institutions, good international networks and world-class quality in a number of areas (Mouton et al., 2019). In order to continue this tradition, higher education, and indeed Geography, must not be a pawn to the broader challenges facing South Africa.

Notes

1. 'Historically Disadvantaged Individual (HDI)' means a South African citizen—
 - (1) who, due to the apartheid policy that had been in place, had no franchise in national elections prior to the introduction of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa,

1983 (Act No 110 of 1983) or the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1993 (Act No 200 of 1993) (“the Interim Constitution”); and/or

(2) who is a female; and/or

(3) who has a disability:

2. ‘New and merged’ universities consist of universities that have been created since the democratic transition in 1994 as well as universities that have merged during the post-apartheid period. Mergers most often involved the merging of ‘traditionally white HEIs’ with ‘traditionally black Africa HEIs’ such as the merging of the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education (traditionally white) with University of Bophuthatswana (traditionally black African) to form North-West University in 2004. For a full list of the university categorisations feel free to contact the authors.
3. The South African population is still officially classified into racial groups. Black Africans represent the descendants of western and central African populations. The ‘white’ population group represent the descendants of mainly Western and Eastern European populations. The ‘Indian’ population group represent the descendants of south Asian populations. The ‘Coloured’ group comprise a mixed population including the descendants of the indigenous Khoisan population, imported Malay slaves, and people born out of mixed-race relations.
4. We obtained the race, gender, and rank profile of Philosophy academic staff for all 26 universities in South Africa through an exhaustive search of university departmental, school, and faculty websites. There was no purposeful reason for the selection of Philosophy as a comparative discipline other than the fact that it is most often in another Faculty or School as Geography at South African universities and only 3 of the 26 universities did not have a dedicated Philosophy department

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