Three decades of change: Exploring colonial legacies and shifts within processes of admission at South African Universities of Technology

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Abstract

Given South Africa's complex legacy of inequality, access to higher education remains a priority for the government, higher education institutions and the public. And while significant progress has been made in terms of increased participation and expanded opportunities, particularly at Universities of Technology (UoTs), disparities remain. This particular type of institution has played a key role in contributing to the redress agenda through their less stringent admission requirements, but they remain underexamined in broader higher education literature. Despite these contributions, marginalised or working-class communities in rural and impoverished areas continue to face significant challenges in accessing higher education. Set against a global backdrop where similar patterns of admission have emerged, it becomes important to understand how and why the processes of admission in UoTs have emerged through the last three decades. In so doing, this study seeks to contribute to the conversation around social justice in higher education, offering insights that could reshape the understanding of why things are the way they are.

This study draws on Critical Realism more broadly and the tools of Social Realism specifically to explore how South Africa's particular colonial legacy remains one of many hidden mechanisms on which we build our reality. Using various documentation and qualitative data generated through interviews, which was analysed using Social Realism's morphogenetic framework, I have endeavoured to tell the story of how, Universities of Technologies and their processes of admission have changed over the last three decades. In so doing I have shown, through using a metaphor of 'The House Modernity Built' how although much change has happened, hidden structures and cultures have worked to maintain a certain status quo, thereby constraining redress.

This study has outlined the emergence of UoTs and their processes of admission as we understand them today. Through this I have presented an argument which suggests that the higher education sector continues to be structured in a hierarchical manner with UoTs located at the bottom. Mechanisms manifesting from a broader neoliberal environment, such as the higher education funding formula and global university ranking systems have placed UoTs in a position where they need to 'catch up', having consequences on the way in which processes of admission have been conceptualised. This has seen English becoming a marker of quality, and diploma offerings being replaced with degree equivalents carrying higher admission criteria, all of which work to compromise the redress needed in South African higher education.

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List of Acronyms

ANC	African National Congress
CATE	Colleges of Advanced Technical Education
CEP	Cultural Emergent Properties
CESM	Classification of Educational Subject Matter
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CR	Critical Realism
CTP	Committee of Technikon Principals
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DHET	Department on Higher Education
DoE	Department of Education
DUT	Durban University of Technology
DVC	Deputy Vice-Chancellor
EPU	Education Policy Units
GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution
HBU	Historically Black University
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HESA	Higher Education South Africa
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HEQSF	Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework
HWU	Historically White University
LoTL	Language of Teaching and Learning
MM	Morphogenesis/Morphostasis
NCHE	National Commission on Higher Education
NECC	National Education Crisis Committee
NEPI	National Education Policy Investigation

NDP	National Development Plan
NDPHE	National Plan on Higher Education
NP	National Party
NQF	National Qualification Framework
NSFAS	National Student Funding Aid Scheme
NSC	National Senior Certificate
PQM	Programme Qualification Mix
PEP	Personal Emergent Properties
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SAPSE	South African Post-Secondary Education
SAUVCA	South African University Vice-Chancellors Association
SEP	Structural Emergent Properties
SR	Social Realism
TUT	Tshwane University of Technology
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UCT	University of Cape Town
UDUSA	Union of Democratic University Staff Union
UK	United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UoT	University of Technology
USAF	Universities South Africa
UJ	University of Johannesburg
UNISA	University of South Africa

Chapter One: Introduction

Sam was born in the year 2000, in the small town of Umzinto, KwaZulu-Natal, where the streets were alive with the sounds of children playing and the hum of daily life. He was born into a nation where freedom and equality were not just ideals, but rights formalised in the Constitution of South Africa. However, his family continually struggled to make ends meet and he was told by his mother that education was his ticket out — a way to break the cycle of poverty that had gripped his family for generations.

In school, Sam was diligent and curious, but he faced significant challenges. He learned English late, and it was not the language of his home or community. Every day, he faced overcrowded classrooms with outdated textbooks, where the lessons were often a struggle to follow. Despite these conditions, his marks were fair and he passed each year, becoming the first in his family to earn his Grade 12 school leaving certificate.

Having completed his final year of schooling, Sam applied to many universities, hopeful that earning a qualification would enable him to gain employment and take care of his family. But the rejection letters came one after the other. "Regret to inform you..." became a familiar phrase. Some universities cited his English scores and his average marks whilst others simply marked ‘rejected’ next to his name.

Year after year, Sam applied, hopeful that that particular year would be different. He would not give up; he could not give up. Instead, Sam took extra classes to improve his English, worked odd jobs to save for application fees, and sought out anyone who could offer guidance or support. But the rejection letters kept coming.

Sam continues to dream of the day when his hard work will pay off, when he will walk through the gates of a university and into a future he has fought so hard to reach. But for now, he remains on the fringes of a higher education system paying the price of systemic barriers in a country built on inequality.

1.1 A Background to the Rationale of This Study

Sam's[1] story is not a unique one within the South African context. Hundreds of thousands share similar experiences, and their struggles are often overlooked because they fall outside the conventional narratives of higher education. What his journey highlights is that the processes of admissions are important and contested. For institutions, admissions represent their lifeblood, marking the first point of contact between a potential student and the university. It is through these processes that universities determine who they accept and who they do not, thus making it a space where power is exerted, and a space particularly susceptible to reproducing coloniality. For Sam, gaining access to higher education represents more than just enrolment — it represents his opportunity for a brighter future, his pathway to the middle class, shaping his future salary, job security, and ability to influence society (Jappie, 2020; Schwartz, 2004).

According to Cele and Brandt (2005), the concept of access can be analysed from two distinct perspectives: physical access and epistemological access. Physical access refers to the ability of individuals to gain entry into higher education institutions based on eligibility criteria, whereas epistemological access, a term coined by Morrow (1993), refers to access to the curriculum content and knowledge needed to succeed in higher education (Zhou & Landa, 2019). Although both perspectives are crucial for providing equal opportunities, this study focused solely on how physical access had changed on the understanding that this can be used as the first lever to promote equity or reinforce existing privilege (UNESCO, 2017). As such, the focus was not on whether a student would successfully complete the programme: completion in this sense becomes a higher-order concern which needs to take into account the education system including curriculum, pedagogy and students' agency (Mkwananzi, 2024). Rather, I chose to look closely at understanding physical access and admission to South African higher education, which remains a complex and challenging issue (Jappie, 2020) and so important, that for some in our country, it has become something one dies for. In January 2012, Gloria Sekwena was part of a three-kilometre queue with her son, Kgositsile, outside the gates of the University of Johannesburg (UJ). There were fewer than one thousand first-year places

1 Sam and his story are fictional, created as an example for illustrative purposes. In my work and in the process of completing this doctorate, I came to meet and hear about many people like Sam. Experiences such as his are at the heart of this study.

available, of which Kgositsile sought one. As the gate opened there was a push from the back of the queue, and a stampede ensued; Gloria Sekwena was crushed to death and another 22 people were injured (Habib, 2012). Habib (2012) argues that the sheer numbers at this gate indicate utter desperation and that although higher education may not guarantee a job, it is increasingly seen as a prerequisite to getting one, enabling people to escape the poverty by which they and their families are burdened.

As a researcher and a practitioner, I had both personal and professional reasons for undertaking this study. My personal reasons emerged from my own experiences as an academic working in the higher education sector of South Africa, where over the last decade I have been involved in admissions decisions. These experiences ranged from making choices on admission criteria to selecting one applicant over another, fully aware of the implications for the one not chosen, and having to turn away desperate, yet hopeful families seeking placement for their children. I found these experiences difficult to navigate, particularly as a white female, a racial category which carries historical significance in South Africa. But what really intrigued me was that despite knowing that the demand for higher education was so high, I often heard how particular programmes in institutions were struggling to meet their enrolment targets; I also heard academics talk about how they could not "find students". It has also become customary for institutions to advertise their last-minute spaces available for late registration, demonstrating that programmes were not yet at capacity. None of this sat right with me, and I became intrigued to understand how the processes of admissions had changed since democracy, most especially at UoTs[2]. How could the demand for higher education be so high, and yet some programmes remained under-enrolled? Linked to this I wanted to understand the question of who gets in and why? I wanted to explore the shifts in admissions, recognising that South Africa's history of colonialism and apartheid demanded a deeper analysis through a decolonial perspective. And so, my thesis offers a nuanced view of how coloniality continues to be reproduced in the admission processes of South African UoTs.

This study draws on Critical Realism more broadly and the tools of Social Realism specifically to explore how South Africa's particular colonial legacy remains one of many hidden mechanisms on which we build our reality. Using documents and qualitative data generated

2 Universities of Technology (UoTs) are a particular type of institution in the South African context. They have a history in technical colleges and have historically been more accessible because of their lower admission criteria compared to traditional universities. See Chapters Three, Four and Five for a more detailed discussion of this institutional type.

through interviews analysed using Social Realism's morphogenetic framework, I endeavoured to tell the story of how Universities of Technologies and their processes of admission have changed over the last three decades. In so doing I have shown, through using a metaphor of 'The House Modernity Built' (Machado de Oliveira, 2021; Stein et al., 2020) how, although much change has happened, hidden structures and cultures have worked to maintain a certain status quo, thereby constraining redress.

I use this introduction as a way to explain why admission processes to higher education remain important today. To do so, I first describe some of the concerns about admissions from a global perspective and then focus on describing the particularities within the South African context. In moving between the macro (international) and the meso (national), I show the relevance of the topic beyond its specific context (of UoTs). From here, I outline my objectives and research questions and conclude the chapter with an outline of the thesis.

1.2 A Global Increase in Demand for Higher Education

The demand for access to higher education across the world has increased rapidly with the advent of mass higher education, making it a strategic priority in both developed countries and in what are sometimes described as emerging economies, such as South Africa (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Mkwananzi, 2024). Global figures as reported by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (2024), show that the number of students in higher education has doubled between the years of 2000 to 2022, rising from 100 million to 256 million. Figures such as these may reflect an increase in participation, but perhaps there is still scope to explore on what basis these millions of students gain access and whether there are significant numbers who do not.

The rapid increase in demand for higher education has placed institutional admission processes under pressure, with entry to some of the world's most prestigious Ivy League institutions (such as Harvard, Yale, Pennsylvania, Princeton, Columbia and Dartmouth to name a few) being described by The New York Times as "academic hunger games" (Currell, 2024). This is in reference to a dystopian story written by Suzanne Collins which entails a brutal competition where children are forced to fight during a televised event highlighting themes of survival and sacrifice. Similarly, Dudley-Marling (2015) describes how in the United States and Canada, schooling is conceived as a competition with clear winners and losers. The winners go to the best universities and feed into the most lucrative careers. The losers are assigned to the lowest

academic tracks and compete for low-status, low-paying jobs. The pressure to be a "winner" is thus immense.

With such descriptions in mind, it is perhaps unsurprising that scandals such as '*Operation Varsity Blues'* have been uncovered. This was the code name given to the 2019 university admissions scandal and ensuing federal investigation in the USA involving celebrities and other wealthy families, who paid exorbitant amounts of money to secure their children's admission to elite universities. Examples like this, along with others, such as UNESCO's 2017 report, highlight that globally, poor students, ethnic minorities, and Indigenous groups continue to be overlooked by higher education, and it illustrates how the system can perpetuate privilege. This report reveals that in 76 countries, 20% of the wealthiest 25- to 29-year-olds had completed at least four years of higher education, compared to less than 1% of the poorest (UNESCO, 2017). This underscores the fact that, despite extensive efforts to improve access, higher education – particularly the university sector – remains largely elitist, with a disproportionate number of students coming from wealthier segments of society (Marginson, 2016b). It is for these reasons that widening access and participation in ways which consider equity and inclusion should remain a key contemporary social issue around the globe and therefore a key research area for studies within higher education for social justice (Burke, 2017; Hinton-Smith, 2012; UNESCO, 2024).

In recognition, and as a way to address this, the World Conference on Higher Education convened by UNESCO in 2001, laid down fundamental principles for in-depth reforms of higher education systems around the world. The conference resolved that higher education shall be equally accessible to all based on merit and that no discrimination can be accepted in granting access to higher education on the grounds of race, gender, language, religion or economic, cultural or social distinctions of physical disabilities. In this way, UNESCO contributed to the reinforcement of an international agenda of higher education based on equity. Subsequently, many countries and their institutions have responded by putting in place structures, policies and measures to overcome existing disparities and promote the access of students from underserved groups.

1.2.1 Widening participation

Widening participation has become a central aspect of educational policy around the world. Using the United Kingdom government as one example, they have in recent decades set two

targets for widening participation in higher education by 2020, firstly to double the proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds going into higher education and secondly to increase the number of students from Black and minority backgrounds entering higher education by 20% (Connell-Smith, 2018). In Kenya, planning in the form of 'Vision 2030' along with the Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals, emphasise the role that higher education has in driving Kenya to a middle-income country (Odhiambo, 2016). This has seen Kenya's higher education system expanding significantly since independence, going from 1000 students enrolled in 1963 to 350 000 university students today (Odeo, 2017). However, the concept of widening participation is highly contested within and across different national contexts and is connected to diverse and competing values as well as interconnected policies across each context (Burke, 2017).

In South Africa, widening participation is largely concerned with redressing the under-representation of certain social groups in higher education and includes enabling access to achieve more socially just education systems. In post-apartheid South Africa, this takes a particularly acute form. However, Jones and Thomas (2005) suggest that a more pragmatic approach has been identified as a dominant approach to widening access, which is described as focusing on individual attitudes existing in a compensatory and remedial framework. As such, this approach is underpinned by concepts of deficiency and emphasises a particular relationship between higher education and the economy, which is characteristic of neoliberalism (Jones & Thomas, 2005). Neoliberalism[3] can be understood as an economic and political philosophy that emphasises free markets, deregulation, privatisation, and limited government intervention in the economy, promoting individual entrepreneurship and competition as drivers of growth (Harvey, 2020). In such a utilitarian, neoliberal framing, the purpose of higher education is reduced to employability, entrepreneurialism and economic competitiveness (Morley, 1999; Thompson, 2000). Such discourses surrounding widening access have been critiqued for individualising social inequalities thereby concealing social structures and processes which can reproduce exclusions and marginalisation in and through higher education. Barr (2008) argues that this may work to reinforce existing hierarchies.

3 Neoliberalism includes the monetisation of all activities and as a concept and will be further discussed in Chapter Two.

Widening participation policies tend to include the identification of specific groups who should be targeted. These targets are different across national contexts, are debated and contested and may change over time. This targeting is intended to ensure that resources, opportunities and funding are specifically aimed at the identified group. However, Burke (2017) argues that these strategies are potentially problematic in the way in which they focus on some groups to the exclusion of others and tend to perpetuate discourses of deficiency. Furthermore, this practice tends to construct target groups as homogeneous, having a single history and a shared set of needs. This fails to acknowledge that personal and social identities are complex and are shaped by deeply embedded structural, economic and cultural inequalities.

1.2.2 Excellence and equity

One of the central discourses in higher education centres on the word "excellence," which, as Burke (2017) argues, has emerged from global pressures for institutions to become world-class universities. The word "excellence" appears not only in many university mission and vision statements but also on institutions' websites describing themselves as "excellent" associated with "quality" "relevance" "efficient" and "accountable," which Shore and Wright (1999) argue have been fairly uncritically imported from the corporate world. Scholars have critiqued the use of "excellence" in higher education arguing that it may be in reality an empty word: "Excellence is invoked... as always, to say precisely nothing at all: it deflects attention from the questions of what quality and pertinence might be, who actually are the judges of a relevant or a good University, and by what authority they become those judges" (Readings, 1996, p. 32).

Furthermore, pursuing excellence can shape perceptions and possibilities around admissions, where institutions are compelled to compete for the best students in a stratified market driven by international rankings[4] (CHE, 2024; McKenna, 2024a; Stevenson et al., 2014). This can place institutions in a position where they need to navigate a delicate balance between excellence and equity – two concepts that can seem at odds. Although excellence should not be seen as in opposition to equity, discourses of excellence in higher education can work to overshadow or challenge discourses of widening participation or equity of access (Stevenson et al., 2014). In this way "excellence" poses tensions for the aim of achieving equity in higher

4 International rankings are an important element of my argument and will be discussed further in Chapter Two as well as in my findings in Chapters Five and Seven.

education and can become embedded in everyday practices of admissions in subtle ways. This may work to compel institutions to participate in competitive practices in the race to be seen as world class (Maher & Tetreault, 2006) often without recognising that the race for funding, prestige, and top students can deepen institutional stratification and self-protective groupings of institutions (Nixon, 2013). In the US context, Lazerson (2007) argues that HE has expanded following a hierarchical structure thereby preserving the social structure of inequality, and becoming the victim of its own success. In China, a similar pattern has emerged where building world-class universities was the dream of generations of Chinese (Liu, 2009) but in achieving this goal, the country has been accused of reinvigorating elitism (Zha & Ding, 2007).

1.3 The South African Context

Although the context of South Africa is distinct in many ways, the challenge to balance excellence (or efficiency) and equity is relevant. South Africa is a nation grappling with historical legacies of inequality and social disparities emerging from apartheid. The apartheid regime that ruled South Africa from 1948 until the early 1990s can be understood as a South African manifestation of colonialism where a racial divide based on white supremacy was reinforced in all domains of society through local rule (Badat, 1999). When the post-apartheid government took power in 1994, it inherited a deeply inequitable and unjust higher education system that did not enjoy public trust and confidence. This system granted preferential access to the white minority, while severely limiting opportunities for the Black majority[5.] This disparity was starkly reflected in the gross participation rates when separated by race: although Black people made up 80% of the population, their participation in higher education was just

5 Throughout my thesis I will make use of the same historical race categories used under apartheid: African, 'Coloured', 'Indian' and white. The term 'Black' in my writing will refer collectively to African, 'Coloured' and 'Indian' groups who were oppressed under apartheid where the term 'non-white' was used. In addition, the term 'Indian' signifies the category assigned to South Africans of Indian descent by the apartheid government rather than being of Indian nationality. The term 'Coloured' remains a highly contested term in South Africa and can be understood as being of mixed race. Throughout my thesis, I will use inverted commas to signify that both of these terms are misnomers of the apartheid regime. I will also be capitalising the words Black, 'Indian' and 'Coloured' as a way to affirm cultural, political, and social identity, and to show recognition of the shared histories, struggles, and resilience of these peoples. Similarly, I will be using lowercase for white as a way to resist the dominance that whiteness has held historically in societal and academic narratives. I do this to challenges the idea of whiteness as a normative, default, or invisible category, instead marking it as one of many identities.

These racial categories are not used to lend credence to racial classification or differentiation but rather for the sake of clarity and consistency with previous reporting.

9%. In contrast, white people, who represented only 10% of the population, had a participation rate of 70% (Sehoole & Adeyemo, 2016).

As a result, the new, democratically elected government addressed these disparities through the implementation of numerous policies such as the Higher Education Act (Act 101 of 1997, as amended), the 1997 Education White Paper 3 (Department of Education [DoE], 1997), and the National Plan for Higher Education (DoE, 2001). Central to these policies and the redress agenda was a belief in the capacity of higher education to deliver opportunities for self-fulfilment, to nurture critical citizens, to encourage free intellectual thought, to respond to contextualised societal and economic needs and to produce knowledge for a modern economy (CHE, 2004). And so, higher education was called upon to contribute to South Africa through the National Development Plan which intended to develop a system of higher education that would "promote equity of access and fair chances of success to all who are seeking to realise their potential through higher education, while eradicating all forms of discrimination and advancing redress for past inequalities" (RSA, 2001, p. 6). This paved the way for the equitable expansion of access to higher education for all South Africans.

However, the efforts to reform higher education have been shaped by the government's broader macroeconomic development strategies and influenced by economic pressures, as South Africa aimed to foster growth and reintegrate into the global economy after the lifting of international sanctions post-apartheid (Badat & Sayed, 2014). The South African economy was expected to operate within the dynamics of the global economy with rationalism, efficiency, effectiveness and performance as central features in stimulating foreign investment and improving global competitiveness. These discourses worked to frame higher education as a contributor to the expansion and improvement of the economy by producing knowledge for a modern economy (CHE, 2004). As with "excellence" in the global context, these discourses of efficiency can be seen to be sitting in tension with those on equity, and achieving an equilibrium between them can be a balancing act.

Subsequently, over the last three decades, much has been written about the transformation of higher education in South Africa (Badat, 2009; Badat & Sayed, 2014; Cloete, 2007; Cooper, 2015; Essop, 2020; Scott et al., 2007). The entire system has witnessed notable advancements with Badat and Sayed (2014) suggesting that no domain of education has escaped scrutiny. In terms of admissions, there is no doubt that higher education in South Africa looks different today. There has been a marked increase in enrolment rates and a broadening of opportunities

for Black people, and mature and female students (CHE, 2022; Cooper, 2015; Essop, 2020). However, access to higher education remains unevenly distributed, with barriers still standing in the way of many disadvantaged groups structured predominantly along intersections of gender, family status, income, race and those living in impoverished areas or rural and township regions (Mathebula, 2019; Venter et al., 2020). This has prompted some scholars to ask, "Why the right to learn rings hollow for many [like Sam above], while for others quality education is an everyday reality?" (Badat & Sayed, 2014, p. 128). Others have suggested that using demographics alone as a measure of redress does not address the systemic roots of apartheid at the scale and depth required (Case, 2015; CHE, 2022; Cooper, 2015; Leibowitz & Bozalek, 2014).

In fact, in recognition of this, in 2015/6, South African higher education students themselves took to the streets in protest, starting with the #Rhodesmustfall protest at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in March 2015 and culminating in a nationwide #feesmustfall protests. What has become known as the #mustfall movements represented unfinished business (Badat, 2016) and marked the students' dissatisfaction with the current efforts in place to redress historical inequalities. Universities were accused of being colonial (Godsell et al., 2016; Heleta, 2016) and perceived as representing white, European culture and economic privilege (Griffiths, 2019). University students were demanding "free, decolonised education for black people" (Griffiths, 2019, p. 143) and were seeking a "postcolonial" university where they could recognise themselves, and where workers, academics and students would all feel welcome in ways which demonstrate fairness and equality (Godsell et al., 2016).

Since then, a vast body of scholarship has explored how students' demands for decolonising higher education have impacted the curricula and informed teaching practices (Trowler, 2019; Zembylas, 2018). With different nuances, this body of scholarship shows there has been an increasing number of initiatives and efforts to decolonise curricula across different fields and institutions (Heleta, 2016; Mbembe, 2016; Morreira, 2017). The same body of scholarship argues that colonial entanglements – manifested in the superiority of the Western-European canon in the epistemic domain, the neoliberal mode of institutional governance, followed by whiteness as a system of beliefs and ways of being – still disproportionally favour white people, including the use of the English language as a main medium of instruction.

These aspects are manifest through “colonial hierarchies”, that is the social, economic and cultural structures of power established during colonial rule, which ranked people and groups according to perceived racial, ethnic, or cultural “superiority” and “inferiority.” These hierarchies worked to grant privileges to the colonisers – often of European descent – who held dominant positions while marginalising Indigenous peoples and others deemed “lesser” within the colonial system. Importantly, these hierarchical patterns did not end with the colonial period; they continued to shape power dynamics, opportunities, and status in many institutions at the time of writing, including higher education. In universities, for example, these hierarchies often appear in the dominance of Eurocentric curricula, access to resources and the ways that certain languages, histories and perspectives are prioritised over others, often sidelining or undermining knowledge and voices from previously colonised communities. Thus, colonial hierarchies continue to influence whose knowledge is seen as valuable, whose experiences are acknowledged and who holds authority, perpetuating a system of privilege and marginalisation rooted in colonial pasts.

It is therefore reasonable to argue that, despite the #MustFall movements and policy reforms, South African higher education remains influenced by colonial hierarchies that continue to shape not only the curriculum and pedagogy but the entire system. However, few studies have explored the mechanisms by which coloniality is reproduced within South African university structures and cultures, particularly in admissions processes – areas that, on the surface, may appear to have been “redressed.”

1.4 Research Questions

The main objective of this study was to explore how and why the processes of admission in UoTs changed over the last three decades. This includes analysing the changes in admission requirements during this period and examining the structural, cultural and agential mechanisms that either enabled or constrained these changes. The research also aimed to identify and explore the specific mechanisms through which colonial legacies continue to be reproduced in the admission processes at UoTs, offering a deeper insight into the underlying forces shaping these practices. In order to do so, I sought to answer the following main research question:

> *How **and why** have the processes of admission to universities of technology changed over the last three decades?*

And the following sub-research questions:

> *How have requirements for admission changed in universities of technology over the last three decades?*
>
> *How have structural, cultural and agential mechanisms enabled or constrained change in the process of admissions in universities of technology within the given timeframe?*
>
> *How and what are the specific mechanisms through which colonial legacies have been (re)produced in the processes of admission at universities of technology?*

1.5 Outline of Thesis

This thesis is organised into seven chapters through which I have tried to tell the story of how today's admission processes to UoTs have emerged, understanding that there are institutional, national and global factors at play. I looked back at the last three decades of our democracy to do so. This first chapter has established the foundation for the study by introducing the research topic and providing an overview of its relevance beyond UoTs and even South Africa. It has presented the problem statement and outlined the specific gap in the literature that the research aimed to address. I also articulated the research objectives and guiding questions to define the scope and focus of the study and tried to explain the rationale for the research and its potential contribution to the field.

Chapter Two presents the philosophical underpinnings of my thesis by defining the key concepts, theories and models which informed the study and links these to the research questions. My thesis was underpinned by Critical Realism. From a philosophical standpoint, Critical Realism is based on the idea that what we observe, feel and experience as humans as the social world emerges from mechanisms beyond our experiences and observations of these experiences. Critical realism encouraged me to explore the underlying mechanisms that gave rise to such experiences and observations. Through this process of excavation, I could uncover how coloniality as one such mechanism has worked to shape today's admissions processes at UoTs.

As an extension of Critical Realism, I used Archer's theory of Social Realism to understand that the social world emerges from a complex interplay of powers in the domains of structure, culture and agency. Identifying the powers in each of these domains over some time allowed

me to determine how change emerged. In order to track this, I used the tool Archer gives us, the morphogenetic framework. Understanding that it would be impossible to identify every mechanism, I chose to focus on the ways in which coloniality continued to work as one such mechanism hidden in the layer of the Real and I used decolonial thought as a lens to do so.

Chapter Three presents the methodology and methods used in this study to answer the main research question. I first explain the choice of the sample for the study, the methods I used to collect data and the reasons for using such methods. This then leads to a discussion of how the data were collected and the kind of data that was collected. Thereafter I discuss the process of using Archer's morphogenetic framework as an analytic tool and the implications of combining this with decolonial thought. In the last part of the chapter, I reflect on ethical considerations and discuss how I considered trustworthiness in the study.

Chapter Four is my attempt to tell the story of the past in order to understand how events have emerged today. This follows the logic of Archer's morphogenetic framework and involves the description of the structural and cultural conditions to which the agents enter. This is otherwise known as T_1 of the morphogenetic framework. I organised this chapter in a way which describes global conditioning, representing the macro level. I then moved to the South African context, which represents national conditioning at a meso level. From there I focus on describing conditioning as relevant to the specific context of UoTs as a unique institutional type. In keeping with the morphogenetic approach, this chapter serves a dual purpose: both as a literature review and as the beginnings of my data analysis, as I have used the events described in this chapter as a basis to inform my later findings.

Chapter Five is the first chapter of the findings. This chapter focuses on institutional changes which took place as "the people" interacted with the "parts." Here I refer to the metaphor of 'The House Modernity Built' as developed by the Gesturing towards Decolonial Futures

Collective (Machado de Oliveira[6], 2021; Stein et al., 2020)[7]. Briefly explained here, this house is used by these scholars to describe the significance of modernity and understand its constituent parts. This metaphor synthesises many critiques of modernity that have been used in decolonial, Indigenous or postcolonial studies and is informed by collaborations with Indigenous communities and other communities of struggle (Stein et al., 2020). Described by the Gesturing towards Decolonial Futures Collective, as "living" (Stein et al., 2020, p. 49) this metaphor can shift depending on its context and I used it as a way to explore how hierarchy in the structural system of higher education in South Africa operates as a colonial device. This allowed me to understand the implications of the name change from "technikon" to "university of technology" and how particular structures in the form of certain policies and mechanisms, (such as university global ranking systems) worked to shape the emerging identity of a UoT.

Chapter Six represents the second of the main findings chapters of the study. This chapter shifts to focus on the people. Again, I refer to the Gesturing towards Decolonial Futures Collective (Machado de Oliveira, 2021; Stein et al., 2020) underpinning metaphor of 'The House Modernity Built' to explore the cultures around the determination of who gets access, and who remains uninvited. I outline the processes involved in establishing admission criteria and discuss how certain discourses framing students as "deficit" work to enable the addition of extra layers to these criteria as a means of measuring quality. At times, certain requirements, such as high English language, act as barriers to entry for disadvantaged applicants from rural areas, contradicting the goal of equitable admissions.

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6 In the book '*Hospicing Modernity: Facing Humanity's Wrongs and Implications for Social Activism,*' Vanessa Andreotti uses her maiden name of Vanessa Machado de Oliveira, meaning as she explains: '*Vanessa, the axe of the olive tree*' (Machado de Oliveira, 2021, p. 120). Reclaiming Machado de Oliveira can be seen as an act of both personal and political significance: a recognition of her heritage and a commitment to integrating her own decolonial journey into her life and work.

7 In my thesis, I frequently reference 'The House Modernity Built', as imagined by the Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures Collective. Writing as a collective, this group brings together a wide array of researchers, artists, and activists, each contributing unique perspectives, expertise, and cultural backgrounds. This collaborative approach enables the group to create work that is layered and multidimensional, capturing the nuanced complexities of decolonial thought and practice. With each member offering distinct experiences and insights, GTDF's writings incorporate diverse voices rather than presenting a singular, unified perspective. In highlighting this I aim to recognise each member of the group alongside their contributions.

Chapter Seven is the concluding chapter of the thesis and corresponds to the final stage of Archer's morphogenetic framework, known as T_4, marking the end of a defined cycle. I use this chapter to bring my findings together, in a way which describes the mechanisms underpinning the processes of admissions in UoTs today. In so doing, I am able to present how, although there have been significant cultural and structural shifts within South African higher education, it has not been enough to achieve equitable access. Rather, I describe how the hidden mechanisms, particularly those of coloniality, work to maintain a particular status quo with consequences for our redress agenda.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework

2.1 Chapter Introduction

Every thesis is underpinned by a theory that assists in making sense of the phenomenon under study. Without a strong theoretical lens, a thesis can easily become a simple description of the researcher's views. As such, this chapter covers the theoretical framework within which this research was undertaken. This study is driven by the need to understand how admission processes at UoTs have evolved over the past three decades, and how these changes have impacted access for first-generation students. I pay particular attention to colonial legacies, using decolonial thought to problematise how such changes have reproduced hierarchical colonial relationships associated with centring Western-European ideologies and knowledges, whiteness and the market logic of universities. I sought to accomplish this through a critical realist perspective and applied tools of Social Realism in my analysis. Combining decolonial theory with the tools of Social Realism has allowed me to view issues from a new perspective, and through this chapter, I will demonstrate why this approach was both appropriate and valuable for this study.

First, I discuss how the underpinnings of Critical Realism informed the ontological approach for the study. This leads to an explanation of how I define coloniality in the study and how I used it as a lens to identify the mechanisms through which colonial legacies were produced and reproduced in the processes of admission at UoTs. I then discuss Social Realism as theorised by Margaret Archer giving specific attention to the morphogenetic framework and its usefulness as a tool for data analysis. Lastly, I explore how decolonial thought can be combined with Social Realism as an analytical tool.

2.2 Critical Realism: The Philosophical Foundation

At its core and supported in the name, Critical Realism signals the desire to change systems that are counterintuitive to an emancipated and liberated society. The 'critical' element in the critical realist project is a concern for social justice and is transformational (Collier, 1994). Bhaskhar (2008, 2010) who is one of the central proponents of Critical Realism, argues that for us to comprehend phenomena in the world we must understand the unobserved workings of this reality which are responsible for generating our observations, emotions and physical

experiences. In this way, he distinguishes between a readily accessible transitive reality and an intransitive reality which is difficult to access but exists and has causal effects of which we may or may not be aware. Applied to research within the field of higher education, it can be used to penetrate the layers of institutionalisation and reveal how wider, sometimes invisible, structures and mechanisms in society continue to embed themselves within the sector. In this study, Critical Realism is used to understand how admission processes to South African UoTs have changed, which is especially important in a society where legacies of colonial structural and cultural conditioning continue to exert considerable influence.

Critical realism is understood as an ontology, which is an understanding of the truth of how the world operates (Bhaskar, 2002). It acts as an 'underlabourer' to social research (Bhaskar, 1978) to identify and resolve problems at their roots by providing a realist framework for complementary social theories, such as Social Realism (Sayer, 2000). In this way, Critical Realism clears the ground and allows Social Realism to engage with empirical research as an applied theory. Critical Realism posits that our conceptions or knowledge of reality are stratified and differentiated, thus arguing that there is a hidden world made up of generative structures or mechanisms which exist independently of human interpretation, knowledge or discourse. My goal as the researcher is therefore to identify how the different layers of reality operate in order to provide a less tainted view of what is observed and experienced in the phenomenon being researched. It is only through acknowledging and working with a stratified approach that this reality can be identified (Bhaskar, 2008, 2010).

2.2.1 A stratified reality

From a critical realist perspective, reality is stratified, emergent and irreducible. It is stratified into biological, psychological and social dimensions that can produce new mechanisms through emergent powers. These emergent properties cannot be reduced to a sum of their parts. Recognising these layers provides the possibility of increased explanatory power to account for interplay and to see which domain influences whom, when and why (Archer, 1995).

Critical Realism delineates reality into three layers, the deepest and most abstract layer holding mechanisms and powers responsible for the emergence in the other layers of our experiences and observations of events. Bhaskar (2002) names these domains as the Empirical (the reality we experience), the Actual (everything that happens or occurs in the real world, whether we observe it or not), and the Real (hidden mechanisms).

The domain of the Real comprises underlying enduring mechanisms which have powers that we may or may not be aware of. These mechanisms interact to produce events which occur at the level of the Actual. How these events are then experienced occurs at the level of the Empirical. The mechanisms at the level of the Real might not always be actualised and so their powers may be dormant until the right set of contexts comes into play. They also do not act in isolation and so there are always many mechanisms at play in the emergence of a single phenomenon. This means that the constraining or enabling effects of a mechanism on the emergence of any event or experience can be reduced or strengthened by the existence of other actualised mechanisms at the time. The focus at the level of the Real is what makes Critical Realism distinctive (Benton & Craib, 2001), in that it requires explanations to go beyond description to identify the mechanisms enabling their emergence.

The next layer is the Actual, where events emerge, some of which we may be aware of and some of which we might not. The Empirical is the layer of experiences and observations via the senses and is to a greater or lesser degree measurable. These experiences and observations are multiple and relevant to our own histories and social frameworks which explains why we might all experience a single event in different ways. How we react in the Actual emerges from our experiences in the Empirical and thus these two layers work together to create the world we experience.

The Actual and Empirical domains are thus located in the transitive domain, pertaining to the data of a study and can be accessed through observations, interviews or documentation. According to this critical realist understanding, what we experience and observe, in the case of this study through policy changes to admissions requirements in UoTs, is in the Actual and Empirical realms, which are products of mechanisms at work in the deeper, harder-to-access intransitive Real domain. According to Bhaskar (2008), the information and understanding obtained from the Empirical and Actual realms are limited in terms of explaining or understanding reality and he therefore recommends that focus is placed on the level of the Real. This allows for a deeper understanding of the reality of the given phenomenon. This is not to say that the layers of the Empirical and Actual are disregarded in Critical Realism research, but instead, they are used in the process of uncovering the mechanisms at the level of the Real.

These mechanisms that are uncovered at the level of the Real interact to enable or constrain events at the level of the Actual and experiences at the level of the Empirical. While events and experiences are generally fluid and can shift or change, mechanisms at the level of the Real

tend to be more resistant to change. However, events and experiences in the world may affect which mechanisms are actualised or emphasised in any given context.

2.2.2 Justifying the use of Critical Realism in the study

It was important for the study to use multiple experiences and events to access and identify underlying mechanisms from where they emerge and which have enduring powers (Bhaskar, 1978; Danermark et al., 2002). The emphasis on the domain of the Real enhances the explanatory significance in the conclusions drawn regarding the investigated phenomena as compared with approaches which are, for example, constructivist in nature. Bhaskar (2008, 2010) critiques constructivism for tending to construct reality through the exclusive use of human experiences, knowledge and perceptions. Similarly, Critical Realism is critical of approaches where positivist cause-and-effect relationships are attributed based on experience and observation (the empirical realm) only. Rather Critical Realism, through its layered view of reality, allows one to describe the events of a social phenomenon, but at the same time seeks to uncover the underlying mechanisms that led to the emergence of the observed or experienced phenomena.

These underlying mechanisms are multiple and attempting to identify them all and account for their effects is an impossible task, which is why Critical Realism acknowledges epistemic relativism. This is a claim that recognises that all knowledge is fallible, partial and changeable over time (Bhaskar, 1979). But this is not to say that any account is equally valid; some knowledge claims are better than others (Albert et al., 2020). Going beyond merely describing the data, I aimed to identify the causal mechanisms that could help explain the social phenomenon, in this case how processes of admission changed at UoTs in South Africa over the last 30 years. This meant I needed to provide accounts that could be deemed credible, in order to move *closer* to reality through time. This required that I use judgemental rationalism, the ability to adjudicate among different constructions and assert that there were criteria for judging which accounts of the world were better or worse (Albert et al., 2020). In order to achieve this, I needed to consider the evidence and sort through truth claims carefully, moving from the data to identifying causal mechanisms and providing explanations that were the strongest possible accounts currently available.

In acknowledging that an almost infinite number of causal mechanisms would be at play in the emergence of any social event, I am indicating the necessary limitations of my study. I was not able to identify all the mechanisms that accounted for the shifts in admissions processes at UoTs in the period under study. But I made a clear decision, in drawing on decolonial thought, to home in on those mechanisms that had served to naturalise the (re)production of colonial legacies in the processes of admission to UoTs.

The effect of formal European colonial administration in place on the African continent from the 15th Century to the first half of the 20th Century has left legacies that remain operationalised at the time of writing (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020). Africa, as described by Onuoha (2018) is still saddled with the perpetuation of the colonial phenomenon. Understanding that there are different layers to reality, I suggest that these mechanisms of distribution of power operate as underlying mechanisms with causal powers on the level of the Real. I opted to use Critical Realism as a means of identifying how these legacies interacted to enable or constrain events at the level of the Actual and experiences at the level of the Empirical as related to higher education in South Africa. I return to the discussion of using decolonial thought as a lens later in the chapter.

The effects of such colonial legacies have, until recently, been largely overlooked in critiques of the structures of social institutions, including in higher education (Heleta, 2016; Le Grange, 2016; Mbembe, 2016; Morreira, 2017; Zembylas, 2018). Rather, scholars have primarily centred their attention on showing and discussing the effects of the predominance of Western European Whiteness on the curriculum and pedagogy of higher education. The discussion of how structures (such as the processes of admission) in higher education remain affected by the colonial legacy has been underexamined. The endeavour to identify these colonial mechanisms within the domain of the Real necessitated tools that enabled me to access this intransitive domain. I looked at Margaret Archer's (1995; 1996) theory of Social Realism to provide suitable tools with which to explore the workings of the Real in order to understand how the processes of admission in UoTs have emerged.

2.3 Margaret Archer's Social Realism

The tenets of CR, discussed above, provide a philosophical foundation that is in principle compatible with a variety of social science approaches as it acts as an underpinning philosophy or metatheory (Danermark et al, 2002). In this way, CR acts as an underlabourer to inform the

study by supplying the ontological concepts such as reality being layered and stratified. Expanding upon Bhaskar's (1998) work on CR, Archer (1995, 1996) offers a framework that enables researchers to examine how change, or lack thereof, takes place within a particular social context. Alternatively, it can also facilitate the exploration of how different phenomena emerge in social contexts. Given the coherence between the two theorists, several researchers have used Critical Realism and Social Realism together to better understand the events and experiences as related to higher education in South Africa (see Boughey & McKenna, 2021; Case, 2013; Masehela, 2015; Quinn & Boughey, 2009).

2.3.1 Archer's stratification of the social world

Social Realism as conceptualised by Archer (1995; 1996, 2000) is concerned with the social world and accepts Bhaskar's (2008, 2010) CR assumptions that there are numerous mechanisms at work in the domain of the Real. Archer extends this concept by arguing that the social world consists of three interconnected aspects: structure, culture and agency. These aspects operate within and across Bhaskar's three domains of reality: the Real, Actual and Empirical. It is within the domain of the Real that these aspects of structure, culture and agency have independent emergent powers that, when activated, intersect to be variously responsible for phenomena that may emerge within any social context.

The independent emergent powers of structure, culture and agency mean that they are not causally dependent on each other. Emergent powers represent the casual ability of these aspects to enable or constrain change within themselves and to exert influence on their environment, potentially leading to changes or maintaining the status quo. As an example, to explain this, I refer to university admission policies. The structure here could refer to the rules in place governing admission – these rules have emergent powers as they shape how applicants are selected, which works to enable or constrain access. Culture could refer to the shared beliefs that influence how these rules are applied, for instance, if there is a cultural belief in meritocracy, the admissions process may prioritise achievement over diversity. This belief has its own emergent power as it can either reinforce the existing selection structure or push for a more holistic change. Agency refers to the actions of individuals, who may use their judgement to interpret or challenge the structures. For example, an academic may recognise the limitations of a test score and advocate for other ways to grant access, thus exerting their emergent powers to influence change within the system. These three aspects operate independently, and although cultures may evolve unless agents or structures change, the admission process will remain the

same. Each domain can either work to enable or constrain change within itself and the broader context.

Social Realism posits that the social world comprises the ‘parts’ and the ‘people’. It is the interplay of these ‘parts’ and ‘people’ that leads to the emergence of events and experiences at the level of the real. Archer considers the ‘parts’ to be a combination of structure and culture, which are argued to be relatively enduring (Archer, 1995). These are then acted upon by the ‘people’ (individual agents) who extend their agency to achieve their personal projects. The parts are said to be enduring because people who enter a given context are confronted by parts which were constituted by previous occupants within that same setting. For example, a vice-chancellor may take up office within a university but does so within a context that pre-existed them. While they may bring their own ambitions and goals, they are enabled or constrained by the institution’s existing norms, ideologies or policies and procedures. Should they not be able to make changes to particular ideologies or policies on a particular cause, a conclusion could be made that the parts have endured and will continue to condition the context. These concepts of structure, culture and agency are complex and require some explanation.

2.3.2 Structure

According to Archer (1995; 1996, 2000), the term ‘structures’ refers to the distribution of access to material goods (such as education) and the way in which relationships are organised in society (such as gender or racial hierarchies). Mechanisms in the domain of structures can be enduring and possess casual properties called structural emergent powers (SEPs). Examples of structures may include resources, a financial system, policies or authorities that shape how people must operate or behave. Critically, these mechanisms remain dormant until agents exercise their own powers to draw on them to pursue a project which will allow for the attainment of a goal. As these structures interact with the emergent powers of culture and agency, an event or experience will emerge at the level of the Actual and Empirical. As an example, it could be suggested that the apartheid regime left behind a particular set of structures, such as the system of higher education itself, the funding allocation or a policy on institutional differentiation, which may continue to condition how admission requirements are conditioned at UoTs. This may have an influence over what opportunities students are exposed to, depending on their race, class of origin, gender, disability status and so on.

2.3.4 Culture

Culture, from a social realist perspective, is seen as the adopted way of ‘what’ and ‘how’ we talk about things based on the beliefs, values, ideologies and schools of thought that shape individuals’ actions in a context thereby influencing how people act in that context. Culture can also be enduring and possess causal properties known as cultural emergent properties (CEPs). While ideas and beliefs are held by people, Archer looks at their role outside of the individuals that hold them through discourse analysis (Archer, 1995). A discourse in this context can be defined as a set of ideas, concepts or values that are bound together through a sign system (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). They can emerge out of specific contexts at different times and are represented by the words or images chosen to describe an event, experience or group of individuals. In this way, analysing the specific choice of words points to the hidden values associated.

Culture, like structure, shapes the contexts that agents enter and has a bearing on whether personal projects will be achieved by people or not. Circling back to the earlier example of apartheid, the regime left behind a particular social culture which continues to condition the discourses within higher education on admission requirements. Views about what is or is not valued within the processes of admissions have implications for who gains access to higher education and who does not. In this way, culture acts as a mechanism with certain constraints and enablements.

Together the ‘parts’, that is the structure and culture, work together to condition the environment that human agents enter (Case, 2013). Both of these aspects of the ‘parts’ present enablements and constraints for the ‘people’ as they enact their agency to achieve their own goals. Determining enablements and constraints involves the interrogation of relational emergent powers within the context of the studied phenomenon. As such, constraints in one context may be enablements in another as these depend on the relative emergent powers of the interplay between structure, culture and agency at the time.

2.3.5 Agency

The interaction of people with structures and cultures is central to the emergence of events and experiences at the levels of the Actual and Empirical. Archer (1995; 2000) conceptualises persons that belong to a collective group as agents (‘the people’) with potential powers or

projects. In this way, ‘agency’ refers to the ability to act based on an individual’s interest or project as they interact with the structures and cultures in their context.

Social Realism refers to individuals as persons who possess personal emergent properties (PEPs) in relation to the position that they hold within their context. These emergent properties or powers of influence may differ in particular settings as well as the strength of their contribution to what emerges. As an example, an academic who determines the admission criteria for entry into a qualification may be influenced by the relative emergent powers of structures and cultures along with other agents within the UoT.

Archer (1995; 2000) proposes that distinction needs also to be made between categories of humans as individuals, as people with specific roles and positions, and as groups or collectives who may be more or less influential in decision making. Often availability of resources and social positions occupied are closely related to influence. Archer (1995) describes agents with little power and influence and low access to social resources as being in the weakest position of influence and calls this group ‘*primary agents’*. They are “collectives sharing the same life chances” (Archer, 2003, p. 263), placed in disempowered positions in society, perhaps owing to their age, race, geographic location or gender (Archer, 2007). In the example of admissions, a primary agent could be considered a student applying for a position at a UoT, who through no fault of their own has attended a rural school with little access to English. Based on their social position, they would have little power to change the particular UoT’s admission policy should they not meet the entry requirements.

In Social Realist terms a ‘*corporate agent’* is a group who has more influential power in achieving their goals by grouping together to pursue a common project. Corporate agents are aware of what they want and can communicate and organise themselves in ways that provide access to resources in order to be in a more influential position. In this way, they can collectively engage in an effort to make changes to or to maintain the context in question. The influential powers of corporate agents rely on the interaction with primary agents, as the latter influence the environment in which corporate agents pursue their goals. Likewise, corporate agents shape the contexts in which primary agents operate (Archer, 1995). Existing cultures and structures in a particular context therefore provide conditions in which agents may be enabled or constrained. Using the example of university admission, the academic staff could have the collective power to establish committees to shape, reform or influence admission requirements and policies conditioned by broader academic or institutional goals. The

committee could either reinforce the status quo or they could use their access to resources and influence to make changes, such as implementing policies for more equitable access. The student as a primary agent from the previous example may choose to organise themselves with other students to develop corporate agency through protesting against particular decisions on unfair access.

Additional agents can be characterised as 'social actors,' encompassing those who occupy roles which have properties and power. Their roles grant social actors access to resources, and with that, more bargaining power. As an example, a registrar at a university whose position is associated with high levels of authority, responsibility and power to overrule an admission policy can be considered a social actor.

2.3.6 The relationship between 'people' and the 'parts'

Emergence in SR terms is described as something new which comes into being through interaction between multiple things (Sayer, 2000). This is often accounted for by how the properties and powers of the 'people' intertwine with those of the 'parts' (Archer, 1995). As mentioned above, structures can have SEPs, cultures can have CEPs and agents can possess personal emergent powers. According to Archer (1995), these properties are relational: they are not contained within themselves but also could not exist apart from each other. They are activated and emergent through interaction with society where a resolution of tensions is sought in the form of an elaboration. Agents can experience either complementarities or contradictions with their contexts which influence their reactions. Where they experience complementarities between their personal projects and their cultural and structural contexts, they will be enabled in their endeavours. Where they experience contradictions, they will be constrained. Given the myriad mechanisms at play in any context, they will inevitably experience both mechanisms that enable and others that constrain.

In this way, Social Realism can be used to account for the way in which 'people' interact with the 'parts' of society to either reproduce the accepted or transform the standards, norms and practices. Archer (1995) identifies this everchanging elaboration of agency and the 'parts' over time, as the property of emergence.

The relationship between the 'parts' and the 'people' has been debated in terms of which one has power over the other (Durkheim & Lukes, 1982; Marx, 1993). Archer (1995) refers to one view of the world as 'upwards conflation' which comes from the ideology that man created the

social world and therefore both structure and culture emerges from human reason. In other words, it is as if 'people' are able to determine their own paths in the world despite man-made structural and cultural conditions. In research guilty of 'upwards conflation', all explanation for events and experiences is assigned to the actions of the individuals involved in the current context. An alternative view sees 'people' as products of society, conditioned by social structures and cultures. This is termed 'downwards conflation.' In research guilty of downwards conflation, all explanation for events and experiences is assigned to the constraints and enablements of the parts alone, as if people were entirely subject to their environmental conditions. Another alternative view exists, 'central conflation', which recognises the systemic and individual aspects of social life as inseparable. The concept of central conflation has also received critique from Archer who suggests that if the 'parts' and 'people' are conjoined then it becomes impossible to identify when or how agents enact their agency, and therefore extremely difficult to identify how, why and when change happens. Rather, Archer (1995) argues that although the powers and properties of structure, culture and agency are intertwined; they need to be theoretically separated for analytical purposes through analytical dualism.

Analytical dualism is based on the premise that the 'parts' and 'the people' are ontologically distinct and temporally distinguishable (Archer, 1995). The methodological approach in Social Realism is used to separate these domains for analytical purposes in order to explore the links between these individual layers understanding their own emergent properties operating at the level of the real. In so doing, any form of conflation is avoided.

As I have used Archer's tools for the analysis of my data, I return to her concepts of analytical dualism and the morphogenetic framework in the next chapter, where I discuss the research methods. In using Social Realism as my overarching ontological framework, I aimed to focus on a particular set of mechanisms to identify their role in admissions over time in UoTs, namely coloniality. To examine the impact of coloniality thoroughly, I rely on decolonial studies (Machado de Oliveira, 2021).

2.4 Decolonial Thought as a Lens for Enquiry

2.4.1 My white identity in a decolonial study

First and foremost a doctoral study is an academic endeavour, one which involves rigour, trustworthiness and integrity. During this process, I have come to appreciate that it is also a deeply personal journey, rooted in self-discovery with promises of authenticity. This realisation

has grown from interrogating and understanding my own positionality better; primarily that of being a white voice in a decolonial study based in South Africa. I cannot promise to have any answers, but I do invite you to join me on my journey as I attempt to tread carefully and as authentically as I am able with a topic that I acknowledge to be entangled with complicities, contradictions, complexities and violences to others.

Through my doctoral journey, I have come to feel that I have an ethical obligation as a white, female, emerging academic within the South African context to explore my role and complicity in a system which remains unequal and fractured. In so doing, I can recognise that in my South African context, I have been afforded privileges based entirely on my race and have not experienced the same violences as others may have done[8]. I was born during the peak of apartheid, early 1980s South Africa, in the small town of Empangeni. Growing up I was shielded from any direct forms of violence, I could benefit from good quality schooling and healthcare and was free to visit any location, all because I was born white. During the early years of democracy (post-1994), we moved to a bigger city, and I continued with my schooling; the major difference was that it was within a more racially blended classroom. During this time my family and I rarely discussed race, I was taught it was offensive to describe friends as Indian or Black or white. Those were words laden with political history and were to be avoided for fear of being judged a racist. And so, my silence prevailed well into my adult life. I have come to learn that in my silence I became complicit in protecting the status quo conditioned by a structurally racist society. Robin DiAngelo (2018) in her book 'White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism' explains how following the civil rights movement in the USA, many people believed that only intentional malicious acts of extreme prejudice should be classified as racist and only 'bad' people committed those acts. This adaptation of racism, which she terms the 'good/bad binary', became a cultural norm, operating to make it impossible for the average white person to understand or interrupt racism. The binary approach functions to stop race conversations (my silence) and exempt the person from further engagement and in that way protects the existing racial hierarchy. Racism becomes a structure which encodes whiteness as the norm for society and white people opt for a racially coded language which continues to produce racist images and perspectives where 'good' is coded as 'white' or an absence of blackness (Johnson & Shapiro, 2003). DiAngelo argues that a critical

8 This topic was presented at the 2023 Rhodes Postgraduate Conference. The title of the presentation was '*Shaking the table from within: A look at positionality in a decolonial study*'.

point is not about being a racist or not, but rather about asking: *How am I actively seeking to interrupt racism as a structure?*

And so, amid feelings of unbelonging as an 'outsider' to decolonial scholarship, I acknowledged that I had a choice to make. I could retreat into my silence in fear of discomfort, or I could explore my positionality and use my voice to understand how our colonial roots emerged and continue to reinforce the status quo today. Should I follow the path of silence and withdraw completely, I am denying the violences of coloniality and therefore remain complicit in protecting the status quo by not recognising and challenging the cultures, structures and institutions which work to keep power in place and maintain the status quo. I would also be leaving the burden of decolonisation on the shoulders of those who already bear the burden of racism and other forms of discrimination and who are already exhausted from fighting these battles for over 500 years (DiAngelo, 2018; Matthews, 2021; Stein, 2023).

Should I choose the path less travelled and engage as an 'outsider', I must recognise that my identity (and race) matters when talking about decoloniality. Matthews (2012) suggests that a white scholar needs to think carefully about the effects of their 'whiteness' in their attempts to contribute to decolonial scholarship. Without such reflections, she cautions that white participation in decolonial struggles may ultimately do more to alleviate the guilt of white academics than to dismantle the hierarchies that decolonial struggles oppose. Tuck and Yang (2012) suggest that too quick adoption of the decolonising discourse may serve to reconcile settler guilt in what they term 'settler moves to innocence'. This is explained as strategies or positions that try to relieve the settler of guilt or responsibility without having to give up land, power or privilege (Tuck & Yang, 2012). In this way, white scholars could be seen as engaging with decolonial scholarship to protect their own relevance in academia and to present themselves as non-racist.

Rather, white scholars need to engage with decolonial work in ways that do not centre ourselves, or attempt to speak on behalf of others but instead aim to amplify concerns, interrupt ongoing harm, and enact repair and restitution for past harms (Stein, 2023). The awkwardness of criticising colonisation must also be acknowledged, as it is a system that has granted white people certain privileges, even while they advocate against it through decolonisation (Moosavi, 2020). Matthews (2021) emphasises the importance of recognising these complexities, while Vice (2010) calls for white South Africans to recognise themselves as a problem and learn to live with this awareness. White scholars need to recognise the entanglements rather than rush

past racism to present themselves as being on the 'right side' or as 'good whites' contributing to decolonisation (Ahmed, 2004). Matthews (2021) refers to this as being so eager to be part of the solution that you do not stop for long enough to realise the ways in which you are part of the problem. Robin DiAngelo (2018) challenges white people to break the apathy of 'whiteness' and racism by appreciating the importance of a complex and socio-historical context when responding to a particular situation; to cultivate sensitivity in relation to ongoing patterns of inequality that has become naturalised, and develop the courage to address these patterns when they are reproduced; to commit to continuous learning (and unlearning); and to approach this work with humility in regard to one's own ignorance and self-reflexivity about one's complicity in harm.

I began this section by outlining the two choices which I had before me; in reality, though, I have come to realise that there was no real choice to make. Sharon Stein (2023) describes her 'colonial debt' as a white settler based in Canada, and part of that is for white voices to acknowledge their responsibility for taking on much more of the labour of identifying and interrupting harmful colonial patterns as they manifest in ourselves and our institutions.

And so, I am using my PhD journey as an opportunity for this, through the process of learning and unlearning following what the collective *Gesturing Toward Decolonial Futures* name the four H's: the principles of honesty, humility, humour and hyper self-reflexivity (Machado de Oliveira, 2021; Stein et al., 2020). This process has allowed me a critical self-reflection of my own whiteness and my own continuum of racism. In this way, decolonial thought has contributed to confronting my colonial past and present and has invited me to interrogate how I have participated in the process of reproducing coloniality. By learning to sit with the discomfort of my individual and institutional complicity in historical and ongoing harm, I hope to become more self-aware and sensitised to my own enduring investments in the promises that coloniality brings, specifically in regard to the entitlement of moral and epistemic authority, unrestricted autonomy and to serve as arbitrators for justice and common sense (Machado de Oliveira, 2021). In this way, I hope to make a small contribution to a shift to a future that is not premised on colonial harm. I cannot suggest that I have been entirely successful in doing so, as I acknowledge that failure is inevitable in this kind of work (Stein, 2023). But I do know that I cannot continue to let the fear of failure or critique immobilise me from trying.

2.4.2 What is decolonial thought and how does it inform my study?

Decolonial thinking and doing emerged as early as the sixteenth century as a response to the oppression the modern Europe enacted on the non-European world (Mignolo, 2007). More recently, though, there has been a resurgence in the 'decolonial turn' (Maldonado-Torres, 2017) and decoloniality is regarded as an academic field of inquiry which aims to critique or challenge the legacy of colonialism around the globe. The field has emerged alongside postcolonial critique (a critique of modernity from the Global South led by the South Asian Subaltern school of thought) and postmodern critique (a critique of modernity from the Global North led by the Latin American Subaltern studies group) (Grosfoguel, 2011; Mignolo, 2000). A decolonial perspective allows for the exploration of cultural and literary dimensions of colonialism but also looks at the economic, social and political dimensions of colonialism.

Studies embedded in decolonial thought seek to uncover and understand the ways in which colonialism continues to shape the world today through ongoing forms of exploitation, oppressions and inequality. It allows for a space of criticality and reflexivity which prompts an interrogation of global hierarchies that constituted imperial power by challenging the concept that Western rationale is universal, neutral or objective (Grosfoguel, 2007; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Zondi, 2016; Stein et al, 2020). It is a particularly useful framework for understanding the complex challenges facing public higher education systems in South Africa as we navigate our colonial, settler-colonial, and postcolonial history (Majee & Ress, 2020).

Mignolo (2011) describes a decolonial approach as one which pushes beyond a political project into an epistemic one by encouraging a 'delinking' from the structure of knowledge imposed by the West, and rather 'reconstituting' ways of thinking, speaking and living. This is described as a praxis of 'undoing and redoing' (Walsh & Mignolo, 2018). Stein (2021) builds on this by suggesting that decolonial theory allows us to see that systemic forms of domination are not just material or epistemic but also ontological, in that they sanction particular modes of existence and foreclose others.

It is, however, important to note that decolonial thought does not prescribe a fixed recipe, but it shows the enduring mechanisms that reproduce modernity/coloniality and invite an interruption of those patterns. It allows us to ask difficult questions and seek out alternative possibilities for knowing, being and relating. Often these alternatives are not sanctioned by

mainstream institutions and discourses and are often ignored or actively suppressed within them (Stein et al., 2020). Having a prescriptive solution would be viewed as slipping back into the same set of colonial entitlements that they seek to challenge, and are often deemed to be 'whitewashed studies' (Tlostanova, 2019). The challenge is to denaturalise Western hegemony without attempting to insert another hegemony in its place. The emphasis is therefore not on achieving a particular change in policy or practice but rather an internalisation of what may prepare us to surrender our sense of superiority and otherness (Stein, 2021), and to allow us to activate viable but currently unimaginable possibilities for co-existing differently. In so doing, we may begin to recognise that we are interdependent and responsible to each other and the earth itself.

Decolonial scholarship should be viewed as an ongoing, context-specific conversation that shifts as relevant debates move both within academic and the broader society with the intention of undoing colonial hierarchies (Stein et al, 2020). Within the continent of Africa, decolonial thought reminds us that coloniality/modernity continues to operate, with many remaining tensions between a Westernised view of the world and racial justice demands in post-apartheid or postcolonial contexts (Majee & Ress, 2020). Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) writes of the common desire to re-centre enquiry and the making of knowledge in higher education on the full historical and cosmological experience of Africa in response to Eurocentricism. There are also common rejections in the form of the marginalisation of the African voice, positioning of Africa as a 'place to learn about and not from' (Hendricks & Leibowitz, 2016) and the objectification of Africa as a site for Western scrutiny (Garuba, 2015; Kamanzi, 2016).

2.4.3 Colonialism and Decoloniality

Decolonial theories contain diverse perspectives, both complementary and contradictory, with multiple interpretations, depending on the colonial history of each context (Stein et al., 2021). A central tenet that distinguishes this body of scholarship from other social theories is the acknowledgement that our current 'reality' continues to produce and reproduce the hierarchical relationships imposed during the colonisation by a few European countries in the African, American, Asian, and Oceania continents during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Mignolo, 2011, 2021; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020; Quijano, 2007). They propose that modernity and coloniality are mutually constitutive phenomena; modernity requires coloniality to create the current conditions of comfort, safety and technological advances.

2.4.3.1 Colonisation

Colonisation occurs when an external power asserts governing authority over a group of people including their lives, lands and natural resources (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020; Stein, 2023). Colonisation is generally understood as a process of political, social and cultural domination established by the Europeans over conquered continents and territories, such as South Africa. Quijano (2000) explains that it was only during the colonisation of America that the idea of 'race' was born. Race was used to differentiate between the conquerors and the conquered and refer to the supposed differential biological structures between those groups. Race worked to place some in a natural selection of inferiority to others; dominated peoples were situated in a natural position of inferiority with their physical traits and cultural features considered inferior. Social relations founded on the category of race produced new social identities in America. One example is how words like Indians[9], Black and Mestizos and terms like "European" took on a racial connotation rather than a geographic one. Race became an instrument of basic social classification and was used to legitimise domination informed by a Eurocentric perspective, thereby naturalising the relations between Europeans and non-Europeans. In this way, Quijano (2000) argues that race became a fundamental criterion for the distribution of the world population into ranks, places and roles in the new power structure.

Simultaneously, a new global world market had been established which required commodities to be organised and produced with a capitalist character. This control of labour and global structure based on racial identities became associated with social roles, and a systematic racial division of labour was imposed. Dominated races were seen as inferior and were subjected to a life of unpaid slavery, whereas the dominant race was able to receive salaries and be independent farmers, merchants, artisans or independent producers of commodities. Exceptions to this were only considered by the dominant group and came in the form of the most 'whitened' mestizos (born of European men and Native American women) judged to have a special talent. The distribution of labour based on race was maintained throughout the colonial period.

As colonisation expanded, social classification using the same criterion was imposed on a global scale. New social identities such as yellows and olives were added to existing categories

9 The term 'Indian' to describe indigenous peoples of the Americas was given by European explorers, who believed they had reached the Indian subcontinent, when in fact they had arrived in the Caribbean.

of race. Here too, these social identities were tied to the distribution of labour satisfying the needs of colonial capitalism. The dominant groups benefited from the control of commodities produced by the unpaid labour of the dominated groups and the concept of race/labour became naturally associated with each other. Soon Western Europe found itself as the epicentre of the whole world market, controlling valuable commodities produced by unpaid labour as well as the sea routes for the transportation of such commodities. The monetisation of the global market allowed for a web of commercial exchange that included links to China, India, Egypt and Syria. This expansion of commercial traffic between the regions formed new regional markets and urbanisation, the hub of which became known as Western Europe. This meant that Europe was able to impose its colonial dominance over all areas on the globe incorporating them into its world system and model of power. In essence all global experiences, histories, resources and cultural products ended up in one global order centred on European and Western hegemony.

The dominant groups created a structural organisation that reinforced dominance over the colonised groups. In some territories, like the lands known as South Africa, colonisers took the lands, marginalised the Indigenous African people and imposed a system of slavery on them. English and Dutch colonisers first expropriated cultural discoveries of the colonised peoples for the development of capitalism and profit in their Western centres. Second, they suppressed the colonised forms of knowledge production, their symbolic universe and their model of expression. Finally, they forced the colonised to learn the dominant culture in a way which ensured the reproduction of domination. This ensured that Europe became and remained the referent. Western conception of human history emerged and placed Europe as the centre of human civilisation, creator and exporter of modernity (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; Quijano, 2000). In this way modernity and rationality became exclusively European and so relations between Western Europe and the rest of the world were coded in new categories: East–West, primitive - civilised, mythical - scientific, irrational - rational, traditional - modern, Europe and not-Europe.

2.4.3.2 Coloniality

The concept of coloniality is different from colonialism or colonisation. Mignolo (2021) argues that the word and concept emerged at the beginning of the nineties. Called ‘colonialidad’ in Spanish it was authorised in neither its language nor birthplace by the epistemic regulations of modernity (Mignolo, 2021). Colonisation installed racial hierarchy during the administration

of colonies, while coloniality refers to the processes that allowed this racial hierarchy to continue existing. Coloniality refers to the longstanding patterns of power that emerged from colonialism and continues to define culture, labour, relations and knowledge production long after the end of colonialism in settler-colonial countries (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; Stein, 2021). In this way, coloniality can be seen as that which survives colonialism (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015) and is the most general form of domination today (Quijano, 2007). Maldonado-Torres (2007) suggests that it is a continuing domination which remains masked by modernity (Quijano, 2007) and hidden in discourse, books, cultures, common sense and academic performances today.

In explaining this phenomenon, Quijano (2000) proposed the concept of the colonial matrix of power. It was used to describe the ways in which colonialism has shaped the social, economic and cultural structures of the modern world. The colonial matrix of power works to naturalise social hierarchies and justify inequalities based on race, ethnicity, gender and other factors; it operates through the coloniality of power, the coloniality of knowledge and the coloniality of being.

The coloniality of power is reflected in the role that the USA and some of the Western European countries have had in the control of frames of reference in the cultural and epistemic domains to evaluate the rest of the world. Race became a key category of social classification. A structural relationship between biologically superior and inferior emerged and became used on a global scale, including in Africa. Ndlovu-Gathseni (2013) believes that this speaks directly to the four constitutive elements of Western domination in Africa. First, there was a control of African economies including land expropriations and exploitation of labour and natural resources. Second, there was control of African authorities, where defeated African chiefs were given low-ranking positions as colonial officials responsible for supervising Africans as cheap labour. The third worked to control gender and sexuality by structuring families and forms of education. The last element was the control of knowledge by imposing Western ways of thinking on the development of African imagination. This worked to preserve colonial mentalities, psychologies and worldviews after the demise of colonialism. It also highlights the relationship of exploitation and domination between Africans and Westerners which started with the act of colonisation but is currently continuing through cultural, social and political power relations (Quijano, 2007; Grosfoguel, 2007).

According to the concept of the coloniality of knowledge, colonialism involved not only the physical domination and exploitation of colonised peoples and lands but also the colonisation of knowledge. An important actor in the colonisation of knowledge is universities. Colonisers installed educational institutions in the colonies, and the universities served as institutions that legitimised knowledge and social status, through education and the development of different disciplinary fields. Since the Renaissance, Westerners worked to ensure that their knowledge was perceived as truthful and universal, using Christianity to spread the message (Amin, 2009). This means that the way in which we understand and create knowledge is in relation to the dominant Western worldview. In this way, Western ways of knowing are presented as being universal, scientific, neutral and objective, whereas non-Western ways of knowing are pushed to the margins. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) uses this to explain how African meaning making, imagining, seeing and knowledge production have become displaced by a continued Western domination and Eurocentrisicm assuming universality (Quijano, 2000). In this way, Western knowledge and imperial power have worked together to inscribe coloniality across the African continent.

The coloniality of being describes the ways in which colonialism not only impacted external structures and systems but also worked to shape the way in which colonised peoples understand their own identities and sense of self. It operates by creating a division between those considered to be fully human and those considered to be less human. Fanon (2008) speaks of the colonised peoples being turned into the damned, considered to be the condemned people and the wretched of the earth. The distinction between the two groups was based on a racial hierarchy that positions white Westerners at the apex and non-Westerners at the bottom. In this way, colonised peoples are dehumanised and depersonalised which leads to a loss of their own cultural traditions and ways of being. Under colonisation, Africans experienced life informed by racialised hierarchies between the white colonisers and their Black selves. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) tells us that the world of the colonised became a domain of violence, war, rape, disease and death. They were denied full humanity and reduced to non-beings who existed within the underworld of coloniality (Grosfoguel, 2007; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Mignolo, 2007; Quijano, 2007).

Grosfoguel (2007) speaks of the myth that the abolishment of colonial administration led to a decolonisation of the world. He describes how we continue to live under the colonial matrix of power and instead have moved from global colonialism to global coloniality. The latter term is

described as continuities of colonial practices and imaginations across space and time on a global scale (Grosfoguel, 2004). However, if we are to succeed in liberation struggles we need to understand the entanglements of the colonial matrix of power and how it works to compromise, dilute and truncate such attempts. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) describes the colonial matrix of power as a complete package with social, economic, cultural, ideological, aesthetic and epistemological aspects which combine to reduce, silence, dominate, oppress, exploit and overshadow the Western world. In Africa, a darker manifestation of modernity was experienced which included the slave trade, mercantilism, imperialism, colonialism and apartheid. And yet after colonialism ended, values of freedom, equality and social justice have not emerged, but rather a postcolonial neocolonised world, built on the myth of decolonisation and illusions of freedom (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). This becomes evident today in the manifestation of emancipatory projects that do not go far enough to question the core logic of Western modernity that constructed a racialised, hierarchical, hegemonic, patriarchal and capitalist global social system.

The word ‘postcolonial’, in ‘postcolonial neocolonised’, signals studies located in the Middle East, Asia and Africa, and signals that there is still a relationship between the former colony and coloniser rather than it being a clear-cut transition between the two periods (Shodat, 1992). It refers to a complex understanding that after independence, structures and institutions remain after being imposed during the colonial era. Ashcroft (1997) uses the term to describe a society’s response to the structural, systemic, cultural and epistemological pattern of domination and exploitation experienced through colonial contact. Former colonies operate within a framework that sees the Western world at the apex of global power while the developing world (Africa) remains at the bottom with rules and routines handed down by the North (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020). Because of this, the ‘postcolonial neocolonised’ world represents illusions of freedom; it lacks coherence, essence and a life of its own, making decolonisation a myth (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). In Africa, some authors propose that leaders have little power or freedom to decide on developments in their own countries without approval from Western capitals (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). For instance, Muiu and Martin (2009) explain the complexity of the political organisation in Africa and argue that African leaders have inherited a colonially designed structure not suited to their context. This is despite an African orderly system, showing political systems, social stratification and religious beliefs, different from Westernised systems existing before the start of the slave trade. Under neocolonialism, African countries receive foreign capital for the purposes of exploitation, or with a series of

conditions attached rather than for the betterment of growing economies. These kinds of investments increase the gap between the rich and poor countries rather than equalising wealth (Nkrumah, 1965). In this way, neocolonialism can be seen as the present global condition that underpins global coloniality appearing in the form of globalisation, through which Western ideas, values and traditions are being spread across the world as global standards of governance.

2.4.3.3 Modernity

The social hierarchy established during modernity in the racial, epistemic, class, gender, and geopolitical domains has continued reproducing until today. The Peruvian scholar Anibal Qujano (2007) argues that this process happened through the promises of modernity. Modernity, as defined by Mignolo (2011), emerged between the years 1 500 and 2 000 and first appeared as a double colonisation of time and space. The colonisation of time was created by the process of conceptualising the Renaissance during the Middle Ages and the colonisation of space by the physical conquest of the new world (post-1500). This double colonisation established European traditions alongside the enforced spread of Christianity, 'civilisation,' and the gradual structuring of colonised states, starting with the 'discovery' and invention of America. In this way, modernity in the non-European world became synonymous with salvation and newness. From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment, Christian theology served as a foundation, with the discourse of salvation through conversion to Christianity evolving into a narrative of salvation through civilisation. The discourse of newness became synonymous with progress. After the Second World War, when America was established as a world force with its own global economic project, the discourses of 'salvation', 'newness' and 'progress' became morphed into 'development and modernisation.' These words work together with the logic of coloniality and so modernity and coloniality become 'two sides of the same coin.' In this way coloniality is constitutive of modernity; without coloniality, there cannot be modernity (Machado de Oliveira, 2021; Mignolo, 2007, 2011).

The notion of modernity portrays industrialisation, scientific knowledge and the formation of national states, among others, as intrinsically positive phenomena, hiding that these same phenomena bring a system of violence for others (Mignolo, 2011; Quijano, 2007). Decolonial scholars argue that even though colonial legacies might have changed in format or presentation (for example, slavery into cheap labour), the established colonial hierarchical relationships tend to persist, acting as mechanisms that we use to compose our own reality. Quijano (2007) argues

that the main lines of global power today and the distribution of resources and work are still one of colonial domination, with European culture seen as a universal referent.

Although it is recognised on a global level that knowledge and realities do occur outside of the Western-European locus, these are seen as being 'marked' thereby having limited legitimacy and recognition in the global cultural order. This idea has been theorised as an 'abyssal line,' with one side of the line representing all things pertaining to the coloniser (race, knowledge, language, culture) and the other side made invisible (Santos, 2007, p. 46). This echoes the work of Franz Fanon (2008, p. 2) who described the European coloniser as having established a conceptual 'zone of being' (coloniser) with the purpose of othering those in the 'zone of non-being' (colonised). To illustrate the point, ex-colonies, such as South Africa, may have achieved political independence from their former colonies, but this does not mean they have eradicated the superiority of Western European countries as leaders and referents in the geopolitical and economic domains at the global level.

In the case of South Africa (much like the USA, New Zealand and Australia), colonialism was replaced by settler colonialism. In the South African case, this ended in 1994, though many of the structures and cultures at play continued in the era of settler colonialism. Likewise, whiteness and the hierarchy of Western-European knowledge and ways of knowing prevailed as the canon in the epistemic realm (Quijano, 2007) in most social institutions, including higher education institutions, the foundations of which are unshakably colonial (Bhambra et al., 2018).

The promises of modernity are one of the mechanisms that tend to reproduce the colonial hierarchies. For instance, the creation of nation states in most of the countries colonised by European empires, including South Africa, established an order that for the most part has neglected the rights, languages, and ways of being and knowing of Indigenous peoples (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2023; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020).

In the epistemic domain, modernity has brought promises that secular and scientific knowledge would lead to economic and social prosperity (Machado de Oliveira, 2021; Mignolo, 2011). In South Africa and elsewhere, this promise continues operating through the presentation of a simplistic view that treats the accumulation of scientific knowledge and education as if it were intrinsically positive, without taking into consideration that knowledge and education are social phenomena, and they are not exempt from reproducing the inequalities of the context.

2.4.3.4 Globalisation

From a decolonial perspective, globalisation can be seen as another facet of coloniality (Mignolo, 2021). Globalisation has been used by some supernational national governmental agencies as a discourse that represents modernity, progress, development and happiness for all inevitable for growth, as evident in some policies such as the South African National Development Plan. However, globalisation operates with a set of rules that work to obscure the hidden hegemony of Western rules and methods of knowing, the canonisation of certain knowledges and of theological, philosophical and scientific vocabularies created during the Renaissance by European men, institutions and languages (Mignolo, 2021). The promotion of globalisation functions on the belief that it just happens, that nobody is in charge of it and that it is a natural consequence of universal history for the benefit of all (Sparke, 2013). In fact, it is the outcome of global linear thinking where observers (actors, institutions, languages) are able to establish colonial difference to regulate the world order according to European visions and interests (Schmitt, 2006).

Globalisation refers to the process of economic, political and social integration that interconnects lives around the planet. Sparke (2013) gives the example of how something happening ‘here’ affects things ‘there’ which sets up interdependencies across the globe. These interdependencies contribute to creating a world where despite inequalities in life chances, people’s lives are being bound together. These global relationships are not new and date back to the sixteenth century when capitalist economic development depended on long-distance trading networks. By the twentieth century, global trade in Europe was so extensive that daily features of life in England – cotton worn, sugar in tea, employment – were tied to everyday life from Central Africa, India or North America (Sparke, 2013). These examples illustrate an important aspect of globalisation: the relationships were created unevenly leading to economic growth in just one part of the world (initially in Europe and then later through the United States of America, parts of Asia and the Middle East) while depending on other parts of the globe. Today, the entire planet is marked with maritime and railroad lines, by aeroplane routes and electromagnetic waves and ranked according to West or not, developed and underdeveloped, emerging or fully-fledged economies supporting the classifying logic of coloniality (Mignolo, 2011).

Since the late twentieth century, the term ‘globalisation’ has featured as a central, albeit contested, concept in many debates in higher education. This is credited to the rapid expansion in industrial, financial and technological shifts during the 1960s and 1970s which packaged globalisation in a rhetoric of ‘salvation’, ‘modernisation’ and ‘development’ of the Third World[10] (Mignolo, 2021). Sparke (2013) argues that this led to the establishment of various forms of global interdependence, as networks of commodity production, finance, trade, communication, media and political organisation intertwined and intensified each other. In so doing, more and more countries and communities became linked creating an interdependent global whole. This integration had political effects on governments, who had to tie national policies to the idea that economic growth is dependent on integrating with global markets. Owing to globalisation having such a strong influence on policy making, it became loaded with political meaning.

The political discourse of globalisation in the 1980s was led by local elites using the language of ‘development’ and ‘market democracy’ signalling a neoliberal turn (Mbembe, 2016; Mignolo, 2021). Notable politicians in the West, namely Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom and President Ronald Reagan in the United States drew on the ideas of Milton Friedman and George Stigler, the intellectual leaders of the Chicago School of Economics. Their ideas claimed that a range of trade, labour and finance policies had to be reformed to make states more competitive and more open to the context of a globalised, capitalist market economy. These policy moves were easily adopted in other wealthier countries such as New Zealand and Canada. In so-called developing countries, such as Chile, Singapore and Taiwan it was imposed with various forms of authoritarian governments to manage social and political life. Other developing countries in the Middle East and Africa complied with the imposition of policy changes to satisfy the requirements of international lending agencies, such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. Sparke (2013) argues that this has resulted in a global, political common-sense approach in regard to pro-

10 Some scholars (Escobar, 1995; Shiva, 2005) have critiqued globalisation, challenging the binary between developed and developing economies. Instead, they highlight the issue of overdeveloped nations, whose excessive consumption patterns deplete the planet’s resources at unsustainable rates. Decolonial scholars often associate mass consumerism in overdeveloped countries with the imbalanced dynamics of globalisation, which perpetuate unequal resource distribution and environmental degradation.

market policy making, economic liberalisation and global market integration, referred to as "neoliberalism".

2.4.3.5 Neoliberalism

Since modernity, the Western world has bequeathed the technologies that gave it political, economic and military power to dominate the rest of the world. Yet this same process exposed the African continent to imperial capitalism, slavery, colonialism, apartheid, neocolonialism and neoliberalism (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). Although slavery, colonialism and apartheid have officially come to an end, countries in Africa develop their political projects within a global order where their capacity to deviate or challenge the current order is limited. For instance, the international division of labour in the production of computers reproduces the colonial racial hierarchy, with territories in the Global South serving primarily as producers of raw materials that are used in technological circuits, which are mainly designed in the Global North. The possibility of South Africa developing an industry that designs new technologies seems unlikely in the current state of competitiveness in the global market economy.

In this way, the coloniality of power functions to maintain the hierarchies of races created in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as Europe constructed itself as the centre of world civilisation. In this way, neo-coloniality and neoliberalism are linked by the colonial matrix of power. Neoliberal policies facilitate neocolonialism by allowing powerful countries and institutions to continue operating in developing economies on their own terms thereby perpetuating a global hierarchy. This is echoed by Amin (2000) who suggests that the dominant Western world keeps the developing world in a subjugated position by monopolising global finances and access to natural resources. Neoliberalism could arguably be seen as a manifestation of these attempts, although portrayed under the guise of salvation (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013).

Neoliberalism as an ideology and regime entails the dominance of a market logic and the economisation of resources and activities with value assigned through monetisation and metrification (Boughey & McKenna, 2021; McKenna, 2022). Neoliberalism is based on the idea that to generate the greatest growth in a global interdependent environment is to shrink government and liberate businesses and market forces from governmental control thereby creating a market-friendly government (Sparke, 2013). In so doing, class interests and business elites have been consistently advanced and all sorts of social institutions and relations have

been marketised and economised (Sparke,2013; Sayer, 2015). In the higher education sector, knowledge becomes a commodity that can be owned, traded or sold rather than having value as a common good (Ashwin, 2020). This manifestation of the 'knowledge economy' does two things. Firstly, it reshapes the university into a place of credentialing and workplace training for global markets in an economy which is knowledge and innovation based (Mbembe, 2016; Vally & Motala, 2014). Secondly, it emphasises that the value of knowledge is in its contribution to economic growth, with the belief that this leads seamlessly to the progress of nations and people.

A neoliberal economy naturally positions measured outputs as high priority and focuses on creating a free market which encourages the privatisation of once state-owned enterprises and where individuals (are expected to) provide more for themselves. Sayer (2014) argues that one of neoliberalism's key characteristics is reconceptualising members of the public as consumers and commodities. In this understanding, people can be seen as a collection of individuals competing against each other to ascend a ladder rather than being members of the same community.

Neoliberalism can thus be regarded as an ideology that is instrumental to maintaining coloniality. It is constituted by invisible threads of power that extend beyond colonial situations and have relations, structures and processes which reproduce colonial hierarchies of domination in the present (Giraldo, 2016). In other words, the rapid technological advances and the expansion of neoliberal ideology have configured a global economic integration, where the cost of such has been unequally paid by countries, institutions and social groups. Emerging economies, frequently labelled as nations in the Global South, are expected to follow the rules and standards of a few leading industrial countries, reproducing in many ways the North/south divide of colonial times (Mignolo, 2020). Rather than following their own local imperatives Africans feel pressured to board the globalisation train as quickly as possible if they are seen to be progressive or attain the same levels of progress and economic growth as some European Western countries (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). This creates a tension between universal desires and local needs.

In higher education, neoliberalism and its associated discourses of managerialism have resulted in changes to how higher education is conceptualised or carries out institutional purposes and practices (Kandiko, 2010). Higher education has become seen in market terms with an emphasis on competition, viewing students as consumers who pay fees to consume education

products thereby acquiring credentials to work as skilled human capital (Naidoo, 2003). Similarly, academics are positioned as neoliberal subjects, promoting managerial ways of administration, characterised by consumerism, profit and commodified knowledge (Badat, 2016). In the same way, processes of knowledge production are increasingly assessed in terms of the monetary value for universities as opposed to a contribution to the knowledge community or public good. The basis of competition drives institutions to assess their worth through rankings, throughput percentages and productivity (Burke, 2013). All of these factors have worked together to create an accepted model of "the university" that is being followed globally regardless of its context or people (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). This global linear thinking mapped the contours of Westernisation of the rest of the world and set up what is known as the globalisation phenomenon (Schmitt & Ulmen, 2006). Globalisation has triggered an increasing number of countries to actively seek to increase their scientific and technology capacity, embracing agendas that reproduce the modernist promise that more knowledge will translate directly into economic and social progress.

An example of this is the discourse around the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) in South Africa. The South African National Development Plan 2030 identifies science, technology and innovation as primary drivers of economic growth and socioeconomic reform (Republic of South Africa, 2012), emphasising the direct relationship between technological knowledge and economic growth. However, the logic of this relationship is too simplistic and contributes to hiding (or naturalising) the violence caused in such a relationship. For instance, the emphasis on increasing scientific and technological knowledges in a neoliberal economy stresses the importance of scientific outcomes (e.g., publications, patents, graduates, products, position on a world ranking systems), rather than the process of knowledge creation, leaving the demands for recentring African knowledges in second place.

Mbembe (2016) argues that this way of thinking has turned universities into large systems of authoritative control, a complex environment of standardisation, gradation, accountancy, classification, credits and penalties. Access and admission into these institutions have therefore been turned into a marketable product which can be rated, standardised, measured, counted and reduced to equivalence through impersonal mechanical tests shaped to select the elite.

2.5 Using the Metaphor of 'The House Modernity Built'

2.5.1 'The House Modernity Built'

Having attempted to explain the entanglements between coloniality, modernity, globalisation and neoliberalism, I now turn to the work of the *Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures Collective*. This arts and research group, composed of researchers, artists, educators, students, and activists, engages in experiments within education and draws on the metaphor they call 'The House Modernity Built.' One of the founding members of the collective, Vanessa Machado de Oliveira (2021), has included much of this conceptualisation in her book *'Hospicing Modernity'* which I will refer to throughout the explanation of the house. I will use the metaphor of this house as a way to surface what has become unconscious, invisibilised and naturalised, most especially to me as a white scholar and permanent occupant of the house who may not recognise the entangled nature of colonial hierarchies (and its legacies). Later, during my data analysis and subsequent discussions, I will return to this metaphor. I will use it to conceptualise how the higher education system in South Africa has emerged, focusing specifically on the positionality of UoTs, within the house and how this shapes the conception of the admission processes.

'The House Modernity Built' (Machado de Oliveira, 2021; Stein et al., 2020) is presented as a creative social map, developed as a method to synthesise the critiques of modernity and is conveyed through an image of a house exceeding the limits of the planet. As explained by the *Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures Collective*, this was originally inspired by Audre Lorde: "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change" (Lorde, 2018). The illustrations (Figure 2.1), as developed by the same *Gesturing towards Decolonial Futures Collective*, continued to draw on analyses emerging from Indigenous, Black and decolonial practices and studies, postcolonial theory and different strands of psychoanalysis ((Machado de Oliveira, 2021). The map has been continuously revised in collaboration with Indigenous communities in South America who added layers, questions and practices to the images. For the purposes of my study, I refer primarily to the first four frames of this creative social map.

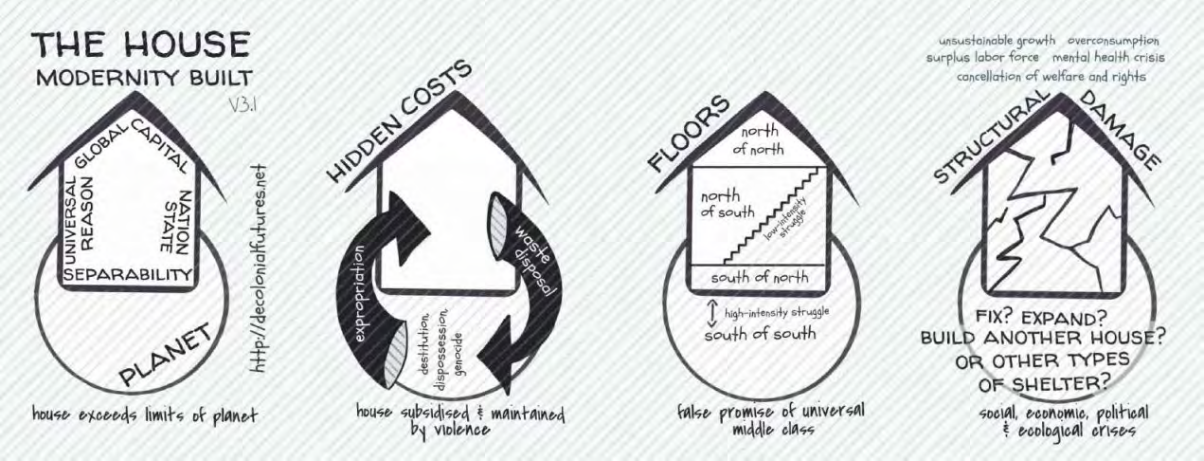


Figure 2.1: "The House Modernity Built" as imagined by the Gesturing towards decolonial futures collective (see housemycelium.pdf - decolonialfutures.net)

In the description that follows, I heavily draw on the explanation that the Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures Collective have given to the different dimensions of 'The House Modernity Built.'

The first frame of 'The House Modernity Built' presents a house built by modernity/coloniality whose size exceeds what the planet is capable of supporting. The house is described as sitting on a foundation based on separability, separating earth from humans and in hierarchies of human value. This separability enables the production of categories and measurements that work to divide, separate and create the world as we know it. This foundation creates degrees of hierarchical value that rank different entities against one another according to their perceived value to modernity's economies. Separation between human beings occurs through the creation of hierarchies premised on race, gender, class, ability, employment and nationality.

The carrying walls of the house are represented on one side by Western humanist values and enlightenment knowledge traditions, which promise consensus and universal relevance and which are secured by denying the relevance of non-Western knowledges (Ahenakew, 2016; Santos, 2007). This wall promises seamless progress achieved through certainty, mastery and predictability expressed primarily through science and technology. The promise of seamless progress rests on eliminating other kinds of knowledge systems and creates the expectation that certain people have the authority to impose meaning, arbitrate justice and distribute resources according to modernity's order of legitimacy, status, merit and fairness.

The other carrying wall represents nation states, promising security through the mechanisms of borders, rights and national homogeneity all of which require violence in order to be secured (Byrd, 2011; Tuck & Yang, 2012). This wall promises security and order through protecting and policing borders as well as fostering social cohesion through constructed national identities. These promises rely on state violence and often occupation of Indigenous lands, generating expectations of unlimited security and the right to define exclusionary communities.

The roof is made of global capitalism, covered by economic growth and consumption as a measure of progress and civilisation (Coulthard, 2014; Da Silva, 2007). The roof operates by promising happiness and comfort through wealth accumulation. This promise relies on continuous economic growth through the expropriation and exploitation of humans and non-human beings. It fosters expectations of unlimited enjoyments and infinite consumption for those who can afford it.

Although the house offers a collection of 'shiny promises,' (Quijano, 2000; Stein et al., 2023; Stein et al., 2020) these are paid for through a colonial underside which is required to build and maintain the house, as illustrated in the second frame. These costs include ongoing expropriation, land theft, exploitation, genocides and the marginalisation and erasure of Indigenous knowledge (also known as epistemicide) to name a few (Stein et al., 2020). These costs are reflected in the second house of Figure 2.1 above in the shape of two arrows that contribute to a circular cycle. One of these arrows, named expropriation, points to the extraction of resources from the planet to the house, while the other arrows show waste generated by the house being dumped on the planet. These arrows depict the pattern of overconsumption and the pattern of unsustainable growth.

The third image in Figure 1 depicts the internal floors of the house, with the penthouse portrayed as the North of the North, belonging to those who have accumulated the most wealth and power in the house and have secured their position as legitimate owners of the house. Given their positionality and access to resources, it would be logical to suggest that these occupants have more influence in decision making and could be considered what Archer (1995, 2000) calls social actors, those who may hold roles of power or whose rules are followed because they possess an attribute deemed as valuable (being white or male as an example).

The second level are those invested in climbing the internal stairs of mobility in an effort to reach the promised status and social or financial security of the penthouse. Given that individuals may be placed in disempowered positions in society because of factors like race, social class, gender, nationality, age or disability status, they often have less access to social resources, which in turn reduces their power and influence. It is only if these individuals organise themselves through collective action in ways which provide access to resources in pursuit of their common ambition that they have more influence to change their status and climb the stairs of mobility. The alternative is that those who find themselves occupying the middle space may earn sufficient status through conforming (taking on the language, habits, dress code or beliefs to demonstrate that they are deserving) and climbing up a few risers of the stairs. They will, however, never reach the top of the stairs, nor will they disrupt the route to the top. However, by ascending the stairs riser by riser, they are demonstrating their investment in the maintenance of the house.

The basement is in the South of the North where those who have been exploited and marginalised for the sake of building and maintaining the house are located. With a low hierarchical worth, most of these 'primary agents' have little access to resources and find themselves with little influence to make any changes to the house. In this way, they are expected to comply with the rules of the house to maintain their right to accommodation and live under the threat of being evicted outside. Outside the house is the "South of the South", those who live without any security that the house promises. This group may have subsidised the house's construction and paid the highest price for its maintenance. They may be fighting for alternatives to the house or perhaps be seeking entry but their traditional livelihoods, beliefs, and 'ways of being' are not recognised as valuable to the house.

The fourth image shows that forms of political, economic and ecological pressures have become unsustainable for 'the House Modernity Built'. As described by Machado de Oliveira (2021) and Stein et al. (2020), it shows the house has reached its limits allowing structural cracks to develop. Because of this, the structure appears unstable, there are cracking foundations with a leaky roof and mould is growing throughout the house. This damage comes from the weight of social, ecological, economic and political crises which include global pandemics, climate crises, unsustainable growth, overconsumption, a surplus labour force, economic instability and social fragmentation, among others. But despite the house's poor state Machado de Oliveira (2021) and Stein et al. (2020) identify various groupings of people. The

first group, many of whom have historically or involuntarily provided the labour and materials for the construction and maintenance of the house, are lining up outside its doors wanting access. The second grouping is made up of those within the house who remain oblivious of its deteriorating state and thus do not recognise any damage. Lastly, there is another group of people who notice the cracks and structural damage, and who each react differently as related to their individual approach to modernity, de/colonisation, and related theories of change. In recognition of the house's state and in reference to the final frame of the illustration, the *Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures Collective* invites the questions: *Should we fix it? Expand it? Build another house? Learn to live without the house? Create another kind of shelter?*

2.5.2 Decolonial theories of change

The *Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures Collective* suggests that those who live within the house have become deeply conditioned by its structure, intellectually, affectively and relationally. From the lenses of Critical Realism (Bhaskar, 2002), it may be reasonable to suggest that 'The House Modernity Built' has created affective and relational mechanisms that operate as a hidden mechanism in the layer of the Real, the layer where certain fears are harnessed within the house and recast as desires for other things, in turn becoming perceived entitlements inside the house. As an example, the fear of scarcity experienced by those committed to climbing the stairs of the house could become a desire for accumulation and turn into an entitlement to property. These feedback loops keep people within the house deeply attached to and dependent on it, thereby conditioning the occupants to reinforce modernity's economies by driving towards further investments in modernity (often without noticing). According to Machado de Oliveira (2021), breaking these affective and relational loops is as difficult as interrupting addictions especially when each structural tenet of the house (its foundations, walls and roof) makes promises which work to naturalise and normalise colonial expectations for its occupants.

As discussed above, the occupants may or may not recognise the ailing state of the house. Those that do recognise the structural cracking will have a different set of reactions emerging from different orientations to modernity, de/colonisation, and related theories of institutional and systemic change. Based on these ideas, the *Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures Collective* distinguishes three theories of change a) soft reform of modernity, b) radical reform of modernity and lastly c) modernity beyond reform.

A change emerging from the ‘soft reform’ space would not be considered decolonial by many scholars as it does not change the terms of reference. Rather, it focuses on superficial changes that do not disrupt the underlying rationales and structures that cause inequality. Those who support soft reforms do not see the need for decolonisation, but rather address reforms that allow more individuals from marginalised groups to enter the house of modernity, only if they accept the existing terms of reference of the house. Using the processes of admission as an example, an institution may introduce a holistic review process for admission, where, in addition to academic performance, they consider extracurricular activities or life challenges faced by applicants. This appears to broaden access, as more diverse groups are invited into the house, but does not overhaul the deeper systemic barriers that decide who gets an invitation and who does not.

From this ‘soft reform’ perspective, colonisation is understood as the exclusion from access to the gifts of colonial societies such as the social mobility of capitalism promised by having access to higher education, a universal reason offered by Western enlightenment which brings about a sense of certainty about how things work offered by having access to disciplinary knowledge, unrestricted autonomy or authority and possessive individualism offered by separating humans from the earth. This approach to change seeks methodological adjustments to the system seen as fundamentally sound, requiring only small improvements to ensure its efficiency and effectiveness. Thus, the ‘soft reform’ space emphasises that individuals determine their own success and failure as measured by the existing system with little reference to structural power relations or alternative measures of success or modes of knowing or being. There is an acknowledgement of difference, but it is prescribed by those doing the including (or excluding) avoiding any social conflict or significant shifts in structure or power relations. The ideal is to incorporate forms of “difference that makes no difference” (Machado de Oliveira, 2021, p. 116) with those included absorbed by the existing structures. Should disagreements arise between individuals with power and status and those without during this process, they are addressed through rational dialogue orientated towards a predefined consensus. In this space, there is no acknowledgement that the debate may be skewed from the outset by those who determine the terms of the conversation: who speaks, when and what is intelligible, comfortable and desirable. Any efforts to disrupt this conversation by primary agents are delegitimised and deemed violent or unproductive, with the only possible solution coming in the form of expanded access to existing institutions.

Those whose theories of change emerge from a 'radical reform' space see colonisation as exclusionary with inadequate distribution and question both what we do in modern institutions and how or why we do it. Colonial legacies are seen to require radical restructuring. Critiques emerging from this space tend to prioritise one or two dimensions of social justice such as racism, capitalism or hetero patriarchy, without necessarily understanding the interconnections between them. The aim of this space is to disrupt modern mechanisms which produce enduring inequalities. In this way, it is hoped that allowing spaces for different knowledges, peoples and experiences with redistributed resources will change the system at a deeper level by prioritising their epistemic value. For processes of admission, this could look at rethinking traditional academic performance metrics and recognising the epistemic value of experiences, ways of knowledge and languages of applicants from historically marginalised backgrounds who come from poor or rural areas.

The final reaction, as explained by the *Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures Collective*, seeks deep, transformative change and understands that more ways of knowing and redistributing resources will not be enough to shift the modern/colonial structure. It is called a 'beyond reform' reaction and here, colonialism is understood as what makes modernity possible. Modernity is seen to be extractive, unsustainable and not able to be reformed. With this understanding, adding to an existing framework is seen to limit the necessary interruption of colonial legacies (Ahenakew, 2016). According to the *Gesturing towards Decolonial Futures Collective*, theories of change rooted in the 'beyond reform' space are varied but generally fall under three responses. Those who opt to 'walk out' of the existing system seek alternatives with guarantees. They may, for example, reclaim social organisation or epistemologies that have been actively oppressed in modernity. However, these may still have some roots in colonial desires and may be romanticised in that contradictions or shortcomings can be ignored (Amsler, 2019). The ability to walk out should also be understood in contrast to those who do not have the option to walk out, as they are structurally excluded from the start.

The next response, termed 'hacking' involves the redirection of resources from within the system towards the development of something else. This approach can be seen as one foot in, one foot out, which requires playing the game of one institution while bending the rules to suit the other. Stein et al. (2020) suggest that those reacting from this space may position themselves beyond implication, and as a result, fail to attend to structural complicity in harm. The last response is called 'hospicing' where modernity's inevitable end is recognised, but people aim

to enable a ‘good’ death through which they can learn important lessons with an understanding of the mistakes of the system. The lessons learned can be applied to something different but require self-reflection and facing up to our own harmful desires and habits of being in order to avoid the reproduction of colonial patterns.

Although understanding the differences in the approaches to decolonial change is important, Stein et al. (2020) argue that it is equally important to explore how these positions are mobilised and enacted. This is important because many of us are socialised to modern systems and institutions and situating oneself on the ‘soft/radical / beyond’ reform spectrum does not necessarily prevent us from reproducing modern desires and habits of being. It remains difficult to break existing patterns despite intentions to do things differently. In this way, it is not a lack of information that leads to a continuation of coloniality but also enduring investments in and desires for what ‘The House Modernity Built’ promises.

2.5.3 Reactions to the state of ‘The House Modernity Built’

As each occupant navigates their way, there will be different reactions to the state of ‘The House Modernity Built.’ The first kind of reaction belongs to those who are wholly naturalised to modernity/coloniality. It may be reasonable to suggest that some of these individuals are ‘social actors’ who occupy spaces within the penthouse given their naturalisation to modernity/coloniality. They have more power and influence given their increased access to resources and may feel under threat so opt for changes that strengthen the security around the house. They may build a higher fence or remove inhabitants of the house who they feel no longer deserve their space as they are believed to draw on more resources than they contribute. This is generally based on the concept of separability and goes back to drawing lines between inferiority/superiority or deserving/undeserving. Stein et al. (2020) describes this position as ‘no critique’ and explains how those with power (social actors) may create an internal panic in the house, used to justify a strong reaction and any subsequent structural changes. The position of ‘no critique’ is not interested in decolonisation and may intensify existing colonial violences that have targeted minority groups. This works to sustain the house and its structures and their interests for generations (Whyte, 2017).

A different reaction comes from those people situated in the ‘soft reform’ space who recognise that parts of the house need to be patched up or even replaced, but do not question the longevity of the house and believe that no alternatives to the house are imaginable. It is in this kind of

space that there is a desire to 'check the decolonisation box' in ways which may satisfy policy or give a feeling of doing 'good', without giving anything up or making any deep structural changes. Jimmy et al. (2019) suggest that this manifests in the formula of *decolonisation = business as usual + small Indigenous contribution – guilt and risk of bad press.*

Those in the radical reform space recognise an opportunity to renovate the house; they may add extra rooms, expand it so as to accommodate more people and use more sustainable materials. They still believe the foundations of the house to be suitable and therefore build from that which exists.

Those in the final space, 'beyond reform', look beyond global capitalism, universal reason and separation. In such a space different options arise; the 'walk out' approach seeks to replace the house with a new version offering similar securities, and the 'hacking' and 'hospicing' approaches might consider different forms of shelter, using recycled materials from the original house while inviting others to join in on the build.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the ontological basis of this study, elucidating how I conceptualise coloniality as a set of mechanisms particularly relevant to this inquiry into access. While acknowledging that changes in university admission processes emerge from the interplay of structural, cultural and PEPs, this study emphasises the specific influence of coloniality within these broader dynamics.

Furthermore, taking a realist position requires that, as I move into analysing or presenting the empirical data, I understand it to be a representation of multiple events and experiences, rather than truth in their own right. As the researcher, using decolonial thought as a lens, I aim to identify causal mechanisms acknowledging that these may be partial or fallible. However, through careful and explicit articulation, and by using the metaphor of 'The House Modernity Built' (Machado de Oliveira, 2021; Stein et al., 2020) I aim to present compelling conclusions. In the following chapter, I describe how I use the tools of Social Realism[11,] particularly the

11 The idea to combine decolonial thought as a lens with the tools of Social Realism was presented at the 2022 Rhodes Postgraduate Conference. The presentation was entitled *'Crossing boundaries or "selling out"? Using a Western theory in a decolonial study'*

morphogenetic framework, which suggests that the parts and people can only be linked by analysis of their interplay over time, and thus examining a problem within a specified time becomes important. In this way, the morphogenetic framework can be used to account for how the powers of the ‘parts’ condition the projects of ‘people’ over time to account for reproduction or change.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Chapter Introduction

Every research project requires a clear design built on a series of deliberate decisions. In qualitative research, it is particularly important to explain and justify these choices, as the study's authenticity and trustworthiness depend on them. This chapter aims to outline the research design decisions, providing careful justifications and showing how they address the research questions. This involves describing the range of data generated and collected, the chosen methods and the analytical strategies or frameworks used.

This chapter also intends to show how theory, data and analysis align to inform the research methods. The methodological approach is intended to show coherence with the ontological and epistemological premises underpinning the study, as presented in Chapter Two. It attempts to demonstrate the theoretical framework at 'work' by ensuring the rigour and integrity of its application. My main aim in this chapter is to make explicit the relationship between what is being researched, the purpose and method being used and how the theory is used to make sense of the data generated.

3.2 Looking at the Research Questions

As discussed in Chapter Two, Archer (1996) argues that change in the social world emerges from a complex interplay between structural, cultural and agential mechanisms. In order to make sense of how such changes emerge or do not emerge, key mechanisms that condition the events and experiences have to be identified. To interpret how such changes emerge or do not, I need to identify the ways in which particular mechanisms condition key events or experiences.

The main question that this study aimed to answer was:

> *How and why have the processes of admission to universities of technology changed over the last three decades?*

To help address the main research question stated above, the following sub-questions were formulated:

How have requirements for admission changed in universities of technology over the last three decades?

How have structural, cultural and agential mechanisms enabled or constrained change in the process of admissions in universities of technology within the given timeframe?

How and what are the specific mechanisms through which colonial legacies have been (re)produced in the processes of admission at university of technologies?

The focus of the study was on understanding the changes made to the processes of admission to UoTs over the last three decades. It became important from a critical realist perspective to analyse data from the Empirical and Actual domains, but then to also dig deeper in order to identify the mechanisms at play at the level of the Real. This analysis involved moving from empirical data, for example, a description of experiences provided by a participant, to suggesting the conditions which could have led to their emergence. This allowed me to ask, '*What must the world have been like for these events or changes to emerge?*' In so doing, I acknowledge that a deeper level of reality exists and that this level of the Real involves a complex interplay of mechanisms. One such mechanism I have understood to be is coloniality, which operates to shape the structures and cultures of higher education in ways that have become naturalised and therefore invisible.

3.3 Study Sample

The research design consisted of a qualitative case study (Merriam, 2009) exploring the case of admissions at two UoTs: The Durban University of Technology (DUT) and Tshwane University of Technology (TUT). According to Stake (1995), a case study is the examination of the complexity of a case, in a way that comes to understand its activities and particular circumstances. Case studies have several key characteristics. Firstly, they entail a thorough exploration of a particular phenomenon within its real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2017). While the phenomenon and context are entangled, a case study should represent a bounded system, with the case clearly defined and delimited (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Secondly, case studies use multiple sources and types of evidence to capture the full complexity of the phenomenon (Yin, 2017). Using a case study in the context of this study was particularly useful as it provided a detailed and rich description of all interrelated factors (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). This depth of analysis was important for identifying both structures and cultures, by providing an in depth

contextualised examination of specific institutions. Through data collection in the form of interviews and document analysis I was able to understand how broader structures can shape individual experiences while simultaneously revealing underlying cultures. Analysing these interconnections provided deeper insight into the complex interplay of mechanisms at work.

The two institutions were purposefully selected for a variety of reasons. Perhaps the most obvious is that they are both classified as UoTs. Furthermore, they are both based in urban city centres and collectively represent more than half the total student headcount enrolments in South African UoTs, with totals of 33 196 and 58 369 students respectively (CHE, 2023). Both institutions are born from complex mergers between historically white former technikons and historically Black former technikons. The DUT is the product of a merger between the former ML Sultan Technikon, initially reserved for Indian students and Natal Technikon for white counterparts in Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa. Similarly, TUT was born from a merger between Technikon Northern Gauteng and Technikon North-West, both of which were classified as historically Black institutions with Technikon Pretoria, an advantaged white institution, all three of which were based in Gauteng, South Africa. During the time of the merger, the now DUT renamed itself the 'Durban Institute of Technology.' This new name changed within two years to 'Durban University of Technology' when UoTs were permitted to use the word 'university' in the name. The change in name and using the word 'university' had ramifications for each institution's strategic plan moving forward, which will be further discussed in Chapter Five.

The comparability between institutions continues as they both appear to actively participate in international university ranking systems and celebrate their individual placements on various ranking scales. According to the Times Higher Education Ranking, DUT was ranked between position 1 001 and 1 200 in the World University Ranking. The same metric positioned TUT between 1 201 and 1 500 of the best universities (THE, 2024). When the comparison included only young universities, both institutions were ranked between 401 and 500 (THE, 2024). I specifically noted each institution's global ranking as they became relevant to the findings presented in Chapter Five.

By purposively selecting these two institutions, which share a comparable historical context, I was able to generate a broader range of data. Having two cases of analysis also helped to call into question my naturalised assumptions of how things work in the process of admission at UoTs. This was particularly important given that I have been employed as a lecturer at one of

these institutions for the past decade, while the other is unfamiliar to me. Examining data that was both familiar and sometimes unfamiliar enabled me to identify key concepts in one case study and cross-check them with the other, ensuring that no important elements were overlooked.

3.4 Data Collection

I used multiple data sources for my research: an analysis of historical literature about South African higher education, national and institutional policies and semi-structured interviews. I chose to analyse historical South African higher education literature and policies alongside data from interviews to produce rich data that would help me better understand the pre-existing contexts (especially as this study spans parts of my childhood). Maxwell (2011) argues that it is through generating rich data that researchers gain a more revealing picture of events alongside reducing the risk of researcher bias to influence description and explanation.

Using multiple sources of data also worked to ensure that the case studies were thoroughly explored and that depth was achieved in the analysis and subsequent findings (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Yin, 2017). Gillham (2000) argues that the findings should, as much as possible, reflect the full reality of the case studied, and that no one kind of source is likely to be sufficient on its own. Using multiple sources of evidence and considering the strengths and weaknesses of each is a key characteristic of case study research and helps to strengthen the research findings by braiding together different strands for a greater understanding of the case (Baxter & Jack, 2010). I now move to discuss how I proceeded in gaining access to and collecting data using literature, interviews and historical documents.

3.4.1 Literature

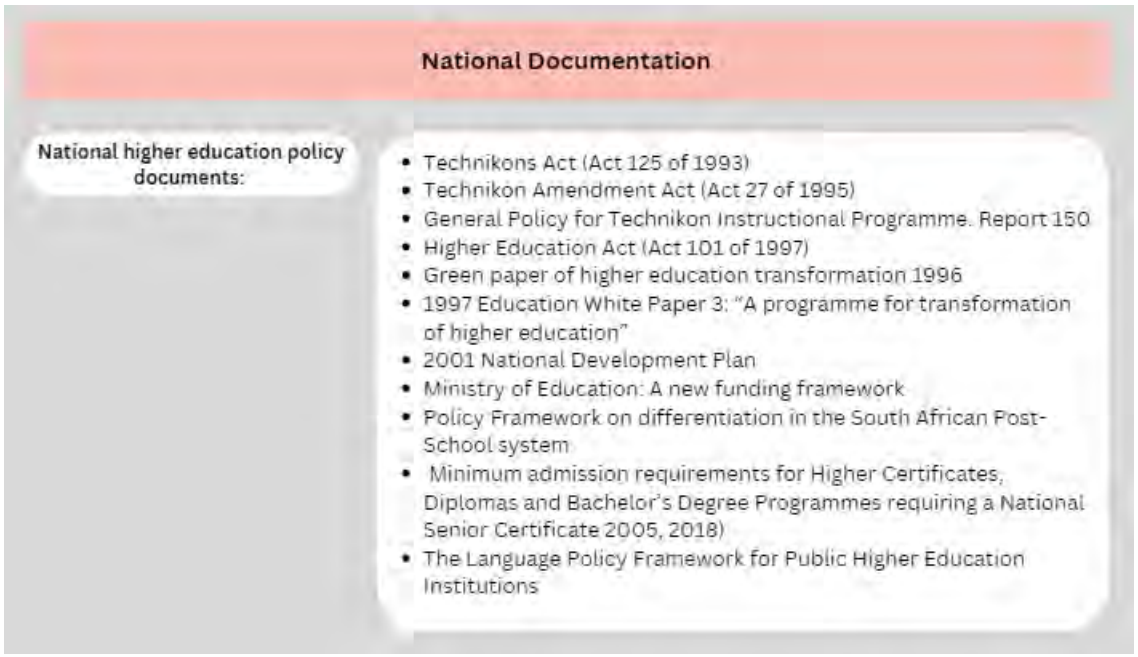
A key aspect of Archer's morphogenetic framework is to understand that every current emergent property has a history, and an important part of giving any account of that property is to explain where it came from rather than relying on how it is currently operationalised (Archer & Morgan, 2020). Methodologically speaking, this required me to move backwards from what currently exists using the morphogenetic approach to think systematically about what has occurred over time. This gave me an understanding of the prior structural context that conditioned interaction moving forward. To do this, I relied on texts about the history of higher education in South Africa and, more specifically, the emergence of the UoT as an institutional type. This allowed me to understand the conditioning structures of 30 years ago, where this

study begins. Merriam (1998) argues that relying on prior studies or literature may be the only realistic approach for historical studies, while Bowen (2009) suggests this as a worthy method as literature can help in understanding the historical roots of specific issues.

Using this approach, I engaged with the literature in two distinct ways. First, I used it to collect and synthesise previous research systematically. Second, I considered it as part of my data collection, as it worked to describe the conditioning structures inherited by the first democratic government of South Africa. For this reason, the following chapter, Chapter Four, is both a literature review and the beginning of my data analysis, a matter I return to when I discuss the use of the morphogenetic cycle for analysis.

3.4.2 National and institutional documentation

The historical documents included in the study as a source of information were gathered from the public domain and were therefore relatively easy to access (see Figure 3.1). I used these documents to understand the structural and cultural contexts from which the processes of admission emerged.



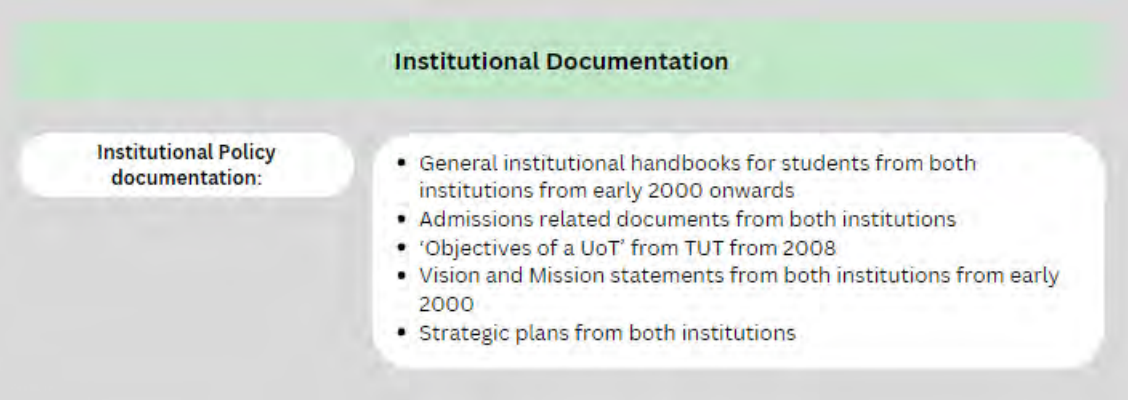


Figure 3.1: List of documents analysed from early 2000 to 2024

In reviewing the documents, I tried to be what Yin (2017) calls a 'good listener' by concerning myself with whether the originator of the document intended any important messages between the lines, looking for any inferences that I could use to corroborate with other sources of information to gain further insight. In this way, May (2001) describes how documents can represent a collection of social practices and constitute particular readings of social events. Understanding that a document is a 'social fact' produced, shared and used in socially organised ways (Atkinson & Coffey, 2011) allowed me to use them to access the cultural realm by exploring the aspirations and intentions of the periods to which they refer.

As a data source about the structural realm, documents often record significant events and how resources are to be allocated. From an agential perspective, documents are important for recording who the decision makers are and who may be responsible for various events. I analysed the documents to examine the discourses that construct the ideas, values and beliefs shaping admission processes. Similarly, I examined them to identify structures and the roles of various agents.

According to Yin (2017), documents serve as a source of information that has various strengths. For example, once they are available they can be reviewed repeatedly as the study progresses, they are unobtrusive in that they are not created as a result of the study, they are also specific in nature as they can be particular to an institution or detail an exact process (such as admissions) and they can be broad and cover a long period, important in a study such as mine which spans across multiple decades.

Although documentation can play a prominent role in data collection for case study research, Yin (2017) warns against mistakenly assuming that all kinds of documents contain the

unmitigated truth. It is important to acknowledge that all documents are written for a specific purpose and a specific audience other than those of the particular study. In this sense, I was an observer needing to identify the objectives of interested stakeholders. May (2001) describes how documents can represent a collection of social practices and constitute particular readings of social events. In so doing they can tell us about the aspirations and intentions of the periods to which they refer.

3.4.3 Interviews

The semi-structured interview can be seen as a professional conversation aimed at obtaining descriptions of the interviewee's life world, with the goal of interpreting the meaning of the phenomenon being described (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2014). In other words, it is a conversation that has a structure and purpose which involves careful questioning and listening. According to Gillham (2000), one of the strengths of using interviews as a data collection tool lies in its ability to produce rich data through communication, most especially when the sample size is small and questions are designed to be open ended. Open-ended questions allow the opportunity for an extended response with prompts and probes to clarify answers or gain further insight. Despite interviews having a reputation as a reliable method, it has attracted fair critique, which I needed to consider during the analysis. Alvesson (2003) suggests that interviewees can be influenced by the interview context and by being conditioned by how one should normally express themselves on particular topics. Furthermore, it should be acknowledged that interviews are socially structuring and socially structured. They create a specific type of social interaction governed by conventions of appropriateness, privacy and disclosure as well as particular distributions of material and cognitive resources (Fairclough et al., 2010). For these reasons, it became particularly important to refer to historical documentation in the analysis process.

My study used purposeful sampling strategies to determine who I wanted to interview. This technique is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases (Patton, 2014). This involves identifying individuals who are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with the phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Clark, 2017).

I specifically chose to interview those whom Archer (2007) terms 'social actors', or individuals who represent(ed) a position of power within the processes of admission, such as vice-

chancellors, registrars or directors of institutional quality departments. I did so because I believed that their experience or voice might reveal underlying mechanisms not evident in the document analysis, and they could articulate how national policies were operationalised within the context of UoTs. These individuals would be considered what Gillham (2000) calls 'elites,' a person in a position of authority or especially an expert who is capable of giving answers with insight into the area of interest. Gilham (2000) recommends these interviews be relatively unstructured as the interviewee will know more about the topic and context. In my study, my participants might know more than I do as a PhD candidate, and in fact, may tell me the questions I should be asking to direct me to what I need to know. Furthermore, the participants by virtue of their experience and authority will have their own structuring of their knowledge and may respond better to topics than direct questions. The benefit is that these kinds of interviewees may be particularly useful in suggesting other people to talk to or directing me to sources of information. It is for these reasons that I decided to use semi-structured interviews, using an interview guide (see Appendix B) that focused on particular topics and that included some key questions which aimed to achieve a natural conversation (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2014). This gave me flexibility in what and how a topic was covered while allowing the participants to have autonomy in directing me into other areas they thought relevant.

After receiving ethical clearance, I contacted my participants via email. Participation in the interviews depended on their willingness and ability to commit to a once-off online interview. I chose to conduct online interviews for two reasons; firstly, the individuals were geographically located all over the country and outside the national borders of South Africa, and secondly, it was a more convenient approach given their schedules. In total, I invited 11 interviewees to participate of which nine agreed to be interviewed; two participants (both were from DHET) did not reply to my emails after numerous follow-ups. As listed in Figure 3.2 below, the people I approached comprised representatives from DHET, previous registrars, vice-chancellors, representatives from quality departments and individuals primarily concerned with institutional admissions.

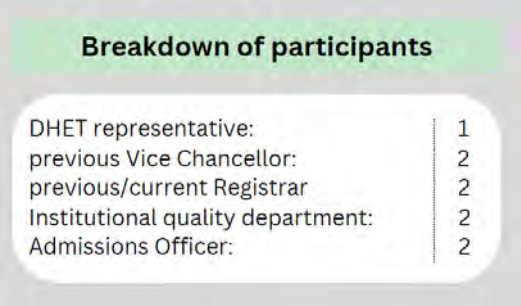


Figure 3.2: Breakdown of participants

Collectively this grouping had representation from UoTs, DHET and traditional universities, specifically to get a sense of the broader higher education sector. The interviews lasted between one hour to two and a half hours in one instance.

Following a discussion about the process and obtaining informed consent, I began each interview by requesting permission to record the conversation. I also asked if the video could be turned on so the interview could be more engaging. My initial question could be considered an icebreaker, where I asked each interviewee to describe how they came to hold their current positions. This question successfully established rapport with the interviewee while learning about their experience (Mikecz, 2012). I found this first question particularly helpful for myself as the interviewer, as at first I felt intimidated to be interviewing 'elites' (Gillham, 2000). I soon realised that when I asked specific questions about their experiences, they perceived it as a compliment and were more willing to share their reflections, appreciating my familiarity with their experience. I believe this helped to break down some of the power dynamics associated with the difference in status between them and me. From this point, I used a semi-structured interview approach to ask questions which led to deeper discussions. It is for this reason that each interview progressed differently, although the main topics were covered in all of them. I did this to gain an understanding of the broader context of higher education and identify the ideas, values and beliefs (which manifest in discourses) concerning UoTs, their students and the processes of admission.

I have chosen to anonymise all data quotes generated from the interviews. However, when citing data from publicly available documents in the findings chapters (Chapters Four, Five and Six), the specific source is referenced as they were all found in the public domain. For all interview transcripts, I used a coding system which I have included in the data analysis chapters. As such, the data quotes from the interviews do not reveal the institution or

participants' identity. Rather, they give an indication of position: VC (Vice-Chancellor), QD (Quality Representative), RE (Registrar), AO (Admissions officer) or Department of Higher Education and Training representative (DR) followed by a sequential number.

3.5 Data Analysis

3.5.1 Combining a lens of decoloniality with the tools of Social Realism

As described in Chapter Two, my study centres on identifying the specific mechanisms through which colonial legacies have been reproduced in the processes of admission at UoTs over the last three decades. In order to do this, I drew on the conceptualisation of modernity/coloniality, which highlights the interconnectedness between the promises of modernity and the ongoing reproduction of colonial legacies across all social domains. As mentioned earlier, I began with the assumption that coloniality is one of the hidden mechanisms operating within the domain of the Real. To uncover how it functions, I used the tools of Social Realism, analytical dualism and the morphogenetic framework.

To identify these mechanisms and understand how admission processes have emerged over time, I needed to analyse the interaction of cultures, structures and agents. Given that the 'parts' and the 'people' have independent emergent powers it became necessary to identify the role that each domain has played in the emergence of admission processes as we understand them today. Although emergent properties operate simultaneously, the separate analysis of the three domains was important so that the identification of emergent properties could be attributed to each entity. The temporal separation of structure, culture and agency for the purposes of analysing data is termed analytical dualism (Archer, 1995).

3.5.1.1 Analytical dualism

Archer (1995) goes to great lengths to emphasise that, in reality, the domains of structure, culture and agency are not separated. However, they can be separated for analytical purposes to acknowledge their irreducible and autonomous emergent properties. This becomes necessary to explain the processes involved in structuring society and how restructuring takes place over a period of time. We can also then explore the properties of mechanisms in relation to the 'parts' in terms of CEPs, SEPs and the agent's PEPs.

Analytical dualism provides explanatory power by foregrounding the temporal aspects with pre- and post-phases that can be studied to analyse changes over time and to explain how these domains influence each other (Danermark et al., 2002). It also recognises the dynamism of the social world and acknowledges that the 'parts' and 'people' shape and reshape one another through their interaction over time. I have used Archer's (1995) concept of analytical dualism to identify the structures, cultures and agential mechanisms (which may manifest as events or experiences) and how an interplay of them has enabled or constrained shifts in admission processes at UoTs over the last three decades. As an additional layer of analysis, I used decolonial thought as a lens to analyse how colonial legacies have shaped such change with the goal of identifying how and which mechanisms allow colonial legacies to be reproduced.

3.5.1.2 The morphogenetic framework

According to Archer (1995), the morphogenetic framework provides a methodological approach aligned with realist social ontology through which the emergence of certain events can be investigated by separately analysing the interactions of structure, culture and agency in a given context. It can help to account for why the emergence of change does or does not happen. The morphogenetic framework was useful to my study as it gave me a structured way with defined timelines through which the interactions of people with the parts could be studied. This enabled me to explain what or why changes did or did not occur in the admission processes of UoTs and how these were underpinned by coloniality as a mechanism operating in the realm of the real.

3.5.1.3 Morphogenesis and morphostasis in the morphogenetic framework

Morphogenesis is a term used to describe the process of social change; "morpho" means shape and "genesis" signalling that the shaping is the product of social relations. "Morphogenesis" refers to "those processes which tend to elaborate or change a system's given form, state or structure" (Archer, 1995, p. 166). Conversely, morphostasis is the maintenance or reproduction of a system's given form, organisation or state. The principles of emergence and analytical dualism recognise structure, culture and agency as analytically and ontologically distinct which possess causal powers that form the basis of the morphogenesis/morphostasis framework (Archer, 1995).

Time is a central part of Archer's morphogenetic framework. Danermark and colleagues (2002) suggest that structure and agency can only be linked by analysis of their interplay over time,

and thus examining a problem within a specified time becomes important. In this way, the morphogenetic framework can be used to account for how the powers of the 'parts' condition the projects of 'people' over time to account for reproduction or change. Social structures (such as how applicants are categorised) are seen to possess causal, invisible powers which continue to exert their effects upon agents and actors; with this understanding, the morphogenetic framework is used to describe *how* these powers are exerted and to what effect. Archer (1995) highlights that it is these individuals who reproduce and change society; they do so through conscious and intentional action or mediation, although sometimes this has unplanned consequences. The morphogenetic framework conceptualises the conditional effects of structure upon action while considering those differently positioned.

The morphogenetic approach is characterised by three phases within a cycle which in reality overlap and intertwine with each other: a 'before' (pre-existing context created by previous agents in that society), a 'during' (the process of interaction with agents) and an 'after' (either morphostasis or morphogenesis), with the final phase signalling the start of a new cycle. Analytical dualism is used to separate these three phases in order to identify which structural, cultural or agential mechanisms are more influential on whom and why. This allows for a rich description and greater explanatory power in understanding how admissions processes have changed over time. The morphogenetic approach is used to analyse the emergence, reproduction and transformation of structural, cultural and agential systems within UoTs. As discussed, Archer's morphogenetic cycle involves three phases (see Figure 3.3 below). The first phase termed T_1, represents structural and cultural conditioning; the second, termed T_2 and T_3 involves the period of social interaction and lastly, T_4, social and cultural elaboration.

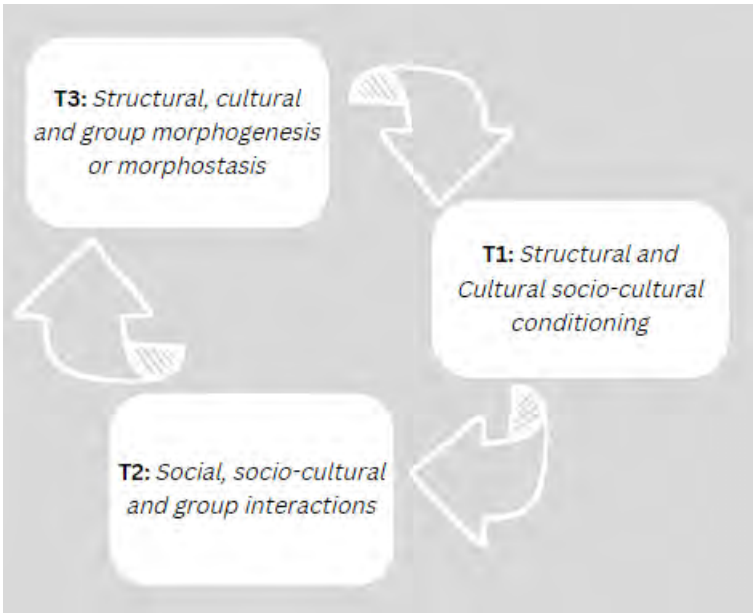


Figure 3.3: Illustration of a cycle of change for structure, culture and agency (adapted from Horrocks, 2009)

- **T_1: Structural and cultural socio-cultural conditioning**

T_1 of the morphogenetic framework represents the beginning of an endless three-part cycle where T equals time. T_1 describes the conditioning mechanisms either structural or cultural or both that include the conditioning mechanisms for current agents (Archer et al., 1998). This is discussed in Chapter Four of the thesis. The determination of T_1 was made by me and has thus been set at pre-democratic South Africa, a time which marked the ending of the apartheid regime. To use the morphogenetic framework, I need to consider the ways in which apartheid ideologies and structures shaped the context in order to identify how the emergence of new ideas, beliefs or policies was enabled or constrained. In this first phase, agents are positioned in 'inherited' contexts of which they have no control. Archer at al. (1998) describes this phase as being born into families or environments that are not of our making. The features of the structural and cultural contexts were shaped by the previous cycle and these structures act as constraints or enablements for the action of agents. These structures work to condition and shape the circumstances agents involuntarily find themselves in and predispose what courses of actions are subsequently taken before agential interactions, intentions or concerns are considered.

Based on this understanding, people will act within the constraints and enablements of the social structures and cultures which they are presented with and they act to either maintain or modify their environment (Porpora, 2013). Their choice of action depends on many factors that interplay with each other and influence how agents react to situations they find themselves in (Horrocks, 2009). This can include their life chances at birth, the resources allocated to them in relation to their race, gender, geographic location, and so on and the powers vested in their positions within society to name a few. Archer (1995) explains that agents mediate their way using the concept of 'internal conversations' to pursue their projects as they negotiate through constraints and enablements presented by structural and cultural conditioning. Through this process of human interaction, aspects of structure can be altered while culture is preserved, or vice versa; alternatively, both structure and culture can be reshaped or reproduced. This prior conditioning is not a direct force or law but should rather be seen as a guiding structural or cultural conditioning which exerts itself in a specific context. The decisions, interpretations and actions of agents are influenced by their vested interests and the opportunities that are bought into being.

- **$T_{2\text{-}3}$: Social, socio-cultural and group interactions**

The second phase (T_2 to T_3) is the period where 'people' interact with the 'parts.' The people exercise their emergent powers to mediate their own interests, goals or projects within the conditioning of the existing structures and cultures, thereby choosing one set of actions over others. The emerging powers of the parts are dormant until activated by agential interaction; when activated, these CEPs and SEP present conditions that may challenge or support the goals of the agents (Archer, 2007). In the case where agents find themselves well-integrated into the structure, there are attempts to protect their own vested interests, bargaining power or material conditions through reproduction. Alternatively, they could find the context contradictory to their needs and work against it, instigating a change better aligned with their goals or aspirations. There are also unintended consequences of interaction and so the outcome of this phase cannot be predicted. Analytical dualism demands that these interactions between agents, cultures and structures should be analysed separately, even though in reality the interplay is continuous and simultaneous. Studying how these entities interact and how emergent powers are exercised allows some explanation of what is seen or experienced at the levels of the Actual and Empirical.

How primary agents interact with each other and the parts in their context may impact the goals or projects of corporate agents or social actors. As primary agents respond to their contexts, they reconstitute the environment which corporate agency seeks to control by aggravating context pressures and problems which may or may not compromise the attainment of corporate agents' interests (Horrocks, 2009). This reconstitution of the environment by primary agents may be unplanned but works to constrain or enable corporate agency. In this way, the influential powers that corporate agents possess depend on how primary agents interact with the contexts that corporate agents have shaped for them (Horrocks, 2009). Given that the power of corporate agency may be constrained or enabled by primary agents who may not be coordinated, the ultimate outcome may not be as either one intended. Rather, it may represent a compromise of some sort between the groups.

- **T4: Structural, cultural and group morphogenesis or morphostasis**

The final phase, termed T_4, signals the end point of the cycle where the outcome is dependent on the relative emergent powers of the people and parts and may not necessarily represent the individual goals of agents. In this way, T_4 represents the elaboration of structure and culture and may also represent the transformation of the primary agency into the corporate agency. The outcome of these interactions shapes the context which future agents will inherit and in this way, T_4 becomes the conditioning context (T_1) for the next cycle.

To determine the elaboration or reproduction of the parts and people, the three stages of the morphogenetic framework need to be analysed in terms of structure, culture and agency separately. In other words, the researcher would aim to determine if there have been any changes in the structures, cultures and agency which in turn affects what emerges in the domains of the Actual and Empirical (what is seen or experienced).

3.5.1.4 The morphogenesis/stasis of structure

Analysing the structures which constitute the social system is based on four concepts as illustrated in Figure 3.4. Firstly, there are internal and necessary relations within and between social structures. Secondly, invisible mechanisms with causal powers are exerted by social structures on social interaction and there are casual relationships between groups and individuals at the level of social interaction. Finally, social interaction elaborates on social structures by modifying current internal and structural relationships. Either by introducing new ones in terms of morphogenesis or reproducing existing ones in morphostasis.

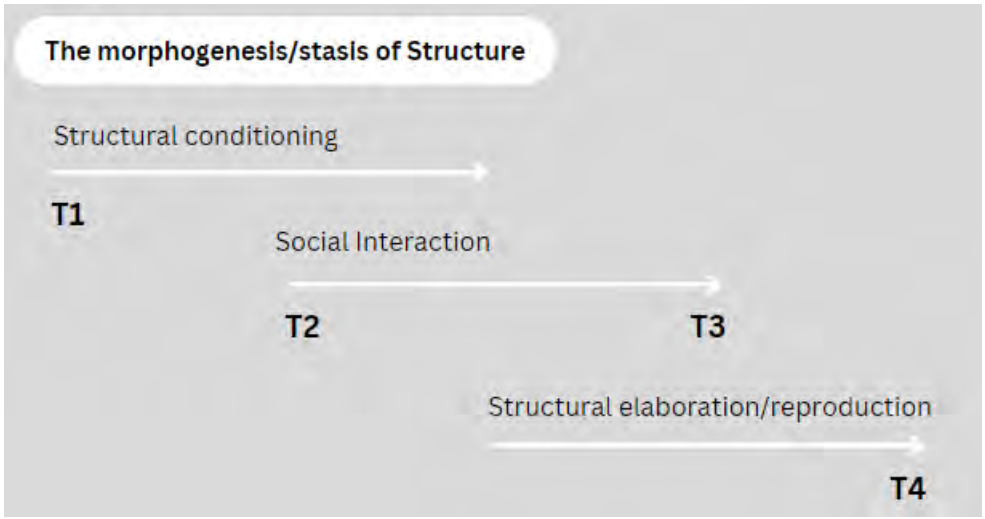


Figure 3.4: Morphogenesis/stasis of structure Archer (1995, 1996)

3.5.1.5 The morphogenesis/stasis of culture

When analysing the cultural domain, the social system also acknowledges four concepts as illustrated in Figure 3.5. Firstly, there are internal and necessary relations within the cultural system and casual influences are exerted by the cultural system on socio-cultural interaction. Subsequently, there are casual relationships between groups and individuals at the level of socio-cultural interaction. Finally, socio-cultural interaction elaborates upon the composition of the cultural system by changing internal structural relationships or reproducing them. A change in the cultural system can be attributed to the relations of contradiction and complementarity between the 'parts' of the system, and the relations of cooperation and conflict between 'people'. When contradictions exist between the ideologies of the cultural system and the social world, morphogenesis is likely to ensue. In the case where complementarities are perceived, morphostasis is more likely (Archer, 1995).

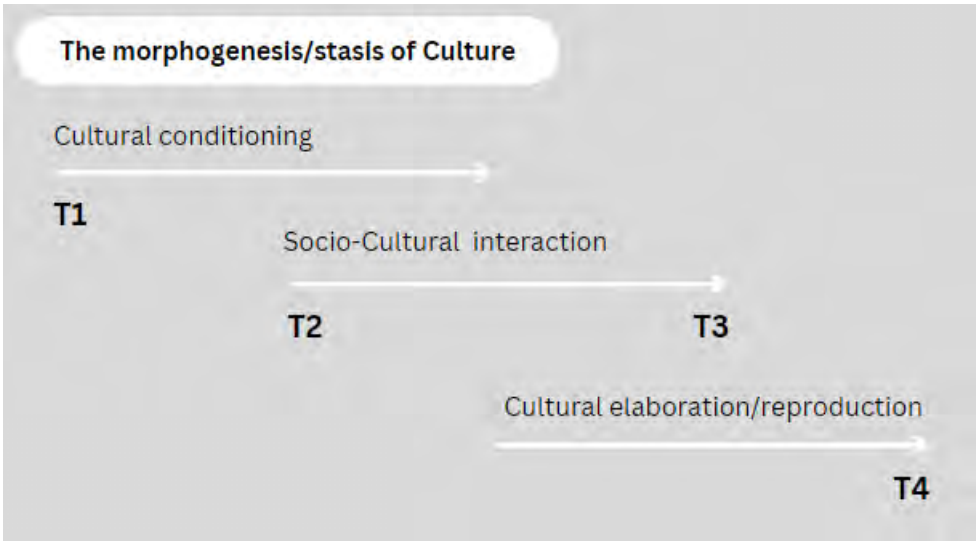


Figure 3.5: The morphogenesis/stasis of culture Archer (1995, 1996)

3.5.1.6 The morphogenesis/stasis of agency

Archer´s morphogenetic framework also serves to understand the role of agents, which occurs on multiple levels as shown in Figure 3.6. From this angle, it is conceptualised that changes or transformations will take place during the periods defined as T_2 and T_3, where agents are confronted by different emergent powers. According to Archer´s morphogenetic framework, it is during this period when conditions may enable (or constrain) primary agents to collectively organise themselves in ways which provide access to resources in order to be in a better position of power. Primary agents could thus be empowered to transform into corporate agents. Consequently, in exercising their emergent powers, agents could benefit from structural and cultural enabling conditions in pursuing their goals.

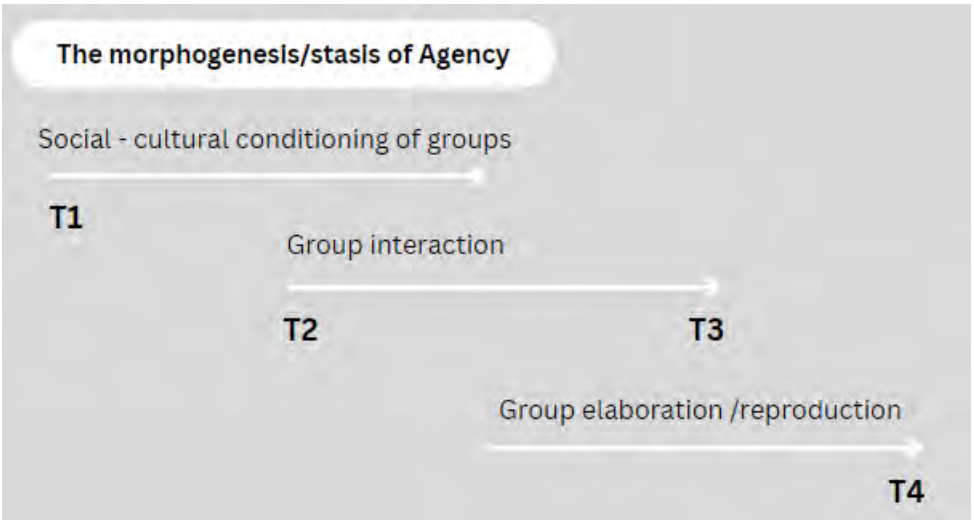


Figure 3.6: Morphogenesis/stasis of Agency Archer (1995, 1996)

3.5.1.7 Situational logics in mediating agential action

Archer (2007) also takes care to expand on how morphogenesis and morphostasis are achieved by attempting to understand the interactions of the parts and the people by using situational logics. Situational logics is used as a concept to explain how change or maintenance of the status quo takes place as a result of agential actions shaped by certain actions in different situations. In this way, situational logics suggest the ways in which interactions of mechanisms result in morphogenesis or morphostasis. Archer (1995) defines four configurations of structure and cultures and suggests the likely situational logic that could arise from them. These logics are not to be viewed as deterministic, as there are infinite mechanisms at play in the social world, but rather they are useful in understanding how the logic of the situation will enable or constrain the emergence of events and experiences.

The situational conditions, primarily drawn from Luckett (2012) with insights from Case (2013), present the range of actions agents may take in response to the structural and cultural properties within a given context. I have chosen to use Luckett's (2012) pared-down interpretation of situational logics, as the distinction that Archer (1995) and Case (2013) make between structural and cultural situational logics seems unnecessary for the purposes of this particular thesis (see Figure 3.7 below).

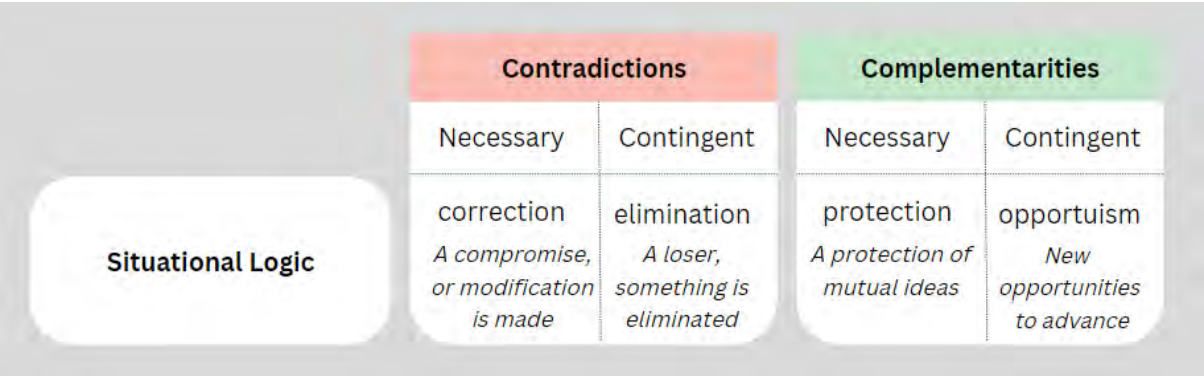


Figure 3.7: Situational logics in the domain of culture and structure (Luckett (2012, p. 341)

Situational logics explore the relationship between mechanisms within the domain of structure and culture. In a contradictory situation, where structures and cultures conflict with each other, there may be an emergence of change (morphogenesis). However, where there is alignment between structures and cultures and they are seen to be complementary, they act to mutually reinforce each other, and the result reproduces the status quo (morphostasis). Situational logics

are described as being heuristic rather than deterministic (Archer, 1995) and should acknowledge that within the social world there is never only a single structure or culture at play, and so their interplay is a lot more complex than either contradictory or complementary.

After exploring whether the cultural and structural conditioning mechanisms are complementary or contradictory, the second step of analysis involves deciding whether these relations are necessary or contingent. They are considered necessary if they are internally related and require each other for existence. They are considered contingent if they are externally related whereby, they both exist in this context but could exist separately from each other in some other context. It is at this level of logical relation that the structural and cultural system can enable or constrain actions chosen by agents. Each of the four configurations is associated with a particular situational logic which predisposes the agents to take action that could either lead to morphogenesis or morphostasis.

In a necessary contradiction between mechanisms, there is likely to be some change or modification to address the condition. Where such contradiction is contingent, then the likely outcome is elimination, where something will need to be removed. In the case of necessary complementarities, an environment of mutual support is likely to be reinforced which works to reproduce the status quo. Such mutual reinforcement between structure and culture creates the situational logic of protection (Archer, 1995). When the complementarity is contingent, the situational logic allows agents the opportunity to achieve their projects through various actions. Such contingent reinforcement between structure and culture can allow the status quo to be more than reinforced and actually extended.

None of these logics are absolute in that they are all affected by multiple mechanisms at play at any moment in the social context. Reducing the complexities of the morphogenetic framework to a set of direct relationships with predictable outcomes has been one of the major critiques against situational logics (Cruickshank, 2003). It is central to the idea of emergence in Social Realism, that events and experiences emerge from the interplay of myriad mechanisms and not through some simple cause-and-effect relationship. Situational logics are thus heuristic rather than laws or principles. I have therefore used the concept of situational logics on my data as points for departure rather than using them as direct conclusions on mechanisms which work to reproduce colonial legacies within admission processes to UoTs.

3.5.2 Data condensation, data display and findings

Gilham (2000) describes the purpose of analysis as faithfully reflecting in summary and organised form what has been found in the study. Generally, this follows three concurrent flows of activity: data condensation, data display and conclusion drawing (Miles, 2014). Data condensation refers to the process of selecting, focusing or transforming the data that appears in interview transcripts, documents and in my case policies. It is seen as part of the analysis and informs decisions such as which chunks of data to code and which category each selection fits into. In this way, it is seen as the form of analysis which sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards and organises data in such a way that findings can be developed. The second flow of analysis is data display, where information is organised into a manner which is accessible and compact to facilitate analytical activities. The third stream of analysis is conclusion drawing and verification. From the beginning of data collection, analysis begins through noting patterns, explanations, flows and propositions. These remain 'hunches' until data collection is complete and analysis proceeds. At this stage these 'hunches' can be verified for their plausibility, their confirmability and their validity. This process is reminiscent of what Archer (2003) terms judgemental rationality, which emphasises careful, reflective evaluation of circumstances and internal deliberations to ensure decisions are based on reason that than impulse. These three types of analysis and the process of data collection create an interactive, iterative and cyclical process. In other words, the coding of data (condensation) leads to new ideas on what should go into a matrix (data display). Entering this data then requires further data condensation. As the matrix populates, hunches in the form of preliminary conclusions are drawn which leads to the need for verification. In this way, qualitative data analysis becomes an ongoing process as the study progresses.

I started the analysis of data right from the preliminary stages of data collection. Through reading literature and policy documentation I was able to plot a timeline of events from 1990 to today. I began with this step as a way to acknowledge that every emergent property has a history and that I needed an understanding of where it came from. I used this timeline to construct a context which covered key Empirical and Actual events, understanding that these work to subsequently condition agents. I started with a macro context (international events), moved to the meso (national events) and funnelled down to focus on the micro (UoTs). This timeline informed the topics addressed in my semi-structured interviews.

As each interview was conducted online, an automatic transcription was generated. I used this initial transcription as a foundation and made corrections while listening to the recording to ensure accuracy. The auto-generated transcriptions at times misrepresented acronyms, accents or language, making the process of correction crucial for maintaining the integrity of the data. Once all interviews were transcribed, I went back to data condensation through coding and categorising transcriptions. To assist in coding the vast amounts of data collected, I used NVivo, computer software that has the capacity to organise and manage large amounts of data by supporting, coding sorting and storing. This allowed me to retrieve, display and inspect codes as frequently as required, however as useful as technology can be during the process of data analysis it cannot bypass the thorny issue of interpretation (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003).

Categorising data or category construction as defined by Merrian and Tidsell (2015) is the process of coding the data by assigning either a straightforward, descriptive label or a more complex one to various 'chunks' of data so that it can be easily retrieved. In this way, codes can be seen as labels that assign symbolic meaning to the descriptive information compiled during a study (Miles, 2014). Coding is thus considered to be a data condensation method that enables the process of breaking down, examining, comparing and conceptualising categorisation data to retrieve the most meaningful material. Importantly, coding is seen as a selective process, where I, as the researcher can make decisions on what is to be included or not. At this stage, informed by my understandings of modernity/coloniality as operating as a hidden mechanism at the level of the Real, and guided by my research questions, I focused particularly on identifying manifestations of coloniality/modernity in the data. Gibbs (2007) describes this as a kind of 'concept-driven coding' where codes are informed by consulting existing literature in the field.

At first, I coded similar views, concepts or ideas that emerged from the interviews and then grouped them together under similar themes. I went back to explore how these themes interacted with my original timeline of events to understand the interplay with key events or structures. This was not a linear process but rather I moved back and forth with the idea that one could inform the other. I then tried to interconnect the themes using the Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures Collective's (2021) the metaphor of 'The House Modernity Built' presented in Chapters Five and Six.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations in any kind of research are important (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). As the researcher, it was my responsibility to respect the rights, needs, values and desires of the participants and institutions involved. Furthermore, ethical considerations cannot be reduced to following rules, guidelines or formal processes, instead Johnsson et al. (2014) argue, that they involve a commitment to responsible conduct that takes into account the well-being of both participants and institutions included in the study. My objective was not to compare or contrast institutions, nor did I intend to cause any kind of reputational damage. As such, throughout the process, I remained focused on identifying underlying mechanisms across the sector as related to the processes of admission and acting ethically.

Prior to data collection, however, formal ethical approval was obtained from Rhodes University (see Appendix A). In addition, individual ethical clearance applications were required for each institution included in the study. Each institution required a full ethics application which needed to serve at their respective internal research committees. One institution was quick to respond, and ethical clearance was granted within weeks, however, the other institution took longer than anticipated, approximately five months. It was for this reason that I started data collection at one institution and then moved on to the next. Ethical approval was also sought from the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) which was relatively easy to get once the correct contact was established. Since gaining approval from DHET, they have followed up regularly in terms of the status of the project and appear to be invested in the process.

Before any interview was conducted, I obtained signed informed consent forms from each participant (see Appendix C for example). I spent time at the beginning of each interview describing the purpose of my study and confirming that the session was recorded. This ensured that the interviewee clearly understood their rights and allowed them an opportunity to object to any aspects of the study. This allowed me to keep the interviews confidential.

3.7 Trustworthiness in a Decolonial Study

Some qualitative researchers have dismissed questions of validity, reliability and generalisation as being positivist concepts (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2014) premised on a singular, objectively knowable reality. As this study does not seek replicability, I prefer to think about issues regarding trustworthiness, meaning that when readers engage in this work, they will have a

sense of confidence in what I have reported but would not expect to regenerate the exact findings in another application of the research. From a decolonial perspective, it remains important for me to emphasise the importance of respect, collaboration and a commitment to ethically engaging with participants and their contexts as the foundation of my actions. Rather than demonstrating that my thesis reveals the 'truth', I want to demonstrate that I am aware of the roots of modernity/coloniality operating in the methodological decisions. This involves a reflexive practice where I continually reflect on my own positionality, biases and context. I strive for transparency by being open about my research decisions and their potential impacts on participants and institutions. In addition, I hold myself accountable not only to my academic peers but also to those directly involved in the research.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) reclaim ordinary language to discuss the truth value of findings, introducing four factors in their approach to trustworthiness. These are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. These principles are often associated with a more positivistic type of research. However, from a decolonial perspective, these terms take on different meanings. For instance, credibility involves recognising the plurality of knowledge systems and the colonial hierarchies that have marginalised the voices of people from historically underrepresented backgrounds. It is not just about relying on various sources of information to represent 'what has happened,' but also about questioning how those sources themselves have been shaped by colonial hierarchies.

In my study on how the admission processes at UoT have evolved, I engaged in a systematic exercise of self-reflexivity, critically examining the nature of the sources selected and the power dynamics they represent. I acknowledge that while I made a concerted effort to include multiple perspectives, I did not incorporate the voices of students and their communities. Indeed, the sources primarily reflect the 'institutionalised version' of how the admission process has changed. This is a limitation of my study, which I now recognise and intend to address once my PhD is completed.

A second dimension offered by Lincoln and Guba (1985) is transferability, this is not an aim for replicability, but rather the possibility of learning from study findings that may fit into a subsequent set of circumstances. However, from a decolonial perspective, the term transferability aspires to universality. I need to emphasise and recognise the relational and contextual nature of what is interpreted as research findings or knowledge.

In this study, the findings come from two UoTs in South Africa that share some similar histories, and while some of the findings may apply to other UoTs universities, I recognise that this may not be the case for other kinds of institutions located in other parts of the country where manifestations of coloniality/modernity may be different.

The third factor used to build trustworthiness is dependability pertaining to the enduring and unwavering nature of research findings over time. Again, traditional notions of dependability are often based on Western-centric standards of objectivity and replicability. Decolonial perspectives challenge these ideas by acknowledging that knowledge is situated, contextual and sometimes non-replicable, especially in qualitative research. Dependability in a decolonial framework would mean rigour in honouring diverse ways of knowing and integrating Indigenous or localised methods of validation. To reasonably justify my findings within this specific context I have taken care to document my approaches and data collection techniques and described how I analysed the data. This has helped me to create and preserve an audit trail, not so that other researchers may replicate elements in differing contexts but more to explain from where my findings emerge.

The final factor is confirmability or getting as close to objective reality as possible. I understand the difficulties involved in this as objectivity is a contested term, especially when seen from a decolonial perspective. From this perspective traditional notions of objectivity are challenged, advocating rather for a more nuanced, context-aware understanding of knowledge that respects and incorporates diverse perspectives and experiences. In this way, I need to acknowledge the ways in which my background, beliefs and context may have shaped my interpretations and findings. By describing my positionality earlier in Chapter Two, I have tried to make explicit from where my findings emerge. I have at times been challenged by my findings and have had to confront many blind spots from both a professional and personal perspective. Part of the process has been learning how to let the story unfold as best as I can.

To make sure I build trust in my research, I refer to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) description of how a community can work to build trust, with one of the ways being peer scrutiny. It is for this reason that I have made every effort to present my research at various conferences during my PhD journey, I have indicated throughout my thesis which concept was covered at each conference. I have used these conferences to present various findings, concepts and my own positionality. Peer scrutiny has provided me with feedback before this study has gone public, which in itself is an act of trust (Stahl & King, 2020).

It has been important to prioritise trustworthiness in my study to solidify the legitimacy of my findings. By considering credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability I hope to have enhanced the quality of findings, thereby making a valuable contribution to the body of knowledge in diverse disciplines of study.

3.8 Limitations

"No study can do everything," (Glesne, 2016, p. 213) and part of contributing to decolonial research is acknowledging that it is an ongoing, iterative process, as such I do not view this thesis as a finite or complete project – it is only my start.

Learning from decolonial thought, limitations are understood not as flaws in research validity but as reflections of my engagement with ethical, epistemic and contextual complexities. This approach reframes limitations as opportunities for growth and deeper cultural sensitivity, paving the way for future research that further aligns with decolonial ethics and inclusivity.

On reflecting on my study, I acknowledge that given the source of primary data, it has come to represent an 'institutionalised version.' By including the voices of students, their families or academic staff in my primary research I could have uncovered different perspectives. In conceptualising my study, I had specifically chosen people with power (social actors) to understand how they made pertinent decisions on admissions, however, it has been through my data collection and self-reflection that I realise just how much these voices matter. Future studies could focus on unearthing these stories and explore the other side of admission to a university, as told by applicants and their families themselves. In this way I could explore the role of student agency particularly as they navigate their way through institutional hierarchies.

Related to participants, another, typically positivist limitation of my study could be seen as the relatively small number of interviewees. Patton tells us that there are 'no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry' (Patton, 2014, p. 470) and while a larger sample size is sometimes seen to provide breadth, I prioritised maintaining depth. From a decolonial perspective, a small sample size is not a limitation, but a thoughtful choice which aligns with context-specific priorities. This choice allowed me to emphasise situated knowledge over generalisability with insights dependent on the richness of the information provided by the selected cases and subsequent analysis rather than on the sample size. In other words, in-depth information from a small number of people is valuable, especially if the cases are information rich. I believe using semi-structured interviews and structuring the sessions around topics rather than a series

of closed questions allowed me to obtain rich data using a smaller sample group. In this way, the study's sampling strategy supported its purpose.

I also acknowledge that an almost infinite number of causal mechanisms will be at play in the emergence of an event or change, and thus I have not attempted to identify all the mechanisms that account for the shifts in admissions processes at UoTs in the period under study. Instead, I made a clear decision, in drawing on decolonial thought as a lens, to focus on identifying the specific mechanisms through which colonial legacies have been allowed to be reproduced in the processes of admission at UoTs over the last three decades.

My final acknowledgement relates to the limitations of the underpinning theory of Critical Realism. While I have discussed its merits in Chapter Two, it is not without critique. Critical Realism is open to critique in relation to judgemental rationality, given that there is an absolute reality which we cannot fully access. Rather, reality, as I understand it, and as I have presented it in this study, represents my best explanation of the phenomenon at a particular moment in time and space. This reality may change over time, thus I acknowledge its fallibility and relativity (Bhaskar, 2008).

Building on this, I acknowledge the complexity of integrating decolonial theories with Critical Realism and Social Realism, given that these frameworks appear to respond to Western knowledge systems. While Critical Realism and Social Realism allows for the emergence of underlying realities, I have been cautious not to present my account as the only version. Instead, I recognise that multiple perspectives exist, and my work contributes to a broader, more nuanced understanding of the events rather than a singular, definitive narrative.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methods and analytical framework underpinning the study. I have attempted to make explicit the research decisions I have taken and to show the links between the research questions, the theoretical framing and methodological decisions. The following chapter, Chapter Four, describes the conditioning at T_1 of the morphogenetic framework and works to explain my timeline of events. This is important as Archer explains that every emergent property has a history, for which we need to account to understand its emergence. This understanding of prior structures and cultures will condition interaction moving forward.

Chapters Five and Six present core findings which emerged from the data as agents began interacting with their conditioning. These chapters therefore reflect T_2 – T_3 of the morphogenetic framework. Chapter Five focuses on the institutional findings as related more to structures, while Chapter Six represents the discourses around students or applicants. In each chapter the metaphor of ‘The House Modernity Built’ is used to help visualise the discussions.

Chapter Four: T_1 Structural and Cultural Conditioning

Having described the theoretical underpinnings of the study in the previous chapter, I now describe the structural and cultural conditioning at the first stage of the morphogenetic framework, called T_1. As described in Chapter Three, individuals (or agents) are understood to be shaped by pre-existing structural and cultural conditions which may enable or constrain the way they act. The possibility for change within the social or cultural systems is also understood as being conditioned by what happened in the past. This study looks at changes to the admission processes to UoTs over the last three decades and thus T_1 begins as apartheid, the political system which had dominated the country since the middle of the twentieth century, came to an end.

This chapter engages with the preconditioning mechanisms at a national level and considers the ways in which the structures of colonialism and settler-colonialism enabled or constrained changes as the systems were reconfigured post-apartheid. Likewise, it analyses the ways in which the cultural system of apartheid enabled and constrained the emergence of certain ideas, beliefs or theories as they were introduced.

4.1 Conditioning at T_1

4.1.1 The colonial history of universities in South Africa

Universities in South Africa emerged from a colonial context thereby propagating Eurocentric ideologies and values rather than organically developing a local higher education system (Heleta, 2018). The first university in South Africa was established in 1829, the South African College, a school for boys with some tertiary education added in 1874. It was declared a standalone university in the year 1928/1929 and given the name the University of the Cape of Good Hope (now the UCT). The second was the University of Stellenbosch, founded in 1874 (Pearson & Reddy, 2021). These institutions were entirely established to prepare white males for further study abroad and were very much modelled on their British counterparts thereby servicing a colonial agenda. Not surprisingly, the institutional identities, cultures and structures of these universities were embedded in Western thought, conventions and practices. They came to represent a crucial part of the historical process of imperialism, established as a symbol and disseminator of European civilisation demonstrating that the colony had “grown up” (Heleta, 2018, p. 50). These underpinning ideologies continued in many ways when the National Party,

associated with segregation through apartheid took control from the United Party in 1948 (Davies, 1996).

These early universities played a pivotal role in shaping apartheid leaders, with several former prime ministers and presidents – such as Hendrik Verwoerd, the so-called "architect" of apartheid as well as John Vorster and Daniël François (D.F.) Malan – having studied at Stellenbosch University. The physical imprints of colonial and apartheid-era figures have persisted at South African universities; for example, until recently, a building at Stellenbosch University bore the name of R.W. Wilcocks, a former rector who contributed to the pseudoscientific justification of racial inequality through IQ testing. It was only in 2021 that Stellenbosch University started the process of renaming the building amid criticism emerging from academic disciplines and divisions housed in the building (Stellenbosch University, 2020).

Both the Dutch and British colonisers and the apartheid regime strived to maintain hegemonic white power and exploit the country for the benefit of the white minority by oppressing the Black majority (Heleta, 2018). As the next pages explain, the apartheid regime reinforced not just the colonial hierarchy of race, but also that of language.

4.2 South African Events at T_1

Aligned with the concepts of Critical Realism, reality is delineated into three layers, and at the deepest layer, there exist mechanisms and powers responsible for the emergence of our experiences and observations of events. These, as discussed in Chapter Two, are the entangled domains of the Real, the Actual and the Empirical. As explained earlier, the domain of the Real comprises underlying generative mechanisms that interact to produce events in the Actual and how these are experienced in the Empirical. The Actual is the realm where events emerge, and while not all of these events are observed by people, they emerge from the interplay of causal mechanisms whether experienced or not. The Empirical realm is the layer where we observe or experience what emerges in the Actual and is more measurable. With this understanding, everything experienced or observed is in the Actual and Empirical realms which are the product of the inner workings of the deeper Real domain. In an attempt to uncover the workings in the level of the Real, I have selected specific events (representative of the level of the Actual and Empirical) during T_1 of the morphogenetic framework to explore in depth. I have selected these specific events as I believe them to be formative in establishing enduring structures and cultures

for which agents will be enabled or constrained during T_2 and T_3 of the morphogenetic framework. I chronologically zoom in on each selected event, as detailed in Figure 4.1 below, using it to explore the manifestations of structures and cultures, with a specific focus on the emergence of technikons and changes to admission processes.

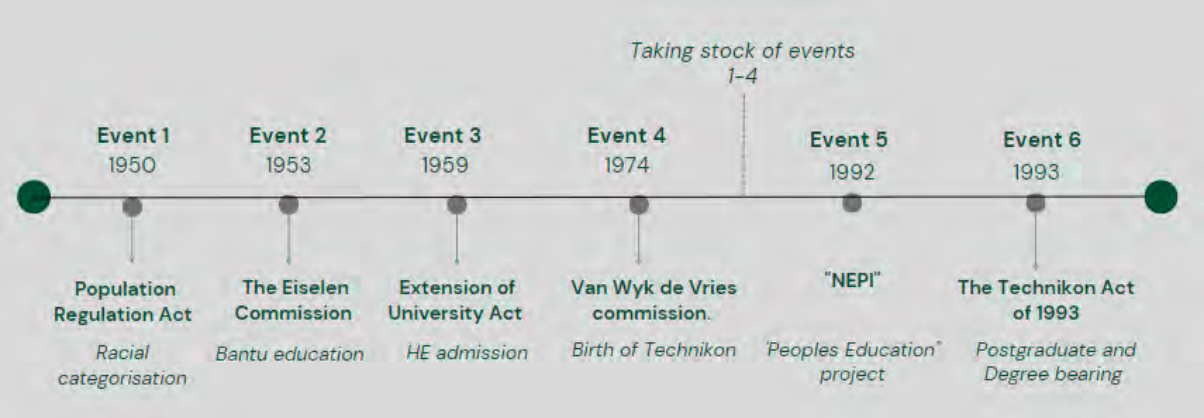


Figure 4.1: Timeline of key events in the level of the Actual during T1

Bhaskar (1979) claims that Critical Realism acknowledges that all knowledge is fallible, partial and changeable over time. In my writing, I have attempted to consider each truth claim carefully so that I can provide explanations of events using the strongest possible accounts to do so. In my attempt to move closer to an accurate representation that recognises the multiplicities of actors and histories at play, I have relied on the research of various South African authors whom I consider seminal in exploring the story of apartheid. I recognise that this writing is an interpretation from my own locus of enunciation but have considered these authors as authorities with credibility in the field. I recognise that in the process of adjudicating among different constructions, there may be voices I have omitted and so I acknowledge that my findings represent one of many potential interpretations of reality.

I have made considerable reference to John Davies as one such text, most especially his paper entitled ‘The State and the South African University System under apartheid’ written in 1996. This paper offered a study of South African university education during the era of apartheid (from 1948 to 1990) as the state struggled unsuccessfully to overcome challenges to white domination in general. Another influential example is the book entitled ‘Transformation in Higher Education. Global pressures and local realities in South Africa’ edited by Nico Cloete, Peter Maasson, Richard Fehnel, Teboho Moja, Helene Perold and Trish Gibbon in 2006. This book includes a collection of various contributing authors and attempts to understand how

complex interactions between state, society and institutions shape change in higher education systems. One of the formative chapters is written by Ian Bunting and is entitled 'The higher education landscape under apartheid' which has been used by many scholars (Boughey & McKenna, 2021; Bozalek & Boughey, 2012) to understand the South African higher education landscape as it was shaped by policies of the National Party government. Throughout the remainder of the chapter, I use these texts as a basis alongside other contributions in order to describe the conditioning of apartheid.

4.2.1 Contextualising apartheid South Africa

The apartheid regime that ruled South Africa from 1948 until the early 1990s was built on colonial policies and practices with the politics of race, set up during the formal occupation by the Dutch and English shaping the higher education system. During colonial rule, South Africa was established as a white man's country with the goal of 'civilising' Southern Africa. From this perspective, the apartheid regime can be understood as a South African manifestation of colonialism, with a racial divide based on white supremacy reinforced in all domains of society through local rule (Badat, 1999).

According to Christie and Collins (1982), the ruling political party between 1948 and 1994 (the National Party) was represented by Afrikaner, white people. Afrikaner nationalism was an ideology that promoted Afrikaner supremacy and pride in their response to the British invasion. During this period, the Afrikaner nation had endured colonial rule for much of the 19th Century and had maintained their cultural identity through their language and religion (Swanson, 1995; Zungu, 1977). They viewed themselves as a pure race which could maintain its purity through racial segregation. Maintaining and protecting their identity and power over the economic, political and educational systems became the focus of how apartheid was structured and policy was thereby enforced to develop an environment of segregation (Zungu, 1977). In the subsequent pages, I describe three events that are crucial to understand the conditioning of T_1.

4.2.1.1 Event 1: South Africa's Population Registration Act, 1950

One of the early ways the apartheid government enacted their power was by implementing structures in the form of policy, one of which was called the Population Regulation Act of 1950 which required that each inhabitant of South Africa was classified and registered according to their race. Race in this context was defined by physical appearance and the act required people to be identified and registered from birth as belonging to one of four distinct racial groups:

white, ‘Coloured’, (Black) African, or Other. The category of ‘Black’ however became used to describe all individuals essentially classified as non-white. These categories are still used today to report on demographics for national South African statistics under the individual headings of African, Coloured, Indian/Asian, white or other (Cooper, 2015). As a reminder, I make use of these same historical race categories used under apartheid for the discussions which follow: African, Coloured, Indian and white. The term ‘Black’ in my writing will refer collectively to African, Coloured and Indian groups who were oppressed under apartheid. These racial categories are not used to lend credence to racial classification or differentiation but rather used in acknowledging that race is not a genetic category or to be seen as ‘fact’ but it is a social construct that was used as the basis for the allocation of resources in apartheid South Africa and therefore is considered a causal mechanism.

Classification of race was determined by the apartheid state and was based on factors such as skin colour, facial features, characteristics of hair, home language spoken and socioeconomic status. Then, the racial classification indicated an individual’s social and political rights, educational opportunities, living areas and economic status. This policy worked to create a physical manifestation of what the Martiniquais psychoanalyst and social philosopher Franz Fanon (2008, p. 2) theorised as a “zone of being” (white) and a “zone of non-being” (non-white). Here, those classified as being within the “zone of being” are enabled to other (or make invisible) those within the “zone of non-being.”

The Population Registration Act allowed for a series of further land acts to be passed. This regulation generates a similar phenomenon of what the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos called the “abyssal lines”, a line that divides the social space in two: what is seen, desired, and recognised, and the other side that is not seen and recognised. South African regulations became tangible ‘abyssal lines’ (Santos, 2007, p.46), which allowed for areas of land to be defined as ‘Homelands’ or ‘Bantustans’ used to accommodate (and invisibilise) Black people. Black people were forcibly removed from their homes and made to live within the boundaries of the defined ‘homelands’ even though many worked in the cities of white South Africa. In addition to this, the apartheid government divided South Africa into five entities: i) The republic of Transkei (part of the old Cape Province, now the Eastern Cape) ii) the republic of Bophuthatswana (part of the old Transvaal Province, close to what is now Johannesburg), iii) the Republic of Venda (also part of the old Transvaal Province, close to what is currently Polokwane), iv) the Republic of Ciskei (another part of the old Cape Province,

close to what is currently called East London) and v) the Republic of South Africa (vast majority of the old South Africa). The first four entities were known as the "TBVC countries" (an acronym for the first four letters of each homeland area) and the last as the "RSA" (Bunting, 2006). The TBVC entities were acknowledged as separate, independent nations by the apartheid government, although anti-apartheid forces in South Africa or any other international government never recognised this. According to the National Party, Black people were meant to be citizens of one of the TBVCs resulting in them being considered "aliens" within the borders of RSA. Consequently, they were denied representation in the national parliament.

4.2.1.2 Event 2: The Eiselen Commission, 1953

Although the state at this time was considered to be a formidable authoritarian machine (Davies 1996), it was shaped by conflicting ideological inputs from within various state departments. One of the central disagreements amongst members of the National Party was between seeking to Westernise Indigenous people or leaving so-called "native" culture untouched without any state involvement in education. The Eiselen Commission was therefore tasked with the duty of aligning the education system of Africans with the aims of the National Party policy and released their report in 1951 (Behr & Ngubentombi, 1988).

At an ideological level, the commission recognised that white supremacy depended on the acceptance by subordinate groups of the superior position of whites on the one hand and on their own inferior position on the other. The commission saw education as a way to create and reproduce particular types of racial identities, and in this instance was used to produce the type of African who would accept both positions and accept subservience (Reddy, 2004; Zungu, 1977). According to Zungu (1977), the Eiselen Commission set out guiding principles for the notorious 'Bantu Education'. One of these principles stated that schools should have a Christian character and orientation, based on the Calvinist religion of Afrikaners. It was essentially used to reiterate that whites were the elect of God (thus superior), and Black people were hewers of wood and drawers of water (thus inferior). The same commission established the production of literature of functional value in the Bantu languages intending to reduce access to material and knowledge produced in other languages thereby controlling information to which the student would be exposed. In addition, the Eiselen Commission determined that the medium of instruction should be in the local mother tongue and funding had to be spread as widely as possible. These principles gave the concept of race a more focused, systematic and

administrative foundation (Reddy, 2004). The same commission recommended the implementation of Bantu Education.

The Bantu Education Act of 1953 (amended in 1954, 1956, 1959 and 1961) was formally introduced to replace the former missionary-controlled education in the Bantustans. Although missionary based education was already founded on segregation, it did not fully meet the National Party's objective of ensuring complete separation and inequality, nor did it allow for complete authoritarian control (Behr & Ngubentombi, 1988). Bantu Education was used by the state to exercise direct control over the Black youth, teaching them that their "otherness" was natural and constraining their aspirations within the bounds of the Bantustans (Molteno, 1984; Reddy, 2004). It centred on the ideology that Black people only needed education to fill labour roles and aimed to provide cheap labour to service the needs of the South African economy through manual training and elementary instruction (Marais, 2011). It was characterised by a simplified, instrumentalist curriculum with substandard facilities, overcrowded classrooms, underqualified teachers and located in homelands or townships away from the urban context (Hurst, 2016; Jansen, 1990). Within these Black schools, Christie and Collins (1982) explain that children would be taught that their culture was of a lower order to prepare them for such a place in a white-dominated society. The sentiment is expressed as such in an address to the apartheid parliament in 1953, where Dr Hendrik Verwoerd, the then minister of Bantu Education, explained that equality with Europeans was not meant for the Black child (Seepe, 2017). Dr Verwoerd believed there was no place for the Black child in European society (such as South Africa) above certain forms of labour, and therefore, while speaking on his government's education policies in the 1950s, proclaimed it to be absurd toteach a Bantu child a subject like Mathematics when it would never be used in practice (Lapping, 1987).

4.2.1.3 Event 3: The Extension of University Act, 1959

The National Party government viewed education, including higher education, as a vital part of reproducing the apartheid social, political and economic order. Higher education was used to maintain social differentiation through a "mental-manual" division of labour (Davies, 1996, p. 325) upon which differences in race and class became constructed, with the elite white minority at the apex (Reddy, 2004). Higher education institutions had their roles defined and assigned to them by the government and were therefore described as "creatures of the state" (Bunting, 2006, p. 42).The Extension of University Education Act of 1959 ensured that racial segregation was entrenched in higher education by steering Black enrolment away from the

established white universities (Moodie, 1994). The apartheid government viewed the increasing numbers of Black students at white universities as a threat and therefore between 1951 and 1968, six South African colleges became fully-fledged, independent universities serving whites only: the University of the Witwatersrand (1922), the University of Pretoria, Natal University (1949), the University of the Orange Free State (1950), Rhodes University (1951), and Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education (1951). Two new white universities were founded during this period: the University of Port Elizabeth in 1965 and the Rand Afrikaans University in 1968 (Moodie, 1994; Muller, 1991).

The same Extension of Universities Act allowed provisions to serve South Africa's Black African, Coloured, and Indian/Asian populations. The South African Native College, renamed the University of Fort Hare with the 1959 legislation, was converted into a university serving primarily members of the Xhosa[12] group (Muller, 1991). Between 1960 and 1961, the South African government established the University College of the North at Turfloop; the University College of Zululand; the University College of the Western Cape; and the University College of Durban-Westville. The next phase included founding universities in the independent homelands. In 1976, universities were established in Transkei, followed by Bophuthatswana in 1979, and Venda in 1983. These institutions' primary purpose was to educate personnel for administrative roles within the homelands. In addition, the Medical University of South Africa was established in 1976 to provide education for Black individuals interested in pursuing medical professions. Furthermore, in 1983, Vista University was set up to offer curricula to Black in-service teachers (Muller, 1991).

According to Bunting (2006), there was little opposition from the Afrikaans or English medium universities to the implementation of the Extension of University Education Act, with the exception of a group of Afrikaner professors in Potchefstroom who communicated to the press their certain criticisms. As a group, they were formally reprimanded by the university council for "careless and undignified exercise of their right to freedom and speech" and had to apologise for doing so (Russell, 1979, p. 149). White universities were therefore ready to adhere to the new policy which meant that higher education institutions deemed 'white' were not legally able to enrol Black students unless a permit was obtained from the education

12 The Xhosa people, also known as AmaXhosa is one of the four Nguni nations found in South Africa and the second largest cultural group in the country. They are mainly located in the Eastern Cape province and speak dialects of isiXhosa

department (Reddy, 2004). Permits were only granted if the applicant's qualification was not available at any institution designated for their particular race group (Davies, 1996; Moodie, 1994). Obtaining a permit was often a difficult task; 190 African students applied for admission to white English universities one year after the Extension of University Education passed in 1960, but the minister of Bantu Education granted permission to only four of these 190. The universities rejected two of these applications on academic grounds, and only two Black students were able to be enrolled in white institutions (Horrell, 1968). Under these exceptional circumstances, when permits were granted to applicants, they were expected to conform to the set of rules and norms that perpetuated a system of domination and structure of privilege (Healy-Clancy, 2017; Heleta, 2016, 2018).

4.2.1.4 Event 4: Van Wyk de Vries commission, 1974

In response to developing student unrest at white English medium universities against the continued implementation of the Extension of University Education Act, the Minister of National Education at the time, Senator Johannes (Jan) de Klerk, announced the establishment of the Van Wyk de Vries commission of inquiry in 1968. The commission was tasked to investigate a broad range of university matters including the funding of the university sector, development aspects of universities and student activities within institutions. The commission was chaired by Mr Justice van Wyk de Vries, along with eight other members, at least three of which were part of the Afrikaner 'Broederbond,' a secret Afrikaner elite organisation which played a major role in the National Party rising to power (Pretorius, 1973).

Based on the report released by the De Vries van Wyk Commission in 1973, one of the main changes to the higher education sector as related to this study was that all existing institutions would be classified as either university or technikon (Bunting, 2006; CHE, 2010; Davies, 1996). The National Party government proceeded to divide higher education into distinct groups based on their functions. The name 'technikon' was unique to South Africa, invented at the time by the National Party with the closest resemblance being 'technion' used in Israel, but without the prestige of being recognised anywhere else in the world as a university (du Pré, 2010).

The foundations of the structural distinctions between universities and technikons lay in one of the underpinning philosophies of the National Party, namely the existence of "essences" (Bunting, 2006, p. 37). The National Party viewed the concept of "essences" as a unique

property, characteristic or feature which set apart objects (such as race groups or institutions) from each other. The National Party believed that it had to identify the essence of the two types of institutions that divided South African higher education. The essence of universities was science and the essence of a technikon was technology (Bunting, 2006). Universities therefore became institutions of science, where scholarly activities in which knowledge for the sake of knowledge was studied; they were intended to train scientists and researchers to enable students to enter high-level professions. Technikons, on the other hand, became institutions of technology and were created from the existing Colleges of Advanced Technical Education (CATEs). According to the Department of National Education (1988), the renaming of CATEs to technikons was significant and worked to improve public perception of what constituted advanced technical education (Pittendrigh, 1988). The newly formed technikons were mandated to provide students with technical and applied knowledge to work in specific vocations (du Pré, 2010). The apartheid government believed at this point that universities could not become involved in technology and likewise technikons could not generate new knowledge.

The National Party government took care to emphasise that even though there were distinctions between the two kinds of institutions, technikons should not be viewed as inferior to universities (Bunting, 2006). According to the Department of National Education (1988, p. 24), the official position of the National Party was that the two types of institutions should stand "side by side" with each other with both benefiting from separate vertical development of a different focus. To demonstrate their commitment to this ideology, the government built specific policies about the function of each type of institution into its higher education framework. The policies stressed that high-level and separate studies could be undertaken in both science and technology and so universities were therefore mandated to concentrate on teaching and research via bachelor, master's and doctoral degree programmes while technikons were expected to concentrate on technology through various National Diplomas, Higher National Diplomas and National Diplomas in Technology.

Contrary to the discourse of "equalness" between technikons and universities, the latter was still described as the "academic leaders in education" by the DoE (Department of National Education, 1988, p. 7). As such, technikons were managed in authoritarian ways (Bunting, 2006; Davies, 1996; White et al., 2011) and treated as "minors" (Cooper, 1995, p. 243). Nationally, technikon education operated a centralised convenorship system with different

institutions across the country offering the same national qualifications from curricula approved by the state. This system was based on a particular institution being appointed as the convenor for a specific qualification; the chosen institution would take the lead in developing the qualification and then obtaining state approval before distributing it to the other technikons entitled to offer the same qualification.

The Certification Council for Technikon Education (SERTEC) came into existence by way of an Act of Parliament (Act 88 of 1986) as a statutory body responsible for quality assurance and monitoring the consistency of offerings across technikons. They were also responsible for granting permission for technikons to offer new qualifications or evaluate changes to existing qualifications should individual institutions wish to implement changes to content or delivery. Each of these cases involved a complex process including multiple rounds of national meetings with other technikons, industry and community stakeholders. It became a long bureaucratic process of rounds of reports, forms and approvals which often constrained the development of new programmes or changes to existing ones (Winberg, 2005). The structure and curricula of technikons resembled that of secondary schooling, to the point that they were at times called "nothing more than glorified high schools" at times (Reddy, 2004, p. 25). The content in their curricula was dense with no time allocated to individual study, research or project work. Up until the 1990s Technikon libraries were sparse and reflected the notion that students would be told what they needed to know through lectures, workshops or in the workplace.

4.3 Taking Stock of Events 1 to 4

In considering events one to four – namely South Africa's Population Registration Act, 1950 the Eiselen Commission, The Extension of University Act of 1959 and the Van Wyk de Vries Commission – it becomes clear that during apartheid governance, the HE sector was both structurally and culturally segregated. This segregation was primarily based on a racial divide (white as superior, Black as inferior), the language of instruction (English or Afrikaans) and an institutional mandate (university or technikon). These segregations determined the relationship institutions had with the apartheid state and impacted their internal governance, funding

opportunities, what was taught and who their students were[13]. Figure 4.2 below depicts the structure of higher education in South Africa during T_1.

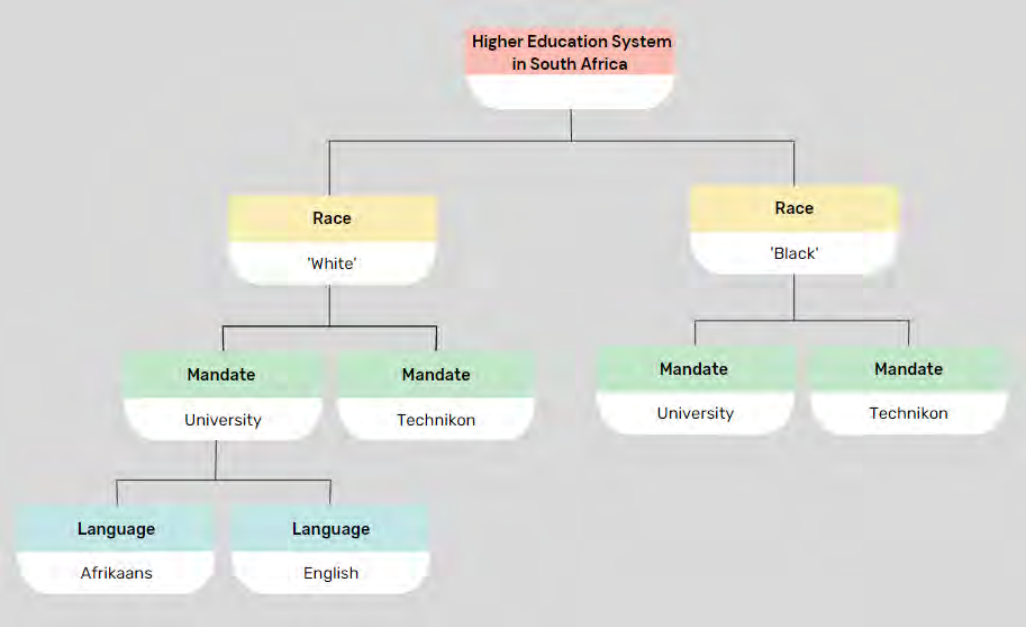


Figure 4.2: Education system in South Africa T_1

4.3.1 Implications of segregation on internal governance

Historically white universities (HWUs) were differentiated through language, and this had an important influence on the relationship between the institutions and the state. HWUs were divided into two sub-groupings, those in which the main medium of communication and instruction was Afrikaans (the language of the government) and those in which the main medium of communication was English. The Afrikaans HWUs were described as being interlocked with the state for the purposes of advancing Afrikaner interests and therefore became major recipients of government funding (Lazar, 1987). They accepted their status of being "creatures of the state" (Bunting, 2006, p. 37) and therefore acted to support the education policies of the apartheid government (Bunting, 2006; Moodie, 1994).

In contrast, English HWUs referred to themselves as "liberal universities" (Bunting, 2006, p. 42) to signal their rejection of being "creatures of the state" (Bunting, 2006, p. 37). These

13 It is important to recognise that, alongside these events in the higher education sector, resistance to the apartheid state was widespread across the broader education system. A pivotal moment in this struggle was the *Soweto Uprising* on 16 June 1976, a student-led protest against the apartheid government's policy of imposing Afrikaans as a mandatory medium of instruction in Black schools. The extent to which students from both the school and higher education sectors united in collective resistance to these oppressive measures is particularly significant.

universities developed a complex relationship with the government during the apartheid years as they collectively subscribed to Western liberal academic traditions and believed that intellectual excellence required strong institutional boundaries to keep the state out. In this way, their commitment to universal values of academic freedom clashed with them acting as servants to the state (Bunting, 2006; Moodie, 1994). They viewed academic freedom as being able to decide for themselves who may teach, what may be taught, how it shall be taught and who may be admitted for study, all of which were heavily restricted under apartheid legislation. Despite English HWUs' commitment to academic freedom, they remained compliant with state regulations, only admitting Black students who had permission from the minister and regulating the number of Black students admitted once race was no longer an admissions regulation.

Historically Black universities were viewed as appendages to the central state maintained full control over the appointment of institutional governing bodies, determined academic standards, employed white Afrikaners into leadership positions and most other roles, and prescribed curriculum to ensure that the socio-political agenda of apartheid was maintained (Bunting, 2006; Moodie, 1994). This was despite the parliamentary discourse on building universities to reflect and develop the distinctive cultures of "non-European races" (Moodie, 1994, p. 3). There were two main subgroups: one for Black students only, controlled by the Department of Education and Training, and the other for Indian and Coloured students, controlled by their respective houses of parliament. The state hoped that this total of six HBUs created by then would inculcate an intense ethnic identity and students would begin to identify with their 'homelands,' thereby allowing the status quo of apartheid to continue (Reddy 2004).

The building of ethnicity by the apartheid government was also important for ensuring divisions between Indigenous populations thereby preventing the rise of corporate agency that could become threatening to the state. These institutions were strategically located in deep rural areas or on the fringes of more affluent areas (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012). The deliberate placement of these institutions in remote areas was aimed at preventing students from engaging in critical or political discourse. Governance within these institutions was authoritarian in nature with legislation in place to control the most basic functions such as determining the times when students could leave the campus, the arrangement of any group meetings on campus, the type of publications (or pamphlets) allowed to circulate, or whether returning students could re-apply for their following year of study (Horrell, 1968). It is for these reasons

that HBUs have been described as “tightly controlled colonial institutions” (Thompson, 1977, p. 291) or “academic concentration camps” (Ashby & Anderson, 1966, p. 349).

4.3.2 Implications of segregation on funding

Government funding of higher education enables institutions to achieve their student-related ambitions. Funding can also be used by the government to steer institutions and students in certain directions through the use of incentives and is arguably one of the most powerful instruments at their disposal (Bunting, 2006). During the years in which events one to four emerged, the South African funding policies mirrored apartheid’s divisions and governance models imposed on higher education. Historically, white universities were given considerable administrative and financial powers; they had the autonomy to decide how their funding from the government would be spent, determine their tuition fees, the number of staff to employ or how surplus funds would be invested (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012; Bunting, 2006). Technikons and HBUs were, by contrast, constrained in their decisions on managing finances, their budgets and their tuition fees (Bunting, 2006). All expenditure budgeting required approval from their controlling government department (either the House of Assembly or the National Department of Education and Training). This included employing new staff, purchasing major items of equipment or maintaining their buildings and infrastructure (Bunting, 2006). These were called negotiated budgets and institutions had to return unspent funds to the controlling department at the end of each financial year. This had two consequences: firstly, budgets were hurriedly spent towards the end of the year and secondly, these institutions were not able to build up financial reserves, nor able to build capacity to plan and handle financial resources (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012).

Later, in 1982, funding of historically white institutions worked according to a funding formula which was conceptualised on the principles of efficiency, institutional autonomy and state intervention in the HE market. The apartheid government believed that only HWUs operated most efficiently when granted high levels of autonomy and that they should only intervene in the HE system when the need existed for failures to be corrected. This became known as the South African Post-Secondary Education (SAPSE) formula and was based on student numbers, subject groupings and course levels.

4.3.3 Implications of segregation on admissions

The student profile of the South African higher education system was characterised by segregation and imbalances in representation and thereby alignment with apartheid policies. Enrolment statistics in Afrikaans HWUs show that 96% of students were white in 1990; a figure that dropped to 89% in 1993. This sociodemographic composition suggests that these institutions rarely made use of the permit system; the few Black students were postgraduates who did not attend classes on campus (Bunting, 2006). Enrolments within HBUs also showed an adherence to apartheid policy and were nearly 100% Black in 1990 and 98% Black in 1993 (Bunting, 2006).

It was, however, the English universities – a group of the HWU – where enrolment most fluctuated. These institutions declared themselves "open universities" in defiance of the Extension of University Education Act of 1959, but despite the public animosity between English universities and the apartheid state, these universities have been accused of not exercising the levels of resistance against the apartheid rules which would have contributed to social and political change (Davies, 1996; Mamdani, 1998). Enrolment figures of Black students into these white universities decreased sharply following the implementation of the Extension of University Education Act (Horrell, 1968; Reddy, 2004). An example is the case of the UCT. In this institution, Black student enrolment declined from 39 students in 1959 to 18 students in 1961 and further decreased to five students by 1965. Similarly, at the University of Witwatersrand, the number of Black students decreased from 74 in 1959 to 38 in 1961 and 10 students by 1965. In both cases, the admission of Black students decreased by around 50% following the implementation of apartheid legislation. The general compliance displayed by these universities may be for a variety of reasons. Firstly, white universities could have been unprepared to oppose the state for fear of social penalties from the white corporate capitalists making financial donations to their institutions (Davies, 1992). Secondly, Moodie (1994) suggests that white universities did not oppose the government because of their close relationship with state officials. This was based on a relationship of mutual respect and membership, as there was a small white elite which bonded together with state officials and university administrators. Another potential reason is the fact that these universities were ultimately more concerned about their own institutional rights than about the emancipation of Black South Africans. In this way, they shared the dominant practices and values of the racist society of which they were part (Davies, 1992).

4.3.4 Loosening of boundaries to admissions during the 1980s

During the mid-1980s, aligned with the new constitutional dispensation, there was a slight easing in the restriction on Black admissions to white English universities and therefore more Black students were granted ministerial permits for enrolment. Universities ensured that an acceptable ratio of Black and white students was maintained by tightening their admissions policies (Reddy, 2004). In this way increasing admission requirements were used by 'open universities' as a mechanism to keep Black students out without being accused of administering apartheid policy. Subsequent enrolment patterns reflect these changes: by 1993, African, Coloured and Indian enrolments had grown to 38% from 28% in the year 1990 (Bunting, 2006).

By the 1990s there were seven technikons designated for white students: Cape (1967), Free State (1981), Natal (1967), Port Elizabeth (1967), Pretoria (1967), Vaal Triangle (1967) and Witwatersrand (1967); one for 'Coloured' students, Peninsula Technikon (1962); one for 'Indian' students, ML Sultan Technikon (1941); and five for African students, Border (1988), Eastern Cape (1987), Mangosuthu (1979), Northern Gauteng (1980) and North West (1976), located in the so-called TBVC areas and one distance learning technikon, Technikon SA (1980) (Cooper, 2015). In the late 1980s, the seven white technikons had under 5% Black enrolments with very few institutions making use of the permit system. The historically Black technikons, by comparison, had a 100% Black enrolment. Cooper (2015) argues that, unlike the HWUs, historically white technikons saw a major unplanned 'Africanisation' of enrolments in the 1990s. Over 10 years (from 1988 to 1998), Black students, in all but one historically white institution, accounted for between 50 to 75% of total enrolments. This rapid 'Africanisation' of enrolments was unplanned in that it was not an intended consequence of policy, nor initiated by the leadership of these institutions. Rather, Cooper (2015) hypothesises that it could be due to Black students and their families living in rural areas and townships exercising their agency to access historically advantaged (white) technikons located in major urban (white) areas. This was in the hope of enhancing their life chances and gaining better opportunities for the youth. Technikons were also more accessible at this point as they charged lower fees than traditional universities and had fewer selective admission criteria for eligibility. In this way, the demographic transformation was underpinned by the agency of Black students to make choices which had been historically blocked by apartheid legislation.

Similar patterns of enrolment are seen in the two technikons designated for Indian and Coloured groups (Peninsula Technikon, Cape Town and ML Sultan, Durban). In these

institutions, Black African enrolments quadrupled in the same period – 1988 to 1998 – (Cooper, 2015). The five historically Black African technikons, all of which were located near cities but within the apartheid designated 'Bantustans', remained at over 95% Black, but did experience an increase in enrolments, a phenomenon that Cooper describes as a "size revolution" (Cooper & Subotzky, 2001, p. 74). Across these institutions, enrolments grew from 3400 students in 1988 to 25 000 students by 1998 (more than a 700% growth). This growth demonstrates the desire of Black students (mainly from working-class households) to achieve a qualification in the form of a National Diploma. The newfound access for students was supported by structures put in place to effect individual redress, such as the national bursary scheme which will be discussed in the following chapter.

4.3.5 Event 5: National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI), 1992

During 1989, progressive academics who were actively involved in resisting apartheid education were informed by leaders of the United Democratic Front, the internal mass movement, that secret talks between the National Party and the ANC government had started. At the time, a settlement between the National Party with a deracialised ANC was seen as the most effective way to safeguard vital interests. These negotiations ultimately led to the lifting of international sanctions and the reintegration of South Africa into the global economy. The first step towards liberation of the political climate took place in February 1990 when the President at the time, Frederik Willem de Klerk, announced the repeal of the ban on the African National Congress (ANC) (and other banned political parties) as well as Nelson Mandela's (ANC president) release after 27 years in prison. For activists against apartheid, this marked the beginnings of change, from critique of apartheid policy through opposition to policy conceptualisation with the prospect of governing.

Nelson Mandela's release was significant as it marked the activation of multiple mechanisms that had been dormant through the apartheid regime, waiting for the right context to come into play. Secondly, it created a moment where primary agents (the apartheid activists) who may have been placed in disempowered positions of society during apartheid, shifted to become corporate agents with emergent powers able to conceptualise their goals. These agents, who after decades of contact with each other only in prison or secret networks were within weeks expected to detail their desired plans for various sectors of government.

For direction around the future of education, the incoming government turned to the National Education Co-ordinating Committee (NECC) which was a national umbrella structure composed of seasoned political activists. The NECCbrought together teacher, student and parent groups mainly from educationally disadvantaged Black communities who were opposed to the apartheid system of education. In the last half of the 1980s, the NECC had established several Education Policy Units (EPUs) in partnership with liberal universities to fulfil the need for "intellectual assistance" (Muller, 2012, p. 119) against the racial segregation rules and apartheid policies. The EPUs' role within the struggle was to provide the intellectual ammunition to underpin the strategic needs of political resistance; however, they had not at this stage generated a comprehensive view of education, nor had they explored concrete policy alternatives.

In December 1990, with the realisation that comparative policy work had become technical with an influx of international consultants such as the Harvard Institute of International Development, the International Institute of Education Policy from Paris, the World Bank and other non-governmental developmental agencies (Muller, 1991), the NECC commissioned a national investigation to be known as the NEPI. The NEPI was tasked with providing comprehensive and systematic policy options for a future education system within the framework for the people of South Africa (Muller, 2012) grounded in the values embodied in the five principles of non-racism, non-sexism, democracy, a unitary system and redress (Parker, 1993). NEPI has come to represent the shift from resistance to transformation, from revolution to structural reform, which took policymaking to the forefront as change became a matter of negotiated agreement, planning and management (Parker, 1993).

After two years of extensive negotiations in a manner which maintained legitimacy and academic rigour during a period of considerable uncertainty and violence, NEPI published 12 sectoral reports and a framework report. These reports proposed structures, processes, debates and conclusions of NEPI, which could be seen as an attempt to balance several tensions in conceptual, political and administrative domains (Parker, 1993). It remains one of the largest policy investigations in size, scope and scale to have taken place in South Africa and involved more than 300 individuals, including academics, national government and community members. They were arranged in 12 research groups, whose member compositions balanced the intellectual and political inputs to achieve an equilibrium in discourse between strategy and analytical demands (Cloete, 2006b).

The most important shift in focus for the new government was that it was no longer focussed on dislodging the previous government from power, but rather to lay out possible alternatives to the present system. In this way, NEPI attempted to replace binary oppositions with new conceptualisations that offered conflict resolution through compromise. It was expected that NEPI would be accountable, participatory and democratic in analysing policy options "for and with the people" (Muller, 2012, p. 135). This meant that community representatives would be invited to join committees and that NEPI would include people living in rural areas. This was in the hope that the findings, once judged viable by the constituents, would be spread as widely as possible.

Each of the 12 groups was purposefully composed of academics, activists and community representatives to spark debate about whether intellectual or strategic considerations should play the steering role moving forward. The debate swayed between an 'ends-based' discourse and a 'means-based' discourse; between a state- and civil society-centred discourse and between equity and efficiency (Parker, 1993). The most contestation, however, came from the concepts of 'equity' and 'development.' Equity came to stand for people's needs, aspirations and struggles, building on the conception of social justice, and development came to stand for economic growth and the integration of South Africa into a world economy dominated by global capitalism fractured by extreme inequalities of wealth and power (Muller, 2012; Parker, 1993). The demand for equity came from the resistance to apartheid education and signified the importance of redressing past inequalities.

For those groups or academics who identified as activists or leaned towards political discourses, equity was paramount, and the discourse of development was rejected for not satisfying the needs of the people. In their argument equity and development were in tension with each other, with equity being the primary goal of the education struggle. The academics did, however, realise that equity of every kind was not realisable and that policy should support how to choose (Gerwal, 1992). Those leaning towards development – largely economists – believed that reconstruction and development could be balanced with equity demands. Kraak (1993) has argued that it was essential to make this assumption so that economic growth could bring progress and equity to pursue reconstruction while retaining legitimacy.

While both groups recognised the need to keep development and equity in some kind of relation to each other, the group advocating for equity was termed "critics" (Muller, 2012, p. 122). This group insisted on retaining the position of tension between the two discourses. The other was called "reconstructors" (Muller, 2012, p. 122); they wished to move beyond the tension to reconstruction as soon as possible. However, it was the editorial board of NEPI who were tasked with balancing equity and development in their final reports.

Although debates within NEPI on equity and development continued, they were conditioned by 'the struggle' in that a common goal continued to provide unification between the 'critics' and the 'reconstructors' (Muller, 2012). Muller argues that it was NEPI's greatest achievement to succeed in balancing equity and development, politics and expertise, critique and reconstruction without allowing them to become either conflated or split apart.

By 1992, the reconstruction agenda of South Africa had gained momentum, spearheaded by the founding of the NECC, activists who were directing and coordinating European Community (now Union) funding to reconstruction and development projects only (Muller, 2012). The NECC came to pursue development for equity and in so doing they emphasised reconstruction. At this point, the NECC felt that the process, negotiations and consultations of NEPI were slowing down the reconstruction agenda and became unimpressed with NEPI presenting policy options rather than clear policy models (Muller, 2012). NEPI's work culminated in the release of the 12 reports in December 1992, covering all aspects of education as well as the framework report and final report summaries, all of which were published jointly by Oxford University Press and the NECC.

Following on from NEPI, the Union of Democratic University Staff Associations (UDUSA) established a policy forum to enable its members to debate the restructuring of higher education. The UDUSA produced a document widely referenced at institutions called the 'Red Book' (Cloete, 2006b) based on five principles mirrored from NEPI: i) non-racialism, ii) non-sexism, iii) democracy, iv) redress and v) a unitary system (Udusa, 1994). The 'red book' argued that policy formulation had to locate itself within tensions, particularly that of equity and development. For example, a balance needed to be struck between the widening of access for disadvantaged students – which could support an equity agenda (at the cost of quality as ratios between academics and students increased) – and maintaining high entry standards with a focus on sciences, which could drive development. Yet, this approach would not satisfy the demands for social justice in terms of access (Cloete, 2006b).

As the first democratic election in April 1994 drew closer, the incoming ANC education department located at the newly established Centre for Education Policy Development produced a policy framework for Education and Training (ANC, 1994). As a product of a political movement about to move into power, the ANC policy framework promised all that previous policy deliberations established by NEPI and the 'Red Book' recommended. However, the ANC did not specify the potential compromises between equity and development or between individual and institutional redress that may be required. The pre-election discourse on policy formation had a strong emphasis on redress for individuals and historically disadvantaged institutions as informed by NEPI (Cloete, 2006b).

4.3.6 Event 6: The Technikon Act, 1993

The granting of degree-awarding status to technikons in 1993 was a recognition of the contribution this sector had made to graduates entering the world of work (du Pré, 2010). Up to this point, technikons had been able to offer National Diplomas only. This change was spearheaded by the Committee of Technikon Principals (CTP), a statutory body acting as a buffer between technikons and the state who represented technical colleges on matters of common interest. The move to offer degrees and postgraduate qualifications may have been considered radical in South Africa but was aligned with global trends. International equivalents such as the United Kingdom's 'polytechnics' or America's institutes of technology were broadening their offerings and gaining prestige as higher education institutions specialising in technical degrees as they did so (du Pré, 2010). The CTP's argument was based on the rapid advancement of technology and the need for "applied research," defined as research which identifies the needs and problems of society and finds necessary solutions. And so, after careful negotiation, the DoE gazetted the Technikon Act of 1993 which made it possible for technikons to become both undergraduate and postgraduate degree-bearing institutions. As of 1994 technikons could – in addition to the three-year diploma – offer a fourth-year Bachelor of Technology (replacing the National Higher Diploma) and master's and doctoral degrees in Technology. While technikons had in essence become technical universities, they retained the name 'technikon' until much later. The ramifications of these changes had an important bearing on the events that took place in T_2 and T_3 of the morphogenetic cycle and will be picked up again in the following chapters.

4.4 Discussion

By mapping six key events from 1953 to 1993, I have thus far illustrated how the contextual structural and cultural conditions of apartheid shaped the emergence of the experiences of the South African population primarily based on their race, geographic location, language and access to material resources. T_1 was shaped by an unequal system of racial categorisation based on the legacies of colonial rule and their policies on higher education. Teferra and Altbach (2004) explain how the legacies of coloniality remain entrenched in universities across the African continent and suggest that colonial higher education shares common elements. Firstly, colonial authorities feared widespread access to higher education. They were interested in training limited numbers of African nationals only to help in the administration of the colonies. This ideology was shared by the apartheid government who were strategic in institutionalising

a system of educational stratification based on race, in which the white people had access to the most prestigious type of education. Secondly, the language of instruction in higher education (and the group of people who spoke those languages as their mother tongue) was the language of the coloniser. In apartheid South Africa, this manifested as Afrikaans and English, each representing a different level of commitment to the government. Thirdly, the colonisers limited academic freedom and the autonomy of institutions. This is reflected in the manner of which the apartheid government treated institutions as "creatures of the state." This was made more obvious in HBUs and technikons that relied on negotiated budgets and were run in highly authoritative ways. The final characteristic of colonial higher education involved a differentiated curriculum, based on race and institutional type (for example the convenorship system operationalised in technikons) which was restrictive and exclusionary.

These characteristics ensured that white people and their interests became privileged over Black peoples. This means that the racial differentiation in different domains of higher education reinforced a social structure highly hierarchical and differentiated, where people´s position and access to resources and power was highly unequal in the social structure. People who occupied positions of power and resources may have chosen to maintain their interests or improve their situation. In this way these positions could be seen as structures which lead to events, observations and experiences and it becomes possible to see how the structure of apartheid worked in different ways to enable or constrain life opportunities for Black people in South Africa.

Chapter Five: T_2-T_3 Institutional Findings

> *We are expanding the scope in terms of what we used to do and so we [are] no longer confining ourselves to only what a UoT [previously technikon] should be able to do, but more as … what a university should be able to do. So, it is more now, you know, upping our game in terms of what universities should be doing or should be known.... So, in a way, yes, we had to change. We had to assume a new identity. (QD2)*[14]

5.1 Introduction

Having examined the preconditioning conditions at T_1 and how apartheid and colonial structures either enabled or constrained changes during the system's reconfiguration, I now shift my focus to the institution as a structure and the ways in which agents engaged with and navigated it. As I present the findings, I deliberately connect them to relevant literature to weave the story together as I understand it. This chapter represents the period of social interaction and forms the basis of T_2 to T_3 of the morphogenetic framework.

This chapter, as detailed in Figure 5.1., largely centres on the key points encapsulated by the data extract above and demonstrates how the shifting structures and cultures in higher education, alongside the emergence of UoTs as an institutional type necessitated the development of a new identity. This evolving identity was shaped by various mechanisms within the higher education sector, both nationally and globally. The discussion begins with an exploration of the national context, focusing on the tension between the discourses of 'equity and redress,' and then transitions to the institutional level, examining the unintended consequences of various structures and cultures for the new identity of UoTs.

14 As discussed in Chapter Three, I have used a coding system to represent the following types of interviewees VC (Vice Chancellor), QD (Quality Representative), RE (Registrar), Department of Higher Education and Training representative (DR1) or AO (Admissions officer) followed by a sequential number.

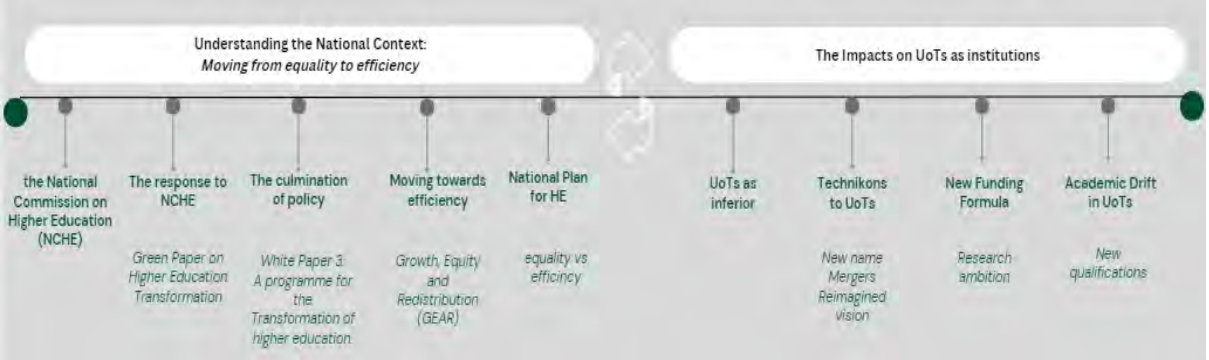


Figure 5.1: Roadmap of Chapter Five

5.2 Understanding the National Context: Moving from Equity to Efficiency

In the lead-up to the 1994 election, South Africa's democratic movement, led by the ANC, introduced the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) as its primary policy platform. The RDP sought to mobilise all of South Africa's people and the country's resources towards the final eradication of apartheid and the building of a democratic, non-racial and non-sexist future. Adelzadeh (1996) suggests that this policy was important politically, economically and socially. Politically, the document represented a consensus among diverse interests and a compromise between competing goals. Economically, the RDP aimed for growth and development through reconstruction and redistribution, advocating a significant government role in guiding the mixed economy. Socially, the systematically marginalised majority supported the RDP for its promise of a democratic society focused on job creation, basic needs provision, and a more equitable distribution of income and wealth.

With the RDP being viewed as the cornerstone of government development policy, the focus of the newly elected democratic government was to build key policy frameworks for steering the transformation of South Africa, including higher education (CHE, 2022b). A key objective was to translate policy alternatives developed as part of NEPI into a set of concrete policy positions that would shape regulations and frame key policies for transformation. To this end, the ANC-led government established the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) in January 1995 to advise the state on the framework for higher education including national goals for higher education, institutional types required by the system including their particular missions and relationships to the state, the structures required to govern and administer higher education and the funding mechanisms required for both institutions and students (NCHE, 1996).

One of the most significant contributions made by the NCHE was at a symbolic level by achieving broad consensus in a particularly contested context (CHE, 2022b). The membership of the NCHE reflected the coalition nature of the government, representing a wide range of views. The commission consisted of 13 members (nine of whom were Black and four of whom were women), including people with policy expertise (mainly from NEPI) and people representing powerful constituencies such as university and technikon principals, labour and business (Cloete, 2006b). At this stage, the government was working under 'national unity' and so membership included those who had served in senior roles within the apartheid government, alongside those who were active opponents of apartheid; each group acting to protect their own interests.

An important aspect of the NCHE was participation and interaction and therefore included an extensive process of consultation with over 100 local and international academics and policymakers split into five working groups. The NCHE aimed to break out of South Africa's academic isolation during apartheid, and so visited multiple industrialised and developing countries as precedents. Likewise, policy experts from the Centre for Higher Policy Studies (Netherlands), Commonwealth Higher Education Management Services (CHEMS, UK), the American Council on Education (Washington) and the World Bank made contributions to the working groups (Cloete, 2006b).

Following a series of public hearings, national conferences and task group workshops, the final NCHE report was submitted to the government in August 1996. Primarily it was based on the principles of equity of opportunity, redress of social inequalities, participatory governance, balanced development of material and human resources, high standards of quality, academic freedom, institutional autonomy and increased efficiency and productivity. These principles are what I refer to as the 'equity discourse' and were underpinned by three pillars; firstly, increased participation through massification thereby providing greater access while producing more high-level skills that were necessary for economic growth. Secondly, greater responsiveness, which would require new forms of management and assessment of knowledge production and dissemination with the hope that this would enable a dynamic interaction between higher education and society to promote development. Lastly, increased cooperation, with the intention to improve collaboration among constituents leading to greater participation and accountability (Cloete, 2006b; Lefa, 2014).

Some key recommendations from the NCHE report included: the establishment of a single, coordinated higher education system including universities, technikons, colleges and private institutions; the introduction of cooperative governance to guide national and institutional structures; the introduction of a quality assurance system and a national qualifications framework to develop coherence and facilitate articulation; and lastly the establishment of intermediary bodies, such as a Higher Education Council through which higher education and the state would be mediated (Cloete, 2006b).

Despite tensions, the final report came to represent a compromise among the diverse members and was considered a success by general consensus (Cloete, 2006b; Lefa, 2014) with many of its recommendations forming the basis of the new higher education regulatory framework as reflected in the 1997 Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education (DoE, 1997) and the subsequent Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997 (RSA, 1997). One of my interviewees described the NCHE as being pivotal in reconceptualising higher education and explained that it came to represent an agreement between higher education and its broader society:

> *[The NCHE] was sort of like a social compact between higher education and society because the National Commission and education had on it a large number of societal players like the union movement, the industry, the community-based organisations, the universities, government and so on. So, it was an attempt to try and produce a social compact between universities and society and, and actually, you know, that's social compact served us well. I mean the [NCHE] actually gave rise to the White Paper on higher education and then to the Higher Education Act. Basically, they [are] all founded on what was in the findings of the National Commission. (RE1)*

This extract reveals that the 'social compact' between higher education and society was based on a collaborative and shared desire for transformation. It represented a compromise between diverse stakeholders and a promise for the future which was expected to be enacted through structures in the form of policy thereafter.

5.2.1 The Department of Education's response to the NCHE: The Green Paper, 1996

The release of the Green Paper on Higher Education Transformation (1996) marked the formal response of the DoE to the NCHE report. The recommendations contained in this report are built on the NCHE report. There was a discourse of transformation to overcome past

inequalities and develop the higher education system in ways which would contribute to society. The vision, principles and goals expressed in the Green Paper are clear and represent the government's commitment to equality, democratisation and justice. The Green Paper explicitly describes the vision of higher education as to "ensure equity of access and the possibility of success to those - irrespective of race, colour, gender, creed, age or class - seeking to realise their potential through higher-level education and learning" (DHET, 2012, p. 4). The system was to be based on the principles of redress, access, democratisation, effectiveness, efficiency, academic freedom, institutional autonomy and public accountability with an endorsement to develop a single coordinated higher education system with a national qualification structure.

There were, however, some differences between the Green Paper and the NCHE Report. Firstly, emphasis was placed on restructuring higher education as a way to foster economic development, with the goal of positioning South Africa as a competitor within the international economy (Lefa, 2014). And secondly, only a single Higher Education Council would be established, in contrast to the NCHE's proposal of two councils. The responsibility of this council was also curtailed. Whereas the NCHE had defined their functions to include policy formulation, funding allocation and system planning, it was decided that the DoE would maintain these and the newly formed council would be assigned matters of quality assurance only.

Overall, the recommendations and discourses centring on equity and redress used in the Green Paper were seen to follow the spirit of the NCHE report and were considered to be well received (CHE, 2022b). It was thus anticipated that the Green Paper would be used as a foundation for developing a comprehensive set of initiatives for the transformation of higher education in the form of the White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education.

5.2.2 The introduction of the White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education, 1997

Initial drafts of the White Paper were found to focus on creating the conditions necessary for economic development in South Africa at the expense of the equity and redress agenda, indicating a shift in ideology for South Africa's future. This shift sparked a strong reaction from universities, technikons, student organisations, political parties and the general public who suggested that the draft had 'gutted key values and principles about justice, equality,

redress and transformation of higher education' (Lefa, 2014, p. 21). In this way, the initial draft prioritised development over equity. This rejected draft version of the White Paper was perhaps the first signal that balancing equity and development would be a prolonged challenge for the new government and that a compromise was needed.

Badat (1999) suggests that this predicament required the balance of multiple intertwined factors, including the eradication of an inherited system of white privilege and subordination of Black people through interventions regarding admissions and funding policies, with the need to satisfy the development needs of a country responding to the global market within the context of globalisation. Development in this instance sought to enhance higher education's ability to deliver graduates and research outputs that would benefit the country's social and economic development needs. The premise of the development agenda was that the system had to improve its efficiency (doing more with less) and effectiveness (being fit for purpose).

A final, majorly revised, Education White Paper 3 on Higher Education was released in August 1997. The major focus shifted back to the transformation of the higher education system to redress the inequalities of apartheid and meet the needs of a new South Africa with fundamentally changed economic, social and political structures. Key challenges were defined as building a single coordinated, well planned, funded and governed higher education system; redressing the inherited institutional and individual inequalities of the apartheid higher education system; and addressing the needs of an economy faced with major developmental challenges. The White Paper referred to a system of cooperative governance that would see the state in a steering and coordinating role while maintaining institutional autonomy and public accountability (CHE, 2022b).

Cooperative governance in this context was understood as higher education institutions being given autonomy to manage their own affairs without the micro-management of the ministry. The ministry would not be too prescriptive in the regulatory frameworks, allowing flexibility for institutions. There was also an understanding that no single actor could claim authority for determining the policies of the higher education system and that any institutional goals needed to be approved by the state. In addition, increased participation needed to be balanced by funding and institutional efficiency and effectiveness. Accountability and responsibility also needed to be shared by all stakeholders (Du Toit, 2014). However, since the notion of cooperative governance was introduced by the NCHE, concerns have been raised about the departure from its original intention. The 1996 Green Paper, the 1997 White Paper, the 1998

Higher Education Act and the 2001 National Plan for Higher Education have been seen as a departure from the NCHE's original conception of cooperative governance. Subsequent developments, as discussed later in this chapter, such as mandatory institutional mergers, the implementation of a unilateral new funding formula and a quality assurance regime all worked to exacerbate these concerns.

In 2002, a CHE Task Team Research Report on Governance in South African higher education concluded that 'the concept of cooperative governance, while serving a key role in formulating a democratic higher education system, is now insufficient' (Hall et al., 2002, p. 107). Again, in 2008, the CHE's Higher Education, Institutional Autonomy and Academic Freedom task team went so far as to describe the government's commitment to consultation as having weakened since 1997 and that the lack of consultation at times has approached 'unacceptable levels' (CHE, 2008, p. 50).

Furthermore, the adoption of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy – a macroeconomic policy framework designed to accelerate economic growth and generate resources for social investment – marked a sudden shift in state priorities. Declared by the Minister of Finance as 'not open to consultation or negotiation' (Muller et al., 2006, p. 294) GEAR reflected a decisive departure from earlier approaches. In this instance, GEAR placed the macroeconomic dimension at the centre of policy, different from its position in the short-lived RDP, where it was almost an afterthought (Gelb, 2007). And so, in contradiction to underpinning ideologies in the RDP, the White Paper, the Green Paper and the NCHE Report, GEAR considered rationalisation, quality, efficiency, effectiveness and performance as central to South Africa's economic re-emergence. The main aims were to stimulate growth through foreign investment and improved competitiveness. In so doing, GEAR was subscribing to the ideologies of neoliberalism and a globalised economy as discussed in Chapter Two by positioning efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness above redress and equity (Muller et al., 2006). This cultural change carried consequences for the higher education sector.

One such consequence came in the form of a request by the ministry to provide proposals on the size and shape of the education system (CHE, 2000). In June 2000, three years after the publication of the White Paper and four years after GEAR was implemented, the CHE released a report called "Towards a New Higher Education Landscape". According to the CHE, the higher education system was increasingly fragmented given the geographic location of some institutions. There were structural inefficiencies related to duplicated programmes across racial

categories, with one such example being ML Sutan and Technikon Natal which were separated by a fence but offered many of the same programmes. There were also inefficiencies related to throughput and graduation rates, skewed patterns of student outputs and poor equity in regard to academic and administrative staff demographics. The three main challenges included effectiveness as related to the relevance of higher education to the labour market, efficiency as concerned with quality and throughput and lastly equity, as concerned with equity targets for the distribution of students by race, gender and social class. Importantly this marked the first time in a post-1994 higher education context where effectiveness and efficiency were listed before equity (Cloete, 2006b). This early shift in emphasis indicates a move towards efficiency, doing the same with fewer resources or doing more with the same resources.

The CHE identified a need to reconfigure the existing post-secondary system and reconceptualise a new higher education landscape (Cloete, 2006a). This would require changes to the size and shape of the sector and should be well planned and structured. According to the CHE, the plan would represent a 'break from the past – a past largely dictated by the geo-political imagination of apartheid planners' (CHE, 2000, p. 13).

In attempting to develop a more efficient higher education system, the CHE recommended establishing a differentiated system with three categories of institutions. The first category included 'bedrock institutions' (a name which became one of the key reasons why the proposal was dismissed) which would focus on undergraduate teaching and learning with limited postgraduate programmes. The CHE believed that these institutions would constitute the foundation of the higher education system and work to ensure equity through increasing and widening participation based on appropriate admission criteria. The technikons at the time would have been categorised within this grouping. The second category would consist of institutions offering comprehensive postgraduate programmes up to doctoral level where applied, strategic and developmental research could be developed across a broad range of areas. The third category of institutions would focus on extensive masters, selective doctoral programmes and specific areas of research.

This proposal generated a heated response from university principals and the government itself. It was met with the 'accusation of reproducing apartheid' (Fataar, 2003, p. 37). Regardless of this, the CTP appeared to accept the report in principle – only on the basis that it would help bring technikons recognition as being part of university structures and pave the way to a name

change, a project so important that they would agree to be classified as a 'bedrock' institution to achieve it (Uken, 2001).

In response to the CHE report, the Ministry of Education published a National Plan for Higher Education which outlined the mechanisms for realising the policy goals of the White Paper. The Minister of Education rejected the CHE's suggested three-tiered differentiated system on the basis that it would introduce rigidity, preventing institutions from building on particular strengths and responding to the rapid changes in the regional, national and global contexts. Instead, restructuring would focus on the steering mechanisms, horizontal differentiation, inter-institutional collaboration and new forms of institutions. The goal of a single coordinated higher education system for South Africa raised by the CHE task team became the focus of the National Plan for Higher Education (DoE, 2000).

According to the then Minister of Education, Prof. Kader Asmal, the National Plan for Higher Education marked the end of all debate and consultation regarding the future higher education landscape (Asmal, 2001). The purpose of the National Plan was to outline the mechanisms for implementing the goals of the White Paper and included objectives such as increased access, equity of access, diversity in the institutional landscape, a high level of research capacity building and development of new institutional identities. This would be achieved through the implementation of three steering mechanisms, the planning process, funding and an appropriate regulatory framework. These mechanisms included 'targets for the size and shape of the higher education system, including overall growth and participation rates, institutional and programme mixes and equity and efficiency goals' (DoE, 2000 p. 12). The National Plan became a fundamental mechanism in enabling conditions for change to UoTs which I link back to as this chapter progresses.

5.3 Universities of Technology (Previously Technikons) Positioned As Inferior

- **Establishing hierarchy as a colonial device**

I begin this section by referring to the concepts of coloniality and modernity as discussed in Chapter Two. As argued in that chapter, coloniality is masked by the promises of modernity which work to present progress and development as intrinsically positive, hiding the violences that these same phenomena bring to others (Mignolo, 2011; Quijano, 2007). In this way, coloniality is constitutive of modernity and without modernity there cannot be coloniality; they are "two sides of the same coin" (Mignolo, 2011, p. 43).

Likewise, I refer back to the Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures Collective (Stein et al., 2020) and Machado de Oliveira's (2021) metaphor of 'The House Modernity Built' as discussed in Chapter Two to surface what has become unconscious, invisible or natural. I use this metaphor to understand how UoTs are positioned within the South African higher education sector and pay particular attention to two colonial mechanisms, those of separability and social mobility.

As previously described in Chapter Two, the Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures Collective (Stein et al., 2020), alongside Machado de Oliveira (2021), argue that modernity is built on a foundation of separability, referring to the separation between people and nature, countries, racial groups and also between institutions. This can enable the creation of hierarchies, ranked on their perceived value to the modern world. In higher education, this manifests as divisions based on institutional status, resources and contributions, which become normalised within modern systems. I use the metaphor of the house to illustrate the mechanisms which explain the positioning of UoTs, and that due to their beginnings in technical education which are positioned at the bottom of institutional hierarchies, in a position of inferiority. Winberg and Garraway (2019) describe the (naturalised) hierarchy as research-intensive universities at the apex, followed by comprehensive universities offering a mix of academic and career focused programmes and UoTs occupying the bottom rungs. According to Singh (2008) and Kraak (2009), historical differences among institutions based on apartheid's binary divide between 'university' and 'technikon' have had the consequence of cementing institutional hierarchies maintained today. The binary is described by one of my interviewees who held an institutional management position at a research-intensive university for decades, as '*The Technikons trained people to be employable. The universities thought of themselves as educating people to be able to think'* (RE1). He elaborated further by describing how UoTs remain shadowed by their beginnings:

> *And you know the the, the, the, the technical institutes [now universities of technology] in the early post union years 1910 to 1925 were explicitly for people who were mentally defective. That stigma stuck. (RE1)*

This extract is interesting for two reasons; firstly, it reveals the concept of separability, the technical institutes as being an 'other'. A discourse in the cultural domain has the power to condition, and in this instance, an idea is revealed which positions technical institutions as inferior. This inferiority is made visible by explicitly stating that they were developed for

people seen as 'marked' or deficit. This is further emphasised in the manner in which the participant repeats the word '*the*' multiple times in naming the '*technical institutes,*' as if careful to use the correct terminology not wanting to offend me, knowing that I am situated within a UoT context. Secondly, this extract shows that a position of inferiority has endured in the cultural domain since the binary divide discussed in the previous chapter during T_1, with the claim that this '*stigma,*' a mark of disgrace, has remained '*stuck*' today, one hundred years later. This was not the only reference to a lingering 'stigma.' Another interviewee, with years of experience in various quality assurance roles within a UoT, describes academics as feeling that UoTs continue to carry a stigma and express their desire for equivalence with other kinds of universities, which are seen as superior.

> *They [academics] want that equivalence. They [academics] want to be treated as equals, and they feel that the UoTs has a bit of a stigma to it. (QD1)*

It is this expressed desire for equivalence and inclusion, alongside a belief that UoTs are inferior that propels agents within UoTs, such as these academics, to pursue projects which could improve their hierarchical positioning. In considering this, I return to the earlier metaphor 'The House Modernity Built' to focus on the concept of social mobility. The interior of the house is described as complete with different floors, complexifying the divisions within the house and problematising desires related to social mobility. The top level of the house is presented as the penthouse and represents those who have accumulated the most power and wealth and who have secured themselves as the legitimate owners and heirs of the house. The second level is those invested in climbing the stairs of social mobility in an effort to reach the promised status and social and financial security of those living above.

In my application of the metaphorical house, I have chosen to only focus on the top two levels of the house as I understood that higher education as a sector would occupy these top spaces. I could also conceptualise that the different floors in the house are further subdivided into different kinds of institutions with different statuses (for example, historically Black institutions vs historically white institutions or research-intensive vs not). To extend this metaphor to the South African higher education system, I could suggest that traditional, HWUs are seen to occupy this metaphorical 'penthouse' or 'apex' (Winberg & Garraway, 2019). These institutions possess qualities perceived as valuable to modernity's economy and therefore discursive aspirations in the cultural domain are enabled by complementary structures to protect their interests as 'owners of the house.' Such complementary structures include the

blunt funding formula that allocates resources in part based on output without regard for the effects of history on an institution's ability to produce such outputs.

Other kinds of institutions (including UoTs) occupy the second floor with their own stratification system (such as historically white institutions (HWIs) vs historically black institutions or rural vs urban). The institutions on this floor are left with little choice but to emulate the qualities of the 'penthouse level' (their traditional university counterparts) in order to climb the stairs of social mobility. They do this in an attempt to achieve equivalence and inclusion thereby achieving a higher status at the same time as escaping their position of inferiority.

> *Because of the status that is, is afforded to a traditional university, everybody wants to be that, even if their starting mandate is something else. (JJ)*

The aspiration for improved status and prestige appears to be a shared goal for both academics and executive management, although it appears from this extract that academics are able to exercise their agency more openly whereas management is more constrained in their approach.

> *They [academics] want the status they want to be recognised as a university, not a university of technology. And you see that in all the [academic] orientation, their research and what they do, their outputs, their publications, etcetera. They fashion themselves to meet that. (QD1)*

> *[The executives] tend to not push it openly. As such, academics are more passionate about it in the sense of wanting to push that. Yes, executive managers as well push the university issues. Sometimes we are a university, you know, and this is what we should be doing. And when they do that, they benchmark, it's not the UoT sector, they benchmark against its the traditional universities you know, but sometimes the context that they are talking about doesn't actually apply to us. (QD1)*

Both extracts refer to a pattern of 'mimicking' characteristics or expectations of traditional universities. Academics are described as 'fashioning themselves' to meet expectations of what is valued, while executive management uses the term 'benchmarking' to compare themselves to traditional universities making these metaphorical 'penthouse' institutions the referent regardless of context.

> *There are tensions which we have to be honest about and that is why I keep emphasising that this is a university of technology. There are still some people that want to be a university and not a university of technology. (QD1)*

These extracts show that individual actors perceive UoTs as located in a position of inferiority, which they allude to in different ways. It is this positioning of inferiority and the desire to escape from a history of deficiency that fuels both academics and management within UoTs to emulate the kinds of universities valued in a neoliberal context. In the process of mimicking these institutions, agents pursued changes to UoTs, including their name and their qualifications and instilling a culture of competition. These changes have been enabled by the state which steers the higher education system primarily on a generic funding mechanism which is output and performance-based. These changes may all appear as 'shiny' for UoTs in the name of progress and development but may come with hidden costs for the sector and individual students.

5.4 From 'Technikon' to 'University of Technology' 1997 - 2004

> *People still see us as a dressed up technikon. (QD1)*

In October 2003, the minister for education announced that technikons would henceforth be known as 'universities of technology' (Asmal, 2003). This redesignation formed part of the reconfiguration of the higher education landscape which took part in South Africa from 2004 onwards as part of the National Development Plan (du Pré, 2010). Through a process of mergers and redesignations as advised by a national working group assembled by the Minister of Education, South Africa's 36 higher education institutions were reduced to a total of 23. What was previously 21 traditional universities and 15 technikons became a system of 11 traditional universities, six comprehensive universities (arising from mergers between technikons and traditional universities) and six UoTs.

However, the quest from 'technikon' to 'university of technology' had begun long before the process of the mergers. The discussion in regard to a name change for the technikon sector began several years earlier, in 1997 when the CTP initiated the debate (du Pré, 2010). There was a strong desire to align the technikon sector with its international counterparts, where similar institutions had adopted names such as "University of Technology" in Australia and Hungary, "University of Science and Technology" in parts of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, "University of Applied Sciences" in Germany and Switzerland, and "University of Professional Higher Education" in the Netherlands. In Ireland there were some institutions which preferred the prefix of 'Institute'. Due to a lack of consensus within the CTP at the time, the matter was dropped until the year 2000 during the formulation of the CHE's shape and size

report when the CTP created their own task team to advise the way forward for the technikon sector. In February 2001, the CTP council overwhelmingly accepted the task team's persuasive argument that a name change would bring an improved status in alignment with trends in the rest of the world. Alongside a new philosophy for UoTs which aimed for equal status to other universities, a formal request was made to the Minister of Education by the CTP to consider a name change from 'technikon' to 'university of technology.'

The new name was not approved by the DoE, which rather used the National Development Plan (NDP) to maintain the binary between traditional universities and technikons. The NDP recognised them as 'two types of institutions offering different kinds of higher education programmes' (DoE, 2000, p. 57) despite knowing that such differentiation was 'likely to be objected to by the technikon sector' (DoE, 2000, p.58). Winberg and Garraway (2019) explain that one reason why the DoE resisted this name change could have been to prevent an increase in subsidies to the institutions (who would now be classified as universities and be offering more postgraduate qualifications, thereby attracting more funding). However, the Minister of Education justified the decision as being in the interests of the higher education sector given the current social and economic development needs of South Africa (DoE, 2000).

In the following years, the CTP continued to engage with the ministry, arguing several key points. First, because a technikon lacked the designation "university," it was consistently perceived as inferior to institutions with that title (du Pré, 2010). In addition, the term "technikon" carried lingering associations with the apartheid-era binary system, which now acted as an obstacle (CTP, 2003b). Finally, the term was not competitively positioned within the local context and often led to misunderstandings (CTP, 2003). The CTP also maintained that as technikons were degree-offering institutions (as per the Technikon Amendment Act of 1993), they could rightfully claim the title of 'university.' The CTP argued that it was extremely difficult (if not impossible) to explain why technikons were degree-awarding institutions, but are not called universities (CTP, 2003). These arguments affirm the positionality of technikons as inferior and reveals the intensification of a market logic through the need for technikons to be 'locally competitive'. Perhaps more fundamentally, the mentioned quote illustrates a deep desire for prestige and equivalence, thought to be inextricably linked with the word 'university.' The power of this word was noted by an interviewee who is a quality manager at one of UoTs in the study and explained the importance of the name change:

> *People were just caught up into it. We are now a university, so it wasn't so much about University* ***of Technology****, but we have the privilege and the honour of using that term* ***university****. … We kind of were caught up in the euphoria of university and we didn't know what it meant. (QD1)*

Such data demonstrates that the most important word in the new name was '*university*'. This is evident in how the interviewee disregards the words '*of technology'* but chooses rather to focus on what is described as '*that term,'* as if it represents something elusive which had long been sought – '*university*'. That single word instilled '*privilege,'* '*honour*' and '*euphoria*' (QD1). These specific words reveal a sense of appreciation, pride and elation in being given an opportunity long desired and not available to everyone.

In this sense, I am interpreting these references to mean that including '*university*' in the name was seen as a signal of inclusion within the higher education sector and represented a move up the stairs closer to the penthouse, and more importantly a step away from the technikon's history of inferiority. Interestingly, this euphoria was not a shared sentiment from those located beyond the UoT sector, such as traditional universities – they initially resisted the name change, perhaps in a move to protect their own interests (du Pré, 2010). This is reflected in a comment made by one interviewee with vast management experience at UoTs and more recently traditional universities, who referred to "*universities of technology, or whatever you want to call them"* (VC2). The last part of the extract suggests that the exact naming of the institutions was not important, indicative of lingering tension or perhaps a shared confusion by the interviewee (QD1) in regard to what the new name actually meant.

Although the Minister of Education had announced the name change (DoE, 2002b), there was uncertainty about what this meant. Furthermore, there was no detailed concept document released by the DoE, as was the case when comprehensive universities emerged (Kraak, 2006; Winberg & Garraway, 2019) or as there was previously for technikons (Report 150). Instead, a document released by the Universities of Technology Vice Chancellors (Du Pre, 2009) became the blueprint for these institutions (Thathiah, 2013). Winberg and Garraway (2019) therefore argue that this made the creation of South African UoTs by decree, in that they were not expected to meet particular criteria to be awarded their name, as is required in other parts of the world (such as post-1992 universities in the UK). In that same way, it was up to the institutions themselves to establish a new mandate and identity, working within the existing

steering mechanisms of the state. Many of the participants reflected on this shift, again emphasising what it meant to have 'university' in the name.

> *Because allowing technikons to call themselves or to move towards being universities, it came with such an expectation in terms of what universities are meant to do. So, in a way, yes, we had to change. We had to assume a new identity. (QD2)*

> *Initially, honestly, again, it starts like that. People just, you know, cotton onto a term and they just run with it and don't really understand what they actually got. But then it became OK, fine. Now what does it actually mean? What do we actually mean that we need to do? At the same time, it was about comprehensives [comprehensive universities] and others as well. But your UoTs, for us particularly. (QD1)*

Without clear distinctions from the ministry between traditional universities and UoTs (Reddy, 2006), these latter institutions and the agents within them drew on existing discourses in the cultural domain to shape their emerging identity and philosophy, as reflected in the 2004 publication '*Universities of Technology in South Africa: Position, Role and Function*' (Du Pré, 2004).

In this way, the identity of UoTs emerged from the interaction between structural constraints and cultural expectations. The study data suggests that UoTs felt compelled to align themselves with the perceived standards of what a 'university' should be, an ideal largely influenced by traditional research-focused universities both locally and internationally. This emergent identity, however, was criticised for drawing heavily on international models without sufficient evidence of broader consultation within the local context (Thathiah, 2013).

The emergence of a new UoT identity was evident when engaging with the vision and missions of the two institutional case studies. In both cases, there was a shift in the mid-2000s, a time aligned to their name change. The shift suggests a neoliberal influence. During this time, vision statements use the discourse of wanting to be 'leading' or 'preferred' institutions. Choosing these specific words might be interpreted as an increasing 'culture of competition' between institutions, acknowledged by one interviewee who describes it as '*we* [UoTs] *are now competing in the space of universities*' (QD2). This emerging 'culture of competition' was also observed by the state, which tried to address it a few years earlier through the White Paper 3 and the National Plan for Higher Education, which states that one of the challenges facing higher education is the 'increased competition between institutions which threatens to fragment

the higher education sector' (RSA, 2001, p. 5). This was important at a time when there was growth in private higher education and a proliferation of partnerships between these and public institutions. The 'culture of competition' is an important concept, one to which I return later in the chapter.

In addition to fostering a 'culture of competition,' there was a distinct emphasis on cultivating an 'entrepreneurial ethos' (TUT) or 'productive citizenship' (DUT), highlighting the link between the university and national development, implying that the purpose of higher education is to serve the knowledge economy. Significantly, both institutions prominently feature the word 'technology' in their visions, reflecting their technical origins.

By 2012, there was a shift in vision statements with the words 'quality,' 'cutting-edge innovation' and 'excellence in teaching, learning and applied research' being used to describe institutions. These words demonstrate a shift in direction, with heavy emphasis on being positioned at the forefront of the sector. This is alongside the inclusion of the words 'applied research,' which demonstrate a newfound commitment to a research agenda, perhaps seen as a step towards becoming what is expected from a university. This expectation is made clear in the data when during an interview, a representative of the Department of Higher Education stated, '*Because they* [UoTs] *are universities and what we are saying in our* [DHET] *policies is that a university should show itself by doing some research'* (DR1).

As in previous years, the term 'technology' remained central to institutional vision and mission statements. However, starting in 2020, the word 'technology' has either been completely removed or diminished in prominence within these statements. Instead, the term 'university' now stands alone, as seen in this narrative at the TUT: 'A people's university that makes knowledge work'. Similarly, in the DUT's vision, a similar expression is found: 'A preferred university for developing leadership in technology and productive citizenship'. In both institutions, the focus has shifted towards broader institutional goals.

The emergence of today's identity, as reflected in the vision and mission statements for UoTs is understood as emerging from the interaction between structure, culture and agency. The shifts in these vision and mission statements reflect how these institutions have changed over time, moving from their original technical focus towards a more research focus as a way to satisfy their aspiration to '*catch up'*.

5.5 The New Funding Formula on Higher Education, 2004

We [DHET] therefore use funding, in particular to influence the patterns of access. (DR1)

Importantly, attaining 'university' status unlocked access to different rewards in terms of the funding formula for higher education. As indicated in the preceding chapter, the previous system, in place until 2004, distinguished between universities and technikons and was weighted in favour of universities, particularly in the allocation of research funding (DoE, 2001). The new funding formula, implemented fully in 2007, treated all universities in terms of one set of rules (CHE, 2016). Funding in the South African context holds significant power because government subsidies are essential for the sustainability of institutions and are used as a steering mechanism by the government to ensure the goals and targets of the National Plan are achieved (DoE, 2001). As Figure 5.2 below shows, UoTs are reliant on state funding to make up 52% of overall income, notably higher than other institutional types (CHE, 2022). Considering this, it could be reasonable to suggest that UoTs are more susceptible to being influenced (steered) by the state, and as one of my interviewees from DHET explained, '*we use funding the, the, the patterns of funding to influence the institutions*' (DR1).

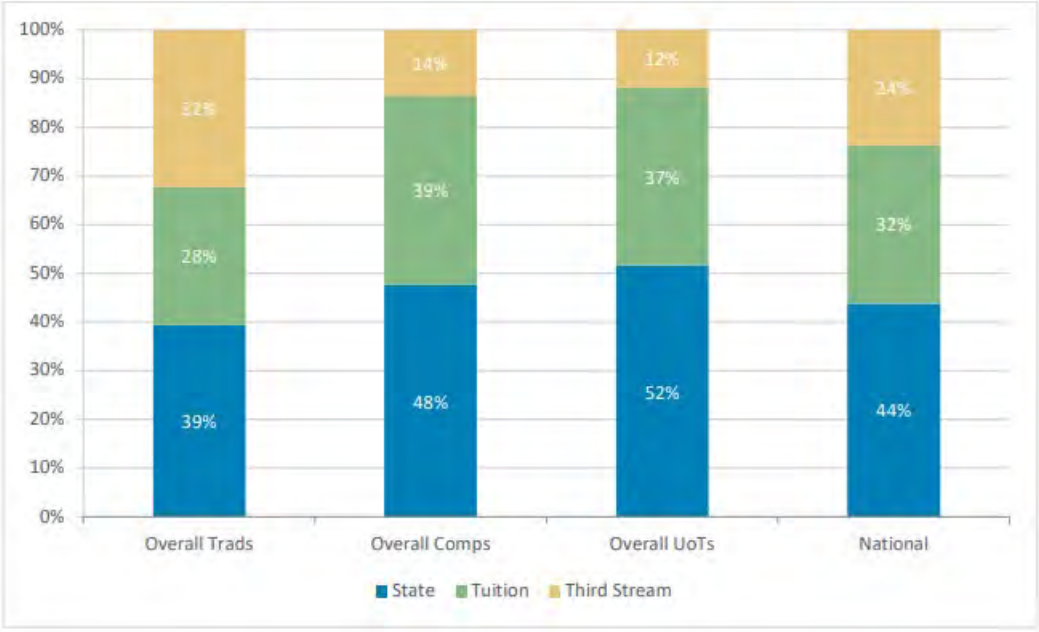


Figure 5.2: Proportion of institutional funding per source and institutional type taken from CHE Vital Stats (CHE, 2022a)

The national plan set out the mechanics of how funding would be institutionalised based on the following principles: funding should be planned in advance and managed as a joint system

nationally; funding should allow for equity and redress in order to make the system more equitable to ensure the system meets its goals at the least cost, and the cost of higher education should be shared between the state and those that benefit from it.

The new funding framework replaced the SAPSE formula that had been operational since 1983, as discussed in Chapter Four, which was based on student enrolments and factored in differential costs of funding students in various fields of study. The new funding framework differed in that it is not based purely on student enrolment numbers (although they remain a central aspect) but is also linked to national planning goals and policy priorities, the amount of funding available in the national higher education budget, and is tied to the approved enrolment plans of individual higher education institutions. The new funding framework has two components: a block grant and earmarked grants. The block grant has four components. First, it includes a teaching input grant, based on approved, negotiated student enrolment plans related to fields of study, type of qualification and level of study. The second component relies on a teaching output grant, based on graduations of undergraduate students. The third element is a research output grant, based on the graduations of master's and doctoral students and approved research publications. Finally, the funding framework also includes institutional factor grants, based on the proportion of enrolment of disadvantaged students. The earmarked components of funding are dedicated to specific projects such as National Student Funding Aid Scheme (NSFAS), infrastructure, teaching and research development and foundation programmes.

Contrary to the National Plan's goal of funding facilitating equity and redress to make the system more equitable, the new funding framework is arranged in such a way that reinforces the superiority of 'apex' universities (HWUs with a depth of research capacity) by especially rewarding qualities, such as research output, that only few universities are able to achieve to any significant degree, thereby intensifying systemic inequality. To illustrate the point, the DHET's annual report on the evaluation of university research outputs for 2022 indicates that 51% of the research publications output units are produced by five out of 26 universities (UJ, UKZN, UP, SU and WITS) (DHET, 2024). Four of these were previously classified as HWUs and one of which, UJ, included an HWU as the largest part of its merger. The funding formula provides relatively large funding for postgraduate qualifications (such as honours, master's,

and PhDs) and incentivises research outputs by rewarding publications in accredited journals[15]. In addition to the financial rewards, the prestige associated with research makes it a highly sought-after outcome across the system (Styger et al., 2016). In this way, incentivising research has created a goal-orientated and performance-related environment where all universities find themselves entangled in the knowledge economy. This 'one-size-fits-all' or 'blunt' (Boughey & McKenna, 2021) system of funding stimulates all universities, irrespective of their mandates and missions to pursue research and offer postgraduate degrees (CHE, 2022b) and undergraduate degree programmes at the expense of diplomas. Essop (2020) suggests that the funding framework has encouraged homogenisation in the system due to the necessity of staying financially sustainable and competitive in a market-driven environment[16]. This is problematic if the goal is to achieve a differentiated higher education sector. As discussed in Chapter Four, there are many reasons to desire differentiation at a national level, albeit with contradictory logics at the institutional level.

The effect of the funding formula on research outputs (measured in publication units and research master's and doctoral graduates) in the UoT sector between 2005 and 2017 is measurable. Figure 5.3 below represents a continued and sustained growth in research outputs, with an overall percentage growth of 313. 4% between the years 2005–2017.

Figure 5.3: Universities of Technology (6 institutions overall) research outputs as adapted from Essop (2020)

15 In South Africa, accredited journals are recognised research outputs that meet specified criteria and qualify for subsidisation by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). Each year a list of journals is made available called the 'DHET accredited journal list,' each entry is recognised for its rigorous peer-review process and national/global relevance.

16 Funding as a mechanism was part of the findings presented at the 2023 American Educational Research Association (AERA) conference entitled '*Exploring how Colonial Legacies are re(produced) in admission criteria of South African Universities of Technology*'

The increase of enrolment into postgraduate qualifications at UoTs on a national level tells a similar story; from 5 377 postgraduate enrolments in 2011 (CHE, 2019) to 9 972 enrolments in 2021 (CHE, 2023). The pressure to produce research and postgraduate graduates, especially for UoTs with the word 'university' now featured in their name, is expressed by an interviewee from DHET who stated:

> *You know generally the UoTs also want to push themselves. Is there money? There is money in research from government. It attracts institutions for their sustainability really, but also for their identity, you know, because they are universities and what we are saying in our [DHET] policies is that a university should show itself by doing some research (DR1)*

Firstly, this extract reveals a strong connection between research and money and how an institution's sustainability and identity are believed to be directly related to its research outputs. This is to the benefit of 'apex' universities and works to reaffirm their superior status, but places UoTs in a position where they need to 'push themselves' to meet the same expectation. Secondly, this extract serves as affirmation that policy is structured with an embedded ideology which values research, which an institution must satisfy in order to be seen, recognised and subsequently rewarded. Although the funding formula seemingly did not set out to reproduce a hierarchical structure among higher education institutions, its implementation has contributed to reproducing the stratification of the South African higher education system along racial, class and urban/rural hierarchies (Cooper, 2015). Bozalek and Boughey (2012) argue that historically Black universities and UoTs continue to be penalised since the policy's implementation owing to their low research capacity starting base and the sort of students they were able to attract.

In addition, the pressure to increase publication outputs has been influenced by the university global rankings systems, in which research strength is a key criterion (Essop, 2018). The growth of university league tables is arguably a manifestation of globalisation (Boughey & McKenna, 2021) and works to push universities into competing for a place in various international ranking systems. According to Badat (2010), these systems draw on an idealised university model based on 'apex universities' within the Global North and serve to maintain their social, economic and status while keeping others at the lower end of the game. I now turn to focus on the world ranking systems as a mechanism which allows colonial legacies to be reproduced within South African UoTs.

5.6 The Global University Ranking Systems, 2000

> *There are some of us who were basically swimming against the stream. You'll find that will never be number one. We can dream as much as we, we want. You know we'll never be number one. We'll never be top ten. We'll never be top 100, you know. Why then do we still, still subscribe to this? (MM)*

The global university ranking systems are not a new phenomenon and have become a multi-billion dollar industry (McKenna, 2024b). Jons and Howler (2013) argue that they are an extension of national league systems already established in many countries. In the market-orientated higher education system of the United States, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching has published a classification of universities since 1973. Even earlier, informal rankings, expressed in the Ivy League from 1954 have become synonymous with private, elite universities which are perceived to hold the highest academic standard. The concept of Global University Rankings emerged during the early 2000s (Altbach & Salmi, 2011; Pusser & Marginson, 2013) and became globally popularised by systems such as QS World rankings, produced by Quacquarelli Symonds, a United Kingdom-based company specialising in study abroad and the Times Higher Education World University Rankings (THE). Similarly, the Shanghai Jia Tong World University Ranking (ARWU, today known as the Shanghai Ranking) emerged in 2000 in China. Liu (2009) suggests the popularity of these systems was initially driven by China's rapid expansion of higher education and its desire to establish itself as "world class". Jons and Howler (2013) suggest that in this way, world university rankings can be regarded as a manifestation of the neoliberal corporatisation of higher education. In this way, the commodification of knowledge and the relentless pressure to produce output are a result of an environment where market forces increasingly govern structures and cultures which make up an institution. As such, the global ranking systems can be seen as emerging within the enabling conditions of neoliberalism.

The ranking systems are based on an international outlook on higher education, largely driven by defining benchmarks for emulating the success of 'apex universities' in the Western world and are driving universities into what Marginson (2007) calls a single hierarchy. Despite criticism for lacking transparency (McKenna, 2024), these ranking methodologies generally rely on a combination of criteria. These include research output, typically measured by the number of articles published in peer-reviewed journals, the number of Nobel laureates among academics and alumni (as seen in the Jia Tong Shanghai University Ranking), the number of

highly cited researchers in specific fields, per capita academic performance and international reputation metrics (as used by rankings like THE and QS).

As a result, seeking placement in the ranking system as an institution means privileging one aspect of institutional life (for example research publications or improved status) at the cost of others (such as widening access to students from lower socioeconomic groups) (Teferra, 2017). In this way, rankings do not consider history or take context into account, nor do they acknowledge the local needs or aspirations of particular universities (McKenna, 2024). Pressure on universities to conform to one ideal works as a constraining mechanism on local or national development priorities (Ordorika & Lloyd, 2015). In South Africa, this may be particularly problematic as the rankings position 'development,' in terms of modernity in the form of achieving a global standard determined by Western countries against a local 'equity' agenda which underpins the foundation of the new democracy.

As several scholars point out (see Chiappa, 2021; McKenna, 2024; Pusser & Marginson, 2013; Shahjahan et al., 2017), the methodology used by these ranking systems is unscientific and has disproportionally favoured a model of Anglo-American research-intensive universities with a scientific focus, located in industrialised Western countries. Badat (2010) among others (Kaba, 2012; Ordorika & Lloyd, 2015) argue that this does not always offer sensible models for those located elsewhere in the globe who may occupy different contexts, and work rather to reproduce existing power dynamics thereby maintaining the status quo of the social, and economic order. In this way, the status of certain universities is reinforced, while others are kept at the bottom of the ladder. In other words, rankings have created a hierarchy that is connected at its core to colonial history, setting up what Mignolo (2021) describes as 'the colonial order'.

This is established by actors in continental Europe and the US making all other regions and people receptors of Western global designs. Shahjahan et al. (2024) argue that this is the case in Bangladesh and use the example of the opposition party leader who publicly lamented that the historically top-reputed, Dhaka University, could not secure a position in the ranked list of Asian universities, reasoning that the institution's curricula were too Indian, rather than being that of the developed world. In so saying, the belief is that the ranking system is a valid measure to evaluate higher education and that a developed nation's knowledge is more valid than Indian knowledge.

As such, there is significant inequality between the academic "core" and the numerous "peripheral" institutions located in formerly colonised regions, a disparity that is reflected in the Global University Rankings (Altbach, 2012). As an example, 17 of the top 20 ranked institutions appearing in the 2024 rankings are located in the Global North (the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Switzerland) (THE World University Rankings, 2024). This is a trend which dominates the top 100, with the highest-ranked university in the continent of Africa (UCT) standing at position 167 in the THE World University Rankings (2024). The top-ranked South African UoT is the DUT and comes in between positions 1001–1200. In this way, African universities and likewise UoTs have become receptors of Westernised designs and standards of quality.

The data generated from this study reveals an initial critique of the ranking systems with participants originally denying their impact on higher education institutions[17]. The participants seemed to want to distance themselves or their institutions from engaging with rankings, with one interviewee describing the ranking systems as *"a horrible, a* ***horrible*** *instrument of globalisation"* (VC1) that presents "*this kind of you know this danger. A very real danger, of, uh, sort of tearing institutions away from the local context"* (VC1). Other interviewees agreed and quickly dismissed the pull of rankings: *"Our universities don't take the rankings very seriously as something to work towards*" (VC2). This was again echoed by the DHET representative who explained, "*You know, we, we don't subscribe to this issue of rankings of universities"* followed by, *"and, and we* [DHET] *don't understand why it should be used as a measure of anything". (DR1).* Recognising that global ranking systems have the potential to distract institutions from local imperatives and calling them an instrument of globalisation echoes arguments against ranking systems as presented by various scholars (Boughey & McKenna, 2021; Shahjahan et al., 2024).

However, despite this initial discourse of general resistance, it was easy for some participants to reveal instances of how other institutions (never their own) have been influenced by the ranking systems, in making changes to better align with the criteria used for judging. Three interviewees eloquently referred to this phenomenon in the following extracts:

> *Their research productivity in one year [institution's name removed] using some devious means*

17 World Ranking Systems as a mechanism was part of the findings presented at the 2023 American Educational Research Association (AERA) conference entitled '*Exploring how colonial legacies are re(produced) in admission criteria of South African Universities of Technology'.*

for publication shoots to the top … so if you play that game, there's a lot of smoke, smoke and mirrors. There's a lot of duplicity. There's a lot of dishonesty. (VC2)

They distort universities. I know of universities that have set up business schools simply for the reason. That, that will enhance their rankings, you know. (VC1)

But I mean [institution's name removed], you know, has terrible staff–student ratio, but has been climbing the rankings because they have been very, very careful to recruit a lot of retired academics who have PhD students. They've got lots of post docs, so their research impact increases. (RE1)

These extracts suggest that perhaps the resistance to rankings is not unanimous across the sector and that despite some outward rejection of the ranking systems, they continue to work in more subtle, persuasive ways. The subtle persuasion may work because the underlying logic of the ranking systems is complementary to the broader neoliberal context of higher education where market-orientated practices like branding, corporate identity and public perception have become increasingly integrated. These factors condition the agents into accepting the ranking systems based on marketing or public relations, which are discourses previously reserved for the corporate domain but are increasingly prevalent in academia. These discourses subtly influence institutions and agents within them to conform to this logic, even if there is some outward critique of them.

One interviewee, the representative from DHET, described the ranking systems used by institutions as "*wanting to be attractive to the world"* (DR1). Another claimed that "*we* [the institution] *tend to pick the one that makes us look the best in terms of where we are"* (QD1). The same interviewee explained that this was acceptable because "*people like ratings, corporates like rankings as well. And people want to associate themselves with the people that are more known things"* (QD1). Another interviewee, a previous vice-chancellor agreed by saying, *"It really is for the user community, that is parents and students, they really take these things seriously"* (VC2).

In these extracts, the participants did not object to using ranking systems in shaping institutional perceptions. They believed that such rankings were necessary for the general public to assess an institution's quality: *"It improves an institution, should I say, and that's why people use it"* (QD1). This quote suggests a set of complementary discourses linking institutional prestige to ranking position.

The associated prestige is also what may drive institutional executive management to pursue ranking positions, despite their criticism of them, as they recognise that they "*give clout"* (QD1) in terms of enhancing their reputation, status or authority. Executive management perceives an improved ranking to be a "*feather in* [their] *cap*" (DR1), in this case, meaning an accomplishment or an achievement that brings honour and recognition or adds to reputation or success. As a UoT, this becomes particularly important given the desire to reach "catch up". To demonstrate the increasing importance vice-chancellors and other management place on the rankings I refer to the following extracts:

> *But of late there's been appetite for participating in rankings, checking rankings, reporting on rankings … I've seen in the in, in our, in our current strategic planning. (QD2)*
>
> *There's prestige that goes with that, that there's, there's perceptions that are, you know more positive and no university vice-chancellor is going to not claim those things when it happens. (VC2)*
>
> *Vice-chancellors in particular, you know, they, they go crazy when they see the listing. Then you find headlines, you know, South African universities, 10 universities have gone up the rankings. They are in the top 500 and so on. (DR1)*
>
> *You can benefit because you know you may attract more research, may attract more partners from around the world, partners that want to do research with you, either locally here or you know, with others around the world. Elsewhere in the world. (DR1)*

These extracts again reveal the persuasive nature of the World University Ranking systems and show how difficult it is for people, both inside and outside of the university, to use their agency to resist them, especially as they bring the promise of improved status and desirability. They function on being subtle or implicit to the point of becoming naturalised, where even the interviewees, although understanding the critiques, start to accept them. This links to the underpinning structural and cultural conditioning of neoliberalism which emphasises competition, measurement and market-based logic as fundamental values, thus making radical change difficult to achieve. In this way, rankings could be seen as a manifestation of coloniality by being portrayed under the guise of development or progress, but at the same time obscure their costs to the equity agenda of South African higher education. This may encourage lower-ranked universities such as UoTs to mimic higher-ranked institutions, despite their specific mandate towards institutional differentiation (DHET, 2014).

In this way, Global University Rankings perpetuate homogenisation or organisational isomorphosim (Enders, 2014) on a global scale. Institutional isomorphism could thus be seen as emerging from the conditioning effects of structures (like the ranking systems) and the complementary discourses (which perceive higher placement in the ranking system as 'development') in the cultural domain. In the South African sector, this has manifested itself through academic drift where previously distinct boundaries between traditional and vocational institutions have been made permeable. Here, institutions such as UoTs begin to mimic key attributes of traditional research-intensive universities (Kraak, 2009) to expand new learner markets, programme fields and income sources creating an increasingly homogenous environment which positions universities as businesses competing against each other.

5.6 New Qualifications at Universities of Technology

> *Putting drag onto a National Diploma making it a degree doesn't work; it still remains what it is. And unfortunately, that's why sometimes it translates into poor performance and those kinds of things, and we actually struggling with enrolments in many sectors with degrees. (QD1)*

Understanding changes to qualifications offered at UoTs is central when considering access. It stands to reason that the higher the qualification (diploma vs degree), the higher the admission criteria will be – and the more difficult they will be to achieve, most especially for those who have less access to resources. There have been notable changes over time to the kinds of qualifications offered at UoTs, which require further background on how programmes are determined, accredited and implemented in the South African higher education sector.

The White Paper 3 identified planning as a key instrument in achieving policy goals but it was the NDP in 2001 which laid out the mechanics of how planning would be institutionalised as a steering mechanism throughout the system. At a national level, this meant that the government would play a more central role in setting targets that higher education institutions would need to achieve. These targets included student enrolments, postgraduate student outputs and improved staff equity profiles (CHE, 2022b). Higher education institutions were expected to align their strategies with national goals through three-year rolling plans which required approval from the DoE, signalling a change to a more managed higher education reform system with a centrally managed approach to enrolment planning.

In the year following the implementation of the new funding formula, the Minister of Education also released a document outlining the new approach to enrolment planning, as this was seen as a key component for determining teaching input funding for each institution. In 2005, the DoE negotiated with each institution that had to present proposals for the next three years of enrolment. The proposals had to include race and gender profiles, enrolment into major fields of study and student graduation rates; however, one of my interviewees explained that calling it *"negotiated is perhaps putting it too strongly because, you know, the department strong arm, the universities into it. I mean, it's not, it's not a negotiation between two equal partners"* (RE1).

This extract illustrates that the DHET is perceived as wielding significant power and operates less through negotiation and more through directives, using financial penalties as a means of retaining control. They do so by "*reducing a good number of percentage points for exceeding or under enrolling in the following years of state subsidy*" (RE1) and as noted by the same interviewee, "*no institution can afford that at the moment"* (RE1).

The same approach of negotiated self-regulation and associated financial penalties was used for determining each institution's Programme Qualification Mix (PQM). The PQM is a list of all the approved qualifications that a higher education institution can be subsidised for. Described by my interviewees as "*an extraordinarily powerful device the department* [DHET] *has"* (RE1) and yet "*it has no basis in law, there is nothing in any regulation or the act that gives the department* [DHET] *the right to set a PQM*" (RE1). The power the PQM holds is again linked to that of funding, so even though a particular institution may in theory offer any qualification registered on the National Qualification Framework, it will not generate a subsidy unless it appears on their PQM. In the context of this study, the discussion on the PQM is closely tied to matters of access, as admission criteria are often linked to specific qualification types. Therefore, any changes to qualification types will directly affect access opportunities.

The PQM was intended to be a central lever for promoting institutional diversity and collaboration and was also expected to control the balance between enrolments into technikon and university programmes. The first stage of PQM implementation was completed at the end of 2002 with the release of the approved programme and qualification profile for all institutions. Any new programmes required ministerial clearance based on: a) the fit between the institution's mission and national needs; b) institutional capacity including qualified staff

and academic staff–student ratio; c) overall graduation rates; and d) the PQM of neighbouring institutions, including a regional review process.

After an institution gained approval for a new qualification to be added to its PQM, the CHE was responsible for its accreditation. The success of the PQM as a steering mechanism relied on establishing clear parameters and criteria for determining an institution's programme mix, based on an assessment of how well its PQM aligned with its mission. Essop (2020) argues that once the initial PQM profiles were approved, it became difficult for the ministry to apply its own criteria, which allowed institutions to expand their PQMs outside of formal regulations (CHE, 2022b). According to Essop (2020), the failure of PQM-based differentiation stems from a lack of capacity at the middle management level within the DHET to fully grasp the purposes of higher education. This problem has been further compounded by frequent staff turnover and the challenges of recruiting suitably qualified and experienced personnel within DHET (Essop, 2020). This perspective seems to be echoed by one of the interviewees in my study, who, with nearly 30 years of experience as a university registrar, remarked:

> *It [the PQM] is the controlling mechanism on the question of [university's] mission. Ten or fifteen years ago, most universities had confidence that the people in the department who ran the PQM process were competent. I don't know what the view of universities would be if you ask them that question in 2022. It's a very serious issue because you essentially have a number of officials in the department, that is not functioning very well, who are the determinants of the mission of the sector and the shape of the sector. I think if you ask the Minister or the Deputy Minister [of higher education] what the PQM was, that they'd say, what are you talking about? (RE1)*

This extract demonstrates a breakdown in the relationship between individual institutions and the DHET indicating that state steering was not without contestation, contradictions and conflict (CHE, 2022b). Some institutions found government interference a threat to institutional autonomy and an infringement on their academic freedom in allowing DHET to approve what qualifications were offered. These steering mechanisms were seen as a "violation of democracy and redress in the name of efficiency and slippage from a state steering role towards a more interfering role, hence encroaching on autonomy" (Cloete & Moja, 1996, p. 40). There is clear evidence here of contradictions between the different mechanisms at play.

As part of the attempt to create a single integrated national framework for learning achievements, the National Qualification Framework (NQF) was established. The NQF is a comprehensive system for classifying, registering, and ensuring quality in the country's qualifications. The system consists of 10 levels, with each level representing a different qualification type. Higher education occupies NQF levels five (higher certificate) to 10 (doctoral degree). The Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) is an important component of the NQF which works to specifically govern higher education qualifications (NQF levels 5–10). The HEQSF sets out the range of qualification types that may be awarded to mark the achievement of learning outcomes that have been appropriately assessed. It also shapes the relationship between different qualification types (CHE, 2013). This also allows for students to transition between qualifications and institutions if or when needed. The HEQSF is overseen by the CHE which assumes responsibility for programme accreditation thereby ensuring quality across the sector and that the NQF standards are aligned with programme offerings. Importantly, it remains the responsibility of the DHET to manage each institution's PQM and enrolment plan, while the CHE accredits actual programmes against the qualifications through the HEQSF. The DHET however has argued that academic drift can be attributed to the HEQSF by providing an open mandate to universities to offer programmes beyond the scope of their mandate (Essop, 2020).

Universities of technology (UoTs) responded to these shifts slowly; as the need to apply for new programme accreditation arose, they opted to expand their institutional PQMs by replacing diploma-type qualifications with undergraduate degree qualifications. Although not immediately apparent, over time, this has resulted in many diplomas (NQF level 6 qualifications) being phased out and replaced by degrees (NQF level 7). This could be seen as an attempt to fulfil their desire to "catch up" with the superiority of apex universities that traditionally offer undergraduate degrees as first entry. At the same time, this shift facilitated progression into higher-level qualifications, such as honours degrees instead of BTech, which ultimately attracted greater government subsidies. This is a significant move given that in 2023, only 40.9% of the National Senior Certificate candidates achieved a pass for entry into a bachelor's degree (DoE, 2024). The majority of candidates (59.1%) can enter only certificate and diploma qualifications – the options of which have become limited given the replacement of diplomas with degrees. Essop (2020) confirms this trend that shows a decline in the proportion of headcount enrolments in diploma programmes at UoTs, from 80.8% to 70.1% between the years 2005 and 2017.

This significant shift in qualification offerings is common to both of my case studies, with one interviewee, a director of quality for their institution, describing that one of the major changes experienced in UoTs was the move to HEQSF-aligned qualifications, enabled by the shifts in institutional identity. They describe the shift as follows:

> *The HEQSF saw new qualification types being introduced for UoTs and allowed for a different or more expanded PQM. For instance, we now have bachelor degrees, especially in the Health Sciences, where mainly we had diplomas. (QD2)*

The director for quality in the other institution explained the shifts from diploma to degree as follows:

> *If you're looking at Health Sciences, all of them are degrees, if you're looking at applied sciences 80% of them are degrees, if you look at engineering 95% of that are degrees. And then for account informatics we have mostly diploma. So that's, that's fine. If you look at management sciences, only diplomas, so we're good there. When it comes to arts and design half and half degrees and diplomas, but with the increasing tendency towards degrees. (QD1)*

These extracts demonstrate the extent of the shift from a diploma to a degree across different faculties but also imply an awareness that offering degrees is contrary to the institutional mandate as the participant comments, "*We're good there*" and "*That's fine*" in reference to their diploma offerings.

The impact of replacing diplomas with undergraduate degrees brought about several consequences, one of which I focus on is the need to increase admission criteria for degree entry as stipulated in the minimum admission requirements published by DHET. I will allude to the specificities of these aspects in the next chapter because they have serious implications for candidate students. Overall, these higher requirements meant that both the UoTs in the study experienced difficulty in achieving enrolment targets for their programmes, which carries a financial penalty from the DHET. One participant explained using specific examples:

> *When we were still offering diplomas, we didn't have a problem of meeting the numbers in engineering, but immediately when they moved from diplomas to degree then we struggle. We* ***really, really*** *struggle. [to fill the places available]. (AO2)*

> *We struggle to find students; they battle with their Maths. We get hundreds of thousands of applicants but more than 50% don't meet the new requirements. (AO2)*

The "*struggle*" for enrolment, as described by the above interviewee is significant given the reported number of applications each institution receives. One of the institutions in this study reported that they had received more than 286 000 applications for the limit of 15 559 first-year places (for the 2023 academic year). Likewise, a similar situation was reported in the second institution which had more than 170 000 applications for 6 000 first-year places. Although these numbers cannot be taken at face value, as multiple applicants are able to apply for multiple qualifications at multiple institutions, they illustrate the excessive demand for first-year placement.

The contradiction of struggling to meet enrolment targets while "*people are hungry for education"* (DR1) may also be reflected in the enrolment numbers for the UoT sector as a whole, which one would expect to be showing steady growth. Yet, the Vital Stats for public and private higher education in 2021 show a reduction of first-time entering students to UoTs; from 48 823 in the year 2016 to 40 168 in 2021 (CHE, 2023). Although this could be attributed to the implications of Covid19, it is surprising considering the above argument, most especially in a country where widening participation is a key national objective and going to university "*is a pathway to jobs, it's a pathway to a better quality of life*" (VC1), as one of my interviewees put it.

In this way, changes made to qualifications offered at UoTs appear to have been primarily informed by their desire to escape a historic stigma, at the same time elevating their status to that of the shiny "penthouse level". This idea is perhaps illustrated in the following two quotes:

> *It was a public perception issue that a National Diploma was second class to a degree, and I think the hope was that the change from technikons to UoTs was also to get away from that stigma. (RE1)*

> *The status [of the degree] is higher. (QD1)*

The aspiration of "catching up", along with a breakdown in the relationship between the DHET and the institutions themselves have enabled UoTs to make these changes in a context which values and rewards higher order degrees through the national funding system. In such a context, this decision could be perceived as progress or development but works to hide the unintended and unexplored associated costs.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter has revealed how during the period of T_2–T_3, UoTs as institutions have been positioned as inferior within the hierarchy of higher education. While this is not a new revelation, I have argued that the concept of "hierarchy" itself is a manifestation of coloniality; more importantly, I suggested that the UoTs' positioning and their aspiration of "catching up" or climbing the hierarchy have been fundamental in informing the changes experienced by these institutions over time. I have demonstrated how the inclusion of the word "university" in the name of these institutions has enabled changes to their vision and mission statements, their research ambitions and their qualifications offered. I have also shown how a neoliberal influence has impacted UoTs as manifested in the form of world university rankings and evident in the way in which the new funding formula for higher education reinforces the superiority of historically white research-intensive universities.

I have done this to illustrate that changes made at an institutional level have impacted admission requirements for entry and determine who gains access to higher education. This is important in a context where a discourse of "equity and redress" has been evident since early democratic South Africa, however, remains in tension with the "efficiency and effectiveness" discourse brought about by the pressures of globalisation. This becomes even more important considering how UoTs are struggling with student enrolment despite the growing demand for higher education.

The next chapter focuses on the applicants themselves, those who qualify for entry and those who "*apply for the sake of applying,"* (AO2) as one of the interviewees, an assistant registrar, called them. This last group consists of students who year after year apply for a placement at UoTs, but who are now deemed unfit for entry – those who carry some of the unintended consequences and costs of the aspiration of "catching up."

Chapter Six: T_2–T_3 Student Findings

The hopeless who continue to apply remain hopeful (RE1)

6.1 Introduction

Having explored the processes of admission from an institutional perspective in the previous chapter, I now turn to focus on the people. Aligned to the previous chapter, as I present the findings, I deliberately connect them to relevant literature to weave the story together as I understand it. It was during one of my first interviews that a particular interviewee described a growing group of applicants, who year after year apply for a space within our public university system. Yet, year after year their applications are rejected. He called them *"hopeless"* but "*hopeful,"* a description which represents the sad reality of many students and continues to sit with me as I write this today. And so, this chapter centres on those who remain uninvited. Metaphorically speaking, perhaps they are the ones waiting outside *"the house"* (Machado de Oliveira, 2021; Stein et al., 2021) knocking at its door in the hope of entering one day.

This chapter explores who the occupants of *"the house"* are, who decides who can be invited in, who needs to keep waiting, and on what basis such decisions are made.

6.2 Understanding the "Student As Deficit" Discourse As a Mechanism

> *We have a lot of these students, but unfortunately the school system is not churning out the kind of students that are totally adequate for the qualification types that we have and the admission criteria that we have. (QD1)*

The extract above describes the schooling system as not producing the kind of students that are adequate for the qualifications offered at university. This reveals that the data shows that blame was often placed on the applicants themselves (or their schooling) for not being adequately prepared for university. This discursively works to exempt the institution from any critical examination of its own structures. The choice of using the word "*churning*" in this context is also interesting. Generally, this word is associated with producing something in large quantities and often implies that it is done quickly or mechanically without much attention to quality, care

or uniqueness. To use this word in relation to the schooling system could reveal the idea that the schooling system is output based, revealing the roots of neoliberalism.

This was not an isolated instance of placing the blame on the student found in the data. There were many other instances which worked together to build up the idea that students are products of their poor-quality schooling:

> *There's clearly a mismatch between the outcomes of the schooling system and you know, the needs of university kind of study. (VC1)*
>
> *Is the school system actually producing sufficient young people to come into the universities? (VC1)*
>
> *Our students are struggling in school subjects not because they are taught in English, but because they poorly taught in any language. (VC2)*
>
> *We are struggling with the lack of academic preparation from the school system. (VC2)*
>
> *The feeling that academic standards in schools have dropped. (QD1)*

These extracts illustrate the terminology used to develop the idea that students are not prepared for university. Here, secondary school graduates (applicants) are described as *not* being prepared for a university level of education, as *not* being adequately taught or having attended schools which are *not* up to standard. These factors, according to various participants, have resulted in *not* enough young people being suited to a university education.

Positioning students as being characterised by deficit by lacking the required academic and cultural resources necessary to succeed in university is not however new. Valencia (1997) tells us that the deficit model of thinking has a history which spans over a century, with its roots in early racist discourses of colonial times. Within higher education literature, the deficit model of thinking has been used to account for a lack of student success and posits that the student who fails in school or university does so due to their own internal deficits or deficiencies (Smit, 2012). In South Africa, this discourse frames the student and their families as lacking some kind of academic or cultural capital – often referred to as the literacies (academic, digital or informational) necessary to succeed (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). Luckett and Shay (2020) argue that at a structural level, Black students especially continue to bear the burden of the colonial legacy which is conceptualised as being underprepared or disadvantaged.

The terminology used to describe students contributes to the deficit discourse. Students are described in terms of what they are not; *not* traditional, *not* prepared for higher education, *not* in a position of privilege or advantage or *not* English home language speakers. In blaming the student for any shortfalls, the higher education system indicates an unwillingness to reflect on its own structures (Boughey & McKenna, 2021; Davis & Museus, 2019). In this way, structures and cultures are protected and therefore remain uncontested allowing admission requirements to be changed in order to eliminate those who are seen as *not* good enough.

Valencia (1997) warns that deficit thinking is a "protean" theory, a flexible theory which can take on different forms to adapt to the context or perspective from which it is applied. In this way, it can impact on a variety of educational practices. It is therefore reasonable to argue that the "student as deficit" discourse in South Africa could permeate structures and cultures informing admission processes, as revealed in the data above.

However, what is not recognised in the extracts above is the link between an applicant's socioeconomic background or geographic location and the school which they have attended. Ndimande (2016) argues that inequalities in education and low standards of living linger today, a consequence of the apartheid era in which schools in impoverished townships were underfunded and under resourced resulting in limited educational opportunities for Black students. Miron and Welner (2012) argue that access to better-resourced schools in South Africa is still largely dependent on wealth, with the same impacting access to higher education.

The direct relationship between school and higher education is explained by one of the interviewees:

> *The demand [to access higher education] is increasing. That's why people are quite distraught when they don't get their child into university. And the same with schools, because of the way these things work, if you get into UCT, you're more likely to have gone to Bishops [elite secondary school] and you know as a parent in Manenberg [township in Cape Town] that if you can get your kid into a better school, then they can get into university. (VC2)*

> *You know to the normal applicant who's not from a privileged school. If you read those [admission criteria], it must be quite disconcerting. You will say, "Oh, God, I'll never get in". You know that sort of thing because the gaps are so big. (RE1)*

The quotes above indicate an awareness of inequalities within higher education by describing different expectations and possible futures for students who come from different social classes. As noted by one participant, students from affluent families are more likely to have attended elite schools, which are defined by Jansen and Kriger (2020) as having virtually all white student enrolments with high to very high fees. Subsequently, these scholars found that it is easier to gain entry to elite universities, a trajectory not typically available to those from poorer townships. For these poorer families, securing access to higher education is reliant on their ability to get their children into better schools typically outside of working-class neighbourhoods (Chetty, 2014; Hunter, 2015, 2019). Jansen and Kriger (2020) describe stories that for some means resorting to providing a fraudulent proof of address or even temporarily renting a dwelling in a particular catchment area closer to a better school.

Together, the above extracts demonstrate a persistent uneven distribution of access to higher education, which disproportionately affects families in impoverished, rural and township areas. These inequalities in the higher education system reflect the broader picture that South Africa is the most unequal country in the world with the richest 10% of South Africans laying claim to 65% of national income and 90% of national wealth (Alvaredo et al., 2018; Orthofer, 2016). This has led some scholars to suggest that the life chances of the average South African child are not determined by their ability or work ethic but rather by the colour of their skin, the province of their birth and the wealth of their parents (Spaull, 2019). In this sense, I understand that racial apartheid is constitutive of class division. It is not an additional structure. From a decolonial perspective, race, class, and gender segregation are manifestations of an enduring imposition of ways of living that favoured European Western white male Christian people.

So, as another interviewee explained above, it stands to reason that for students who do not come from a privileged school, the existing admission criteria seem unattainable. These students are perceived to have “bigger gaps” long before they enter a university. And because of how the hierarchical system of higher education works (elite school to elite university), the individuals with bigger gaps need to seek alternative placement at lower levels of higher education (such as at UoTs), and are therefore judged as *more* deficit when compared with their elite peers.

- **UoT students as "more deficit"**

> *You know [UoTs name] by no means gets the best students in terms of performance at school. (VC1)*

Here, one of the VCs I interviewed, with vast experience in UoTs and other national university structures, indicated that UoTs do not attract the top-performing Grade 12 scholars; the choice of the words "*by no means"* emphasises this view. This suggests that students at UoTs are judged as being *more* deficit. Having this understanding of UoT students becomes important as it acts as a mechanism which enables higher admission criteria to be introduced in these institutions who desire to "catch up"; in other words, an institution cannot aspire to their penthouse peers with students considered "*more deficit."* Changes need to be made according to *who* best aligns with their goal.

To demonstrate how UoT students are perceived, I reference various descriptions from interviewees:

> *The majority [of students] are from the lower quintile schools, I think they are from quintile 2 and quintile 3 mainly. And then from, you know, deep rural areas or areas, you know, uh, where they're really disadvantaged. (QD2)*

> *There are more Black students and then also there are more, I'll say maybe 80% of the applications of the students are relying on NSFAS. (AO2)*

> *Our student profile has changed totally. I think we [are] more than 90% [Black] African. We have a lot of students that come from rural areas, and they are depending on NSFAS. The last number I heard was over 80%. (AO2)*

There are common themes that emerge between these extracts, all of which tend to group geographic location, socioeconomic status and race to explain any perceived shortcomings. Firstly, many of these students are described as hailing from *rural* areas. Rural in this context refers to inherited boundaries drawn by the apartheid government which are yet to be desegregated.

Within these areas, most students have attended quintile 2 and 3 schools. This designation of schools refers to a post-apartheid policy which enabled schools to become "fee-free" under a system called quintiles. Schools are divided into five categories: Quintile 1 consists of the poorest 20% of schools, which receive the highest per student allocation from the government

and are thus fee free. It also indicates the unemployment and literacy rates of the community in which the school is located. Quintile 2 would represent the next poorest 20% and so on. Quintile 5 in this structure represents the most affluent schools which receive the lowest allocation per student from the government. The quintile system has been critiqued for not capping maximum fees levied by the schools. As a result, inequality between poorer schools in the lower quintiles and affluent schools in the higher quintiles has increased through the private contributions of middle class and wealthy parents.

Using this quintile system gives an indication that most students who apply to UoTs come from poor economic backgrounds. Closely linked to this, more than 80% of students at both UoTs included in this study, are described as being reliant on the NSFAS. This indicates that their household income is less than R350 000 (18 000 USD) per year. In contrast, HWUs, which I have conceptualised as being at the penthouse of the House of Modernity, such as Stellenbosch University, have only 15% of student enrolment depending on NSFAS funding, considering data from 2019 (NSFAS, 2019).

Secondly, the student profile is described as being mainly Black. This is expected given the stated commitment to increasing participation in higher education, evidenced by an increase in the proportion of higher education student headcount within this demographic from 35.4% in 1990 to 79% in 2021 (CHE, 2023; Cooper & Subotzky, 2001). However, despite this growth in Black headcount enrolment, there are significant inequalities which continue to characterise access to the different levels of "The House Modernity Built" or institutional types. As a proportion of total headcount enrolments, white students remain concentrated at penthouse level research-intensive universities (and increasingly in private institutions), while Black students are more evenly spread across the different institutional types (Essop, 2020).

As a proportion of total headcount enrolments, Black students are more evenly spread across the different institutional types than white students, who are mainly to be found in the traditional research institutions (such as UCT, WITS, Stellenbosch) and the distance institution, Unisa.

According to Essop (2020), research-intensive universities[18], including the University of South Africa (UNISA), one of the largest ones in the system have experienced a small increase of

18 In Essop's (2020) report entitled '*The changing size and shape of the higher education system in South Africa, 2005-2017'* the term research-intensive universities refers to a group of institutions made up of the University of

white students that varied from 34.5% to 37.9% between 2005 and 2017. When UNISA is excluded from the figure, the percentage increases from 49.8% to 58.7% between 2005 and 2017 in the same period. This increase in the proportion of white enrolment in these latter research universities contrasts the enrolment composition observed at UNISA and other comprehensive universities, where the increase in enrolment comes mainly from Black students. In 2017, 94.4% of all white students were in three institutional types: research-intensive universities – 37.9%, comprehensive universities – 31.9% and the distance university – 24.6% (Essop, 2020). However, at the lower level of the house (within the UoTs), there has been a substantial decline in white headcount enrolments of -63.3% between the years of 2005 to 2017, equating to an annual average decrease of -8% (Essop, 2020). The decline in white student enrolment was noticed by some interviewees:

> *We were more white in terms of students, and then once we merged things changed drastically. Once we merged, I don't know what happened, well what happened to the white community because they just like, no longer here. (AO2)*

> *The white community, they are in the private colleges. (AO2)*

> *So, people are not going to take our nonsense indefinitely then. And I think that's what's happening. The move has already started. (QD1)*

These extracts demonstrate that there has been a noticeable shift in racial demographics within UoTs, which demonstrates alignment with the goals of the White Paper 3. Interestingly however, rather than this being seen as a constructive contribution to the redress agenda, there are inferences of a loss of something or a concern over where the white students are, with suggestions that they are accessing private higher education rather than attending predominantly Black UoTs. This shows how the ideology of "whiteness" is embedded with concepts regarding quality, and acts as a hierarchical device in that predominantly Black institutions, or *not* white institutions, appear as *more* "deficit" and therefore remain positioned on the second level of the house. What this could reveal is although structural changes regarding race have shifted in higher education, the underpinning culture of "whiteness as quality" is yet to be disrupted (see Shahjahan et al., 2024).

Cape Town (UCT), KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), Pretoria (UP), Stellenbosch (US) and the Witwatersrand (Wits). During apartheid, all of these universities were designated as white institutions, and all were classified as 'traditional' according to the DHET.

To understand how the concept of "whiteness as quality" impacts changes to the processes of admission, I turn to scholars who argue that "whiteness" is often entangled with hierarchy and quality (DiAngelo, 2018; Jansen & Kriger, 2020; Steyn, 2001). DiAngelo (2018) provides an illustrative example when she refers to neighbourhoods in the US. She argues that judgements about home equity and status of the area are based on how racial demographics are changing and synthesises this discussion in the phrase "Going up? It will be getting whiter. Going down? It will be getting less white" (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 53).

Jansen and Kriger (2020) discuss a related issue, highlighting how in South Africa, race remains closely tied to perceptions of educational quality, a dynamic that continues to shape the identity of post-apartheid schools. In this context, former privileged white schools (and their predominantly white teachers) are still viewed as the standard of quality. This perception attracts middle-class Black parents who seek to secure the advantages offered by these schools, thereby sustaining the predominantly white institutions and revealing the complex intersection of race and class.

The same emerging patterns are reported by the study's participants regarding private and public higher education, especially at the UoTs, as the following extracts show:

> *Uh, the private education sector in terms of offerings has exploded, and what has happened is that these privates will have a good reputation in the sector and the reasons they are quite different is because of security. [Name of UoT] is known for strikes and upheaval continuously burning up. (QD1)*
>
> *There's only so much you can tolerate in terms of endless strikes and uncertainty [at UoTs]. (QD1)*
>
> *What has changed is this culture of destruction you know. Which we never experienced over the years but it's now like an accepted culture. Every year there must be destruction and for me, I feel like. I don't know, it's a sense of entitlement that our students seem to have. (AO2)*

In these extracts, in conjunction with the ones provided previously, UoTs are depicted as places of uncertainty with students who are characterised with less desirable attributes of being "*destructive,*" and "*entitled.*" It could be reasonable to suggest that these descriptions have become proxies for *not* white much like how Jansen and Kriger (2020) suggest that privileged schools in South Africa have perfected how to talk about race in admissions without explicitly naming it. This becomes particularly obvious when compared to the contrast in how many

private institutions are described as places of security with good reputations. The underlying perception that whiteness is entangled with quality was revealed in how various interviewees expressed concern over white students moving away from UoTs to other (private) institutions and this works to reinforce the positionality of a UoT as below other kinds of institutions.

The discourse of "*student as deficit*," and furthermore a UoT student as *more* deficit works to frame the student as "a problem." Because of this, students are seen as a constraint in achieving the institution's project to "catch up" with universities located in the penthouse of the House Modernity Built (Machado de Oliveira, 2021; Stein et al., 2020). Thus, in order to reach the penthouse above, changes need to be made to *who* is deemed worthy for entry through the processes of admission. This change is important as I suggest the desire to "catch up" begins to outweigh the commitment to redress and the structures which support it. This has subsequent implications on who is and who is not invited into The House Modernity Built (Machado de Oliveira, 2021; Stein et al., 2020).

Archer (1995) tells us that in a contradictory situation, where cultures (in this case, the desire to "catch up") and structures (such as the White Paper 3's commitment to redress) conflict, there may be an emergence of change through morphogenesis. Furthermore, Archer (1995) describes that if these relations between structure and culture are externally related but could exist separately from each other they are termed "contingent." In the case of a contingent contradiction, the likely outcome is described as an elimination of sorts, where something is removed in order to progress. Perhaps in the case I have described above, the *more* deficit student (based on their geographic location, socioeconomic status and race) becomes who is eliminated in preference for another kind of student – the kind of student who is seen as familiar with the penthouse, who possesses a good command of the English language and who aligns with the aspiration to "catch up". It is for this reason that various "layers" are seen to be added onto UoTs minimum admission criteria which work to filter out those deemed "*more deficit,*" those who in this study were described as "*the hopeless who continue to apply*" (RE1).

6.3 Exploring How Admission Criteria in UoTs Are Determined

> *Higher Education Act for public universities stipulates that each public university must set its own admission requirements and must publish them, and that they must make provision for redress. (RE1)*

The emergence of today's minimum admission criteria in UoTs can be seen as a product of changes made to governance, the structures of the higher education landscape and changes made to the UoTs themselves. In the discussion that follows, I refer to Figure 6.1 below to highlight key structures used to describe the emergence of minimum admission criteria used today.

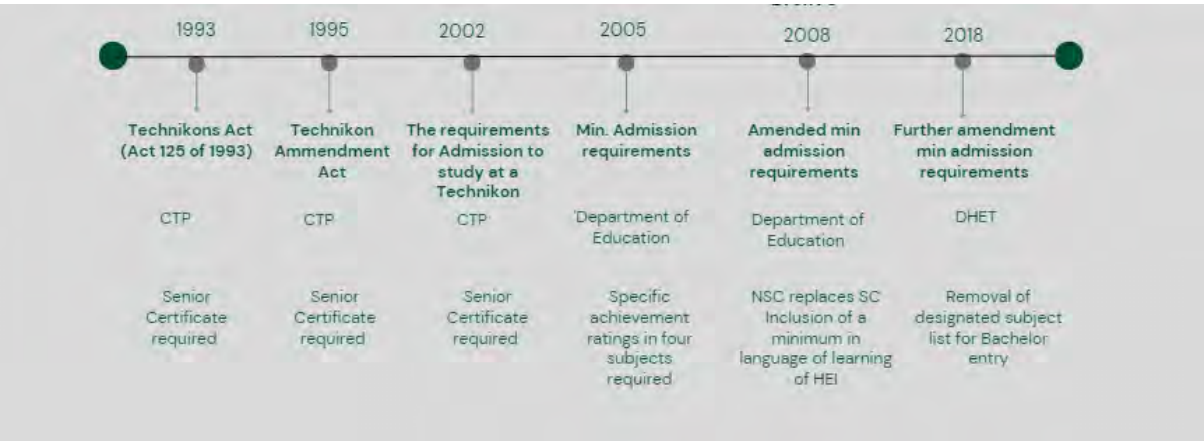


Figure 6.1: The changes to minimum admission criteria over time

- **Policy changes to minimum admission criteria over time**

As described in Chapter Four, UoTs (previously technikons) functioned as separate entities from universities under a central convenorship system governed by the CTP. Under their guidance, the minimum admission criteria to what was known as the National Diploma was a Senior Certificate. A senior certificate was awarded to a scholar on successful completion of their Grade 12 year following 12 years of schooling. Over and above this minimum admission requirement, specific subject combinations or minimum scores in particular subjects were allowed to be stipulated as approved by the CTP. Although there were general policy amendments for technikons between the period 1993 and 2002, the minimum requirement of a Senior Certificate remained unchanged. This fact may account for some of the reasons why white technikons were quick to transform during this period, as their entry requirements remained lower than their university counterparts (Cooper, 2015), as discussed in Chapter Four.

Later, in 2005, the DoE introduced a unitary higher education framework aligned with the Higher Education Act of 1997 and the White Paper 3, which proposed a single qualifications framework for higher education, The DoE took on the responsibility for determining the minimum criteria for admission for all certificate, diploma and degree studies across both

public and private HEIs. The DoE recognised Higher Education South Africa (HESA) – now Universities South Africa (USAF) – as the statutory body responsible for making recommendations for such minimum admission criteria. Higher Education South Africa (HESA) emerged as the successor to merged organisations, the South African University Vice-Chancellors Association (SAUVCA) and the CTPs. This arrangement marked an important juncture where technikons (who had at the same time changed their name to UoTs) and universities converged under the same framework, bringing with it a change to the existing admission policy.

And so, in 2005 the DoE released the '*Minimum admission requirements for Higher Certificate Diploma and Bachelor's Degree programmes requiring a National Senior Certificate.*' This policy was introduced with the understanding that the then-existing Grade 12 Senior Certificate would be phased out and replaced by the National Senior Certificate (NSC) by 2009. The new NSC offered all subjects at one level rather than the previous Senior Certificate which included higher, standard and lower grades across subjects. The requirements for the NSC are that Grade 10, 11 and 12 scholars take four compulsory subjects, which are two South African languages, Mathematics or Mathematical Literacy and Life Orientation. In addition to these subjects, scholars must select three additional subjects.

In preparation for this 2005 admissions policy, recommendations for minimum admission requirements were made to the DoE by the Matriculation Board, a statutory body of HESA and currently housed under USAF. The matriculation board is seen as a conduit between DHET and the institutions. One of the interviewees, a representative from DHET, describes how "*it stays in touch with the universities. They consult across the universities on the criteria for admission to university and what criteria determines a Bachelors pass* (DR1)". A *"bachelor's pass,*" formerly known as a matric with exemption, is the highest level of pass in the NSC and is the minimum requirement for entry into a bachelor's degree. The criteria used to determine a bachelor's pass is important to explore as it has become an indicator that the candidate is worthy of entry to a higher level within the higher education structure, which promises upward mobility. Using the metaphor of a house of modernity, the requirements can be seen as a manifestation of an "abyssal line" (Santos, 2007, p. 46) and works to separate those with it who are legitimated, and those without it who are not.

According to one of my interviewees, a longstanding member of the matriculation board, the matriculation board began by establishing the criteria for a bachelor's pass and then "*scaled*

down for diploma and certificate entry" (RE1). A strong factor in developing minimum admission criteria came from the need to balance redress, aligned with the goals described in the White Paper 3.

This point was underscored during an interview with a representative from the DHET, who emphasised that admission criteria "*should continually seek to redress the inequalities in our country, especially those brought about by our historical past of discrimination" (DR1).* Another interview described that the decision to simplify the bachelor's pass criteria came from an *"informed hunch due to a lack of empirical information*" [from DHET] (RE1).

During the interview with the matriculation board representative, the decision was taken to simplify the criteria of a bachelor's pass on the following basis:

> *If a person has passed four subjects at 50% [a level 4] or better, she or he is likely to be **good enough** to profit from degree studies. (RE1)*

Furthermore, the subjects selected and passed needed to be listed on the "*designated subject list,*" an additional requirement only applicable to bachelor's degree entrance and was explained by the same interviewee as

> *...a fairly arbitrary thing. Subjects like languages, Mathematics, Physical Science and biology were in the designated list – but not design. It was a traditional approach to what is an academically formative school subject. (RE1)*

Although acknowledged as an "*arbitrary thing,"* the extract demonstrates that traditional formative school subjects (languages, maths and life sciences) were grouped together and awarded a higher status, whereas other subjects (Agricultural Management Practices, Agricultural Technology, Dance Studies, Design, Civil Technology, Electrical Technology, Mechanical Technology, Computer Applications Technology, Hospitality Studies & Tourism) were excluded from the list making them less valuable. In this way, if a student was able to pass these designated subjects (with higher status) at 50% or better, then they were deemed *"good enough"* for degree entry.

This is reminiscent of a particular manifestation of modernity in the epistemic domain which Mignolo (2011) explains as the belief that scientific knowledge will bring economic and social prosperity. From a decolonial perspective, Mignolo (2011) critiqued this notion as it assumed that following Western models of scientific advancement would lead to economic growth and

social prosperity, most especially in the Global South. He problematised this by arguing that this way of thinking ignores the diversity of epistemologies and works to reinforce global power imbalances which favour Western knowledge systems over Indigenous knowledge. In the context of a designated list of subjects, this promise presents a simplistic view that certain subjects (and those who are successful in them) hold a higher status, without considering how this may reproduce inequalities or threaten the redress agenda.

To return to the metaphor of "The House Modernity Built", those who had access to and were successful in languages and sciences were recognised as familiar, or as "*good enough"* to occupy spaces closer to the penthouse. Those without were seen as inferior, as *not* worthy (deficit) and sent to other levels of The House Modernity Built. The minimum admission criteria were then "*scaled down"* (RE1) from here for diploma entry. As such, a diploma entry requires an achievement rating of 3 (40–49%) or higher in at least four senior certificate subjects in any combination.

Later in 2008, there was an amendment issued to the policy '*Minimum admission requirements for Higher Certificate Diploma and Bachelor's Degree programmes requiring a National Senior Certificate'* as the NSC was phased in. The minimum requirements for entry both into a diploma and bachelor's degree remained unchanged, as did the designated subject list as discussed above. The only change was in regard to language. In the amended 2008 policy, there was an inclusion of a minimum mark in the language of teaching and learning of the higher education institution. This was de facto a minimum mark in English as this was the language of teaching and learning in all but three of the 26 South African universities at the time. Today, English is the language of teaching and learning at all public higher education institutions. The dominance of English and the implications thereof for student admissions is discussed in more depth later in the chapter.

The last, and most recent, amendment to the minimum admission criteria, came in 2018 and affected only bachelor's degrees. This amendment was released by the DHET, having been established in 2009 as the statutory body controlling all functions pertaining to higher education, further education, adult education, qualifications and skills development. The amended policy revoked the designated subject list, meaning that a candidate could select any of the 20-credit recognised NSC subjects and qualify with a bachelor's pass. In this way, all NSC subjects were intended to hold equal status. A participant, an active member of the

matriculation board described how the designated list was "*controversial from the start"* (RE1) and expanded by describing how the decision to revoke the list was taken:

> *It was a long debate between the DHET and the Department of Basic Education [DBE]. The DBE in particular wanted it abolished because it meant that subjects on the designated list were given preference, and technical schools also wanted a chance to achieve a bachelor's pass. (RE1)*

This extract reveals a tension between the two newly formed departments[19]; the DBE wanted the list revoked to avoid certain subjects being given preference over others and to give equality of access for those to technical schools. Instead, the DHET, influenced by the South African Universities Vice-Chancellors' Association and the Committee of Technikon Principals (SAUVCA-CTP) had proposed a narrowing of the list, wanted to retain the existing list of subjects. These were Official Languages at Home or First Additional Level, Music, Geography, History, Life Sciences, Mathematical Literacy, Mathematics, and Physical Science (Blom, 2014). The decision to retain the list reveals an assumption that there was a relationship between the designated subject and success in a bachelor's degree. This ideology was contested in a 2011 report undertaken by HESA entitled '*The value of designated subjects in terms of likely student success in higher education*' which presented findings to demonstrate that success in higher education seems much more likely to be associated with better results at school level in all subjects, rather than with particular subjects offered (Blom, 2014). Subsequently, in 2017, the DHET and DBE moved to abolish the list altogether.

At the time, media reported that this change meant that more pupils would qualify for entry to degree study but warned that "pressure on institutions to accept first years is enormous and it is reasonable to expect that admission will still be reserved for the higher NSC achievers" (Oberholzer, 2018, n.p.). Using Archer (1996) the structure (designated subject list) was complemented by the culture that certain subjects (English, maths and science) have more value than others and are a measure of being *"good enough"* for entry. But, as the extract demonstrates, a contradiction of agential interests between the DHET and DBE resulted in a

19 The Department of Education in South Africa was split into two separate departments – the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) – in 2009. The decision to split the department stemmed from the recognition that basic education (which covers primary and secondary education) and higher education (which includes universities, colleges, and vocational training institutions) faced distinct challenges and required different strategies and governance approaches. By separating the two, the government aimed to create more focused and specialized oversight for each sector.

change through compromise. The designated list would be revoked, however, higher education institutions were still given autonomy to reserve admission for higher NSC achievers through policy as follows:

> *An institution is entitled to specify an appropriate level of subject achievement for a particular programme. … Similarly, an institution will be entitled to specify subject requirements for a particular programme. For example, Mathematics and Physical Science might be considered as requirements for admission to a Bachelor of Science Degree. (DHET, 2018, p. 21)*

This clause gives individual institutions autonomy to specify subject combinations or appropriate levels of subject achievement for a particular programme should it be required. This is explained in Section 37 of the Higher Education Act which specifies that it is the council of a particular higher education institution who determines the admission policy of their institution, alongside entrance requirements and selection for particular programmes. However, while institutions are allowed to set their own admission requirements, the Higher Education Act is clear that an institution must provide appropriate measures to redress past inequalities and may not unfairly discriminate in any way (RSA, 1997). In other words, these requirements must remain sensitive to the educational background of learners (Koch & Dornbrack, 2008).

An interviewee, acting as a representative from DHET explained it as follows:

> *We [DHET] are not responsible for the admissions policies of the institutions in the higher education system, that is, let me say, for the universities. And the reason being is based on autonomy of the institutions, and that they, the institutions decide by themselves on who to admit and who not to admit. But we do have influence,* ***we tell*** *the institutions that they need to expand their access and that in the expansion of their access they should seek redress. (DR1)*

This extract reveals that even though admission policies are viewed by the DHET as an institutional responsibility, institutions are awarded agential power by the DHET to decide "*who to admit and who not to admit."* However, this agency is perhaps limited as the statement is followed up with an acknowledgement that the DHET has "*influence"* and that this influence is used to "*tell*" (a word perhaps indicating limits of agency) institutions to expand access and seek redress. The DHET uses the tools of planning and funding to "*tell"* the institution what it wants done. However, this is where a contradiction emerges between the goal of redress and the tool used to achieve it, such as the structure of the funding formula. As Chapter Four details, the funding framework includes output and performance-based aspects valuing the discourse of

efficiency which reinforces the superiority of "*apex*" universities and their students. As was mentioned, HWUs emerged from a position of privilege and have access to resources used to achieve the output and performance valued by the funding formula. In this way, efficiency is placed in tension with the redress. For some institutions, like UoTs, the draw towards efficiency is too strong and complements their project to "catch up" which begins to change "*who to admit*."

In this compromise, the discourse that certain subjects are more valued than others offers some measure to judge which students are *"good enough"* for degree studies, irrespective of the structural changes made to policy through the minimum admissions criteria. This belief continues to emerge in different ways, but specifically in how institutions determine their own admission criteria.

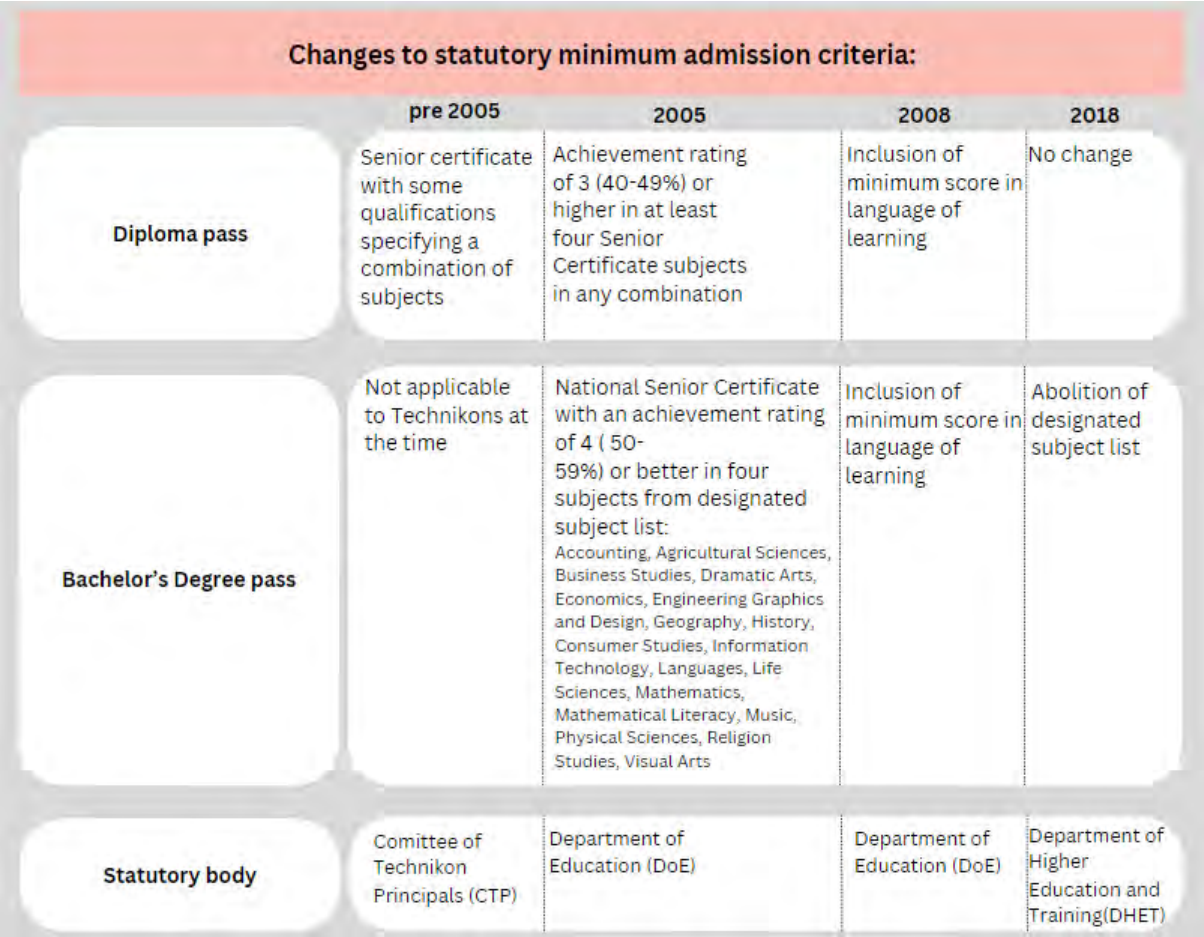


Figure 6.2: Graphic illustration of changes to statutory minimum admission criteria

6.4 Institutional Response to the DHET Minimum Admission Criteria

> *OK, that's the minimum [admission requirement], but we're going to put a **layer on top** of that as to what we actually **want**. (RE1)*

Institutions consider the DHET's minimum admission criteria for undergraduate entry as a starting point only. Conditioned by the discourse in the cultural domain of "*student as deficit*," institutions supplement these criteria with specific subject combinations and levels of achievement in order to get what they "*actually want.*" Framing admission requirements from the position of what the institution "*wants*" rather than considering redress, enables colonial legacies to be reproduced. In this way, existing structures are protected and an elitist education system can be maintained at the expense of the redress agenda.

Protection of these structures becomes evident in how one interviewee defends the elitist nature of universities by saying *"to accuse universities of being elitists, it's like accusing kittens of being cuddly. It's in their nature to be"* (VC2). This particular extract exposes the conditioning of agents and shows that universities are still deeply and inextricably linked to their historic elite status. This particular interviewee insinuates that this has not changed over time and further to this point added the following:

> *You know, the university is not the Salvation Army, it is not there to rescue the perishing. It is there to make sure that the **most** talented students get into university and that they become leaders in our society. (VC2)*

The extract above highlights the significance for universities to safeguard their historic elite status and hierarchical structures; the comparison between the Salvation Army and the university is illustrative of this point. One of the ways it does so is by making sure that only the "*most*" talented students are invited in. This suggests that an underlying "elitist" culture endures despite South Africa's growth in participation rate[20]. The participation rate in this context is important. Trow (1973) differentiates between elite, mass and universal higher education and argues that once participation exceeds 15%, the system has shifted from elite to

20 The participation rate refers to a total headcount enrolment over the national population of 20–24 years old, calculated as a percentage. The National Plan for Higher Education (Department of Education, 2001) explains that: "The participation rate is calculated using the UNESCO standard, as the percentage of 20–24-year-olds of the general population enrolled in higher education".

mass education[21]. In South Africa, the participation rate figure now stands at 22% (CHE, 2020) indicating that structurally, a shift has been made from furthering the interests of the elite under apartheid to a mass system for a diverse student body. However, an underlying and enduring elitist culture continues to condition how and who are considered "*most talented"*, thereby failing to consider higher education's new massified, diverse student body or question what the university needs to become to serve the needs of a diverse population.

Determining the *"most talented"* student is often shaped by institutional priorities, which are heavily influenced by colonial structures. As explained by an interviewee from a university's quality department, these structures ultimately dictate who is deemed talented:

> *Generally, the faculties give the departments autonomy so departments can prescribe admission requirements for their programme. And if the discipline requires it, they can add, you know, further constraints to it. We have to meet the [institutional] requirements, which obviously meets the national requirements, and we then tend to say, although the minimum is maybe a 3 or something in Mathematics, for our programme we made it a five or whatever might apply.... They might have tweaked those a bit because of, not because of the admission, national admissions, but the feeling that we need to improve our standards as such. (QD1)*

The extract above outlines the process of determining admission criteria for particular qualifications; firstly, the DHET is responsible for stipulating the minimum criteria; institutions however are thereafter granted autonomy to add "*layers*" or "*constraints*" to these minimums. The institution in turn shifts this autonomy onto its faculties, who again shift it to departments, and finally to the academics within them. This marks an important change for UoTs and their academics, as they are no longer constrained by the previous convenorship system which dictated admission requirements under the CTP.

Fundamentally, the extract highlights how admission criteria are framed as a mechanism to "*improve standards"* rather than being tailored to the specific demands of the programme to ensure that admitted students have a fair chance of success. This is evident in the way the interviewee justified tweaking an achievement rating for the sake of maintaining standards, without addressing the specific prior knowledge required for the programme and how this

21 Trow (1973) identified a "broad pattern of development of higher education" in "every advanced society" (p. 1). Higher education was growing from an "elite" system enrolling less than 15% of the school leaver age group to a "mass" system with 15–50% and then a "universal" system with over 50%.

should be reflected in matric scores. Later, in the same interview as above, a similar absence emerges from a discussion about academics needing to change admission criteria after their programme has been implemented. The interviewee described this:

> *You know, we [academics in departments] said five [an achievement rating] or something, but is it necessary? And my response was that's what you put. Why you asking us, you know. This happened even this year. In fact, last week people are doing that. (QD1)*

This extract describes cases of academics (who are responsible for determining admission criteria) deferring to the quality department to check if an achievement rating of 5 was necessary. This indicates that when academics are determining these criteria, they are not necessarily considering what prior knowledge is needed and its correlation with a final matric score, they are basing their decision on what score will likely "*increase standards."* In this way, academics have become conditioned to think that additional "*layers*" are a mechanism to improve standards, with this subsequently becoming a naturalised practice across the system. This combined with an "*aspiration to catch up"* results in increased levels of achievement ratings being required to attract the "*most talented*" despite high levels of prior knowledge not always being necessary.

Although these changes may appear as progress, they come at a cost to the national agenda in terms of expansion of access or redress, by creating barriers for individuals who may no longer qualify for entry. The UoTs experience the cost of changing admission requirements through difficulty in attaining enrolment targets. As described by one participant, UoTs are "*actually struggling with enrolments in many sectors with degrees" (QD1),* which appears illogical given that demand for public higher education outstrips spaces available. Newspapers highlight this contradiction at the beginning of each year using the following headlines: '*Students jostling for places'* (Magubane, 2024), '*Thousands of applicants for limited spaces at varsities'* (Mahlangu, 2022), '*Universities: There are more applicants than spots available'* (Makwea, 2023). Each of these articles (and many others) presents application figures well exceeding the number of places available as indicated in Chapter Five. While it is difficult to equate applicant numbers to the number of applications (each applicant can make multiple applications for different qualifications or at different universities), these numbers do illustrate that demand outstrips places available and that no South African public HEI should be "*struggling with enrolments."*

The same interviewee who described above how academics were questioning achievement ratings, noted that because some programmes (previous diplomas and now degrees) are struggling with enrolments, they want to make changes to their admission criteria.

> *People are constantly wanting to tweak those three-year degrees and four-year degrees because the whole premise in terms of designing the programme was flawed, so your admission criteria for the students entering into these degrees was flawed. (QD1)*

Considering that academics have questioned the purpose of achievement ratings or subsequently needed to tweak admission criteria to ensure full enrolment is further evidence that perhaps these layers are informed by the discourse of "*student as deficit"*, more so than what the discipline specifically requires. This is an important point, as although DHET policy states an institution may specify achievement levels and subject combinations, it does so with the proviso that it be related to or required in the field of study. The exemplar from the minimum admissions policy reads as such:

> *Admission requirements for a bachelor's degree programme in Fine Arts or Music might include a specified level of achievement in the corresponding recognised NSC subjects... or Mathematics and Physical Science might be considered as requirements for admission to a Bachelor of Science Degree. (DHET, 2018)*

This extract from the DHET policy illustrates the relationship required between qualification and NSC subjects, which can be used to justify specific requirements. This connection does not appear to be strong in the extracts above and only when enrolment numbers become difficult to achieve are admission criteria interrogated and judged as flawed, requiring "tweaks" to enable more applicants to qualify for entry. The decision to make tweaks therefore emerges not from a discourse of redress, which requires universities to be mindful of which potential students are excluded based on gender, race or class, but more so a discourse of "improving standards" revealing its neoliberal influence.

In a similar way, the DHET appears to understand these layers as a way to make universities more efficient:

> *It's pointless to have a student who's going to spend, let's say, 6,7,8, years in a programme that is meant to only be three years. And the more you stay in this system, the less the institution is going to make money out of you. So therefore, the institution will put a layer of sifting them and so on. Maybe one or two or three layers of sifting. So that is also just to reduce the number*

[of applicants] so that they are having the right numbers but also that they are having the right people. (DR1)

The above quote demonstrates a strong neoliberal discourse evident in the way in which students have been commodified by reducing them to units that carry a monetary value linked to the duration they spend in the system; the longer they spend at the institution, the less benefit they bring. In this instance, rather than being concerned about forms of knowledge or programme expectations linked to slow throughput, the focus is on efficiency, with layers used as a way to ensure output. This becomes another example and links to concerns discussed in Chapter Four, where discourses of efficiency have begun to outweigh discourses of redress. Subsequently *"one or two or three layers of sifting"* are used by institutions to "*have the right people"* revealing an underlying logic that the right people are those who can be efficiently moved through the system. What this fails to consider is *how* a candidate is judged as being the "*right person"* or the *"most talented,"* and what cost this might have on the redress agenda.

6.5 Understanding the "Layers of Sifting" As a Mechanism

It doesn't matter in which programme you are coming to study; you need English. (AO2)

The criteria for identifying the *"right person"* or the *"most talented"* seemed closely linked to the designated subject list mentioned earlier. Although this list was officially abolished in 2018 through policy changes, the data from this study revealed a persistent discourse valuing high scores in Mathematics and particularly English in Grade 12 as key indicators of talent. Likewise, Hurst (2016) suggests that English is often perceived as a predictor of student success in university and continues to play a gatekeeping role in access to higher education.

6.5.1 English as a marker of quality

Various participants describe that "*English is compulsory across all qualifications"* (QD2) and refer to their expectation that "*incoming students* [should] *have at least, I don't know, at least 70% in English"* (VC1). Proficiency in English could be seen as a reasonable requirement of admission at UoTs owing to the structural conditions of the system and for the purposes of student success for various reasons. First, higher education institutions in South Africa continue to be dominated by English as the language of teaching and learning (DHET, 2020) and it remains a mark of the colonial history of the country and its education system (Hurst, 2016). Secondly, as explained earlier, it is aligned with the DHET minimum admission policy which

stipulates a minimum score in the language of learning (English). Finally, it is intensified by globalisation and the current dominance of English in higher education worldwide. However, requiring inflated levels of achievement for entry into particular qualifications at UoTs (upwards of 70%) fails to recognise that not all young South Africans have equal access to English in their schools (Koch & Dornbrack, 2008). This becomes especially apparent when considering the 2011 South African Census, which indicated that only 9.6% of the population reported English as their home language, a figure that further decreased to 8.7% in the 2022 Census. And so, these kinds of criteria work to reinforce the domination of English in higher education.

In so doing, English is centred and positioned as superior to any other language and there is the potential for those with lower levels of proficiency in English to then be deemed inferior and, by virtue of being excluded from higher education, pushed to the periphery (or lower level of the house). It is essential to bear in mind that language is intricately connected to matters of social justice (Tollefson, 1991; Wiley, 1996), especially given South Africa's history where language was used as an instrument of control, oppression and exploitation (DoE, 2002a)[22.]

As I have described earlier, during apartheid, the existence of different languages was used to legitimise separate development which resulted in privileging English and Afrikaans as the official language of the apartheid state and the marginalisation and underdevelopment of African and other languages. Language fuelled two major political struggles in South Africa: the Afrikaners' resistance to British imperialism and the fight against apartheid. The state's attempt to enforce Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in Black schools sparked widespread protests, leading to the mass movements of the 1980s. For this reason, the Constitution of South Africa takes special note of the diminished use and status of Indigenous languages and therefore indicates that the state must take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of Indigenous languages (RSA, 1996).

In this way, the preference for multilingualism over monolingualism, along with the principle of equal status for all 11 official languages, shapes the direction of language policies in South Africa. The higher education language policy acknowledges the importance of equitable access

22 English as a mechanism was part of the findings presented at the 2022 South African Education Research Association (SAERA) entitled '*Exploring colonial legacies in admission processes of Universities of Technology'* and the 2023 American Educational Research Association (AERA) conference entitled '*Exploring how Colonial Legacies are re(produced) in admission criteria of South African Universities of Technology'*.

and fair opportunities for success for all students pursuing higher education. Similarly, the 2001 National Plan for Higher Education emphasises that language should not be a barrier to access and success. In line with this, the ministry of higher education has encouraged institutions to develop strategies that promote multilingual policies.

However, a contradiction emerges: while these well-intentioned multilingual policies exist as a physical structure, they have not effectively altered the dominant practice that positions English as a marker of success and status. In other words, at face value within the South African context, multilingualism is valued and treated with significance, but the reality is that a monolingual ideology is still being upheld as standard academic practice (Mbirimi-Hungwe, 2023). Koch and Dornbrack (2008) argue that if South African institutions are truly committed to addressing past inequalities and ensuring equal access, they cannot continue to enforce monolingual admission criteria, as the data in this study may indicate. Requiring a high level of English proficiency as a condition for admission perpetuates the exclusion of those who most need access to education to break free from the constraints of poverty. It works to further undermine Indigenous languages. In one extract, an interviewee explained how requiring high levels of English in admission criteria works to exclude and at the same time escalate the dominance of English over home languages:

> *It's unfortunate because it [English as an admission criteria] then makes our mother tongue languages of less importance. You know when it comes to one being admitted at university, because they are not even considered for that matter. It escalates the dominance of English over our mother tongue languages and therefore still continues to decimate our languages. (DR1)*

Words such as "*unfortunately*" or describing how individuals are not even considered for entry based on their language indicate an acknowledgement of injustice. Furthermore, this practice is described as working to "*decimat*e" mother tongue languages. Shava and Manyike (2018) argue that the hegemony of a colonially imposed language (English) as the global language of education and the economy has had a negative impact on the role of Indigenous languages and their perception by Indigenous people. Higher education is no exception, with English dominating all aspects of South African universities, with some scholars arguing that there is a lack of appreciation for Indigenous languages (Mutasa, 2015; Thiong'o, 1986). Where Indigenous languages are visible in these spaces, they remain on the periphery, existing only in university policy documents or taught as standalone subjects (Makhanya & Zibane, 2020). Some have suggested that African languages are portrayed as barbaric and useless in

developing African people (Le Grange, 2014) and that English is associated with upward social mobility thereby working to preserve coloniality in higher education. As a result, there has been a decline in student use of African first and second languages (DoE, 2002a) and a danger that those groups excluded from education during apartheid remain excluded, working to benefit some and harm others (Makhanya & Zibane, 2020; Zikode, 2017).

Unequal levels of English proficiency and the consequences of such were shared by many participants, who explained how a higher than minimum English requirement works to exclude many applicants:

> *It affects them big time. Because of the language, which is not their mother tongue, they get excluded. (AO2)*

> *I will say that the majority of the students will find that they meet all the minimum subjects that are required, but English. (AO2)*

These extracts explain how "*the majority*" of applicants meet minimum subject requirements except for English, and because of this are "*excluded*" or "*not even considered"* for entry. Quantifying the "majority" is difficult. However, as a vague indicator, English as a first additional language is the largest subject in the NSC exam; 592 008 scholars sat for the exam in 2021, however, it had the second lowest rate of distinctions in that same year at 1.5% (DBE, 2022). This indicates that high scores in this subject are difficult to achieve for the majority of candidates.

Other participants were more explicit about their critique of English being used in admission processes:

> *I mean I can remember that at [UoT name] there were programmes with unrealistically high requirements for English. I mean, there's a big question there. One should ask you know what's the logic of that? Just what are you trying to achieve with that? (VC1)*

> *Now at the level of universities admissions requirements. I don't think there should be such a high premium placed on being able to speak English. Because most of our students, actually particularly students from townships to rural areas and so on, and from African speaking communities, actually most of them learned to speak English with some degree of confidence and competence only when they get university. (VC2)*

These extracts reveal a level of resistance against using "*unrealistically high"* requirements for English in admission criteria. This was clarified by elucidating that numerous candidates from townships and rural areas face limited access to the language and may only develop proficiency during their university education. To illustrate the point, one interviewee told the following story:

> *There's a young man [Alex] that I recruited from Nyanga in Cape Town because he got 100% in history, so I recruited him to [name of university]. And you know, he couldn't string together a few sentences in English, right? And he is now the senior English teacher – believe it or not, at a school in Pretoria. (VC2)*

This particular story is important to highlight as although it is but one example, it may represent the experience for many school leavers. The interviewee explained how Alex from Nyanga, (one of South Africa's oldest Black townships) with an assumedly low matric score in English, became proficient in the language during his time in university and is now employed as an English teacher. In a similar way, another interviewee used this example:

> *But what is interesting is that there are applicants who were admitted by error, without meeting the actual minimum requirement and they are getting distinctions. (AO2)*

These individual accounts support the concept of underlying proficiency (Cummins, 1980, 1985; Cummins, 2000; Hauptman, 2000) which suggests that the ability to infer, deduce, apply knowledge, and engage in problem-solving using contextual language cues is a skill that can be developed in one language and transferred to another. This transfer occurs once a threshold level of proficiency in the additional language is achieved and when academic discourse in the first language is already established. In other words, should an applicant have developed competencies in their home language (such as isiZulu), they can transfer themselves to an additional language (English). In this way, a higher home language score may be a better predictor of the ability to cope with academic work than school achievement in the language of teaching and learning (English) alone (Koch & Dornbrack, 2008). This may call into question admission requirements which specify a high score in English, rather than in a home language.

However, this is not to suggest that academic performance at school is unrelated to predicting success in university. Many studies claim that school academic performance is a useful and reliable predictor of performance in higher education. Barnes et al. (2009), Eiselen and Geyser

(2003) and Lourens and Smit (2004) all found that there is a significant relationship between final NSC scores and academic success. Van Rooy and Coetzee-Van Rooy (2015) suggest however, that these results have a greater predictive power of academic success among students with higher marks who are already in a low-risk category than for students with lower school marks. The predictive value of lower marks, or those considered "*deficit*", is not high and therefore not a helpful measure to determine admission. Van Rooy and Coetzee-Van Rooy (2015) conclude their study by suggesting that achievement in even English in matric does not correlate strongly with academic achievement at university, while Koch and Dornbrack (2008) conclude that implementing monolingual admission criteria will continue to exclude those who most need to escape the restraints imposed by poverty. What this discussion highlights is that the reliability of final matric scores (language included) to predict success remains contested in academic literature and therefore there may be room for other ways of conceptualising admission.

To a certain extent, those interviewed as part of the study tried to conceptualise other ways of admission and reflected on their responsibility as agents with decision making power:

> *Do we require an applicant to be where we want them to start, or do we start with the applicant? (RE1)*

> *My thing is increase access with a flexible policy around English so that you don't set it too high at the admissions level. But make sure that there are enough support systems within the university so that even as the student learns, you know science or maths or history and so on, there are ample opportunities to learn English well enough to exceed. (VC2)*

> *I don't know whether the language will make you successful, or maybe we should change the way of teaching. Instead of relying on 'if you know English, you will make it,' what other ways can help those people, which English is their second language, rather than excluding them based on minimum admission rule? (AO2)*

> *I think that we should challenge that [high English requirements], we should challenge the notion. You know, it's always important for academics to have control over admissions requirements, but that comes with responsibilities. So, if you have the right to set the entry requirements, then you have a responsibility to ensure that you are not keeping people out unfairly. You're not, kind of closing the doors of the students who might perform very well, you know. (VC1)*

In the extracts above, interviewees position students in the centre as being concerned about the social justice and fairness of using English as a barrier to entry. Many scholars have argued that language and its policies are intricately connected to concerns of social justice, which is particularly important in a South African context (Cliff & Yeld, 2006; Koch & Dornbrack, 2008; Tollefson, 1991; Wiley, 1995; Yeld, 2001). In looking at these extracts, each interviewee questioned other possibilities by looking at existing institutional structures and suggesting a more flexible admission policy regarding English, or changing teaching methods to contest the notion of, *"if you know English, you will make it."* One interviewee emphasised that it is important for academics to exercise their agency in challenging admission requirements which close doors on students who may perform very well.

But despite these calls to challenge institutional structures and the literature that contests the extent to which proficiency in the language of teaching and learning is a predictor of academic success, the practice of specifying "*unrealistically high"* scores in English in admission criteria continues across higher education, including in UoTs. Although participants expressed a level of resistance, it would appear that they have not engaged their agency to address this matter as the required level of achievement in English has increased over the last 30 years. This is especially the case in UoTs who are aspiring to "catch up" with HWU universities – those located in the penthouse level of the house of modernity – and therefore want only the "*most talented"* students. Increasing the levels of achievement is enabled through structures in the form of the DHET and institutional policies which work in complementarity with the enduring discourse of "*English as quality*". According to Archer (1995), such complementarity between structure and culture creates the situational logic of protection, which refers to actions aimed at preserving existing structures and stability, resisting change to safeguard established interests. In this way, the dominance of English endures.

Although some interviewees called for the academic community to challenge or question higher English requirements, there was no data indicating how or if this had happened. Archer (2007) suggests that those who hold powerful positions in the institution can draw on their personal emergent powers as social actors to bring about change; she also suggests that even primary agents without much power could collectively organise themselves as "the potential to challenge the status quo. However, there was no evidence of the participants taking any action to challenge the English language requirement. In fact, the same participants gave arguments justifying why English proficiency is vital in higher education:

> *It's just that our system in South Africa has always been in English. (DR1)*

> *We should teach them in English, to the best of our abilities, because the world is organised that way. South Africa is organised that way, public life, economic life, social life, cultural life is increasingly organised around English. (VC2)*

In the extracts above, it becomes evident that there is an acceptance that the use of English is just the way in which the world is organised. In this denial, an imagination of something otherwise is constrained. Arguably, the global dominance of English thus works as a conditioning mechanism that constrains academics from addressing this matter. In this way, these extracts reveal a naturalised hierarchy of language, with English positioned within the "zone of being" (Fanon, 2008, p. 2) or the right side of the "abyssal line" (Santos, 2007, p. 46) and other languages positioned on the periphery, marked with limited legitimacy or recognition in the global cultural order. In these examples, the participants appear to have been conditioned by a global order which operates through the colonial matrix of power (Quijano, 2007) by naturalising the way social, economic and cultural structures of the world operate. This is revealed in how they provided a rationale that justifies the mechanism of English while knowing the inequality it can bring. Comments such as South Africa being increasingly organised around English or that most students will get their degrees in English demonstrates an acceptance of this. In fact, the hierarchy of language is so deeply embedded that it is difficult for participants to imagine a world *not* centred around English. This is shown by the same interviewee cited above, who explained the joy in a dissertation being written in isiZulu, but it remains unimaginable that it could be anything more than that.

> *There's a part of me emotionally, politically that likes it [reviving isiZulu in HE]. But there's a there's a pragmatism to my thinking as a person, which sort of says if we can do it on the side, that's fine. But in the meantime, if every now and again, a student writes an entire dissertation in isiZulu, it's on. I mean, who cannot be happy about that? But the truth is in a mass education system, most students are going to get the degrees in English. (VC2)*

In these ways, participants have come to accept that this is "*just the way it has always been in South Africa*," and perhaps feel powerless to challenge the status quo.

6.5.2 The cost of the "layers"

> *Yeah, I must say … we still have a lot of applicants that apply who we usually call the 'apply for the sake of applying'. And the reason why we say that is because they don't meet*

> *requirements for programmes, but they apply for them. … So those who just ignore what the universities requires and just apply and that is quite a big number of applicants that we see annually. (AO2)*

There is little doubt that the demand for higher education in South Africa grows each year (CHE, 2024). As the interviewee who refers to the joy of seeing a dissertation written in isiZulu explained it, access to higher education represents more than the attainment of a degree, it has a much higher social value and return:

> *The social rates of return to higher education is the highest in the world. In other words, if you get a degree you benefit much more as an individual than anybody else in the world. And socially your family benefits, the country benefits. Those rates of return, as the economists call it, are very, very high. (VC2)*

In South Africa, there is a strong link between an individual's level of education and their standard of living, as unemployment rates and income are closely tied to educational attainment (Bhorat, 2004). This is often referred to as a graduate premium and explained as the economic advantage that individuals with higher education qualifications, particularly university degrees, have compared to those without such qualifications. Cloete (2009) reports that individuals in South Africa who have completed some level of higher education are between two and three times as likely to be formally employed than those who have not. This premium reflects the increased income, better employment prospects and upward social mobility associated with having a degree (Burns & Keswell, 2012; Keswell & Poswell, 2004). In other words, obtaining a university degree has the potential to alleviate poverty for both the graduate and their family. However, graduate premiums are also a clear indicator of inequality because they signal the differences in income between graduates and non-graduates (Marginson, 2016a). In South Africa, the graduate premium remains significant, reflecting the value placed on higher education as a pathway to economic stability and social advancement (Louw et al., 2007). With this in mind, it is understandable that individuals who belong to the uninvited group of "*apply for the sake of applying"* persist in submitting applications year after year, despite their chances diminishing with each attempt.

Various interviewees understand it is because *"people desperately want to get space in higher education"* (AO2) as it is "*a pathway to jobs, it's a pathway to a better quality of life*" (VC1). However, giving this group the name "*apply for the sake of applying"* and perceiving them as "*just ignor[ing] what the universities requires"* (AO2) does not reflect that same

understanding. Rather, it reveals a neoliberal undertone, in that the concerns about social redress have perhaps been overlooked for more efficient admission processes which reduce applicants to numbers. Simply said, those that do not meet the criteria, regardless of their context, do not matter.

It could then be reasonable to suggest that the *"apply for the sake of applying"* group continues to expand annually, as they are joined by new applicants, further intensifying the competition for the limited spots available at universities. This makes it increasingly difficult year on year for those who remain uninvited to gain access. However, contrary to how most participants describe the growing demand for places, one of the interviewees suggested that "*if you add the number of places in the post-school education and training sector there's absolutely enough place for every student that's coming through the system"* (VC1). His argument is based on the premise that "*those students that don't get into universities go to the colleges"* (VC1).

Assessing the accuracy of the previous statement is difficult because data on the number of applicants compared to available spots is rarely made public. However, in 2023, it was reported in the media (Makwea, 2023) that there were 196 325 first-year enrolment spaces across the 26 public universities and 208 299 spaces in the TVET (vocational college) system in South Africa. A total of 404 623. That same year, in the National Senior Certificate results there were 572 983 successful NSC graduates who completed their secondary schooling (broken down into the following categories of pass: bachelor pass: 282 894, diploma pass: 187 879 and higher certificate pass: 101 973) (DoE, 2024). This demonstrates a deficit in places available without considering the applicants who applied from previous NSC years, the exact number of which is difficult to determine. Indicatively though, it would appear when consulting the public HE headcount enrolments by age group that most students (28%) are between the ages of 25 to 35 indicating that they were older when accepted, and thus more likely to have not entered straight from NSC to university. In other words, their numbers need to be considered when looking at places available. Together, this demonstrates that demand outstrips number of places available, contrary to what is described by the interviewee. What remains particularly intriguing is the participant's strong conviction in this belief, which may be linked to an attempt to alleviate a sense of guilt associated with turning away desperate students, which is further discussed in Chapter Seven.

Judged now as "*most deficit,"* invisibilised by modernity and positioned on the other side of the "abyssal line" (Santos, 2007,p.46), these uninvited guests are sent to lower levels of the metaphorical 'The House Modernity Built,' namely "*the colleges."* In South Africa, as part of the post-school education landscape, these colleges are the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Colleges (TVETs). The TVET colleges are overseen by the DHET and offer a wide range of vocational and occupational programmes, designed to equip students with practical skills and knowledge, preparing them for employment in various industries. In South Africa, as in many countries, vocational training and manual labour are entrenched as second-class fields, often conferring lower social and economic status (Balwanz, 2019). This perceived second-class status is transferred to the institution in that TVETs have a tarnished reputation (Makola et al., 2023) and are usually seen as less desirable than universities. Azeem (2022) and Zulu (2017) argue that they are perceived as the last resort for students rejected by the universities.

However, TVETs in South Africa are seen by the government as a tier of education that has the potential to contribute to skills training at an intermediary level and to be a catalyst in growing the country's economy. The DHET envisages an integrated post-school system where articulation between levels of the higher education system is encouraged, with targets in place to increase the total number of students enrolled in TVETs from just over 700 000 in 2024 to 2.5 million by 2030 (Branson et al., 2015). An interviewee based within a UoT representative gave insight into these plans:

> *The government wants to grow the TVET sector, and they have bold plans for it, where they want them to offer some programmes that were traditionally offered by university technologies. (QD1)*

The White Paper for Post-school Education and Training (DHET, 2013) outlined the government's intention for an integrated post-school system. This would mean that different types of institutions complement each other and work together to improve the quality, quantity and diversity of the post-school system. With this in mind, TVETs would be able to expand both their numbers and their mandates by offering programmes that were traditionally only offered by UoTs. This works in complementarity with UoTs "*aspiration to catch up*," as the introduction of another institutional type perceived as inferior to those with university in their name, will enable UoTs to move up the hierarchical ladder and be seen as occupying a space closer to the penthouse.

6.6 Conclusion

In the years that followed the shift to democracy, policymakers developed an entire new set of policies and frameworks used to guide the higher education system. These led to changes in the structural system which enabled UoTs to reimagine themselves. Part of this reimagination was fuelled by an "*aspiration to catch up,*" which has impacted *who* is invited into the institution and *how* applicants are judged to be the most talented. This led to structural changes to admission requirements, some of which I have tried to show have emerged through the discourse of "*student as deficit"* which acts as a mechanism to enable additional "*layers"* to be added. These *"layers"* are entangled with the idea of "quality as whiteness" and as such colonial legacies are reproduced. One such layer is the English language, which has become a gatekeeper of access by being used as a tool to determine *who* is familiar with the penthouse level of 'The House Modernity Built.' In recognising only those most familiar, structures within institutions are protected and a hierarchical system remains.

This is not to ignore the strides made in transforming demographics in South African higher education over the T_2–T_3 timeframe, of which there has been much progress. However, this chapter has attempted to reveal the ways in which the "shine" of coloniality is reproduced in our admissions processes and the cost paid by the hopeless, those considered "*most deficit.*" Similarly, it has also presented a case for a reimagination of admissions, free from the pull of neoliberalism and efficiency to bring us back to our priority of redress. Until we do so, coloniality is perpetuated and we remain entangled in a soft reform space, which does not involve major shifts or a drastic interruption of the way power and resources are accumulated by current beneficiaries. This is in order to make space for difference and for the redistribution of resources, opportunities and symbolic values.

The following chapter will conceptualise change and outline the study's contribution to the decolonial debate using the lens of Social Realism.

Chapter Seven: T_4 The Invitation to Dig Deeper

> *… the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.* (Lorde, 2018, p. 2)

7.1 Introduction

The findings chapters began with an exploration of the structural and cultural conditions at the first stage of the morphogenetic framework as described in Chapter Four. Having understood these allowed me to see the ways in which agents have been enabled or constrained through their interactions with both the structures (Chapter Five) and cultures (Chapter Six) regarding the processes of admission to UoTs.

This final chapter marks the last stage of Archer's morphogenetic framework, termed T_4, and signals the end of a defined cycle. I use this chapter to describe how I see "the house today." I do this to describe how although there have been significant shifts in regard to certain cultures and structures, it has not been enough to achieve what Archer would call "morphogenesis," or what some decolonial scholars denominate as "beyond reform" (Machado de Oliveira, 2021; Stein et al., 2020). Rather, I present how coloniality continues to operate with refined tools and emerges as hidden mechanisms in the layer of the real working to maintain the status quo, resulting in morphostasis.

As a reminder, the main objective of this study was to explore how and why the processes of admission in UoTs have changed over the last three decades. This includes analysing the changes in admission requirements during this period and examining the structural, cultural and agential mechanisms that have either enabled or constrained these changes. In addition, the research aims to identify and explore the specific mechanisms through which colonial legacies continue to be reproduced in the admission processes at UoTs, offering a deeper insight into the underlying forces shaping these practices. In order to do so, I sought to answer the following main research question:

How and why have the processes of admission to Universities of Technology changed over the last three decades?

And the following sub-research questions:

How have requirements for admission changed in Universities of Technology over the last three decades?

How have structural, cultural and agential mechanisms enabled or constrained change in the process of admissions in UoTs within the given timeframe?

How and what are the specific mechanisms through which colonial legacies have been (re)produced in the processes of admission at UoTs?

To help in answering these questions I used two UoTs as case studies and subjected them to the tenants of CR and SR to investigate.

7.2 A Decolonial Exploration of Findings

Throughout my thesis, I have explored the entanglements of coloniality/modernity within the South African higher education sector and their impact on changing processes of admission. In this last chapter, I explain the changes and challenge their transformative value. In so doing I have felt under pressure to offer an alternative or the certainty of a solution or even to propose my vision for a decolonial future and a plan of how this may be achieved. The reading of numerous successful PhDs tells me that perhaps it is standard practice to make these kinds of recommendations, with many scholars of higher education tending to follow the formula of offering a description of the primary problem, followed by a prescription that purports to solve the problem. Stein (2022) argues that this description–prescription approach does not consider the volatilities, complexities and uncertainties of the current context and a prescribed prescription cannot be able to fully take into account the various communities that would be affected. Furthermore, my attempt to identify the conditioning mechanisms from which the status quo has emerged is by definition partial. As discussed in Chapter Two, I have used judgemental rationality to offer what I hope is a convincing argument as to the emergence of the status quo, but it cannot be seen to be complete, given the epistemic relativism of all researchers. To boldly state what *should* happen next would thus in many ways be counter to the social realist position I have taken. Nonetheless, Social Realism is a theory of change and

if my depiction of the status quo is of a situation that falls short of social justice, then I need to offer some way of looking forward.

It becomes important then to ask where that sense of forward is orientated, in whose name, for whose benefit and at what expense? At times, especially while writing this chapter, I have been tempted to provide a prescription, but I have come to recognise these moments as my own need to feed my colonial desire for a viable, pre-made alternative that can replace a broken system rather than learning to feel uncomfortable with the unknown and unknowable. I have therefore realised that I cannot give a "prescription" or a systemic alternative as I do not know what the work of reparation, rematriation or redress may look like or where it may lead – even after writing this dissertation. In this way, I take comfort in how Stein describes that "no future that is decolonial could be imagined by one person, and a white settler at that" (Stein, 2023, p. 252).

Similarly, Stein (2023) suggests that if the problems we face are products of our existing systems, any alternatives developed from within these systems are likely to reproduce colonial patterns. In fact, a decolonial higher education future may be unimaginable from where we currently stand and can only become a possibility once we have given up the search for universal answers and guaranteed outcomes. I am also cautious not to rush into suggesting a particular mechanism requires "fixing" and present an immediate "feel-good" solution. These solutions are often driven by a rush to reform and because the layers of coloniality in higher education are so entrenched and complex, it remains largely immune to these kinds of interventions. I do, however, acknowledge the urgency of systemic change and the importance of taking action to reduce harm, most especially as a white academic.

Furthermore, while writing up the final findings which you will read below, I have also caught myself thinking that what I am suggesting is ridiculous. How can I argue against meritocratic admission processes when our higher education system in South Africa has become synonymous with low throughput rates? (Boughey & McKenna, 2021; Scott et al., 2007). As such, I have sometimes found myself asking "*Is it wrong to want the 'most talented' students? Will these students not have the best chance of successfully graduating?"* Quietly, I remind myself that South Africa's throughput rate remains low, despite a "meritocratic" approach to admissions, suggesting a misalignment in this logic, but it is also important to take note of these reactions. Stein (2022) asks us to take note of these thoughts as we are exposed to decolonial work and ask ourselves: "Where did this response come from? Where is this response leading to? And what possibilities are being foreclosed by these responses?" She reminds us that

“things can always be otherwise” (Stein, 2023, p. 61) and perhaps these questions or responses reflect my own inner colonial way of being that I need to recognise and unlearn.

The ‘Three horizons group,’ an education charity with a focus on futures thinking, describes this practice of doubt, often emerging through the discourses of “Don’t be ridiculous, that could never happen” or “No way! That isn’t possible” (H3Uni, 2024, n.p.) as a set of blockages conditioned by social habits including customs, language and dominant social expectations. Given the extent to which colonialism has colonised our imaginations it may be an unimaginable world to suggest processes of admission to be otherwise, and this may be because there is a certain level of uncertainty involved which most people try and avoid. However, in reading the final findings and discussions, I invite you to keep Stein’s (2022) prompt questions in mind. I am hoping that this will enable the discernment and accountability needed to face the decolonial project with the four H’s; humility, humour, honesty and self-reflexivity.

7.3 Key Discussions

This study uses Archer’s conceptualisation of the social world, focusing on the interplay between structure, culture and agency. According to Archer, each of these aspects possesses emergent properties that interact over time within the morphogenetic cycle, consisting of structural conditioning, social interaction and structural elaboration. This temporal sequence is critical in understanding the dynamics of social change. In the context of higher education in democratic South Africa, I have used the morphogenetic framework to analyse the interactions between “people” and “parts.”

Looking back in time, I have identified key moments which I have considered to be “tipping points.” These tipping points are crucial events or phases where interactions either reinforce existing structures (morphostasis) or lead to significant transformations (morphogenesis). Looking at these tipping points collectively has revealed that despite the intentions for deep reform in 1994 and the apparent changes in our higher education system, deep structural changes have been constrained. Instead, changes over the last three decades have emerged from what the Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures Collective (Machado de Oliveira, 2021; Stein et al., 2020) call a “soft reform” space. To circle back to the decolonial theory of change as described in Chapter Two, a “soft reform” change tends not to change the terms of reference, it rather focuses on a change of policy or practice and the inclusion of marginalised populations into existing institutions. In this way the system is seen as fundamentally sound and requires

only small improvements to ensure efficiency and effectiveness. There is little interrogation of structural power relations and although difference is acknowledged it is prescribed by those doing the including or excluding. The ideal is to incorporate a "difference that makes no difference" (Machado de Oliveira, 2021, p. 116) or what I consider "cosmetic reform" to maintain the status quo while revealing an underlying relationship with coloniality. Although social actors or corporate agents may acknowledge disruptions when they arise, they work to protect their interests in the system and therefore the solutions come in the form of "patching up" what is existing rather than questioning the longevity of the system or imagining a new one. This is what Andreotti et al. (2015) calls "soft reform" in which the system can continue with "business as usual" (Jimmy et al., 2019) or what Archer (2007) calls morphostasis.

I now move to present an overview of these "tipping points" and how ultimately these impact admission processes within UoTs. To do this, I once again rely on the Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures Collective (Machado de Oliveira, 2021; Stein et al., 2020) metaphor of 'The House Modernity Built.'

I now look back at the "tipping points" from T1 illustrated in Figure 7.1.

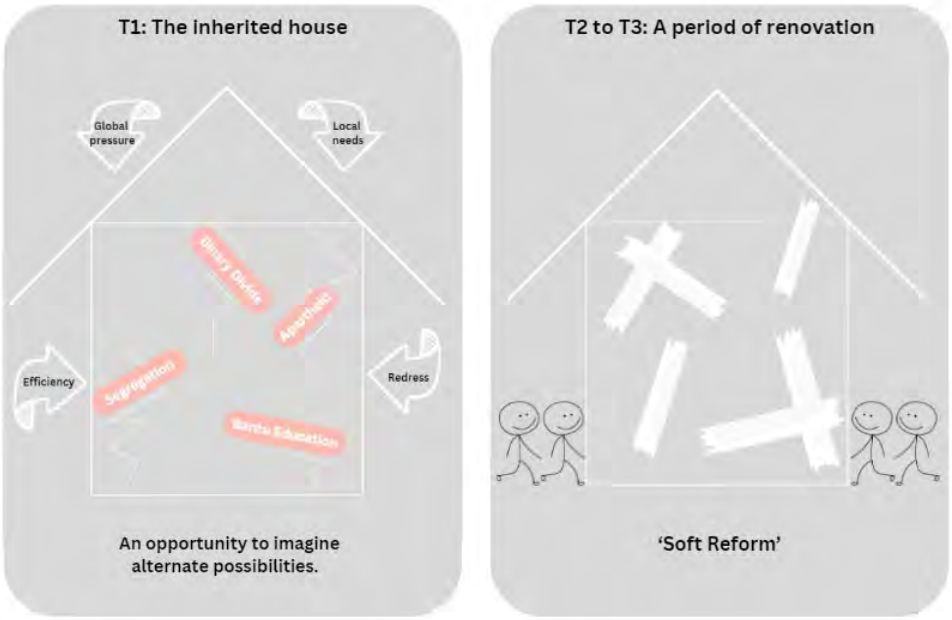


Figure 7.1: An illustration of my interpretation of the South African higher education sector as inspired by 'The House Modernity Built' (Machado, 2021; Stein et al. 2020)

To illustrate my findings, I refer back to the metaphor of 'The House Modernity Built' and used this as a basis to illustrate how I see what was inherited at T_1 (see Figure 7.1). The first frame of this figure depicts the broken house of higher education in South Africa, a representation of that which was inherited by agents at T_1 of the morphogenetic cycle in 1994. The inherited "house" was fractured by the colonising logic of apartheid and racialised segregation serving the interests of the elite. This became enacted in Bantu Education and there was a strong binary divide between different types of higher education institutions (universities and technikons). Metaphorically speaking, the house was cracked and in poor condition, as outlined in Chapter Four or the description of T_1.

However, with the election of the first democratic government in 1994 came the promise of redress and the opportunity to decide if the house was worth fixing, if it could be expanded, if another one could be built in its place, if we should learn to live without a house or to reimagine a new structure suited to accommodate a changed South Africa as guided by a new set of social actors. However, these new social actors were deeply and unconsciously conditioned by the existing structures of the house, intellectually, affectively and relationally. Furthermore, there were additional and conflicting forces being exerted on the house, as discussed in Chapter Four – where local needs had to be considered against the background of re-entering the global market alongside the rise of neoliberalism as a global ideology, placing the discourses of "redress" and "efficiency" into tension with each other. Consequently, the newly elected government's imagination, despite its commitment to deep transformative change or a "beyond reform" response (Machado de Oliveira, 2021; Stein et al., 2020) that could redress the effect of past racism and social and economic inequality, became constrained by the allure of global competitiveness which offered the promises of development and progress. At this point, with the understanding that the house was cracked and needed repairing, renovations to the house began. Existing damage to the structure of the house was patched up, repaired or replaced on the instruction of newly appointed social actors. Inspired by discourses of redress, methodological or policy changes were implemented based on including those previously marginalised into the *existing* (although renovated) house.

One seminal structure came in the form of the National Plan for Higher Education in South Africa, which was seen as an attempt to address the historical and socioeconomic challenges that plagued the country during apartheid and describes redress in higher education as integral

to South Africa's wider political, social and economic transformation. The policy explains how a higher education system should

> promote equity of access and fair chances of success to all who are seeking to realise their potential through higher education, while eradicating all forms of unfair discrimination and advancing redress for past inequalities.(RSA, 2001, p. 6)

This highlighted the need to increase and broaden participation, particularly for Black people, women, disabled and mature students. While the White Paper was important for creating space and opportunities for all who sought to enter higher education, thereby reducing immediate colonial harm, it was based on *inclusion* into an *existing* system. Stein et al. (2021) describe how the inclusion of Indigenous peoples (and their knowledges) into an existing institution will not disrupt coloniality, in fact, it may strengthen coloniality by giving it the appearance of a "kinder, gentler façade" (Stein et al., 2021, p. 20). Stein et al. (2021) further elaborate that those who are "being included" remain objects of difference who are conditionally invited into the institution by those who retain the power to make, rescind and deny the invitation.

In this instance, the underlying colonial conditions under which the institution operates remain untouched and unnamed. Inclusion, therefore, can also work to renaturalise existing institutional structures by restoring the institution to a position of moral legitimacy, at the same time as foreclosing further critiques. In this way, institutions can claim to be working against coloniality in ways which shield them from future critique while maintaining the status quo. Meanwhile, those who are included are expected to be grateful for their inclusion and adapt to existing social and institutional norms on which their inclusion depends. Should these primary agents voice objections or ask for more substantive changes they may be dismissed as ungrateful or standing in the way of progress. According to Archer (1995, p. 294), this would be considered "morphostasis," in that the structural and cultural conditioning mechanisms work together to form necessary complementarities which creates an environment of mutual support in which the status quo is reproduced – even though the system may have different looking occupants.

While redress was heavily foregrounded in the White Paper, it was not long after this that the GEAR macroeconomic framework declared by the Minister of Finance in 1996 was published. This policy marked a shift in state priorities, where discourses of efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness were positioned above those of redress, which is why I consider it to represent

a “tipping point.” Following on from the discussions I outlined in Chapter Five, it was this policy which considered rationalism, efficiency, effectiveness and performance as central to South Africa’s successful re-emergence into the global market once international sanctions were lifted and aimed to stimulate growth through foreign investment and improved global competitiveness. Importantly, it demonstrated that the South African economy was expected to operate considering the dynamics of the global economy, which has been mainly driven by the neoliberal ideology (Sparke, 2013). As outlined in Chapter Two, there is a clear connection between neoliberalism and the underpinning logic of the global economy; as such, the renovations of the house were shaped around these expectations. Rather than reimagining “the house” as a different structure altogether, methodological adjustments were made to what was existing. Along with discourses of efficiency, the policy worked to condition how funding for higher education was imagined with consequences for institutions.

The new funding formula for higher education, as discussed in Chapter Five, represents one structure that emerged from the discourses of efficiency and again represents a “tipping point” for how institutions began to arrange themselves. The funding framework was designed in such a way as to reaffirm existing structures of hierarchy, echoing an order of the inherited higher education system. Those institutions that had historically produced research (HWU) and offered postgraduate qualifications continued to be rewarded (financially and in status) and those who could not (HBU, Comprehensives and UoTs) remained judged as inferior. This effectively maintained a divide between institutions. The new funding formula also served to create a goal-orientated and performance-driven environment where a culture of competition was fuelled between individual institutions with each one needing to compete for funding, status and the “more talented” students in a market-driven and commodified context. For higher education institutions judged as inferior (such as UoTs) there remains little choice but to mimic historically white institutions. These were institutions that had already developed their research capacity and had secured their position within the penthouse. As such, the discourse expressing the “aspiration to catch up” becomes validated as a way to get to the upper floor. It is this “aspiration to catch up” which becomes a central logic behind structural changes to UoTs – from name changes to offered qualifications having implications on who is deemed fit for admission.

7.4 T_4: Looking at the House Today

Chapter Four represents that which was inherited and describes the conditioning mechanisms at T_1 of the morphogenetic cycle. Chapters Five and Six built on this by looking at the interaction between the "parts" and the "people." I will now discuss how I see "the house" today[23], which represents the final stage of the morphogenetic cycle, known as T_4. Up until this point in the chapter I have outlined broader events in South Africa with the understanding that these will influence the higher education sector. I now move to zoom in on this system to understand how UoTs and their admission processes are shaped today. I have conceptualised this as "*the house today*."

There is no doubt that the occupants of "*the house today"* look different. Both literature and statistics in the last three decades demonstrate that policies of redress have contributed to shifting demographics within higher education (Case, 2015; Cooper, 2015; Essop, 2020; Leibowitz & Bozalek, 2014). Figure 7.2 demonstrates that as a proportion of higher education headcount by population group Black African students grew from 8.8% in 1980 to 79% in 2021, while white students dropped from 67.7% in 1980 to 10.5% in 2021.

Proportion of higher education headcount by population group 1980 - 2021

	1980	1990	2001	2005	2010	2017	2021
Black African	8,8%	35,4%	58,6%	61%	67%	73,7%	79%
Coloured	13,1%	6%	5,4%	7%	7%	6,2%	5,8%
Indian	9,5%	6,4%	7,2%	7%	6%	4,8%	3,9%
White	67,7%	52,1%	28,7%	25%	20%	14,3%	10,5%
Unknown						0.9%	1,2%

Figure 7.2: Proportion of higher education student headcount by population group 1980–2021 (CHE, 2016, 2019, 2022, 2023; Cooper, 2015; Soudien, 2021)

23 The findings of how I see the house today were presented at the 11th Higher Education Close Up (HECU11) conference held at Rhodes University in 2024. The paper was entitled *'A fragile trust: Exploring student admissions in South African universities of technology'*.

However, although widening access to Black students is an important step it does not guarantee change at a deep structural level. Badat (2020) and Luescher et al. (2023) explain how often redress within institutions is reduced to the notion of equity, and the notion of equity in turn to that of demographic representation. However, a change in the demographic composition of the student body does not necessarily address the roots of apartheid and its coloniality at a transformative scale and depth (Case, 2015; Cooper, 2015; Leibowitz & Bozalek, 2014). Viewing redress merely as achieving demographic representation limits radical change and instead aligns with an ideology of checking the decolonisation box as described by Machado de Olivera (2021) or "racial gesture politics" (Rollock, 2018, p. 313). This is defined as implementations appearing to offer serious engagement with the concern of inequality but doing very little to interrupt the deep racial and class inequalities in higher education. Jimmy et al. (2019) discuss a similar concept about how decolonisation is sometimes understood. They tell the story of an organisation wanting to decolonise and so hire an Indigenous person to do this work, the Indigenous person accepts the position hoping the organisation understands decolonisation in the same way as they do. However, most activities of the organisation go unchanged; the mere presence of an Indigenous person is meant to decolonise the public appearance of the institution and so they argue that the organisation has followed a specific formula of:

> decolonization = business as usual + selective Indigenous content – guilt and risk of bad press. (Jimmy et al., 2019, p. 7)

Based on Jimmy's formula, a similar one could be suggested for how redress policies are implemented and understood within higher education institutions:

> redress = business as usual + increased access to marginalised groups – guilt and risk of bad press

Such an understanding of redress works to protect the existing structures of the house, leading to a deep transformation of the sector remaining elusive with institutions doing little to fundamentally alter the identity and core assumptions of the modern South African university itself (Hlatshwayo, 2020; Luescher et al., 2023).

It would then be reasonable to propose that changes that we have seen have emerged as soft reform, despite promises from the state for a more radical change. Agents, when encountering "tipping points" appear to have been socialised to modern systems and invested in the promises

that the House Modernity Built will bring. Although many changes have taken place in the process of admission of UoTs, the process has not brought the promise of redressing fully. Because of this, I argue that the changes we have seen have made "a difference that makes no difference**"** (Machado de Oliveira, 2021, p. 116). Archer (1995) refers to this as morphostasis where the social system is maintained or reproduced, attributed to complementarities between agents and structures or cultures.

To explain my argument, I now zoom in to examine the structure of 'The House Modernity Built' to understand the mechanisms at work that perpetuate soft reform today. To illustrate my findings, I use the figure of a house with each mechanism forming a part of the house's structure. The depiction of a house in this context works well, as although each structural element of the house is separate, they function collectively to support the entirety of the house's structure. In a similar way, each mechanism, although discussed individually below, is entangled within each other and works together in ways which constrain deep transformative change.

You may see moving forward, that in my discussions and visual representations of "*the house"* I have not positioned every kind of university. Here, I refer to the nuanced landscape of South African higher education, as discussed in Chapter Four, where there are divides between historically Black universities and HWUs, or rural and urban universities. These factors would impact where each institution would be positioned within the house of modernity and extend beyond this study's scope. Given the parameters of this study, I have specifically concentrated on where UoTs as an institutional type are positioned in relation to HWUs. I have chosen to include HWUs as my study has shown through various findings outlined in Chapters Five and Six how they are widely regarded as the referent model of universities.

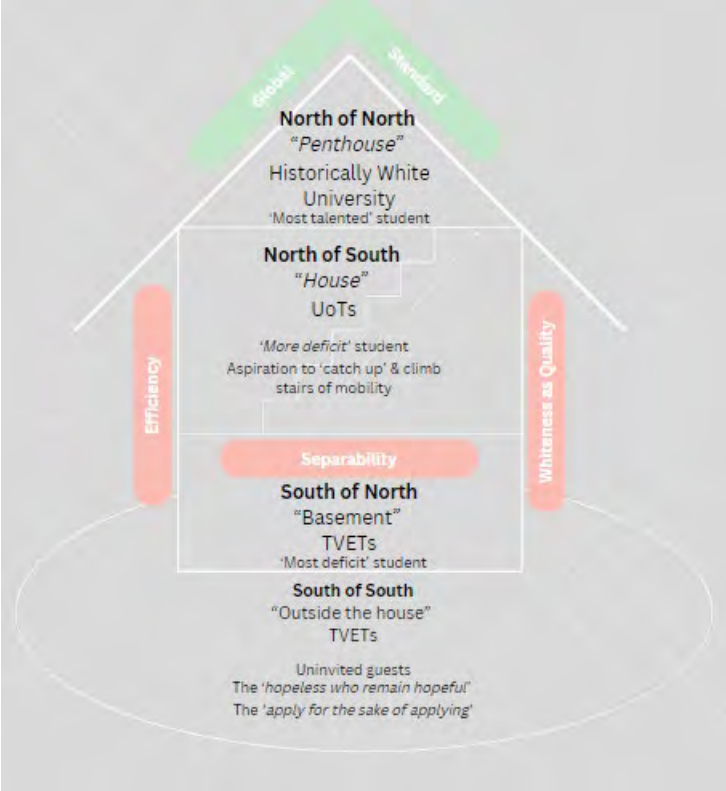


Figure 7.3: A representation of the South African higher education sector at T4 as adapted from the 'The House Modernity Built' (Machado de Olivera, 2021; Stein et al., 2020)

7.4.1 A foundation of separability

Machado de Oliveira (2021) describes separability as one of the main foundations of 'The House Modernity Built,' which has formed the basis of the illustration in Figure 7.3 above. With its roots in the colonial notion of human exceptionalism and anthropocentrism, separability represents the idea that humans are separated from nature, being the first one at the centre. In some ways, this is similar to what my data reveals in regard to the continued elitism of higher education in South Africa. With its foundation built of solid concrete that separates the "*most talented"* from the "*apply for the sake of applying,"* the house creates degrees of hierarchical value that rank separate beings or institutions against one another according to their perceived utility within modernity's economies. Once inside the house, the internal separations become more nuanced and occur through the creation of hierarchies premised on race, location, institutional type, access to resources, research capacity or a higher world ranking position. These fantasies of separation and hierarchy lay the groundwork for the rest of the house.

The apex of the house (or penthouse) represents the "*North of the North"*: institutions that have accumulated the most wealth and power in the house and who have secured and stabilised their position as legitimate producers of value and heirs of the house. In South Africa, this space is occupied by HWUs which have come to represent an aspiration to other types of lower-ranked institutions. The students who attend these institutions are seen as the "*most talented*," often coming from elite secondary schools in the country and possess attributes that are most recognised as familiar to the house. Notably these institutions still account for the highest proportion of white students in the higher education sector (Essop, 2020) and the lowest proportion of NSFAS-funded students (NSFAS, 2019).

The second level, positioned underneath the penthouse, is labelled the "*North of the South*," and represents those who are invested in climbing the stairs of mobility in an effort to reach the level established by the *"North of the North"*. It becomes important to notice that the stairs in the diagram above are not depicted equally – some treads are wider than others and some risers are higher than others. This is to convey the idea that the stairs are not easy to climb, some steps up may be harder than others depending on one's congruencies to the house's economies. With each upward step, there may be hidden costs involved, but the house makes promises; that once an institution reaches the penthouse it will be worth it.

It is here that I have positioned UoTs given their "*aspiration to catch up"* as described in Chapter Five which works in complementarity with policies on funding and the inner workings of global university ranking systems. This aspiration to climb the stairs of mobility and reach the penthouse underpins many structural changes discussed in Chapters Five and Six over the last three decades. One aspect of climbing the stairs becomes inherently about *who* the students are and how aligned they are with the house, specifically the penthouse. Given findings discussed in Chapter Six which revealed the way in which UoT students, have been historically judged as being *"more deficit"* compared with the students who are able to attend HWUs, who appear to occupy the space of the penthouse of the house. Multiple *"layers"* are added to admission requirements by UoTs in a way which filters out the *"more deficit"* in order to emulate the "*most talented"* of their penthouse counterparts. One of the most impactful layers is the requirement of having high scores in English, which will be discussed under the separate heading "*wall of whiteness*".

The "*most deficit*" students, bearing attributes which the house no longer recognises as valuable to its economies are rejected and sent to the basement in the "*South of North*," where I have positioned the TVET colleges, introduced in Chapter Six. Most often these are Black, working-class applicants from rural locations who have had little access to English during their secondary schooling.

The basement level of the house serves a dual purpose for UoTs (or those situated in the "*North of the South"*); firstly, in having a level beneath them, they are inevitably elevated within the hierarchical higher education system and therefore can lay claim to a "higher" status. Secondly, it may alleviate any sense of guilt that could arise from refusing entry to a large number of applicants, as they have another alternative to pursue as discussed in Chapter Six. In the process of alleviating guilt, institutions are in a way also denying their complicity in perpetuating ongoing hierarchies. As described by Machado de Oliveira (2021), modernity/ coloniality can operate as a series of constitutive denials which restrict the capacity to sense, relate and imagine otherwise, one of which is the "denial of entanglement" (Machado de Olivera, 2021, p. 48). Theorising from a humanistic perspective, Machado de Olivera (2021) describes this as an insistence on seeing ourselves as separate from each other and the land, rather than being entangled within a wider metabolism.

The findings of this dissertation demonstrate that within a structural or institutional context, a similar denial may emerge; an insentience on separating institutions by hierarchy value as determined by the naturalised ordering principles of the house, without seeing an entanglement within the broader higher education sector or society at large. In other words, HWUs remain centred and UoTs their "other". This is further complicated by another denial, what Machado de Olivera (2021) calls the "denial of complicity in harm" (Machado de Olivera, 2021, p. 111), explained as denying systemic, historical ongoing violences by choosing to ignore that our comforts, securities and enjoyments are subsidised by exploitation elsewhere. Within the context of higher education, UoTs "*aspiration to catch up*" and occupy higher levels of the house to attain certain comforts or enjoyments, carries a cost. Some of this cost is carried by those who may have previously qualified for entry, but are now sent away, those like Sam, whose narrative I used to open the thesis.

The space outside the house is labelled the "*South of the South"* and has come to represent "*the hopeless who remain hopeful*." These individuals are considered unfit for the house, and again are often those with less access to resources, who may have attended low quintile (zero fee-

paying) schools in outlying areas with little access to English. This is despite strong discourses of redress and policies which support equity of access. Although there are certain exceptions, as my participants described, the life chances for this group have not radically changed over the period between T_2–T_3 and they remain knocking on the house's door.

7.4.2 A wall of "globalisation"

One of the load-bearing walls of the house is built on globalisation. Globalisation as argued in Chapter Two is underpinned by coloniality and is used as a word to represent progress, development and happiness for all but works to obscure the hidden hegemony of Western ways of being. Sparke (2013) argues that globalisation functions on the belief that nobody is in charge and that it is a natural consequence, however, it is rather the outcome of a global type of linear thinking where colonial difference is established and used to regulate the world through the lens of Westernised ideals. One manifestation of globalisation emerges through the discourses of "efficiency" in a highly competitive global market as an unquestionable rationale that justifies several policies implemented between T_2 and T_3. One seminal example is the GEAR discussed in Chapter Four. Discourses of efficiency position South Africa's economic re-emergence into the global market as related to neoliberalism. Neoliberalism as an ideology, as discussed in Chapter Two, entails the dominance of a market logic with the economisation of resources and activities with value assigned through metrification and monetisation. Development in this instance is seen as the system doing more with less and requiring an increase in graduates and research outputs.

Influenced by discourses of efficiency, knowledge is increasingly viewed as a commodity to be owned, traded or sold, rather than serving as a common good. In this way, access to this knowledge is dependent on personal attributes most likely to achieve the desired outcomes. Sayer (2015) argues that one of neoliberalism's key characteristics is reconceptualising members of the public as consumers or commodities. With this understanding, people can be seen as a collection of individuals competing to ascend a ladder, rather than being members of the same community. In a similar way, this manifests during processes of admission, where applicants are reduced to inputs who are ranked and made to compete against each other for spaces.

Understanding that within a neoliberal context, outcomes are positioned as a priority, it then becomes reasonable to suggest that admission processes at UoTs between 1994 and 2020 have too become outcomes based, designed to ensure that only the "*most talented"* students gain access in order to satisfy a desired outcome. As Chapter Six describes, the most talented students are characterised as those who have high scores in English as well as Mathematics or Science-based subjects and those who have attended elite secondary schools. Additional "*layers*" informed by the house's desire for progress and development are added to admission criteria and used as tools to filter candidates. This ensures that outcomes are met and rewarded as efficiently as possible. In this environment, critical engagement with redress has been overlooked in favour of efficiency.

For those committed to climbing the stairs to the penthouse, driven by an "*aspiration to catch up"* (such as UoTs), the relationship between institutions and the wall of globalisation is intensified. Adhering closely to the ideologies of this wall which appears as "shiny" becomes a way to demonstrate progress and presents a clear route up the stairs of mobility. What it does not account for, however, is the hidden costs, which are often carried by those in the "*South of the South.*"

7.4.3 A wall of "whiteness"

Another load-bearing wall of the house is entangled in the enduring ideology of "*whiteness as quality."* This ideology has been imposed since colonial times and has come to represent what it means to be civilised, modern and human (Sarder, 2008). The 2015 student protests, known by the hashtags #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall represented an attempt to disrupt "whiteness" within universities, however others have suggested that it remains intact today (Heleta, 2016).

In my study, *"whiteness as quality"* was revealed in the way various participants shared their concerns about the dwindling white student population at UoTs. Rather than seeing these changes to demographics as signals of redress, it was suggestive of a loss of something, as if a dwindling white student population could impact reduced institutional quality. Because of this, "layers" are added onto minimum admission criteria to emulate the "*most talented students*" while filtering out those who are seen as "*more deficit*." I suggest that the description of "*most talented"* is implicitly coded as a signifier of "*whiteness*" – which is seen as a desirable and recognisable attribute for the penthouse. In this way the ideology that "*whiteness = quality"*

works as a lens through which all candidates are judged. Only those deemed suitable, with signifiers such as high scores in English are given access to the house.

As I showed in Chapter Six, one of the strongest signifiers of "*most talented"* has manifested in competency in the English language. The data generated from interviews across the higher education sector demonstrated that a high English score has become naturalised across admission criteria. This reflects the underpinning ideology that the higher the score in English the greater the chances of success the applicant has. This has been structurally reinforced with the current DHET (2018) policy requiring a minimum score in the language of teaching and learning, of which the de facto language in South Africa is English (Madadzhe, 2019). This practice is intensified at the point of university application, where institutions are given autonomy to prescribe additional "*layers*" and require, as one of my participants describes an "*unrealistically high"* score for English to be considered for entry. However, this practice fails to recognise how not all young South Africans have equal access to English in their schools and that English-dominated admission policies favour those who are already privileged, thereby perpetuating inequality and injustice (Koch & Dornbrack, 2008). It also fails to consider the contradiction with the founding provisions of the South African constitution, Act 108 of 1996, which states that "all official languages must enjoy parity of esteem and must be treated equally" (RSA, 1996, p. 4).

The continued superiority of English in higher education becomes a mechanism which constrains radical change and demonstrates the entanglements imposed by the global neoliberal economy where English holds a higher status and has become a lingua franca of business and academia (Green, 2012). Today, ideologies around "*whiteness as quality"* and structural arrangements in support of this, work to reinforce this load-bearing wall thereby protecting the internal structures of the house and the interests of those within.

Despite some participants recognising the injustice of "*unrealistically high"* English requirements or providing examples of individual success stories, there was a general acceptance of the status quo. Many participants even moved quickly to explain the importance of English within South African higher education, revealing how naturalised the global order and its languages of legitimacy have become. Even those recognising the injustice of the practice were not capable of imagining an alternative. Archer (2007) describes this as a reproduction in agency, where primary agents choose not to collectively organise themselves in ways which would give them more power to change the status quo.

It could also reveal the interests of those within the house, wanting to preserve the structures around them with the understanding that the house can bring certain benefits and protection. The mechanism of *"whiteness as quality"* keeps the higher education sector within a soft reform space, as although there was recognition that the "house needed repairing" and a change to how the occupants of the house looked, deep structural changes remain elusive. The "house" still requires others to conform to its requirements and remains a colonial outpost, reproducing hegemonic identities rather than eliminating hegemony (McKaiser, 2016).

7.4.4 A roof of global standards

The final component of the house comes in the form of the roof which I have imagined as *"the roof of global standards."* This roof structure represents the boundary of imagination to those within the house and brings the promise of quality, comfort and protection through the attainment of universal standards ascribed by the global order. As Ramoupi (2011) argues, European values are still perceived as the standards on which South Africa's higher education system is based, with one such measure being the university global ranking systems. The ranking systems, having been established by actors in continental Europe and the US make all other regions and people receptors of Western global designs by encouraging lower-ranked institutions (such as UoTs) to mimic standards determined by Western research-intensive universities (Marginson & Van der Wende, 2007).

In this way, the ranking systems have become a tangible measure of worth in an era of open global competition between nations and individual institutions. Increasingly, national higher education systems and institutions are judged based on their global standings (Marginson & Van der Wende, 2007). Universities are used as a symbol of national achievement and prestige and as contributors to economic growth in the global knowledge economy.

Although participants in the study openly critiqued the use and foundations of global rankings, as discussed in Chapter Six, it was evident that a good placement in such rankings was acceptable to use for matters concerning corporate identity, marketing or public relations/perceptions. This shows how difficult the ranking systems are to resist, especially for institutions who are committed to *"climbing up the stairs of mobility"* while being confined by *"a wall of globalisation"* In this context, the ranking systems have become persuasive; promising quality, progress and status, but obscuring the cost they may bring to the local agenda of redress.

It is this *"roof of global standards"* that encloses the house and works to constrain the imaginations of those within it. The roof shapes policy and practice within higher education to conform with the demands of the global knowledge economy. It works on the promise that higher education serves as a means to achieve economic prosperity; thus, knowledge becomes a commodity, a private good with the potential to benefit those who can generate it, rather than being a "public good" and existing for the good of humankind.

The roof represents a "global standard" and becomes the benchmark for comparison and measure of excellence. This roof of global standards operates as a mechanism that limits the capacity to imagine otherwise, thereby amplifying the power of the walls. It continues to determine who speaks and in what language, when and what is intelligible or comfortable and desirable and gives little legitimation to other ways of being, although it may acknowledge differences. Those within the house who have become socialised to modern systems and distracted by their efforts to climb the stairs of mobility begin to accept elements of the ranking systems, despite an awareness of them being "*a horrible, horrible instrument of globalisation"* (VC1). This echoes Stein et al.'s (2020) description of a soft reform response, where the continuation of coloniality is not due to a lack of information but rather ongoing investments in and desires for the benefits promised by achieving the global standard. With the roof firmly in place, it remains difficult to break existing patterns despite intentions to do things differently.

7.4.5 Using the metaphor of the house to explore change

In describing the house today, I have shown how the foundations, walls and roof remain firmly in place, acting as mechanisms that work to preserve the system's underlying structure and order, thereby constraining the kind of change promised through the discourse of redress. I have been able to explore the broader system of higher education in South Africa by understanding that the processes of admissions are a symptom of a larger interplay of mechanisms. In so doing, I have shown that changes made to admission processes alone under the discourse of redress through widening participation may have changed *who* is invited into the house but has not been enough to disrupt the enduring, underlying colonial mechanisms which continue to shape the house today.

Archer (2007) would call this morphostasis and explains that it is these mechanisms, operating at the level of the real, which reinforce existing structures, roles and norms in society thereby resisting changes that could disrupt the status quo. Similarly, Machado de Oliveira (2021)

refers to this maintenance of the status quo as stemming from a "soft reform" approach, which focuses on integrating others into existing institutions through methodological adjustments, viewing the system as fundamentally sound and needing only minor improvements to enhance its efficiency and effectiveness. I would consider this to be a "cosmetic" type of reform, suggesting changes are symbolic, thereby maintaining core structures.

In using the metaphor of a house, I illustrate the complexity of achieving deep, transformative change. Speaking about the metaphor – if one element is changed, such as a specific wall being demolished, doors or windows being replaced, or who is invited into the house, this does not guarantee morphogenesis as the house still stands on its original foundations. In other words, making changes to one element at a time will not be enough to change the status quo, as is evident in the case of my thesis. Archer (2007) contends that the status quo of the current system relies on the interconnection of multiple mechanisms, meaning that isolated, incremental approaches to change are insufficient. Instead, addressing these concerns requires comprehending the broader systemic interactions at work should a more transformative change be sought.

Perhaps in this context, a "beyond reform" approach, as described by de Oliveira (2021) and Stein et al. (2020), might be more transformative, moving forward with the recognition that the broader system cannot be reformed since it is unsustainable to guarantee its promises of redress. Instead of merely adding to or making methodological changes within an existing framework – which would limit the disruption of colonial legacies – this approach advocates a complete reimagining of what could be possible. But in order to do this, we need to engage with our own colonial desires.

As Chapter Two details, theories of change rooted in a "*beyond reform"* space are varied, but generally fall under three kinds of responses offering possibilities and limitations, system walkout, hacking or hospicing (Machado de Oliveira, 2021; Stein et al., 2020). Those who react by walking out, often seek alternative systems and institutions hoping for guaranteed outcomes, which can reflect colonial desires like certainty and progress. This highlights the privilege of choice some have to walk out, over others who are structurally excluded from the system. The next reaction is to hack modern institutions and to direct resources towards nurturing something else. This is sometimes understood as "one foot in, one foot out" requiring one to play the game while bending the rules. It does become difficult to recognise when one is playing the game or

being played by the game and Machado de Oliveira (2021) warns that some may position themselves outside of implication in the system.

The final reaction is called hospicing the system. This position recognises the inevitable end of unsustainable institutions but sees the necessity of enabling a good death through which lessons can be learnt. These lessons are learnt through understanding the accomplishments and mistakes of the dying system so they can be applied to the creation of something different. This approach also relies on us hospicing our own investments into the promises modernity makes to us through facing our own desires and habits of being.

Machado de Oliveira (2021) discusses the transition between endings and new beginnings, emphasising the significance of entering the eye of the storm without knowing its direction. This is important as modernity conditions us to believe that in order to change reality or our ways of being, we first need to imagine what this change looks like, and then make a plan and act to achieve that goal. To truly envision something different, we must first acknowledge the harm we cause and become dissatisfied with the aspects of our lives that contribute to those harms. However, this transformation does not happen overnight; it requires a long and sustained practice of remembering the intention. It is also important to navigate this space carefully, avoiding the extremes of moving too slowly or too quickly, to avoid being caught and tossed around in the whirlwind of change.

Stein et al. (2021) refer to this as the long haul of decolonisation, where initially people are excited and desire to make a change and so seek an easy feel-good solution. In so doing there is a feeling of purpose and redemption. However, at some point, the fantasy of quick fixes is demolished as people encounter complexities, uncertainties, conflicts and pushbacks. At this point, people can feel hopeless, hurt and disappointed, sometimes abandoning their decolonising efforts. It is at this point where stamina, integrity and generosity (Stein et al., 2021) for the long haul of decolonisation is required, especially for somebody like myself, a white person who has been socialised into systemic colonial habits of knowing, being and relating for all of my life. I, as do we all, need to learn to have patience with uncertainty, vulnerability and non-linear movement in order to weather the ups and downs of this work.

7.5 Reflecting on Contributions to Ongoing Conversations

Stein (2020) tells us that decolonial scholarship should be viewed as an ongoing, context-specific conversation which is able to shift within academia and the broader society. And so,

with this in mind, I view this study as a contribution to the decolonial conversation, one which emerges from my own positionality.

At this point, I feel it is important to note that analysing how processes of admission have changed at UoTs has taught me that my role as a researcher is not to prescribe a solution, but rather to identify, interrogate and interrupt (Menezes de Souza, 2021) enduring colonial patterns so that conversations about alternative possibilities for knowing, being and relating can be had. These alternative possibilities may be sanctioned or suppressed by mainstream institutions and discourses. Machado de Oliveira (2021) explains this as an attempt to delegitimise any disruption to existing systems, deeming them as unproductive. My challenge and perhaps contribution to the conversation is to avoid any prescriptive solutions to how the processes of admission at UoTs should happen as this could lead to slipping back into the same set of colonial entitlements which I seek to challenge by inserting one hegemony in place of another. I am, therefore, not attempting to change policy or practice concerning the processes of admission but rather question existing ways in how they are imagined, showing how they are conditioned by coloniality. In so saying, I acknowledge that perhaps this may be discouraging for some readers who are seeking a solution to an urgent problem, but my intention is to demonstrate that the problem requires thinking otherwise without prescription.

7.6 My Contribution to Ongoing Conversations

The contributions of this study are multifaceted. Firstly, while there are many studies which look at decolonising higher education in South Africa, many of them focus on curriculum or pedagogy (Heleta, 2016, 2018; Le Grange, 2016; Mbembe, 2016; Morreira, 2017; Zembylas, 2018). In contrast, this study explores how a structure, in the form of admissions, has been informed by colonial legacies and simultaneously functions to maintain the status quo. The studies which do explore admissions, typically do so with a focus on demographic shifts in student enrolment, reflecting one of the ways in which transformation is understood (Breetzke & Hedding, 2016; CHE, 2016; Jappie, 2020). This study, however, offers a contribution to the debate by identifying the mechanisms through which colonial legacies get reproduced in university structures and cultures thereby broadening the scope of the decolonial debate in higher education. Future work could extend on this by exploring the role of student agency in navigating institutional hierarchies.

This study has also made use of a particular understanding of coloniality, as related to its link with modernity, and more particularly in reference to the metaphor of 'The House Modernity Built' (Machado de Oliveira, 2021; Stein et al., 2020) This metaphor has helped me to identify mechanisms hidden in the layer of the real and visualise their impact on social change. This has led to a deeper understanding of the structures and cultures which work to constrain or enable change within the processes of admission. It has also allowed me to position the specific context of UoTs within a broader national structure and to examine the South African higher education landscape within the context of a global environment.

Furthermore, this study contributes to literature specifically in reference to UoTs, an institutional type that has undergone a multitude of changes throughout the last three decades yet remains under examination in the broad scholarship of higher education (Walker, 2019). The UoTs remain an important institutional type as they have, and continue to fulfil a large part of the country's transformation narrative due to their positioning of providing different access points within the higher education sector (CHET, 2010). Some scholars argue that the role and position of UoTs within the higher education sector are still up for debate and that their identities are still under construction (Winberg & Garraway, 2019), or that they can be seen to bear the socio-historical and political scars of the once, deeply fragmented HE sector (Coleman, 2016) presents an opportunity for reimagination. I remind you that "things can always be otherwise" (Stein, 2023, p. 61) as I am left to wonder how.

7.7 Conclusion

As I draw my thesis to a close, I reflect on my own learnings throughout this journey. I am reminded about the deep meaning of admissions in South Africa, that one application carries the hopes of not only the applicant but their entire family. I think about the opening story of Sam and consider the daily price that he and countless others continue to pay in a South African higher education sector conditioned by coloniality. In reflecting on this, I take accountability for my own role in this process, challenging myself to imagine things otherwise.

I have started to see how discourses such as "excellence" or "efficiency" work to portray progress, but in so doing conceal the hidden costs that they may bring. I have seen how although different occupants have been invited into the house, and we have redecorated the interior, all of us still occupy the very same house featuring the same levels of separability. I have seen how global conditioning impacts national imperatives and works to shape institutional

practices and the minds of the people within them. And finally, I have seen how my own whiteness works to keep me blinkered.

As a final reflection, I am reminded of an article titled “Intergenerational Responsibilities in Difficult Times: The Story of the Faculty of Education’s ‘Generational Bowl’” (UVIC, 2024). It recounts how Dr Vanessa Andreotti, newly appointed Dean at the University of Victoria, navigated the difficult task of budget cuts. Aware that budget reductions often create tension as individuals and departments compete for limited resources, Dr Andreotti sought guidance from Indigenous knowledge keepers on how to approach decision making. Following their advice, she introduced the idea of creating a living symbol to serve as an ethical compass throughout the deliberations, leading to the creation of the "Generational Bowl."

At meetings, a red bowl was placed at the centre of the table, and participants were invited to write down the names of children they knew personally. As they placed the names written on a piece of paper in the bowl, they were asked to say them aloud, evoking a personal and tangible connection. Following this, a broader group of children were identified – children who were underserved, in conflict areas, children with disabilities or mental health challenges. The third round extended to children who were not already in the bowl, the next generation of children. The bowl was then covered with rose petals, symbolising a blanket of protection, compassion, and healing and reflecting a responsibility to the future.

The Generational Bowl became a powerful reminder to look beyond immediate concerns and individual interests, focusing instead on the future being shaped. It came to represent a shared vision focused on ecological and intergenerational responsibilities which manifest as being accountable – not to themselves, nor their departments or careers – but to a broader educational sector, a broader society and the planet. In working together and using the bowl as a guide, they managed to find a pathway forward around a common goal of serving the future rather than protecting the past.

With this particular story in mind, I cannot help but wonder how we could reimagine the processes of admissions if we first spoke Sam’s name aloud, or the name of one of our own children. How could things be otherwise if we re-centred the needs of our people?

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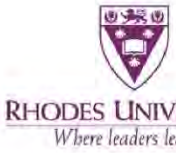
Appendices

Appendix A: Rhodes Letter of Ethical Clearance



Rhodes University, Education Faculty
Research Ethics Committee
PO Box 94, Makhanda, 6140, South Africa
Tel: +27 (0) 46 603 8393
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https://www.ru.ac.za/researchgateway/ethics/

19 August 2022

lyndall kemm -stols

CHERTL

g20k2000@campus.ru.ac.za

Dear Mrs Lyndall Kemm-Stols

Re: PhD Ethics application

APPLICATION NUMBER: 2021-5322-6451

This letter confirms that your research ethics application has been reviewed and **APPROVED** by the Education Faculty Research Ethics Committee (EF-REC). Your permission letter(s) where applicable have been received and you are free to proceed with your study.

Approval is granted for 1 year. An annual progress report is required in order to renew approval for an additional period. You will receive an email notifying you when the progress report is due.

Should any substantive change(s) be made during the research process, that may have ethical implications, you should notify the Education Faculty REC Chair via email. This includes changes in investigators. The REC Chair will advise as to whether a new application is necessary.

Do keep this clearance letter secure and accessible throughout your study and after its completion. It will be needed when a thesis is examined and when publications are submitted to journals.

Please also submit a brief report to the REC Chair on the completion of the research. This can be done via email. The purpose of this report is to indicate whether the research was conducted successfully and whether any ethics-related matters arose that the committee should be aware of, in order to guide future studies.

Sincerely,

Prof Eureta Rosenberg

Chair: Education Faculty Research Ethics Committee

Appendix B: Semi-structured Interview Guide

Welcome, a brief discussion on informed consent

Tell me a little bit about your experience in student admissions.

How long have you been working in student admissions?

And at which institutions?

Could you give me some information on your job title and description of responsibilities?

We have experienced many changes as a University of Technology since 1994, how would you describe these changes and are there any events which stood out for you during this course of time?

How do you think these changes have impacted on admission processes?

Could you talk me through the processes of admission (maybe I can suggest pre merger, merger and now?)

Do you think the ideas / beliefs / values behind access / admissions has changed since 1994, and how would you describe such changes?

How has national admission policy changed over the last two decades? How did UoTs respond?

Can you think of any external pressures which may impact changes to admissions policies?

I want to ask you specifically about how you think a few concepts have impacted on student admissions or institutions in general;

The first one is the World University Rankings.

The next one is English as a language of Learning and minimum requirement.

Finally, the funding formula of South Africa.

How do you think access has been widened to first generation students?

Appendix C: Invitation to Participate and Informed Consent Letters

INVITATION TO PARTICIPANTS

Date
Participant's Name
Participant's Details

Dear (*participant's name*)

Re: Invitation to participate in a research study

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled *Universities of Technology: Exploring how colonial legacies have shaped student admissions over the last two decades*. I have chosen to look at this as I am interested in the shifting dynamics of rules about access in the University of Technology, most especially during the transition from Technikon to UoT. I believe your participation is important as you have a unique insight into the processes of admission at Universities of Technology (UoTs). I believe the admission processes are important as they are often the first contact point between candidate and institution and has come to represent the promise of a better future for many South Africans. It is hoped that in understanding more about the process of undergraduate students' admission will lead to a new way of conceptualising admission processes and policies for both UoTs and the sector in the future. This will be to the benefit of first-generation students and bring our country closer to achieving social justice.

The research will be undertaken through a document analysis and a series of interviews. Your identity will be anonymised in the study, however I may describe your role and responsibility, in the form of a job title or description as an example. The collection of this data will require a once off meeting which is anticipated to be 90 minutes in duration.

Should you agree to participate, I will explain in more detail what would be expected of you and provide you with more details on the extent of the research including potential risks, benefits, and your rights as a participant. I have also included the ethical clearance certificate from Rhodes University for your information.

Participation in this research is voluntary and a positive response to this letter of invitation does not oblige you to take part. To participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form to confirm that you understand and agree to the conditions, prior to any official interview commencing. Please note that you have the right to withdraw at any given time during the study.

Thank you for your time and I hope that you will respond favourably to our request.

Yours sincerely,

Lyndall Kemm-Stols
Student number: 20K2000
Rhodes University

Main Supervisor
Dr. Roxanna Chiappa Baros
Rox.Chiappa@ru.ac.za

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**This form will not be sent blindly to participants but rather explained during the initial conversation in the interview. Thereafter the participant will be asked to sign as agreement.*

Research Project Title:	*Universities of Technology: Exploring how colonial legacies have shaped student admissions over the last two decades.*
Principal Investigator(s):	Lyndall Kemm-Stols

Participation Information
• I understand the purpose of the research study and my involvement in it • I understand that all research has risks, however I am a willing participant in the study • I am aware that I can withdraw from the study at any stage • I understand that some information gained during the interview will be published, but care will be taken to anonymise my identity as far as possible • I am happy for Lyndall to record the meeting • I understand that I will be given the opportunity to read and comment on the transcribed interview notes • I understand that I will not be paid for my participation

Information Explanation

• I confirm that the above information was explained to me by Lyndall and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study entitled; *Universities of Technology: Exploring how colonial legacies have shaped student admissions over the last two decades.* This information was explained to me in English and I am in command of this language:

Voluntary Consent

I, ……., voluntarily give my consent to participate in the above-mentioned research.

Signature:
Date:

Researcher Declaration I, Lyndall Kemm-Stols declare that I have explained all the participation information to the participant and have truthfully answered all questions asked by the participant.

Signature:
Date: