CHAPTER 2

IAN BUNTING

THE HIGHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPE UNDER APARTHEID

This chapter lays out the South African higher education landscape as it was shaped by the apartheid policies of the National Party government prior to 1994. It describes how the disenfranchisement of the African majority culminated in the establishment of five separate legislative and geographic entities (the Republic of South Africa and four ‘independent republics’) and traces the process by which this policy led to the establishment of 36 higher education institutions controlled by eight different government departments. The chapter also describes the apartheid thinking which led to the differentiation of higher education in South Africa into two distinct types – universities and technikons – and shows how sharp racial divisions, as well as language and culture, skewed the profiles of the institutions in each category.

1. POLICIES OF THE APARTHEID GOVERNMENT

1.1. Racial divisions in South Africa

At the beginning of 1994, South Africa’s higher education system was fragmented and unco-ordinated. This was primarily the result of the white apartheid government’s conception of race and the politics of race, which had shaped the higher education policy framework that it laid down during the 1980s.

The apartheid government, under the influence of the ruling National Party, had, by the beginning of the 1980s, divided South Africa into five entities:

- The Republic of Transkei (formed from part of the old Cape Province).
- The Republic of Bophuthatswana (formed from part of the old Transvaal Province).
- The Republic of Venda (also formed from part of the old Transvaal Province).
- The Republic of Ciskei (formed from another part of the old Cape Province).
- The Republic of South Africa (which consisted of the vast majority of the land holdings of the old South Africa).

The first four entities became known as the ‘TBVC countries’ (using the first letter of each in the acronym) and the fifth as the ‘RSA’.

The South African government at the time considered the first four entities to be legally independent countries, but they never received international recognition of their ‘statehood’. The international community regarded these four ‘republics’ as apartheid creatures, the only purpose of which was that of disenfranchising the majority of the citizens of South Africa. In terms of the National Party’s ideology, Africans (who constituted close to 80% of the population of the old South Africa) were supposed to be citizens of one of these and other potentially ‘independent’ republics (e.g. one for Zulus in the old Natal Province). They were presumed to be ‘aliens’ in the Republic of South Africa and therefore not entitled to representation in the national parliament.

The apartheid government extended the disenfranchisement of its African citizens by introducing, in 1984, a new constitution for the Republic of South Africa (RSA). This constitution divided the national parliament into three chambers (the ‘tricameral parliament’): one house for representatives of white voters (the House of Assembly), one for representatives of coloured voters (the House of Representatives) and one for representatives of Indian voters (the House of Delegates). No provision was made in the 1984 constitution for any representation of Africans in the RSA parliament, even though this group constituted at least 75% of the population living in the RSA, outside the TBVC countries.

A key element in the creation of the three separate parliamentary houses in the RSA in 1984 was a distinction drawn between ‘own affairs’ and ‘general affairs’. What were described as ‘own affairs’ were matters specific to the ‘cultural and value frameworks’ of the coloured or Indian or white communities. ‘General affairs’ were those which had an impact across all racial communities. Education was considered by the 1984 constitution to be an ‘own affair’ as far as whites, coloureds and Indians were concerned. This implied that all education for whites (primary, secondary and higher) was the responsibility of the House of Assembly, for coloureds that of the House of Representatives, and for Indians that of the House of Delegates. This constitution considered education for Africans in the RSA to be a ‘general affair’. Responsibility for the education of Africans was therefore vested in a ‘general affairs’ government department which was termed the ‘Department of Education and Training’ (DET).

2. THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR HIGHER EDUCATION UNDER APARTHEID

The introduction of the 1984 constitution in the RSA, with its distinction between ‘general’ and ‘own affairs’, entrenched the apartheid divisions in education in South Africa. A direct consequence was that higher education institutions had to be designated as being for the exclusive use of one of the four race groups: African, coloured, Indian and white. By the beginning of 1985, a total of 19 higher education institutions had been designated as being ‘for the exclusive use of whites’, two as being ‘for the exclusive use of coloureds’, two ‘for the exclusive use of Indians’, and six as being ‘for the exclusive use of Africans’. The six institutions for Africans did not include the seven institutions in the TBVC countries, even though it was expected that the latter would be used almost entirely by the African citizens of the four ‘independent republics’. 