Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin: researcher identity and performance

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INTRODUCTION

It is told that when the Israelites were in exile in Babylonia, King Belshazzar hosted a banquet and, in a moment of arrogance, drank from the wine cups looted from the Temple in Jerusalem. A disembodied hand wrote against the wall the words – *Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin*.

After none of his advisers could translate the words written on the wall, Daniel was called and translated the words as having the following meaning: God has numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end. You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting and your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and the Persians.

The words are somewhat ironic at this moment when I celebrate my appointment as a full professor at one of the biggest open distance learning universities in the world. I was weighed and not found wanting, *this time*… Despite the fact that this is cause for celebration and humble appreciation, I would like to share with you glimpses into the world of research and of *being* a researcher – where each article that you submit, each performance evaluation cycle and each renewal of your contract as research professor, bring with it trepidation and anxiety. As researcher you constantly fear that moment when you will notice the writing on the wall and look for a translator who then translates the verdict to you - *you have been weighed and found wanting.* Upon this verdict the system may spit you out like a sour plum. Your kingdom will be divided and you will be forgotten.

CENTRAL QUESTION/PROBLEM STATEMENT

The central question in this lecture therefore is: how do we understand researcher identity and performance? How does one become a researcher and when/why can you say "I've made it"? What criteria are used to evaluate your impact and value as a researcher? And how does your identity impact on and shape you into being a researcher, performing research? And finally, probably underlying of all of these questions: what is research? (Gray, 2013).

The answer or at least part of the answer lies in the intersection between the constructs of identity and what we regard as valid knowledge and effective performance. Identity consists of many different constituting factors such as gender, race, culture, age, and home language, to mention a few. My identity as researcher is therefore part of my identity. My performance as researcher is part of a wider construct of what we consider to be valid knowledge, and how we measure the effectiveness in the production of new knowledge. Researcher identity *as* performance is therefore found in the nexus between researcher identity and performance…

I will not attempt to answer all of these questions, but I would rather like to open up issues that inform these questions and that may deepen or widen our understanding of the nature of being a researcher and how we evaluate the impact of research.

WHY IS THIS QUESTION IMPORTANT?

So why is the question important? What does identity have to do with performance? Many think that the value of research and the gravitas of a researcher are dependent solely on his or her scholarship. The issue of researcher identity and performance is, however, complex and multilayered.

In the South African context only 14% of university professors are black (Van der Merwe, 2014), and the vast majority of researchers in higher education are still white and male (Habib, Price & Mabelebele, 2014). In the context of the UK, a survey done in 2013 found that only 1 in 5 professors is female while 45% of non-professorial academics are female (Grove, 2013). In the North American context, Mason (2011) reports that not only are there fewer women at the top of the academic hierarchy, but they are also paid less than men. Mason (2011) also found that only 23% of the professoriate in the US is female. And research by Dione (2013) found that male academics have a 4-to-1 chance of being interviewed compared to female scholars in the same field.

At Unisa in 2011 academics younger than 40 years of age produced only 20% of the outputs, while about half of Unisa's research outputs was produced by academics older than 50 (Mouton, 2013, p. 19). Of the total of 504 associate and full professors, only 40% (204) is female. Among the 144 black associate and full professors, only 27% (39) is female.

I will not attempt to explore in depth the possible reasons for this state of affairs and it falls outside the scope of this lecture to provide pointers for strategies on how we can address this state of affairs. But it is important to note, at this early stage in this lecture, that we cannot and should not shy away from discussing race and gender in the context of research. And I would like to pursue something that has interested me, and that is whether race and gender also matter when researchers publish in digital formats or perform their scholarship through social media?

When I publish an article in a printed journal my name and affiliation appear alongside my article. In a digital age where we share information like never before (see, for example, Eggers, 2014) the mere fact of providing my name is enough for others to find out who I am, what race and gender I am, what I had for breakfast and what I did last night… Though we like to believe that the only thing that matters is whether my reasoning is valid, scholarly sound or interesting – there is increasing evidence that gender and race matters.

Anita Sarkeesian is a feminist cultural critic researching how women are portrayed in video games. Her work did not go unnoticed. Over the last few months she has received death and rape threats from male gamers. She had to move from her home, and into police protection (Wingfield, 2014). Her opinions and her gender definitely mattered.

Another example is Tressie McMillan-Cottom (2014) who publishes a blog on the ways in which her race and gender impact on perceptions regarding her gravitas as a scholar. She shares data of how many rape and death threats female academic scholars receive. The analysis of the responses to her blogs shows that many of the responses refer to her race and gender as a reason why her contribution should be disregarded. Somehow it seems as if the fact that she is black and female makes her research less credible than the research published by white female and male scholars. (In this context, see Buni & Chemaly, 2014).

Consider, too, the example of Roxanne Gay, a successful author who happens to be black and female. In her blog "The price of black ambition" (Gay, 2014) she shares how her status as a black girl in the United States – a daughter of Haitian immigrants – made her realise that she had no choice but to claw her way forward to get equal recognition and not be treated like a second-class citizen.

So the issue of researcher identity is not only a matter of "how many" as in how many articles I publish, it also intersects with other elements such as race and gender. (Also see Vilson, 2014).

And age? Does the age of a researcher matter?

A recent anonymous post by *The ThesisWhisperer* (2014) provoked a storm on Twitter and other social media when s/he asked the question "Should older academics be forced to retire?" In the blog the author makes it clear that s/he supports an institutional strategy to force academics older than 55 to retire.

At Unisa, of the total of 504 associate and full professors, 68% are over the age of 50… How does this impact on my identity and my performance?

In the preceding section I attempted to provide glimpses into the issues attached to researcher identity and performance and their embeddedness in race, gender, and the age of researchers. There are also other elements we need to consider such as:

1. The impact of the quantification fetish in modern universities – where we count everything and where that which we cannot measure or count, does not count
2. The ways in which research is linked to scholarship and whether it is possible to be a scholar and not a researcher, or a researcher and not a scholar
3. The ways we understand identity
4. Researchers increasingly inhabit 'in-between' spaces between private and public, physical and virtual worlds. How does this impact on their identity and performance as researchers?
5. Researcher identity as performance
6. Context/structure and agency

Let us consider these six issues briefly. Later on we will encounter some of them in more detail.

1. The impact of the quantification fetish in modern universities

In the context of the dominant auditing and managerialist culture (Apple, 2007; Clegg, 2010; Deem, 2011; Hall, 2014a, 2014b; McKenzie, 2004) in education, institutions have a quantification fetish measuring outputs and performance. How does this impact on being a researcher, on performing research? What do we measure? Who determines the criteria? What is not measured and how does this impact on my final score? Gray (2013) pleads that we reconsider research as scholarly engagement where “Scholarship is not just about publication, but about interaction, interpretation, exchange, deliberation, discourse, debate, and controversy” (Gray, 2013, par. 5). Scholarship is therefore “not just the production of text” but in its essence about “the way in which constellations of people and objects produce meaning, understanding and insight, through interaction, acts of interpretation” (Gray, 2013, par. 6). How do we create spaces in our measurement of research for interaction, interpretation, exchange, deliberation, discourse, debate, and controversy?

2. The relationship between research and scholarship

What is the relationship between being a scholar and being a researcher? As we increasingly share our identities and research in digital formats and in different online forums, the exact boundaries between these two constructs become ever more difficult to maintain. Traditionally, it was proposed that you couldn’t be a researcher if you were not also a scholar, while it may have been possible to be a scholar and not a researcher. Being a scholar traditionally meant being widely read and knowing about the historical developments in your field as well as keeping up to date with the most recent developments. A researcher, on the other hand, was supposedly more narrowly focused on solving problems, finding new solutions to old problems, critiquing old solutions and even finding new problems, and reporting findings in accepted formats.

I believe it is impossible to think about being a researcher without also being a scholar. But we should not be too quick to judge scholars who are not researchers in their own right. You see, it boils down to what we use as criteria for research, an issue I will return later. (Also see Czerniewicz, 2013; Gray, 2013; Weller, 2011).

3. How we see identity

We also need to reflect on the issue of *identity*. Many see our personal identities as singular constructs, usually conceived of in binaries – male or female, white or black, straight or gay, researcher or non-researcher, lost or saved – among others. There is a certain safety to be found in identity as fixed and as singular. This often results in statements that if you are ‘this’, you cannot, also, be ‘that.’ There is, however, another way to see identity – namely to see identity as a *process* where I am and can be a number of things at the same time, and where the exact relationship between these different elements of my identity can be in flux, and evolving. In contrast to identity as a singular fixed construct, this means that we see identity as “neither fixed nor singular” and that my identity assumes particular patterns “against particular sets of personal, social and historical circumstances” (Brah, 1996, p. 123). (Also see Du Toit, 2014; Lategan, 2014; Maalouf, 2000; Sen, 2006). My identity is therefore “robustly plural” and the importance of one identity “need not obliterate the importance of others” (Sen, 2006, p. 19). Not only does my identity consist of many mutually constitutive or even incommensurable layers, it is also dynamic and context-specific (see e.g. Du Toit, 2014).

In the context of this lecture I therefore embrace my identity as a white, gay, Afrikaans, 56 year old, single male *and* a researcher at Unisa. It is, however, also important to note that each of us makes choices – "explicitly or by implication – about the relative importance to attach, in a particular context, to the divergent loyalties and priorities that may compete for precedence" (Sen, 2006, p. 19). (Also see Boelstorff, 2005; Prinsloo, 2012). In a wonderful reflection on the multiplicity of identity, the African scholar Achebe, in an interview with Appiah, states that each of the tags we include in our identity has "a meaning, and a penalty and a responsibility" (Appiah, 1995, p. 103).

4. Being in an 'in-between' space

Flowing from the realisation that our identities are, in fact, not cast in stone, but multidimensional, we also need to consider how our use of social media and the move to digital formats shape our understandings of our identities, of research, and more importantly, our understanding of how we perform research. As researchers, we increasingly inhabit 'in-between' spaces that may resemble, at times, heterotopic spaces as proposed by Foucault (1986). One of the characteristics of this 'in-between space' is that the boundaries defining that space are not very clear or possibly porous. For researchers, the clear boundaries between public and private spaces are disappearing as we inhabit various spaces simultaneously (Rymarczuk & Derksen, 2014). We concurrently live in physical worlds and digital worlds where our private and public lives intersect and where our identities as researchers, teachers and scholars merge with other identity markers such as our race, gender and age, as well as with our personal activities and likes. Research as 'in-between' space draws us in like a black hole, and once we are inside we cannot find the exit (See Rymarczuk & Derksen, 2014, for a description of Facebook as heterotopic space). Time disappears in the digital world where what I posted or shared yesterday or a year ago is only a click away on Google. *The past has become perpetually present.*

Researchers therefore increasingly inhabit a "no-person's land" with a dizzy mixture of physical and digital spaces where it suddenly matters when you change your relationship status on Facebook from "single" to "it's complicated" and share a petition protesting against the continuing Israeli occupation of Palestine. Technology and social media have therefore changed the way that we are as researchers, how we disseminate our research and thinking, and increasingly, how we are rated and how our research is valued. (Also see Czerniewicz, 2013; Gray, 2013; Rymarczuk & Derksen, 2014; Weller, 2011).

Access to this 'in-between' space is only for the chosen, for those accepted, for those who know the rules and play accordingly (Foucault, 1986). Seeing our acts of performing research and being researchers as inhabiting 'in-between spaces' or 'non-places', allows us to consider this space as a space of being in perpetual crisis, where individuals are constantly classified as rated or non-rated, where papers are accepted or rejected, and where we live in constant anxiety looking out for the writing against the wall.

5. Research identity as performance

The *second part* of my title gives the impression that there is a difference between 'researcher identity' on the one hand, and 'researcher performance' on the other. In this presentation I would like to propose that identity and performance are not two different aspects of being, but are actually, and increasingly, one thing. We should therefore rather speak of 'researcher identity *as performance'* (Bagley, 2009; Usher & Solomon, 1998). There are, however, a number of tensions in seeing researcher identity as performance.

On the one hand, if my performance as a researcher is an integral part of my identity as a researcher, this brings to the fore the question about how performance is evaluated, and by which criteria one's performance is judged and by whom. On the other hand, if I don't perform (according to the specified criteria set by those in power), am I still a researcher? If I don't publish, as measured against the criteria informed by a number of assumptions and certain views on what counts as a publication, can I still call myself a researcher?

6. On context/structure and agency

How much choice does one really have or do the way we grow up and the circumstances of our childhood predetermine what we can become? Is it possible to work hard and rise above your circumstances? The question regarding the impact of our context on the number of choices we have as well as our ability to choose has perplexed scholars for many years. I don't think we are necessarily closer to understanding the complexities and interdependencies between the structures we find ourselves in, and the choices we have (Archer, 2003; Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1994; Giddens, 1984; Shilling, 1994). In this lecture I follow the opinion of Maton (2012) who proposes that we need to understand the dynamic interaction and inherent multiplicity in the relationship between context or structure and individual agency. I will speak more about this relationship later.

DISCLAIMER

In this lecture I speak in my *personal* capacity as a researcher and I do not speak or claim to speak on behalf of all researchers. Doing research and being a researcher in the field of distance education (DE) or open distance learning (ODL) may share characteristics with doing research and being a researcher in other disciplines such as sociology and history or differ dramatically in some respects from being a researcher in fields such as mathematics, chemistry and law. It is, however, crucial to acknowledge that what counts as research in the social sciences may not necessarily count as research in fields as diverse as accounting or mathematics. How research is measured in mathematics may therefore be dramatically different from how research is measured in the social sciences.

The basis of this lecture is an auto-ethnographic report in which I reflect on my own experiences of my identity as researcher and how my performance is evaluated by myself, my institution and the broader scholarly community. When we share our stories, we choose what to share, what to hide or simply leave out, what to emphasise and even what to minimize. Criticisms against auto-ethnography or personal narrative presented as research in its own right, often allege that such narratives are contrived, manipulated and manipulating, narcissistic and self-indulgent (see e.g. Maguire 2006; Wall 2006). I acknowledge that revealing and hiding are often two sides of the same coin (Ellis 2007). In deciding what to reveal and what to hide, the ethnographer or storyteller is like a bricoleur, deciding, seemingly randomly, what to add and what to discard.

MY APPROACH TO THIS QUESTION

When I want to play a sport, or when I am invited to play soccer, tennis, rugby, hockey, chess, or whatever you can think of, it is important that I understand what the sport is all about. I need to know what the rules are, what my position on the field entails, who the referee is, what the other players on the field expect me to do, and what I can expect of them. It is also important to understand the field – how big it is, where the boundaries are, and how the field is demarcated. Players will also inspect the state of the field before a match – to look for soft patches or holes which can trip a player (see Thomson, 2012).

The idea of investigating researcher identity and performance/as performance as playing on a field finds its roots in the work of the French sociologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002). Bourdieu tried to explain how society works – who determine the rules, what determines who becomes successful and so forth. Some of the central concepts in the work of Bourdieu are the notions of habitus, the field and capital. Bourdieu emphasised that we cannot (and should not) disregard the identity of the players and how they grew up: the skills they acquired, the support they had, their training and their inborn talents allowed them to play on a specific field. He called this collection of identity traits, dispositions and skills – *habitus*.

Important elements in my habitus are the amount and nature of the capital I have. Bourdieu therefore distinguishes between symbolic, social and cultural capital (Crossley, 2012). Without going into a detailed discussion, I will use an example to illustrate these forms of capital. My race, my gender, my talents, etc., provide me with a certain value in my community. My qualifications, the brands I wear or don't wear, the type of car I drive – all these are symbols of, and forms of capital that allow me to negotiate transactions and shape my interactions with others. As a player on and in the field of research, my status as player and my position interacts with my skills and dispositions.

As a researcher it is, however, crucial that I understand the field on which I am playing. The shape and state of the field impacts on the "interactions, transactions and events" that occur on the field (Thomson, 2012, p. 65). "The actual condition of the field (whether it is wet, dry, well grassed or full of potholes) also has an effect on what players can do and thus how the game can be played" (Thomson, 2012, p. 66). The notion of the 'field' in the work of Bourdieu does not refer to a peaceful pastoral English meadow. On the contrary, Bourdieu uses the notion of 'the field' as resembling a battlefield where different armies and individuals battle it out for space and victory (Thomson, 2012).

If I understand Bourdieu correctly, he proposes that how and where I grew up shaped and shapes my choices, my opportunities, and the resources I had and have to my disposal. Critics of the work of Bourdieu felt that he over-emphasised the importance of the field or societal structures on individuals and that he also overestimates the impact of our contexts on the choices we have as if individuals are *predetermined* to fulfill certain roles because of their circumstances. Thomson (2012) makes it clear that Bourdieu never implies that my habitus precludes my choices but he emphasises that my habitus *shapes* my choices. In the work of Bourdieu there is a dynamic interaction between the way I grew up, my talents, my culture, etc., together with the amount and nature of the capital I have to my disposal, in relation to my position on the field and the state of the field. The combination of these three elements (habitus, capital and field) determines my agency or the choices I have and make. Maton (2012, p. 50) illustrated this with a formula:

[(habitus)(capital)] + field = practice/agency

Though we cannot and should not underestimate the way my habitus and the amount and nature of capital I have influences the way I play on the field, Maton (2012) states that we are not "pre-programmed automatons acting out the implications of our upbringings" (p. 50).

To summarise - the way I grew up, my race, my gender, the socioeconomic circumstances in which I grew up, the type of schooling I received, the opportunities I had, intersected with the choices I made (the good ones and the bad ones). There is therefore a dynamic at play between the structures we find ourselves in and our agency. My success as a researcher, the way I perform my identity as a researcher, my ability to negotiate the different demands, claims, criteria and evaluations are therefore shaped not only by my past and present, but also increasingly, by some of the trends in higher education.

STRUCTURE OF THE PRESENTATION

In order therefore to understand how my identity as a researcher and my performance are actually related, linked and overlap, I will firstly explore, in a personal narrative, how my own habitus shaped and still shapes my identity as a plural construct and how it impacted and impacts on the capital I had and have. After exploring my habitus and capital, I will map some of the issues researchers face in the field of research. I will conclude this presentation by returning to considering researcher identity as performance.

UNDERSTANDING THE FIELD OF BECOMING AND BEING A RESEARCHER: [(habitus)(capital)]

I want to acknowledge that the context in which I grew up, the choices I had and the choices I made were shaped not only by the political regimes and ideologies over a period of 56 years, but also by technological developments and changes in the legislative and socioeconomic environments. Time will, however, not allow me to provide details of all these shaping factors and I will therefore focus on the impact of the political and ideological aspects.

In 1948, eleven years before I was born, the National Party came into power. This set into motion a context that shaped the way I grew up, the opportunities I had, and the choices I was afforded, and made. Through extensive legislation, individuals were classified according to a list of criteria and these classifications determined where you lived, the schooling you received, the curricula you were taught, and your social mobility. For example the Bantu Education Act of 1955 (promulgated in 1956) resulted in black schooling receiving one tenth of the funding compared to the funding of white schools. The Minister of Native Affairs at the time, Hendrik Verwoerd, said:

> "There is no place for [the Bantu] in the European community above the level of certain forms of labor ... What is the use of teaching the Bantu child mathematics when it (sic) cannot use it in practice?"

In 1958, a year before I was born, 69 Black South Africans were massacred in Sharpeville, 187 people wounded and the ANC and PAC banned.

I was born in 1959 and classified a *European* or white. I was born into a white Afrikaner family – my father was a miner and my mother a qualified teacher. I grew up in a mining village called Stilfontein with a siren that went off at 9 o' clock at night after which all black people had to be outside of the town boundaries or go to jail.

In 1961 South Africa became a republic with the majority of its population not having citizenship. I started school in 1965; two years earlier than black children of the same age were allowed to start school (Nkondo, 1979). The curriculum and time allocated to the subjects were different for white and black kids. For example, for Standards 1 and 2 (the equivalent of Grades 3 and 4) black children had subjects like gardening and music which were not included in the curricula of the Transvaal Education Department (Nkondo, 1979).

In 1966 Hendrik Verwoerd, the father of Apartheid, was assassinated, and we got the Friday afternoon off from school. During the period I spent in primary school, (1966 to 1971) about 3 million South Africans were resettled in reserves or homelands. In the last half of my high school years I was a petrol attendant over weekends, and a waiter in the local Wimpy during school holidays. I was a disaster on the sport field as my lack of ball-sense was clear for all to see. I just did not know how to negotiate a world in boys wore blue, men wore safari suits and played rugby, while girls knitted, wore pink and played with dolls. I took to reading, building models or planes and war ships, drawing pictures of cars and animals, and designing paper doll dresses for all the girls in the class.

Stilfontein, my hometown, had a small town library with enough books to keep a curious white boy busy – ranging from *Trompie* and *Saartjie*, to Enid Blyton's *Famous Five* and the *Secret Seven*. I quickly got bored with the children's section (Afrikaans and English) and moved to the adult section where I discovered Elmar Steyn and Konsalik, before moving on to Alfred Hitchcock. It did not take long before I discovered the non-fiction sections where I found books about the world wars, the big earthquake in San Francisco in 1908 and books on Greek art.

I matriculated in 1976 at an Afrikaans high school when Soweto was burning, with 575 people killed. The year 1976 was also the year in which my father died and my life and the life of my family turned upside down. I passed matric with a 'B' for English, and barely passed Mathematics and Science.

Choosing a university as an Afrikaans-speaking European was fairly easy. I had 19 universities to choose from, compared to two universities dedicated to coloreds, two for the exclusive use by Indians and six for the exclusive use by Black students (Bunting, 2006). Of the 19 universities dedicated for the exclusive use of white students, six were exclusively dedicated to Afrikaans-speaking students.

In 1977 I enrolled at Pretoria University, studying theology when Steve Biko was killed in jail. I graduated with a bachelor's and a masters' degree during the 1980s. During that time I never interrogated my whiteness and its benefits – those came naturally. I completed my doctoral examinations in 1984 and began a dissertation on Black Theology. After seven years in the ministry and just after the first democratic elections in 1994 I joined Unisa as a student advisor.

In 2002 I flew to Finland to present my first ever paper at an international education conference. At Frankfurt Airport, as I was going through border control, I was looking for the right queue to join. The only queue I could join was the one that stated: 'For Non-Europeans.'

In 1959 I was born a European and 43 years later I realized that for all of these years, I was actually a Non-European.

Acknowledging white privilege and the way it shaped my education and provided me with opportunities *is not surrendering* to the notion of victimhood and suffering that is prevalent in the much of the current white, Afrikaner discourse. There is a vast difference between recognising the "historic burden of whiteness" and self-abasement or lame apologies (O'Hehir, 2014). Personally, it is impossible and disingenuous to ignore how my race and gender shaped my opportunities, and provided me with social, cultural and economic capital. My race and gender, and the socioeconomic circumstances of my family allowed me to play on a field while many others were excluded from playing. (Also see Bowler, 2014; Crosley-Corcoran, 2014; Gedye, 2014).

The impact of those years of privileged access to resources will still be felt for many more generations to come. So, when questions are asked in 2014 as to why only 14% of professors are black, and why the vast majority of research produced is by white male professors over the age of 50, I, for one, am sadly not surprised.

It falls outside the scope of this lecture to reflect on strategies on how to address this inter-generational cost of apartheid in the academe. Allow me just to say that I pray that Unisa's efforts to support young academics of previously disenfranchised groups bear results. And may those who benefit from these strategies and interventions have the grace and courage to own up to the responsibilities that come with these opportunities.

My identity as researcher was therefore irrevocably shaped by my context, the choices I had to my disposal, the privileges of my class and race, as well as the choices I made – the good ones and the bad ones. The formula provided by Maton (2012) not only provides me with a way to understand how my context and choices shaped me, the formula also provides interesting glimpses of what it means to perform my identity as researcher. I now find myself as player on the field of research – with its own sets of rules, a new referee, an increasing digital audience, and a minefield of choices.

UNDERSTANDING THE FIELD OF BECOMING AND BEING A RESEARCHER: field

In this section I will briefly describe three broad themes in looking at the field of performing research, namely

a) The broader higher education context
b) The move to digital and networked identities
c) The (changing) rules of performing research

(a) The broader higher education context

The writing is on the wall, if you would excuse the pun. The higher education landscape is changing, quite dramatically. There is increasing evidence of the corporatization of higher education and vast growth in the for-profit sector of higher education (Morey, 2004). There are also concerns regarding the way the current dominant models of neoliberalism and its not-so-humble servant – managerialism – are impacting on higher education (Deem, 1998; Deem & Brehony, 2005; Diefenbach, 2007; Peters, 2013; Verhaeghe, 2014). There is talk of "academic capitalism" (Rhoades & Slaughter, 2004) where academics "sell their expertise to the highest bidder, research collaboratively, and teaching on/off line, locally and internationally" (Blackmore 2001, p. 353).

The professoriate is increasingly squeezed to do more with less, while being blamed for "the ever-expanding list of the university's system's shortcomings" (Altbach & Finkelstein, 2014, par. 3). Not only are salaries lagging, but there is increasing evidence that the middle-class existence of professors is a thing of the past and many professors now moonlight to make ends meet (Saccaro, 2014). Higher education has not been put on a diet, but is increasingly starved by government policies and changing funding agreements. There are also concerns that "universities focus too much on measuring activity, not quality" (Anonymous, 2014).

In the North American context, only 200 of the universities of a total of 4,500 are research universities – making research professors something of a "special breed" (Altbach & Finkelstein, par. 11). In the light of increasing funding constraints, researchers are evaluated with regard to the amount of funding they obtain for their research. Many researchers now have to pay their own salaries through external funding:

> The research universities will have three classes of professors, like the airlines. A small first-class cabin of researchers, a business-class section of academics who will teach and do some research, and a large economy cabin of poorly paid teachers (Altbach & Finkelstein, 2014, par. 16)

Professorships as tenured or full-time faculty are becoming increasingly disposable features of neoliberal higher education (Giroux, 2014b) as the number of adjunct faculty and administrative staff members far exceed the appointment of academics (Giroux, 2014a). Giroux (2014a) quotes Ginsberg who refers to the rise of the "all administrative university" (par. 1). Higher education is therefore in the process of becoming unbundled and unmoored (Watters, 2012). In 2012, of the 1.5

million professors in the US, 1 million are adjunct professors appointed on a contract basis (Scott, 2012).

The field on which I am playing is changing. What counts on this changing field? What are the rules? Who is the referee? What do I need to survive in this context? What role does my researcher identity as a multiple and dynamic construct play?

(b) The move to digital and networked identities

The increasing move to open and digital research processes and dissemination has the potential to dramatically alter the way we see and evaluate research, and how we perform research. No longer is it important to only be a researcher, you also need to be a connected or networked scholar. Performing our research online not only require specific skills and capital, but also shapes our identities, performance, and impact. (See e.g. Stewart, 2014).

Czerniewicz (2013), one of the leading scholars in this field, states that the digital environment impacts on how we conceptualise research, how we collect and analyse data, how we disseminate findings, and how we engage with other researchers in the field. The conceptualisation of research is moving from being a private and an individual activity to a shared, crowd-sourced activity where researchers share hypotheses and ideas on social media, software, such as Mendeley and other networks. Researchers now make their data sets open and public while busy with the analyses and findings. They publish these findings in different iterative versions through blogs and various research networks. Instead of only articles in journals, the dissemination of findings now also takes the form of podcasts, video-casts and blogs. There is a move away from expensive textbooks that provide limited access to students and other scholars, to open educational resources (OER), open textbooks, open lectures, etc.

In a 2013 article in the esteemed journal *Nature*, Priem (2013) explores how going digital will change scholarship and change our criteria for evaluating the impact of research. The change from paper to digital will firstly expand "the flow of scholarly information …by orders of magnitude, swamping our paper-based filtering system" (p. 438). Digital scholarship will also expose "the delicate trace work of ideas beneath the formal structures of the academy" resulting in "new maps of scholarly contribution, unprecedented in subtlety, texture and detail: (p. 438). The last element of the change involves how editors and reviewers "will be replaced by the aggregated, collective judgments of the communities themselves" (p. 438). Going digital will change how we disseminate, certify, filter, and reward research. (Also see Van Noorden, 2014).

All of the above impacts on how we assess researcher value and impact.

While most higher education institutions still value and measure research through the number of citations and use the quality of journals as an indication of researcher impact and value; it is no longer business as usual. Networked scholars now manage different accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Linked-in and Google+ (Thomas, 2014). We 'Like', share and post in a context where we increasingly believe that "Sharing is caring" (Eggers, 2014, p. 303) and that if you prefer to be disconnected or private, your 'friends' believe that you have something to hide.

How does this change the game of performing research? How do we negotiate this 'in-between' space where the boundaries between public and private are disappearing and where we uncritically assume that the number of 'Likes' on our Facebook pages or the number of re-tweets show something about my impact? At present we do not know.

Whatever the answer to these questions, there is increasing evidence that the way we perform and measure research is changing. For instance, Holbrook & Brown (2014) propose that other possible indicators of researcher impact may include the following: angry letters from important people mention by policy-makers provoking lawsuits, website hits, blog mentions and social-network contacts.

As researchers we need to take our digital footprints seriously. Goodier and Czerniewicz (2012) published a very useful guide to facilitate an understanding among scholars not only of the importance of having a digital footprint but more importantly, to manage their footprints. In an insightful article by Lee (2014) he states that in online environments your audience is four times larger than we think (Lee, 2014).

To what extent these alternative metrics and criteria will gain a foothold in the corridors of Unisa and higher education will have to be seen. We cannot, however, ignore these changes in the field, and the rules of the game. Should you as a researcher decide to ignore the impact of these trends, you may soon find yourself alone, with the 1997 picture of your "Person of the Match" award against your wall.

(c) The rules of performing research

Despite the fact that Unisa is a comprehensive open, distance-learning provider, with the majority of our students enrolled as undergraduates, we cannot escape from the race for reputation as a formidable research institution. Unisa's Strategic Plan 2015 clearly states the intention: "To position Unisa in the Top 5 universities in South Africa in terms of research outputs per academic by 2015 (Placed 6th in 2004 in numerical outputs)" (Unisa, 2015, p. 17). There are therefore many incentives to support and encourage research and multiple opportunities for young aspiring researchers from previously disadvantaged backgrounds to claim spaces as researchers.

Against this backdrop, I signed a performance agreement at the beginning of the year in which I committed myself to perform according to number of set criteria. As a research professor my job description consists of academic leadership (10%), research (80%), community engagement (5%), and academic citizenship (5%). While the exact percentages of each of these criteria are negotiated within certain parameters, the most important criterion is research. The research criterion is broken down into the following:

- Publish his or her own research whether as articles or chapters. To score a **3** out of 5, you needed to have published 7 *individual* articles in the last 3 years, or 10 *individual* articles in the last 5 years. If you co-authored the article with another researcher – *you only get half the points.*
- A further 15% weight is allocated if I submitted a grant application to an *external* funding agency. To score 3 out of 5, your grant should have been successful.

- 10% of the total weighting is allocated to being a rated researcher. A C-rating guarantees you 3 out of 5.

There are also a number of other rules that include, but are not limited to:

- *Not all journals are created equal.* The South African Department of Higher Education (DHET) publishes an annual list of journals that are deemed to be of acceptable quality. This list is updated on an annual basis. There are also the A-rated journals like the *Journal for Learning and Instruction* with an acceptance rate of 13% and a turnaround time of 6-10 weeks. Or consider the *British Journal of Educational Technology,* another A-rated journal with an acceptance rate of 9%, but with a quick turnaround time of 4-8 weeks (University of Wollongong, 2013). In building your capital and reputation as researcher you need to publish in the best possible journals. The stakes are high, but so are the rewards.
- *There are also concerns about these 'A'*-rated journals. In her research regarding high-impact journals, Bishop (2013) reports that "high impact journals treat newsworthiness as an important criterion for accepting a paper" and success is not necessarily owing to scientific rigor (par. 2-3).
- *Choosing a journal is becoming a minefield* with allegations of plagiarism and bribery, and the increasing prevalence of hijacked journals and predatory publishers (Jalalian & Mahboobi, 2014).
- There is also the issue of *geopolitical alliances* in the journal industry where the European network disregards the American network, and vice versa. Or where you try to break into one of these networks as an African writing from the southern part of Africa and you may feel that it is just so much harder to earn respect.

UNDERSTANDING THE FIELD OF BECOMING AND BEING A RESEARCHER: [(habitus)(capital)] + field

Now that we have mapped the field of research, explored how identity shapes my selection for teams, and briefly explored the changing rules of the games, let us return to where we started. How do researchers and academics respond to the changes in the field? You don't have to go very far looking for an answer. It is easy to classify the responses as a binary and juxtapose those researchers that excel and embrace the changes, and those who somehow find it difficult to negotiate the changing field of research.

Whether at Unisa, or in international higher education more generally, there are increasing concerns among researchers and academics that the pace and increasing demands to do more with less, is just getting (too) much. Recently Phillip Nel (2014) published an essay in *InsideHigherEd* in which he reflects on the question "why faculty members work so much." The essay triggered a huge number and range of responses, with many academics and researchers agreeing with Nel (2014). There are many reasons why academics work so much, and Nel (2014) reflects on a few, for example:

It is "part of a habit" (par. 2) - we just can't say no to being invited to write an article or serve on a committee or review an article. *Actually, saying no is not an* *option.* Every time we say 'yes' we make a deposit in our social capital bank account and you never know when you will need credit. The more you say 'yes', the more opportunities and obligations accrue. Nel (2014) also refers to the fact that constant overworking has become an essential part of the economics of higher education. With higher education increasingly using contract staff to teach and research, you are permanently unsure whether you will still have a job next year.

We should also not underestimate the impact of technology on the constant 'busyness' of academics. Office hours will soon be a 'found in museums' as we increasingly log on to check our emails after leaving the office, or when we are on leave. Higher education has become a 24/7/365 service where our students, as customers, are always right.

Possibly underlying all of this is the fact that we really do find our work interesting and our interest spills over into our lives. There are no longer boundaries between office and our personal lives. We postpone our medical checkups and race to the next committee meeting. It is no longer "publish or perish" – it has become "publish and perish".

In response to Nel's (2014) blog, Richard Hall (2014a) reflects on "academic labor and performance anxiety" where the "shame [of not performing] becomes a central tenet of everyday academic life" (par. 2). He refers to an earlier blog by Kate Bowles, one of my favorite bloggers, in which she writes that academics "overwork because the current culture in universities is brutally and deliberately invested in shaming those who don't compete effectively…" in stark contrast with the heroic few who do, somehow, meet the shifting goalposts (par. 7-8).

Kate Bowles, recently (2014) reflected on her experiences of being an academic, researcher and having cancer. In her blog titled "Walking and learning" she quotes Arthur Frank in thinking about being an academic and a patient. In the drama of receiving treatment and lab results, you "lose your capacity to make choices, to decide how you want your body to be used. Finally, in the blandness of the medical setting, in its routines and their discipline, you may forget your tastes and preferences. Life turns to beige" (par. 1). Bowles (2014) compares this experience with the diagnostic assessments and constant evaluations in higher education where you are only as well or healthy as your last productivity assessment. Individuals lose their humanity as they become mere resources to increase the institution's competitive standing.

For many academics and researchers, the constant and all-consuming race to produce outputs makes us lose our ability to make choices, to decide how we want our bodies to be used. We forget our tastes and preferences. Life turns to beige. Death by a thousand paper cuts.

During our performance evaluations and our Senate meetings we are told that we must just become more rugged, more resilient. And in the process we become alienated from our labor over-analysing our performance until our minds bleed (Hall, 2014a) and we hate ourselves for not doing enough, publishing enough, *being* enough.

IN CONCLUSION

In this lecture, I have attempted to engage with how my identity as researcher intersects with my performance as researcher. At the start of this lecture I positioned *researcher identity as performance* in the nexus between identity as plural construct on the one hand, and what we consider research and knowledge and the production thereof, on the other hand.

At present most of the dominant narratives regarding research are the official narratives of performance contracts, evaluations and rankings. When we, as researchers tell our stories, we attempt to claim back our narratives as researchers and provide a counter-narrative, to speak instead of to be spoken for. When we tell our stories, we represent *ourselves* in contrast to the official stories and representations in statistics, institutional reports, performance management systems and rankings. “Telling stories of illness is the attempt, instigated by the body’s disease, to give voice to an experience that medicine cannot describe” (Frank, 1995, p. 18).

In the context of the ever constant fear of not being good enough, or missing yet another opportunity to prove yourself; “telling our stories not only serves a therapeutic purpose in repairing senses of self but, more importantly, also creates and reclaims futures” (Frank, 1995, p. 61).

We need to tell our stories as counter-narratives to the legitimation of “the banality of heroism” (Frank, 1995, p. 92) as is often represented in our institutional prize givings and rituals of fake fraternalisation.

At the start of this lecture, I speculated that we cannot distinguish between a researcher’s identity and his or her performance. In telling my story as a researcher I illustrated that the “researcher self is not separate from the lived self” (Richardson, 2003, p.197). My story, that you graciously listened to, was “a means of understanding (and healing) ourselves” (Gaitan, 2000, par. 6). I close with the words of Ellis (2007, p. 26) :

> Listening to and engaging with others’ stories is a gift and sometimes the best thing we can do for those in distress… Telling our stories is a gift; our stories potentially offer readers companionship when they desperately need it… Writing difficult stories is a gift to self, a reflexive attempt to construct meaning in our lives and heal or grow from our pain

Thank you for listening to my story.

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