

Migrating selves: reconstructing and renegotiating Black immigrant academic identities

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Abstract

This study set out to explore how Black immigrant academics (BIAs) reconstruct their identities within academe. Utilising the research methodology of narrative inquiry, this article explores how BIAs came to see themselves across those communities, which were of primary importance to them in the reformation of their identities. Through the construction of narratives of experience, their lived and told stories emphasised the diversity of their identities that were negotiated with others within personal, historical and situational contexts. The study of BIAs' lives from their perspective, in which they actively and socially develop their identities, not only provides a lens through which they can be understood as shifting constructions of identity, but allows them to rethink who they are and have become and what influence power relations has in promoting or negating their sense of academic self.

Keywords: academic identities, immigrant academics; reconstruction, renegotiation, wandering scholar

Introduction and background context

The hues and contours that define the South African higher education landscape has changed with the inception of democracy, to transform the higher education system to become “a key allocator of life chances as an important vehicle for achieving equity in the distribution of opportunity and achievement among South African citizens” (Department of Education, 1997). In unraveling its shape and form over the past two decades, the education landscape has witnessed the transformation in higher education leaping outwards to fulfil criteria set by internationalisation and related efficiency criteria. Resultantly, former White South African universities are attempting to transform, not only in terms of responding to equity numbers in the appointment of indigenous Black academic staff, but also in the appointment of Black immigrant academics (BIAs). Thus, the staff cohort at former White South African universities comprise increasing numbers of BIAs. The consequence of these appointments on policies, teaching pedagogy and practice, and research execution deems as crucial, an investigation into the reconstruction and renegotiation of BIA identities.

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South Africa has a complicated history and a complex perspective on Black immigrants. Statistical population estimates for South Africa report the total population as 57 725 600, of which 80.9% are Black African; seven-point-eight percent White; eight-point-eight percent Coloured and two-point-five percent Indian (Maluleke, 2018). According to the 2016 census, South Africa has two-point-two million legal immigrants and close to one million undocumented foreign nationals (Chumia, 2016). The changing demography of academic staff at higher education institutions in South Africa indicates an upward trajectory of Black African academics across all rankings from 22% in 2005 to 27% in 2015 and a concomitant downward trajectory of White academics across all ranks. Indian and Coloured academics most closely represent their national population representation (Breetze & Heddings, 2018). It is within this specific South African complexity that BIAs find themselves. It is within the physical, political, philosophical, social, economic and educational environments of the host country and host institution that they need to function.

The University comprises different ‘communities’ the nature of which and how they are produced directly influence the location and identities of academics. Differences between individuals in terms of status and autonomy has a profound effect on the participation of academics and on their sense of professional identity (Nixon 1996) and the underlying structures and ideologies in these communities that can work to their disadvantage. Being an academic is no longer straightforward, if we consider the extent to which they have access to, or can cross boundaries to other communities of practice within and beyond higher education (Macfarlane, 2016). Much has been written internationally on immigrant academic identities (Pherati, 2011). However, little if any studies have been conducted in the South African context. Accordingly this study asks, how do BIAs reconstruct and renegotiate their identities within South African academe.

Exploring the terrain: the immigrant academic as a wandering scholar

A review of the voluminous literature revealed that the personal and professional well-being of immigrant academics influences their capability and functioning (Kolapo, 2009). This literature review presents the reconstruction and renegotiation of BIA identity within the context of human movement, the concept of professional identity and the crisis of exposure to a xenophobic reception.

The context: the wandering scholar and human movement

Human movement is a global phenomenon of people in search of an improved existence and an increased quality of life. From a sociological perspective human movement affects, and is affected by, matters of race and ethnicity, social structure, as well as political policy. Three sociological perspectives help to understand the concept of human movement namely, *symbolic interactionism*, in which “shared meanings, orientations, and assumptions form the basic motivations behind people's actions” (Conley, 2013); *social conflict theory*, which examines migration through the prism of competition for power and resources (Borja’s, 2011) and *structural functionalism*, which claims “that every society has certain structures that exist to fulfil some set of necessary functions” (Durkheim, 2009). Against this background of migration, reference is not only made to the “otherness” of the host society, but, consideration is also given to how immigrant academics navigate the stressful balance between inclusion and exclusion (Flum & Cinamon, 2011). This navigation is often met with difficulties as immigrant academics attempt to resolve discrepancies between incompatible social expectations and status, and identity issues (Roccas, Schwartz & Amit, 2010). Identity is not limited to the influence of a particular group; it is created and adapted in response to people with whom individuals engage in any given context (Marks & Thompson, 2010) and within the everyday realities that individuals inhabit (Clarke, Hyde, Drennan & Politis, 2013). Thus, the reconstruction of a professional identity occurs both against the background of a collegiality and a “collective identity” (Billot, 2010). Collective identity refers to a person’s sense of belonging to a group. The identity of the group or the ‘collective’ becomes a part of the person’s individual identity.

The concept: the wandering scholar and professional identity

Definitions of professional identity usually focus on its fluidity and continual re-interpretation of experiences (Clarke et al., 2013). This fluidity of professional identity allows individuals to interpret, adapt and remodel their behaviour in accordance with structures and boundaries that they encounter (Whitchurch & Gordon, 2010). Cultural experience becomes an issue of personal identity development and reformulation and may be experienced by an uprooted individual as debilitating (Weinreich, 2009). Internationalisation of higher education and the significance of “foreignness as a resource” are used as strong arguments for receiving immigrant academics into the host institution (Larner, 2015). Despite this,

immigrant academics are often “met with opposition” and the ethos of reception is often unwelcoming. (Marbley, Wong, Santos-Hatchett, Pratt & Jaddo, 2011:167).

The crisis: the wandering scholar and a xenophobic reception

Xenophobia is a reaction against *foreigners*, while racism is a reaction against a *generic group* (Wallace, 1999: 5). Xenophobia and racism can thus be seen as an attitude or a mindset (Harris, 2002). In the South African context, however, the xenophobic discourse typecasts African migrants as “a threat to the economic, social and cultural rights and entitlements of citizens” (Crush & Ramachandran, 2010:216). African immigrants are stereotyped as foreigners and are often mistreated, vilified and insulted (Adam & Moodley, 2015). The emotionally charged and derogatory term *makwerekwere* is selectively used to describe only African foreigners (Umezurike & Isike, 2013) and is “not restricted to a dislike of foreigners” (Harris 2002:170). Adam and Moodley (2015) note that, while most societies mete out “anti-immigrant hostility”, South Africa is unique in its “ferocious mob violence against fellow Africans”. The official rhetoric may have turned pro-migration, however, South African voters have become increasingly hostile to foreigners” (Facchini et al. 2013:327). Thus, establishing a professional identity in such a context adds another complicated layer.

Theoretical framework: locating the academic in the world of academe

Higher education comprises several communities of practice in which academics participate as members on a number of different levels (Delaney & Healy, 2014). “A community of practice is a group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do, and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015:1) It is within these communities that ‘culture is both enacted and constructed and where personal identity coalesces, is shaped and reshaped (Trowler & Knight, 2000:30). Academics of today not only move in multiple timeframes (Clarke et.al, 2015), but also have access to and can cross boundaries into other communities of practice within and beyond higher education. Wenger (1998:163) argues that academic identity is a “nexus of multi-membership through a process of reconciliation across boundaries of practice”. Kogan and Teichler (2007) distinguish between two types of communities that directly influence the formation of academic identity, namely, internal academic communities (departmental, faculty); external academic communities that encompass widening circles first within academe (own wider institution and other universities), then outside it (societal) and then to the wider world.

The inner workings of academe

Within the domain of inner workings of academe, Henkel (2005) delineates three distinct but interconnected concepts of academic identities. First, she argues that the academic is a ‘distinctive individual’ who is constituted of a unique history, a chosen moral and conceptual framework and identified within a defined community or institution by her personal achievements.

It is within this space that identities are seen as a ‘learning trajectory’ (James, 2003:7) that “incorporates the past and the future in the very process of negotiating the present” (Wenger, 1998:74). This form of identity is personal, reflecting the life history of the academic and is inextricably interwoven into the very essence of being, of the academic; who you are, your commitments and sets of values. It is within this frame of reference that identities are seen as ever-changing and evolutionary.

Second, the academic is an ‘embedded individual’. She is a member of communities and institutions defined by their own languages, conceptual structures, histories, traditions, myths, values, and practices and achieved goods. The individual in this context fulfils her role as an academic that is strongly determined by the norms of communities and institutions she inhabits. These experiences are social, reflecting the contexts in which academics live.

And third, the academic is a ‘professional individual’, which is a combination of both individual and social identities (Whitchurch, 2010). Tension arises as the academic tries to establish a professional sense of self, since this process unfolds within the social context of the institution, where the academic finds herself anchored. However, elements of professionalism are often in contrast with the kind of behavioural directives and prescriptive frames of the institution (Henkel, 2005). The inner workings of academe can affect aspects of academic community participation and identity construction and impact on the values of academic autonomy and the freedom to move across boundaries of practice.

The outer workings of academe

How are academic identities influenced by the widening circles first within the wider institution and then outside it? Kogan and Teichler (2007:211) argue that within the university there are collegial clusters, increasingly yielding power to the wider university concerns, initiatives and control. The individual academic as Henkel (2005) notes, increasingly becomes dependent on the institution for her place within the system (Smith, 2017). Academics enter academe with a ‘biographical and cultural knapsack’. When they

enter an occupational role, their experiences are ‘... radically influenced by the things they bring with them to the university and by factors inherent in the institutional context’ (Robertson et.al, 2012:12). Within this context, identity becomes a constant social negotiation that is understood through practices with which academics engage. Consequently members’ experiences of different communities of practice create possibilities for identities to be both productive and conflictual (Wenger, 1998). Thus, identity is not merely defined by the individual, but by the way, in which the individual is perceived as being a full member of a community. The outer workings of academe can positively or adversely affect the professional identity of an academic. Exposure and opportunity to fully participate in widening circles of communities of practice (institutional, national, international) could bolster an academic’s professional identity and create a sense of belonging. Lack of exposure and opportunity to such communities of practice could instil a sense of academic isolation and affect the growth and development of an academic. I will now discuss the research strategy that was employed in this study.

Research strategy

Social constructivism, qualitative case study and narrative inquiry was employed in this study (Clandinin & Connelly 2000). Data capture comprised a mix of semi-structured interviews, field notes and a researcher journal. This paper only reports on data obtained from the semi-structured interviews. Pseudonyms were given to the research site and to participants to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The site of this research study was Equity University (EU), a historically White university that had recently made the shift to become a research-intensive university. The working languages at EU were English and Afrikaans. The local indigenous language was Sepedi. The demography of the academic staff at EU comprised 49% White, 23.9% Black African; four percent Coloured; three percent Indian and 20.1% immigrant of which 15% were Black immigrants. The research sample was varied in terms of country of origin, ethnicity, gender, age and years in South African academe and comprised of twelve immigrant academics.

Table 1. Participants

	Pseudonym	Country of origin	Rank	Gender	Age Range	Years In SA
1	Prof Tembo	DRC	Professor	M	50-55	15
3	Prof Chukwu	Sudan	Professor	M	50-55	10
2	Prof Obanda	Nigeria	Associate Professor	M	50-55	7
4	Dr Omidire	Nigeria	Senior Lecturer	F	55-60	18
5	Dr Adebayo	Swaziland	Senior Lecturer	M	45-50	15
6	Dr Pasha	Zimbabwe	Lecturer	M	45-50	9
7	Mr Elufisan	Lesotho	Lecturer	M	35-40	6
8	Mr Tawamba	Cameroon	Lecturer	M	25-30	6
9	Mrs Mafuta	Kenya	Lecturer	F	30-35	8
10	Mrs Chirisa	Zimbabwe	Lecturer	F	30-35	9
11	Ms Mwambakana	DRC	Junior Lecturer	F	25-30	15
12	Ms Adebajji	Nigeria	Junior Lecturer	F	25-30	12

Data was analysed utilising qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2000). Codes were generated from the data and continuously modified by the researcher's treatment of the data 'to accommodate new data and new insights about those data' (Sandelowski, 2000:338). This was a reflexive and an interactive process that in the first pass through the data yielded 73 codes and 8 themes. The kinds of items that appeared related to identities, opportunities, challenges, experiences of the migration process, hardships of migration and working experience at EU. These extensive codes were further analysed to identify data related to key concepts in the research question, theoretical frameworks, and literature review. Multiple readings of the data were conducted, organizing codes and themes into higher levels of categories within and across interviews, observations, and other sources of data. The list was whittled down to 40 codes, 4 themes and 2 categories that directly addressed the research question. Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee at the Faculty of Education.

Findings

The inner workings of academe

The immigrant academic as a 'distinctive and embedded' individual

Although the self is comprised of multiple, shifting, and simultaneous identities, a dominating identity represents a facet of the self that is most influential in self-definition. A dominating identity "can overshadow others and is influenced by status of that identity, by reference group affiliations, and identity development" (Robinson, 1999). This study found

that irrespective of whether BIAs had lived for a longer period in South Africa than in their country of origin they all identified strongly in terms of country of origin:

I am from the Yoruba tribe ...a Nigerian.
I am Sudanese.
I hail from the Congo and I am a proud Congolese academic.
I am Kenyan.

None of the participants identified as South African or in terms of a hyphenated identity, for example, Zimbabwean-South African, although some had been in South Africa for fifteen years and seven of the twelve participants had obtained South African citizenship. It would seem that this attitude could be attributed to being perceived as outsiders, and to the lack of integration into mainstream society. A participant explained that although he was in possession of a South African identity document, he did not qualify for opportunities reserved for South African born citizens:

I have resigned myself to the fact that I can't be a White South African, I can't be an Indian South African, and I can't be a Coloured South African. And, unfortunately even if I am a South African by document, I won't really be a Black South African. I would tell myself that maybe I am a pseudo-citizen (Dr Adebayo).

Although Dr Adebayo's 'pseudo-citizenship' status created a sense of discomfort, he nonetheless produced his South African identity document when confronted by South African law enforcement agents and his South African passport for visa applications. However, his pseudo-citizenship status highlighted his sense of non-belonging, which negatively influenced his professional identity. In contrast, Professor Chukwu blatantly refused to assume a South African identity because he saw South Africa as a site of contamination:

I cannot affiliate with people who lack morals and values... things like just common decency. It would seem that some Black South Africans have forgotten their roots. They dress inappropriately; have little or no respect for anyone or anything...maybe it's because of apartheid? All I know is that my culture... back home, it different. That's why I am proud to identify as Sudanese.

Professor Chukwu's rejection of the South African identity highlights and demonstrates one way of how agency may be enacted in the form of rejecting the South African cultural identity.

The immigrant academic as a 'professional individual'

Some BIAs minimized their differences to obtain benefits of the inner and outer workings of academe by voluntarily blending into the academic culture of the institution 'I don't behave like a foreigner, I behave like one of them so that I can get the same benefits' (Mrs Chirisa). BIAs shared the same phenotypic appearance as Black indigenous academics, resultantly White academics found it difficult to distinguish between them:

To a historically White institution and White academics, it is all about inflating the number of Black academics at the institution, without really de-aggregating the data. They just see you as a Black person. They don't even attempt to find out about you as a person. We are just put into a category (Dr Pasha).

In contrast, appearance and accent was an instantaneous marker of the "Other" to Black indigenous academics, who viewed BIAs as a threat (Crush & Ramachandran, 2010:216).

BIAs expressed their sense of what they termed 'double jeopardy':

Here in SA I have come to realise that one is resented not just by Whites but also by South African Blacks (Dr Omidire).

Here the Blacks do not like you and the Whites do not like you, so its double jeopardy (Ms Mwambakana).

BIAs mentioned that there seemed to be a culture of non-acceptance and a refusal to accept change:

They say things like "we have been in this place; we cannot allow an outsider to come and turn this place upside down". I have to adjust and do this and do that (Ms Adebajji).

We still have people on campus who do not accept you, who think that who are *you* or what do *you* have to offer? I am a full professor in my discipline, yet, none of my contributions are taken into consideration. I have to just follow what is 'usually done'. I feel like my academic standing is constantly questioned and undermined (Prof Tembo).

It would seem that many BIAs perceived the institution as 'giving lip service to transformation' rather than effectively transforming:

What I see happening is talking transformation where they feel we need a Black and then they look for a Black whom they can work with easily...like-minded and appoint him. They thought in me they found someone whom they could do as they want, but when they realized I was independent-minded ...they say this and I say that...they get angry (Prof Obanda).

The lack of effective transformation was also evident in the use of language as exclusion. From the told stories, BIAs lamented that the institutional culture, promoted 'language as exclusion', both officially and socially in daily institutional practices. For example, the use of Afrikaans by White colleagues and Sepedi by Black academics:

Not that this man is unaware in a meeting that there is somebody who does not understand Afrikaans. He knows, but just decided that it doesn't matter... it doesn't matter whether I understand or not, it doesn't matter (Dr Omidire).

You sit there at a table talking and all of a sudden, they just switch to an indigenous language. You are excluded. Language is still a weapon in South Africa (Dr Pasha).

Academic exclusion was evident in non-participation of BIAs in joint projects and opportunities for exposure and networking:

You know some of our colleagues, especially White colleagues, get all the opportunities. They are junior to me but you will just hear that they are in this joint project or they are representing the department at this conference (Prof Tembo).

Such practices seemed to instill a sense of loneliness and a feeling of alienation in some BIAs. 'You always feel alienated; you always feel that you are different from them. You are just a fly on the wall' (Mrs Mafuta).

Furthermore, BIAs were disproportionately impacted by contractually limited appointments at EU, which potentially further explicated the forms of marginalization to which this group was subject and highlighted the ways in which this othering was institutionally embedded. Many BIAs did not qualify for promotion or performance bonuses due to their contractual appointments. Such discriminatory practices entrenched their sense of non-belonging and made them feel that what they had to offer to academe was valueless:

It's a difficult space; I'd rather go back home and rise through the ranks (Dr Pasha).

I am too proud a Black man to go and expose myself to racism or the cold shoulder. I think I will go back to my country (Dr Adebayo).

Black people are still second rated at this university. They have to work extra hard to really prove themselves before they get recognition (Prof Obanda).

BIAs expressed that their academic integrity was constantly being challenged. Any ideas that they voiced were not taken seriously and it seemed that their colleagues did not trust them. A sense of academic imperialism seemed to prevail at EU:

If you want to write you can but you must take it to your director, from there to whomever, so that they can read and endorse it...my feeling was, this is an insult. I've got my PhD, I have published before, why must I be subjected to this, academically this is not how things are done...they wanted to make sure that what I wrote was appropriate (Dr Omidire).

Despite the above-mentioned challenges, a minority of BIAs claimed that they found solace in the exceptional infrastructure of the university and that there was pressure to give of their best. This was largely because they were not exposed to such infrastructure and incentives in their countries of origin and felt to some extent privileged to be at EU:

I am fortunate to be at a University that has such excellent buildings and laboratory facilities, state of the art lecture rooms and easy accessibility to wealth of academic and digital resources. Back home we do not have these facilities and it makes life as an academic tough (Mr Elufisan).
Here there is accountability and incentives you have no reason not to deliver' (Mr Tawamba).

The last two comments represent a thread that runs counter to the largely negative narratives listed above. Although these threads exist simultaneously, it is important to indicate that these

comments are largely about infrastructure and incentives and not so much about ‘human connections’.

Outer workings of academe

Communities of practice beyond the faculty were extremely limited. Most BIAs had only attended departmental staff functions. Interactions with the staff members, especially White staff were limited. Despite the fact that research is in the job descriptions of all academics at EU, many BIAs were not given opportunities for exposure and growth in this regard. In terms of broader community structures, very few of them aside from the two professors were involved in externally funded research projects, which provided opportunities for conference attendance and networking. From the stories they told, BIAs were not provided with any mentorship and were left on their own to navigate uncharted waters of the South African academe. Much of the outer workings of academe were initiated by BIAs themselves. They were not privy to established networks initiated by the Head of Department or other colleagues in the faculty, nor were they invited to join existing projects. Furthermore, opportunities for networking during outside social gatherings was limited:

Even in socials, we are never invited to go with international guests for a supper at a restaurant or a colleague’s house. We just hear of these things by the way (Prof Obanda).

Analysis and discussion of findings

Universities are in a continuous process of being “instituted” by means of practices such as recruitment and employment (Ahmed, 2013). One of the results of these practices is the overwhelming presence of white bodies within academia. Through this continuous process of assemblage and reproduction, whiteness becomes the norm. In so doing, the white body appears unmarked and invisible within the university system while the minority body is always a stranger and marked as other, as is the case with BIAs at EU. These ‘others’ at EU become “bodies of colour that provide organizations with tools... We become the tools in their kit. We are ticks in the boxes” (Ahmed, 2013:153). Thus, the request to “embody” diversity to address transformation can result in the problematic recording of people of colour by academia as a mere sign of compliance.

Findings revealed that BIAs perceived the institution as ‘talking about transformation’ rather than effectively transforming”. What this points to is the way universities deploy policies in ways that both resist and deflect attention from substantial change. These common

sense diversity practices naturalize power imbalances within the university. According to Ahmed (2013), universities simulate the appearance of diversity through documents such as mission statements and equality policies that can be used to create a paper “trail” (2013: 97). This results in documents replacing action, where the more a policy circulates, the more it is seen as present, the less it actually does. In this way, diversity policies become a means of changing how an organisation is perceived so it can continue, relatively undisturbed, in its existing mode; what Ahmed terms ‘lip service model of diversity’ (2013: 58).

Minority bodies are constrained from making change as the institutional culture and the ethos of reception is unwelcoming, exclusionary and alienating. In addition to bias, systematic constraints and expectations built into academic institutions may prevent minority bodies from making change. Within this alienating context, power imbalances also play a huge role. Often, the positionality of minority bodies is precariously perched at the lower end of the power scale. Thus, they would rather comply than face disciplinary action or dismissal.

A number of significant findings have emerged from this study. First, the interplay between personal and professional identity of BIAs. Although all facets of an immigrant academic’s personal journey of transition play a role, the inner and outer workings of academe have a direct and significant bearing on their professional identity. Participants in this study chose to identify in terms of their country of origin and did not assume a South African identity, even in a hyphenated form. Perhaps the framework of intersectionality could help us better understand why these participants chose to identify the way they do. Intersectionality is used for understanding the ways in which categories of analysis such as sex, gender, ethnicity, legal status, and migration intersect, and how these intersections shape minoritized individual’s needs and experiences. Understanding intersectionality is thus essential to combatting the interwoven prejudices that people encounter in their daily lives. Cho, Crenshaw and McCall (2013) highlight how multiple systems of oppression make us more conscious of our minoritized identities in certain encounters; this seems to be what is happening to participants in this study, with a heightened sense of non-belonging due to their being foreign. However, the question arises as to whether the feeling of belonging (or not) is more about being socially liberal or conservative? Given the historical and political context of EU, a former white Afrikaans-speaking University, it is more likely that these BIAs were exposed to conservative academics at EU, who are resisting the institution's shift to a focus on equity and this contributes to tensions experienced by BIAs. Although matters such as differing worldviews, establishing relationships, differing values systems, social conventions and religious beliefs may be conceived as personal, they play an important role in the

formation of a professional identity as they may be linked to an analysis of the broader context of systemic exclusion, xenophobia and racism within the organizational context.

Second, the inner and outer workings of EU in the form of communities of practice both within and beyond the faculty continue to operate along racial and patriotic lines. In the stories BIAs told, it would seem that opportunities to participate in communities of practice beyond EU, such as collaboration and networking, were linked to nationality and racial identity. Opportunities were not provided for BIAs to locate themselves beyond the boundaries of EU, thus enhancing their participation and encouraging them to take on new professional identities. Their lack of a 'desirable' racial identity disallowed them from shifting locations which could have led to participation in other communities of practice that were socially desirable, such as 'social gathering events'. A lack of these practices contributed to conflictual professional identities and had debilitating and devastating influences on the formation of BIAs' identities.

Third, a sense of belonging and the desire for membership at an institutional level also informed the place that they occupied in the landscape of practice at that time (Clarke et. al, 2015). The reconstruction of academic identities by Black immigrants illustrated their conflict between actively participating in the discipline and maintaining relations with this community. In the stories they told, BIAs described feeling as if the disciplinary community did not always contribute to their positive sense of self.

Eurocentric cultural imperialism was pervasive throughout EU. Reconstructing a professional identity within such a context, involved a difficult interaction between the institution and themselves. Institutional practices such as pseudo-transformation, physically, psychologically and emotionally eroded the self-esteem of BIAs and instilled a sense of worthlessness. To illustrate this, the finding on language refers to a specific component of language, which is termed "language as exclusion". Language, in this regard, is not "a gap of vernacular knowledge", (Pherali, 2012: 330), nor is it about being "handicapped in communication capabilities" (Flum & Cinamon, 2011:377). Language as exclusion, refers to the deliberate social and professional marginalisation of an individual through the consistent and intentional use of a language in which the individual is not fluent.

Language-as-exclusion was operationalised both officially and socially at EU. The official languages and medium of instruction at EU was Afrikaans and English. Officially, all avenues of communication via documents reflected both languages. However, academically and socially, Afrikaans was increasingly used by white colleagues and Sepedi (an official African language) was used in social circles by indigenous Black colleagues as a measure of

exclusion and a tool of power. This was not a situation where colleagues were unaware that someone was being excluded from a conversation. It was also not about completing a sentence or two of an already existing exchange, that is, if a colleague was conversing using English and then ended the conversation with a sentence in Afrikaans. It was a situation where the entire conversation took place in Afrikaans with colleagues fully aware that BIAs in their presence could not speak Afrikaans. This behaviour was consistent with the overall culture and exclusionary practices that were deeply embedded in institutional structures and practices. Language is not just an issue of communication, it is laden with emotional inference. BIAs perceived these actions as deliberate exclusion; a measured marginalisation and an affirmation of rejection through the exclusionary power of language, and understood this behaviour as a calculated block to social and professional integration. Othering occurs not only as a result of individual actions but is also institutionally and systemically grounded in the ideologies and practices of the institution. Various tactics (both overt and covert) that are embedded in these systems and structures, both within and outside of academia are then used to contribute to the ongoing marginalization of the “Other” and to the ways in which power circulates in the institutional context.

Fourth, for these BIAs being a member of the disciplinary community involved a clear sense of professional identity and participation as evident from their eagerness to have their academic identity and intellectual integrity acknowledged and recognised. Their yearning for congeniality of associates, rapport with department leaders, career advancement opportunities, research opportunities, influence in department and influence in the institution painfully surfaced in their narratives.

Fifth, in the stories that they told, BIAs had a sense that they had to work much harder than White colleagues to prove their competence even though they possessed the academic qualifications and a wealth of teaching experience at tertiary institutions. BIAs described their professional and academic identities as being constantly questioned and undermined. This finding concurs with the literature that claims “black minority staff feel under greater scrutiny, have to work harder to prove themselves, are less likely to be encouraged to go for promotion, and are less often successful in applications for promotion when they do apply” (Beer, 2015).

Human connections’ in this study were limiting and to a large extent negatively influenced BIA identities. Given their negative experiences in academe, it is not surprising that many BIAs viewed South Africa as a transit destination en-route to other countries that have a more welcoming ethos of reception.

Conclusion

BIA identity reconstruction involved different forms of community participation and identification; were determined by time, place and sociality and lived through the discourses academics employed to make sense of who they were. Aspects of BIAs professional identities were located across many contexts and often indicated their struggle to live their professional lives in a way, which was consistent with their professional values and actions. Through self-reflection and the construction of narratives of experience, their lived and told stories emphasised the diversity of their identities that were negotiated with others within personal, historical and situational contexts. Their experiences of different communities of practice entailed ‘ambivalent relations of multi-membership’ (Lave & Wenger 1991). Furthermore, the complexities and tensions inherent in professional identity building often led to non-participation in which there existed, a split between a person’s activities and their relations with participation, a rupture between what they are actually doing and how they find themselves located in the “community” (Hodges 1998, 273). The formation of academic identities is largely defined by power relations inherent and characteristic of an institution, the intricate and subtle workings of which play a pivotal role in affirming or negating professional identities of BIAs.

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