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Dominant discourses, policy challenges

The global and the local

As we have pointed out in the introductory chapter, this book is an attempt to answer questions we asked ourselves about changes in the higher education sector over the last two decades. As two individuals with a specialist interest in higher education, we were very aware of problems that plagued the system. Dominant discourses have focused on the inefficiency made evident by student performance data (see, e.g. CHE 2020; Bunting et al. 2014; Scott et al. 2007 for South Africa; and Cloete et al. 2011 for eight flagship universities across the continent). The data also reveal continuing inequity between social groups. In our own country, black South Africans, the group the work on 'transformation' had intended to serve, bore the brunt of the poor success, throughput and graduation rates to a much greater extent than their white peers. We were also aware that constructing the problems of the system using the relatively abstract concepts of inefficiency and inequity served to mask the very personal experiences of many thousands of students.

The very hard questions we were asking about what had gone wrong in higher education were all the harder because of the work we had undertaken at both national and institutional levels on initiatives aimed to contribute to 'transformation', and our specialist interests in higher education also allowed us to see that much about the situation in South Africa was not unique.

Statistics from other systems allowed us to contextualise the problematic performance data in South Africa. In Australia, for example, research (Edwards & McMillan 2015) has revealed completion rates for students from low socio-economic backgrounds as standing at 69% and for indigenous students at 47% in comparison to the 78% of their more privileged peers. The same research showed that one in five indigenous students had dropped out of Australian universities before completing two years of study. In the United Kingdom, research has shown that socio-economic status impacts on the higher education participation rate overall and particularly at high status universities (Crawford et al. 2017). Similar statistics showing that students from lower socio-economic groups attend and thrive in higher education in far lower numbers than their more privileged peers can be found in the United States of America, France, Korea, and Brazil (Altbach et al. 2009;

Walpole 2003). Interestingly, the cultivation of a 'sense of belonging' amongst students has been identified as key to addressing high attrition rates (see, e.g. O'Keeffe 2013) and a number of large-scale projects have been initiated to this end (see, e.g. Tomas 2013).

The idea that students fail to complete because of their experiences of 'not belonging' in universities around the world resonates with the expressions of alienation made by many South African student protesters in 2015 and 2016. There would appear to be evidence, therefore, that developments in higher education at a global level have led to the emergence of similar phenomena in a number of locations.

This chapter begins with an analysis of T_1 which we identify as the period before 1990, a period which 'conditioned' the South African higher education system and put in place certain enablements and constraints. In this chapter, as we begin to use the framework outlined in Chapter Two, we consciously draw on the 'bigger picture' as developments in South Africa have been conditioned by those at a global level and we are beginning to see similar phenomena emerging from them. In this analysis of T_1 we move from identifying mechanisms conditioning all the policy work and other development that took place at a macro (global) level to a meso (national) level and finally to the micro (institutional) level.

The macro level

Until the middle of the last century, almost every higher education system across the world was an elite system catering for a very small group of students from specific social backgrounds. In Britain, for example, only about 5% of 17- to 30-year-olds were in higher education in 1960 (Finegold 2006). The number of institutions in any higher education system was relatively small and those who managed to enrol in a university largely came from privileged backgrounds. The serving of a relatively homogenous elite meant that the cultural systems of the universities were fairly stable. Assumptions about who was being taught could remain unchallenged, as higher education largely served the status quo by educating those whose backgrounds prepared them, to a large extent, for higher education, with the result that they knew what to expect from a university and what the universities expected of them.

Following the Second World War, moves towards the political left and the election of socialist governments in the United Kingdom, and a number of other countries, saw attempts to widen participation in higher education, alongside the emergence of a human rights discourse across the world (Mettler 2005). This opening up of universities led to the establishment of a new kind of institution, often developed outside major cities and with more vocationally focused programmes. The new universities were in part built to accommodate a group of students who had previously been excluded. The extent to which these students gained what in South Africa has been termed 'epistemological access' (Morrow 1993, 2009) to the universities (rather than merely opening their doors in a process of 'formal access') has been problematised by many. Maton (2004), for example, explores the experience of the 'wrong kind of knower' in British universities as they widened access in the 1960s. While similar shifts happened in many other countries, the focus on the United Kingdom example is particularly pertinent because the colonial

histories of many countries in Africa has often tied us to their political, economic and social patterns. We will return to this issue later in the book but, for now, simply want to point out that the widening of access in the latter half of the 20th century is an example of the way changes in higher education systems emerge from broader political, economic and social shifts.

As a number of thinkers have pointed out, one such political, economic and social shift that has impacted on higher education most heavily is that of globalisation. Mann (2013: 11) explains globalisation as

> the extension of distinct relations of ideological, economic, military, and political power across the world. Concretely, in the period after 1945 this means the diffusion of ideologies like liberalism and socialism, the spread of the capitalist mode of production, the extension of military striking ranges, and the extension of nation-states across the world.

Possibly the aspect of globalisation that has exercised the most influence on higher education, however, is what economist Manuel Castells (1996, 2001) has argued is a 'new economy'. Central to this 'new economy' is the role of knowledge, thanks to its focus on the 'reinvention' of existing goods.

Castells (2001: 52) describes the centrality of knowledge and of the use of information and communication technologies in the 'new economy' in the following way:

> Productivity and competitiveness are, by and large, a function of knowledge generation and information processing; firms and territories are organized in networks of production, management and distribution; the core economic activities are global – that is, they have the capacity to work as a unit in real time, or chosen time, on a planetary scale.

Globalisation and the 'new economy' were enormously significant for higher education largely because of another discourse that came to be known as the 'high skills thesis', closely associated with the likes of Ashton and Green (1996) and Finegold and Soskice (1988). The high skills thesis argues that economic prosperity is dependent on a highly skilled workforce and 'joined-up' policy that will allow a nation to benefit from globalisation. The need for a highly skilled workforce then resulted in increased emphasis being placed on the role of the universities in producing it.

The high skills thesis has not passed without critique, with Kraak (2006: 9) pointing out that:

> The reality of high skill production is that it actually only occurs in a few sectors in the leading advanced economies, including: information technology; biotechnology; pharmaceuticals; aircraft manufacture; machine tools; the high skill end of financial and business services; and the high professions in the civil service, law and medicine. In other sectors, low skilled based work continues and even grows.

There is also considerable debate regarding the extent to which the high skills approach is appropriate for developing nations with some, including Kraak (2006), arguing for a 'hybrid' approach that seeks to develop and utilise a mixture of skills that can be drawn upon in different economic contexts. Regardless of these critiques, the power of discourses that privilege the high skills thesis has had profound implications for universities across the world, particularly with the rise of what has come to be called the 'Fourth Industrial Revolution', or the belief that the increased availability of technology will fundamentally change the nature of political, social and cultural life. While many universities subscribe to the need to drive such technological changes, others have argued that the Fourth Industrial Revolution will increase inequality and constitute a form of recolonisation (De Sousa Santos 2019).

Early implementers of the high skills thesis included the United Kingdom and Australia, with both countries seeing growth in their higher education systems from the late 1980s onwards. This growth was achieved by establishing new universities, often by awarding university status to institutions which had formerly been more vocationally orientated (as later occurred in South Africa). In the United Kingdom, for example, institutions known as 'polytechnics' and which had previously awarded a range of vocational and technical qualifications achieved university status thanks to the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act. A further group was created out of former university colleges. A similar picture can be painted for Australian higher education. To return to our Critical and Social Realist framework, what we can see, then, is the interplay of a set of discourses about globalisation, high skills and the knowledge economy operating in the domain of culture with a set of structural arrangements (acts of parliament, policies, funding and so on) which led to the emergence of new universities and increased enrolments. The establishment of new universities and the enrolment of increased numbers of students can then be conceptualised as emergent events. It is easy to see how a very diverse range of experiences and observations can result from the process we have outlined. The experiences of staff and students are well documented in the academic literature and we will draw on these later in this book.

As value was placed on higher education as a means to achieve economic prosperity, another discursive shift occurred. It does not take much to move from understanding the value of knowledge within an economy to placing a value on knowledge itself. This shift in thinking was accompanied by the fact that the universities, as knowledge producers, had the means of creating knowledge which could lead to profits in this new 'knowledge economy'. Rather than being a 'public good' and existing for the good of humankind, knowledge increasingly came to be understood as a commodity, a private good, with the potential to benefit those who had it or who could generate it.

This so-called 'commodification of knowledge' is then related to other discursive moves and to developments in the structural domain. If knowledge is understood to carry monetary value for individuals, rather than being a broader good in service of the public at large, then the need for the state to provide funding for the universities that produce it falls away. So, too, does the need for the state to fund the students seeking this knowledge

– if they will be the beneficiaries of this knowledge commodity, the logic goes, then they should pay for it. All this then leads to neoliberal discourses arguing for reduced state funding for higher education and students. These shifts in the world of ideas (i.e. in the cultural domain) then allow for developments in the domain of structure in the form of policies and new funding instruments.

Across the world, national policy moved to reduce state funding for universities and for students. In the case of reduced state funding for students, this shift reversed developments that had taken place from the end of the Second World War aimed at broadening access to what had been perceived as a public good, closely tied to national development and social cohesion. Such changes had included the provision of grants intended to allow students from lower socio-economic backgrounds to enter universities in pursuit of higher learning. The thinking now went that if students wanted to gain a qualification which would allow them access to the private goods achieved by competing in the global economy, they needed to pay substantially towards the cost of that qualification. As a result, responsibility to pay ever-increasing tuition fees began to be placed on students who either had previously only paid minimal fees or, in the case of those receiving state grants, had received a free higher education.

Associated with discourses promoting globalisation, therefore, we see an increase in neoliberal ideas in the form of a shift away from the 'welfare state' that characterised the period after the Second World War to the discourse of the free market, where individuals were expected to provide more for themselves in a process which became known as 'neoliberalism'. The development of neoliberal policies, through which state funding was reduced, also resulted in an opening up of opportunities for private enterprise. Private universities have always existed but the latter half of the 20th century saw a growth in private provision in many countries, including in countries across Africa (The Education Commission 2016).

In many respects, South Africa provides a contradiction to this. Because of the peculiar circumstances resulting from apartheid, social grants have greatly increased since the early 1990s as has direct funding of students in the form of grants from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme. However, in line with the global picture, South Africa experienced decreases in state funding of universities.

The reduction in state funding for universities not only required them to levy tuition fees but also to become more entrepreneurial and business-like as they managed their affairs. As a result, universities consciously began to seek opportunities to 'sell' the knowledge outputs they produced and often established specialist offices to assist researchers in doing this. The search for 'Third Stream Income', the other streams being tuition fees and state subsidy, also increased with institutions offering short courses and very actively seeking donor funding.

To return to our Social Realist framework once again, in the latter half of the last century, we can see the interplay of discourses that promote globalisation, the 'knowledge economy' and neoliberalism, with policies and funding frameworks reducing the responsibility of the state for higher education. This complementary interplay led to the emergence of more universities and to the enrolment of greater numbers of

students who did, however, have to pay ever-rising tuition fees. Clearly, this then led to very different experiences on the part of students, parents, staff and other stakeholders in higher education systems. For example, a phenomenon widely reported in some countries (see, e.g. Neves & Hillman 2018) is the expectation that a university should provide value for money. Students' experiences of a university were thus often those of consumers of a product being sold to them. In many respects, universities have then responded to this by privileging tools to gauge 'student satisfaction' and, even, their perceptions of value for money. While globalisation, notions of the 'knowledge economy' and neoliberalism had their origins in, and privileged, the Global North, they have come to colonise the Global South in a number of ways.

Before leaving the global picture, or macro level at T_1, there is a need to note another set of discourses prevalent from the late 1970s onwards and associated in particular with the appointment of British prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, and the United States president, Ronald Reagan, and their adherence to their economic advisor Milton Friedman's notions of deregulation and the free market system. These discourses privileged an approach to the management of public services termed 'New Public Management'. Key to this thinking is the idea that public services, including higher education, need to be actively managed for efficiency by drawing on approaches developed in the business sector. The blending of economic principles related to the supposed desirability of the free market with principles of managerial supremacy led, in universities, to 'shifts in governance authority from the professoriate towards the university councils with compositions that resemble those of the private sector' (Nampota 2015: 123).
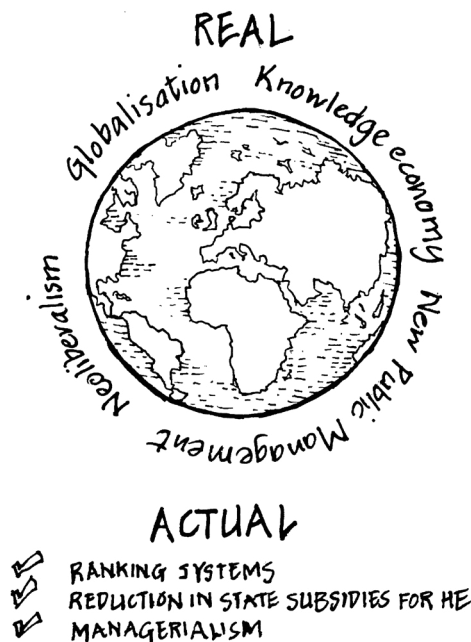
It is rare indeed to find a university without a strategic plan and an implementation strategy or one that has not engaged with activities such as quality assurance. These, and other structures and processes, emerge in part from the ideas of New Public Management, and have led to what Marginson and Considine (2000: 4) and others call the 'enterprise university':

> Established academic institutions including senates and councils, academic boards, departments and collegial rules have been supplemented (and sometimes supplanted) by vice-chancellors' advisory committees and private 'shadow' university structures.

New Public Management has been particularly influential in relation to funding frameworks, which are now often 'output dependent' in that the amount of funding an institution receives as subsidy from the state is related to its teaching and research outputs. Increasingly more abstract concepts such as learning and knowledge materialise as concrete elements that can be counted and rewarded, through metrics such as numbers of graduations and academic publications.

Associated with New Public Management discourses has been the emergence in higher education of what Whitchurch (2015) calls 'Third Space Professionals', who are individuals working in areas such as academic planning, quality assurance and so on, which were unknown in universities half a century ago, and who are often conceived of as being necessary for ensuring efficiencies in this neoliberal framework.

We have described globalisation as a set of relations which sees ideologies, goods and people moving seamlessly across the world, aided by information and communication technologies, sophisticated transport links, and a relaxation in protectionist policies, and fuelled by the high skills necessary to achieve this movement. Some universities have drawn on such globalisation discourses along with national policy to operate 'offshore' by opening campuses in countries other than the one in which they were originally established. The creation of 'education hubs' as a conscious strategy aimed at economic sustainability by some countries is part of this process. Dubai's 'Knowledge Village', a free-enterprise zone, provides a good example of one such hub, and anyone driving into the area sees universities operating offshore lined up like global chain stores in a shopping mall.

Another phenomenon, perhaps not yet commonplace in Africa, is the selling of 'accreditation' by universities in the Global North to a partner university in a developing higher education system. Effectively the 'accrediting' universities are selling their status as an institution in a more developed system to a partner in a new system. While such relationships are often costly for those seeking to share the Global North branding, they do not necessarily offer much in the form of quality oversight and support.

The understanding that higher education is a global enterprise coupled with the reduction of state funding that emerged from some of the ideas we have discussed in this section led to yet another phenomenon, that of universities chasing the enrolment of foreign students who were required to pay higher fees than locals. For example,

the relatively low number of universities in countries in South East Asia and in China compared to their population size and the value being placed on higher education as a private good led many foreign students to seek places at Australian universities. Many Australian universities pursued these enrolments vigorously with consequences for teaching and learning and institutional cultures, which then became focused on the logic of profit (Marginson 2009; Marginson & Considine 2000; Marginson & Rhoades 2002). Compensating for reduced state subsidy by recruiting large numbers of international students makes universities particularly vulnerable to global economic downturns which result in few young people being able to afford to study overseas. If the university's raison d'être is making a profit, then it is without purpose when profits dwindle.

The impact of globalisation on higher education has had another significant effect in the growth of university league tables. The influence of ranking systems such as the QS World University Rankings, produced by Quacquarelli Symonds, a United Kingdom based company specialising in study abroad, and the Times Higher Education World University Rankings, amongst others, has pushed many universities into competing for a place in these international tables. Seeking a place in an international ranking system generally means privileging one particular aspect of institutional life (for example, research publications or the pursuit of an individual holding a Nobel Prize) at the expense of others (e.g. the widening of participation by students from lower socio-economic groups) (Teferra 2017). The criteria used by a particular ranking system mean, moreover, that some universities are simply excluded from such systems, a point made forcibly by Badat (2010: 245):

> The indicators and their weighting privilege specific university activities, domains of knowledge production, research types, languages, and university types. Thus, the natural and medical sciences are privileged over the arts, humanities and social sciences; articles published in English are favoured over those in other languages; journal articles are favoured over book chapters, policy and other reports. Furthermore, "comprehensive" universities and generally larger institutions with a wide range of disciplines and larger numbers of academics – especially researchers – are privileged over others ... The rankings therefore enable the self-selection of universities whose missions and academic offerings strongly match the rankings' performance measures.

This point is taken up by Marginson (2009), who claims that ranking systems 'inculcate the idealized model of an institution as a norm to be achieved and generalize the failure to achieve it'. And, of course, as Badat (2010) points out, the 'idealised model' on which the systems are based draws on universities in the Global North which, due to their location in Western capitalist societies, do not always offer sensible models for those located elsewhere. In spite of the many critiques of global ranking systems, universities across the world continue to play the game with consequences which are not always positive.

The meso and micro levels

The mechanisms at the macro level described in the previous section of this chapter play out in different ways around the world as they intersect with more context-bound structures and cultures at local levels. We now turn again to the meso and micro levels of our analysis of these mechanisms in the South African case study.

As South Africa moved towards democracy, conditions in the higher education system were very different to what they are now. From the 1950s onwards the higher education system had become increasingly structured on the grounds of race. Cooper and Subotzky (2001) provide what they term a 'historiography' of higher education in South Africa, which traces the development of the different kinds of institutions, effectively showing how race led to the creation of a number of different systems. Some institutions were reserved for white social groups while others were specifically established for black, 'coloured' and Indian groups, with each group experiencing very different levels of resourcing and varying degrees of freedom to conduct their own affairs without interference.

Historically white institutions were the best resourced and enjoyed the most freedom, not only in matters related to governance and the curriculum but also in relation to the way they could manage their financial affairs (Bunting 2006; Cloete et al. 2006). These institutions also tended to occupy prime locations in urban areas. Institutions intended for black social groups enjoyed far less privilege. Initially established only to train black people for roles in the apartheid state, the locations of many of these institutions were in rural areas.

The role allocated to historically black institutions of contributing to the socio-political agenda of the apartheid regime meant that tight control was exercised over governance structures by the state, usually through the state's appointment to key positions of individuals who were sympathetic to its ideology. The lack of freedom of movement within the Republic thanks to the 'Pass Laws' which limited the movement of black citizens meant that the historically black universities enjoyed a 'captive' student population regardless of the socio-economic status of homes of origin, a situation which was to change after 1990 when the relaxation of apartheid legislation meant that students with the means to do so fled to historically white institutions (Cooper 2015).

Finances of the historically black institutions were tightly controlled by the Department of Education and Training, in the case of those within the borders of the Republic, or by respective 'governments' for those established in the 'homelands'. 'Homelands' or 'Bantustan states' were established for specific racial and ethnic groups, with pseudo governments never recognised by the international community. Unlike their historically white counterparts, historically black institutions had to apply to the relevant entity for approval of expenditure, the appointment of staff and the levying of tuition fees. As we will discuss in more detail later, funding had to be spent within the financial year, with no possibilities for investment of any surpluses. The requirement that historically black institutions should request approvals of this nature and then apply a 'use it or lose it' process resulted in a lack of capacity to manage budgets which was to impact on their

functioning once the requirement fell away following the end of apartheid (Bunting 2006; Moyo & McKenna 2020).

Under apartheid, therefore, structural conditions resulted in deep divides between institutions intended for different social groups. These divides contributed to the 'cultural isolation' of groups of institutions from each other, a situation which was exacerbated by the academic boycott of South Africa which meant that the country as a whole had constraints on its access to the wider world of academia. Cultural isolation was not limited to the historically black institutions since language also played a part. Historically white institutions were divided according to the language of learning and teaching, with the Afrikaans-speaking institutions more disposed to the apartheid regime than their English-speaking counterparts. In keeping with our realist framework, it then follows that the experiences of staff and students in the different kinds of institution also varied enormously.

At the historically white, English-speaking 'liberal' universities (Cape Town, Natal, Rhodes and Witwatersrand), staff enjoyed considerably higher degrees of freedom with regard to the way they chose to teach and research. These universities drew on discourses related to academic freedom to argue that teaching must be unconstrained and that decisions about who should be admitted were the prerogative of the institution itself and not of the state, though, as we will argue later, this only sometimes translated into these institutions actively defying the state. Institutional governance drew on traditions of collegiality which had long dominated European universities, with academics participating in structures such as faculty boards and the senate and, at departmental level, being led by professors appointed on the basis of their academic, rather than management, achievements. Administrative divisions were staffed with well-qualified individuals and, as a result, finances and other functions were well run. Appointments to key positions in the vice-chancellorate were largely free from the influence of the state.

At the same time as they claimed rights related to academic freedom, however, these same institutions drew down state funding in the form of subsidy which was considerably more, per capita, than that provided to those established for black social groups. A student enrolled at a historically white, English-speaking university entered well-resourced libraries, sat in well-equipped and well-maintained lecture theatres, was taught by highly-qualified, research-active staff and was likely to live in a comfortable hall of residence. In spite of, or possibly because of, all these privileges and freedoms, these universities never exercised the levels of resistance to the apartheid state which could have contributed to social and political change (Mamdani 1998; Maylam 2017).

At the historically white, Afrikaans-speaking universities, academics enjoyed considerably less freedom since these institutions had accepted the apartheid government's construction of them as 'creatures of the state' (Bunting 2006). This support for and adherence to state policies impacted on governance structures which, as a result, were relatively authoritarian in nature. As 'creatures of the state', they also tended to see knowledge itself as having an instrumental purpose, and criticality was not as valued as at their English-speaking counterparts (where it was evident in 'liberal' discourses if not

consistently in action). The adherence of the Afrikaans-speaking universities to apartheid policy meant that these institutions were rewarded financially through donations from individuals and corporations which saw this as a form of investment. As a result, these campuses were some of the most well-developed in the country. A student enrolling at an Afrikaans-speaking university would, however, be unlikely to sit alongside a black peer. The English-speaking universities sometimes drew on the University Amendment Act (Act 83 of 1983) (RSA 1983), the so-called 'Quota Act', which allowed for the admission of small numbers of black students to programmes not offered at historically black institutions. The Afrikaans-speaking institutions generally eschewed this opportunity except at postgraduate levels where students did not have to come on to campus to attend classes (Bunting 2006).

The geographical division between institutions had an enormous effect on staff and students, which we will argue continues to this day. All historically white institutions were to be found in major cities, with the exception of Rhodes University, located in a small town in the Eastern Cape, and black universities were found in rural areas or 'homelands', with the exception of the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and the University of Durban Westville (UDW), established for 'coloured' and 'Indian' social groups respectively. As the 1980s wore on, both of these institutions rejected tight apartheid controls by admitting students from all social groups. This resistance to apartheid ideology attracted scholars from the political left, with the result that students enrolled at UWC and UDW would likely have experienced access to more critical thought than at many other institutions in the system. Their stance against apartheid meant that they regularly experienced brutality at the hands of the apartheid state. They were able, however, to benefit from funding from overseas donors such that these campuses enjoyed infrastructure that was more favourable than their positions in the apartheid order would suggest.

A further divide characterised the apartheid higher education landscape, and this related to the binary distinction between so called 'technikons' and the universities. Technikons were established to provide vocational education to different social groups. As such, their conceptual agenda was limited and they offered little in the way of postgraduate education or research. Governance within the technikons tended to be very authoritarian (White et al. 2011) and this control extended to the curriculum, with all technikons following the same curriculum for a particular qualification, developed by one 'convening' institution. As we will argue later, this lack of experience of working with the curriculum on the part of academic staff employed in the technikon sector, alongside the lack of research in the institutions more generally, was to impact these institutions as they acquired full university status in the early 2000s.

Technikons offered vocational training and students enrolled at these institutions would, in most cases, have been registered for a national diploma, rather than an institutionally developed qualification. Their programmes of study would have afforded them work-based experience and they would have been taught by staff who were experienced in business and industry but who might have been minimally qualified academically. Depending on the social group for which the institution was intended, the

resources available to students would have varied enormously as would the qualifications that were available. Perhaps most significantly, the technikons would not have exposed students to the criticality associated to some extent with some other institutions.

At the meso (national) and micro (institutional) levels at T_1, therefore, structural and cultural conditions were conducive to enormous disparities and differences observable in events and experiences of both staff and students. While these distinctions took a particular shape in apartheid South Africa, it is worth noting Teferra and Altbach's (2004) overview of the effects of colonial education across the entire African continent. They indicate four characteristics: (i) there was limited access to higher education; (ii) the language of instruction was that of the colonisers; (iii) the curriculum was limited and was focused on providing the administrative and other skills needed to manage the colonies; and (iv) there were limited physical and ideological freedoms. As we have shown, all four of these characteristics were in evidence at T_1 in South Africa.

As the end of apartheid dawned, therefore, the ANC government-in-waiting was faced with the task of eradicating these numerous disparities in order to create a single, coherent higher education system that would serve all South Africans equally. At the same time, however, the government had to contend with the challenges of globalisation, and its impact on the economy more generally and on higher education in particular. The need to balance equity with efficiency is something with which policy had to grapple, and it is to this that we now turn as we begin to explore T_2 to T_3 in the framework which underpins the argument in this book.

Policy after apartheid

The new government that came to power in 1994 did so as a result of compromise. South Africa did not have a revolution and civil war that totally upended the status quo. Instead there was a negotiated agreement regarding human rights for all and that the goods of society needed to be shared more equally than previously. The new South African Constitution (RSA 1996) accepted responsibility on the part of the state for basics such as education, housing, healthcare and sufficient food and water 'within its available resources'. Early policy work following the first democratic election in 1994 focused on 'reconstruction and development', or more specifically on the alleviation of poverty and the shortfalls in social services experienced by the majority of the population. In order to do this, however, policymakers acknowledged the need for a stronger economy. By 1998, the need to engage with globalisation through the establishment of macroeconomic stability meant that state *responsibility* for the provision of basic services was reconstructed as the *facilitation* of basic provision through the wooing and protection of both domestic and international capital and by means of tight deficit controls and an almost total liberalisation of tariffs and capital controls in the Growth, Employment and Redistribution Programme (GEAR), which replaced the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). The slogan that had characterised ANC politics during the early years of its rule, 'growth through redistribution', thus shifted to 'growth for redistribution', echoing the Friedman Doctrine noted earlier in this chapter. Economic growth and improvement of

the conditions experienced by the majority were seen to be inextricably linked. This had implications for higher education.

Probably the most significant piece of policy in this T_2 to T_3 period was the 1997 *White Paper on Higher Education* (Department of Education (DoE) 1997), subtitled 'A programme for higher education transformation'. The White Paper identifies four purposes for higher education:
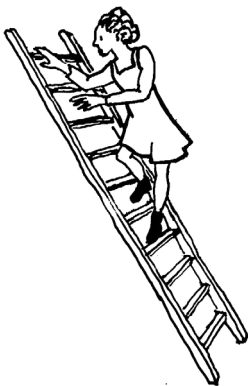
1. To meet the learning needs of individuals in order to achieve self-fulfilment;
2. To provide the labour market with 'high skills';
3. To contribute to the development of a critical citizenry; and
4. To contribute to knowledge creation, knowledge evaluation and knowledge dissemination.

These four purposes acknowledge the contribution of higher education to both the 'private good', that is for graduates to thrive in a society economically, intellectually and emotionally, and the 'public good', that is for society itself to prosper through higher education's contribution to economic growth and, importantly, the criticality deemed necessary in a new democracy.

Curriculum and the global economy

The 1997 White Paper set out a programme for higher education but, before it had even been published, other policy had already set South African higher education in a particular direction. The South African Qualifications Act of 1995 (RSA 1995) established the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) as the 'guardian' of a National Qualifications Framework (NQF). In establishing a national qualifications framework, South Africa was following other countries in the world that had already developed frameworks. In doing so, South Africa can be seen to have been responding to the agenda identified for higher education as a result of globalisation.

A national qualifications framework functions as a means of mapping qualifications on a structure. The reasoning behind qualifications frameworks arguably relates to what we have earlier termed the 'commodification' of knowledge and, in particular, to the knowledge possessed by individuals. 'Knowledge workers' are in demand in any country which seeks to participate in a globalised economy, especially as we enter the so-called 'Fourth Industrial Revolution'. Just as globalisation relaxed the controls on trade across national borders, qualifications frameworks seek to allow individuals to carry their learning across borders. Someone with a qualification gained in, say, Kenya might want to work in Australia or China. Their qualification would only have 'currency' in the foreign country if it could be recognised and 'measured' internationally. Qualifications frameworks seek to make this possible.

Individuals might also want to cross borders in order to further their learning. They might, for example, want to build on a master's degree attained in Rwanda by pursuing doctoral-level studies overseas in the United Kingdom either by actually attending a university in that country or by enrolling in a programme and studying using open- and distance-learning. By describing and measuring the learning achieved at a particular level, a qualifications framework makes study and employment across borders possible.

While qualifications frameworks might contribute to economic development and efficiency, in South Africa the need for a framework was also based on arguments related to equity. During apartheid, the majority of South Africans had been denied access to formal education of any quality. This does not mean, however, that such individuals had not learned in the course of their lives. The qualifications framework therefore aimed to be able to measure, map and record learning acquired informally, through a process known as the 'recognition of prior learning'.

If a qualifications framework is to be able to describe learning in order to meet the goals discussed above, it needs a 'language' of description that will be understood globally. It is at this point that the concept of the 'learning outcome' enters the story. Learning outcomes, sometimes called 'learning competencies', describe what learners will be able to *do* in order to achieve a qualification. What learners are able to do needs to be observable in order to be measurable and, therefore, accredited. Although outcomes can encompass knowing, the argument is that the knowing itself cannot be observed. As a result, outcomes need to be expressed as manifestations of knowing.

This sort of thinking took the focus away from knowledge per se to the skills that could be demonstrated as a result of knowing. In doing this, learning outcomes served the sort of thinking associated with the new mode of economic production in an era of globalisation. Stephanie Allais, in South Africa, was later to term the process of implementing the National Qualifications Framework 'selling out education' (Allais 2014) because of the way knowledge came to be neglected. The 'neglect' of knowledge is a point to which we will return in Chapter Five of this book, so the discussion at this point is somewhat cursory. Nonetheless, it is important to introduce ideas about knowledge in a chapter focusing on the higher education context.

As we have already described, the 'new economy' associated with globalisation is dependent on the constant reinvention of existing goods. The reinvention of, say, a T-shirt to ensure it is made from sustainable materials might require knowledge of the polluting effects of chemical processes involved in dyeing fabrics. It might also require knowledge of the actual construction of fabrics from, say, bamboo. This requires theoretical knowledge involving understandings of what takes place at a molecular level. In order to develop this knowledge, other kinds of knowledge are necessary. Learners must know about molecules per se, before they can understand the way different molecules can combine to make new ones. This kind of knowledge is referred to by sociologist Basil Bernstein (2000) as 'hierarchical' knowledge, in the sense that it is cumulative, with each new item of knowledge building on what went before it.

The *practice* of actually dyeing the fabric involves a different kind of knowledge, however, since it involves applying knowledge of chemical processes to dye or print on

a piece of fabric. In order to do this, an individual might not need to master the entire hierarchical structure of knowledge. Rather, they might only need to know enough of the chemistry to be able to dye a particular kind of fabric successfully. The focus would be on the process and the successful outcome of the process of dyeing or printing rather than on the knowledge underpinning the process.

The construct of the learning outcome was privileged in discourse in South Africa from the mid-1990s onwards as the qualifications framework was introduced. Since then, critiques of the learning outcome as a construct and also of the pedagogical approach of outcomes-based education have abounded. We will deal with some of these critiques later in this book but for now will focus briefly on critiques related only to the nature of knowledge.

These critiques, captured by the work of scholars such as Stephanie Allais (2014), mentioned earlier, and Leesa Wheelahan (2010), Jeanne Gamble (2014), and Paula Ensor (2014), argue that limiting learners to contextualised knowledge, for example, to just enough chemistry to know which dye to use on a certain kind of fabric, denies them the ability to move beyond that context. Access instead to an entire 'knowledge structure' would allow them to move beyond the context they have been working in to new contexts (Mtombeni 2018). Disciplinary knowledge, captured in the notion of a 'knowledge structure', is thus argued to be *powerful* knowledge, and the use of learning outcomes which specify particular contexts is seen to be ultimately disempowering because it limits learners to those contexts. This is discussed in more depth in Chapter Five.

Another key set of arguments relates to equity considerations and particularly to the notion of democracy. Bernstein (2000: 31) argues that abstract theoretical knowledge allows us to access the 'unthinkable, the impossible and the not-yet thought' and that, because of this, access to this knowledge is central to a democracy. In a similar vein, Michael Young (2007: 41–42) claims that theoretical knowledge allows us to 'to project beyond the present' to a future or alternative world, while Wheelahan (2010: 2) maintains that 'access to theoretical knowledge is important because it provides access to society's conversations about itself'. From these perspectives, if theoretical knowledge is not secured in the curriculum, the ability of higher education to contribute to the development of a critical citizenry, a purpose identified in the South African White Paper, is called into question. The development of the national qualifications framework and the privileging of the construct of the learning outcome from the mid-1990s onwards can be seen to have achieved exactly the opposite through the emphasis on skills and contextualised knowledge in pursuit of narrow outcomes related to economic production. The privileging of contextualised knowledge over conceptual knowledge could work against the very goal of economic development also identified in the White Paper. As we will show in later chapters, the influence of the learning outcome has been all-pervasive at many universities in South Africa.

A great deal of effort and energy was expended at South African universities to register all qualifications on the new national qualifications framework. In common with frameworks across the world, *qualifications*, described in the form of learning outcomes, are registered on the framework at a number of levels. The original NQF had three

columns. One column was intended to describe 'general' qualifications based on learning grounded in the disciplines and which was theory-driven. A second column was devoted to vocational and professional qualifications with a focus on applied learning required by 'the workplace'. A third column, the middle 'articulation column', was intended to allow for movement between the two columns on either side. This meant, for example, that a learner who had qualified in the general track could move to vocational or professional learning by using the 'articulation column' to acquire a qualification which would facilitate the shift into professional or vocational learning. The articulation column was also intended to allow for the recognition of prior learning. In principle, a learner who had not been able to access formal learning but who had, nonetheless, learned could have her learning accredited using a qualification in this column and then move into another column to progress along a 'learning pathway'.

Once qualifications are registered on the South African NQF, a programme of study, which will allow learners to meet the outcomes describing the qualification, then needs to be designed. Qualifications are described using a 'nested' approach, which involves becoming gradually more specific about the area of study or qualification focus. This is achieved by first specifying the level on the NQF at which the qualification is registered and the number of credits[1] it carries. The qualification type, also called the 'descriptor', is then allocated. A qualification type would be, for example, a bachelor's degree or a diploma. The 'designated variant' or 'designator' is then added. A bachelor's qualification could then become a Bachelor of Science. The final level of description involves the area of specialisation. Thus, a Bachelor of Science in Geology or Forestry Management could be registered. This nested approach led to a large number of new qualifications being registered on the framework and was accompanied by the development of the programmes which led to them.

Many universities took up the discourses in policy documents related to producing graduates for the global economy by developing programmes with a specific vocational focus. This vocational focus appeared in the area of specialisation that might include subjects such as Tourism or Water Management. As this shift towards vocationalism proceeded, so concerns regarding the move away from 'powerful knowledge' were voiced (Muller 2009; Maton 2009; Shay 2013; Shay & Steyn 2014; Young & Muller 2013a, 2013b). In some universities, the move involved wide-scale reorganisation of traditional academic departments into schools or programme teams. This disruption to the way academic life had proceeded traditionally was very upsetting for some and impacted on the way academics began to perceive themselves and their work. This is a subject we will take up in more detail in Chapters Five and Six.

As new programmes were developed, curricula changed in other ways thanks to the introduction of modularisation. As part of the introduction of the South African NQF, the concept of the 'unit standard' had been introduced. Unit standards describe units of

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1   A credit is a unit of learning. Credits are measured by calculating 'notional hours' or the number of hours it is estimated it would take the 'average' learner to complete the learning. In many countries, one credit is assumed to take ten notional hours.

learning and can be grouped together to form a 'whole qualification'. For higher education, a 'whole qualification' was defined as comprising at least 120 credits. Unit standards, on the other hand, can consist of very small numbers of credits. As the NQF was introduced, the universities resisted the use of unit standards and insisted on the registration of 'whole qualifications' on the NQF because of concerns that such approaches would reduce coherence in programme design. There was a sense that university programmes are more than the accumulation of multiple small units of learning and that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

This decision to avoid the use of unit standards did not mean that learning was not disaggregated into smaller units, however, because as part of the process of registering qualifications and developing programmes, many universities moved towards modularisation. As a result of the process of modularisation, learning was packaged into smaller chunks that could then be combined into entire programmes. In traditional universities, rules for combination often require a mixture of foundational, core and elective modules. Modularisation therefore provides students with some choice and allows them to accumulate credits which can, in principle, be transferred.

As we have tried to show, the work on the NQF had important implications for universities not least because of the way it constrained understandings of knowledge. Structural and cultural conditioning during apartheid impacted on the way individuals took up this new thinking about knowledge as something that could be divided into small units and described as outcomes. Earlier in this chapter we indicated that, during apartheid, different kinds of universities enjoyed different kinds of freedoms with only a small group of universities resisting dominant thinking, and, even then, this was only by some groups in such institutions and only to some degree. Arguably, the historically black universities and the technikons were structurally and culturally conditioned into the greatest compliance to the state. As a result, once new policies were introduced at a national level, it was in these two kinds of institutions that the call for change at programme level was heeded most closely.

In our work analysing the history of the South African Academic Development movement (e.g. Boughey 2005b, 2007, 2010a, 2012a; McKenna 2003, 2012a, 2012b), the late 1990s were identified as a time when capacity to work with issues related to teaching and learning in higher education was eroded thanks to financial stringency experienced throughout the system as a whole. Academic Development, sometimes known as 'Educational Development', had grown during the early part of the decade as universities sought to accommodate the learning needs of black students who entered the system following the shift to democracy. This growth was seen in the establishment of posts, albeit mostly soft-funded, and in the creation of centres and other entities focused on providing support not only for student learning but also for staff development. Once the need for financial stringency started to bite, however, many posts were lost and, in some cases, centres and other entities were closed.

Unfortunately, this happened at a time when expertise in curriculum development and scholarship was most needed to question the direction the system was taking. Critiques of the use of outcomes-based education and the National Qualifications

Framework did emerge (see, e.g. Chisholm 2005; Jansen 1998; Muller 1998; Muller & Taylor 1995) but these were often focused on the schooling system. There were also some critiques of the implications of this shift for higher education (see, e.g. Shay 2013) but these came much later and partly as scholars of teaching and learning in higher education took up the work of Bernstein (2000), Maton (2014) and others. For the most part, and as the research noted earlier in this book was largely to show (Boughey 2009, 2010b; Boughey & McKenna 2011a, 2011b), universities responded to the need to recurriculate using the principle of the learning outcome in one of two ways. The universities of technology and historically black universities tended to be compliant and registered their whole qualifications and spent energy aligning programmes to notions of outcomes-based education. The historically white universities either used a very 'light touch' or, having complied with the need to register outcomes for 'whole qualifications', then proceeded to ignore pedagogical implications despite the plethora of policies related to teaching and learning being developed at that time (McKenna & Boughey 2014). Many of the policies emerging at this time related to the introduction of a national system of quality assurance.

Quality assurance

In developing a 'framework for transformation', the White Paper on Higher Education (DoE 1997) called for quality assurance in South African higher education. Quality assurance can be seen to be associated with the shift towards New Public Management at a global level noted earlier in this chapter, whereby public institutions are seen to need careful 'managing' to become more 'efficient'. The need for quality to be assured is also associated with an increase in the number of universities in national systems and with the growth in the number of private, 'for profit' institutions established as higher education increasingly became constructed as a commodity. As this happened, institutions established in one context often began operating 'offshore', sometimes as limited companies, as we have indicated previously, and the need became paramount to ensure that the offerings of a university established in, say, America, were of quality once moved to a very different context, say, Oman.

By 1997, the year of the White Paper, several countries had introduced quality assurance to their own higher education systems (Chidindi 2017). The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education was established in 1991, and began with eight national quality assurance bodies as its membership; it now has more than 300 national, regional and professional higher education quality assurance agencies as member organisations. Thirty-four countries on the African continent currently have some form of national quality assurance body, with South Africa being amongst the first. South Africa's need for quality assurance identified in the White Paper was realised through the establishment of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) as a permanent standing committee of the Council on Higher Education (Council on Higher Education (CHE) 2001a) which had been set up to advise the minister of education on

matters related to higher education, and also as a result of the White Paper. As in other countries, and following Harvey and Green (1993), the HEQC used an understanding of quality as involving 'fitness for purpose', although this dominant definition was also married with that of 'fitness of purpose', value for money and 'transformation', where the term 'transformation' was understood to involve 'developing the capabilities of individual learners for personal enrichment, as well as the requirements of social development and economic and employment growth' (CHE 2001a: 14).

The *Higher Education Quality Founding Document* (CHE 2001a) identifies a number of areas of responsibility of the HEQC, including the accreditation of providers of higher education to offer qualifications registered on the NQF, auditing and institutional review, and capacity development. The first phase of work, however, came to focus on accreditation and auditing, with the creation of an accreditation system and the completion of a first cycle of institutional audits between 2005 and 2012.

The institutional audit cycle was to impact on teaching and learning in South African universities in substantial ways. From the 1980s onwards, those working in the Academic Development movement had drawn on discourses related to equity as their work was focused on providing access to those long disenfranchised by apartheid. As policy requirements began to impact on the universities as the century drew to a close, a new role for Academic Development practitioners drawing on efficiency discourses began to emerge (Boughey 2007) as institutional managers realised that the capacity to support the demands of quality assurance and other policy requirements lay with Academic Developers. From the early 2000s onwards, new jobs were created in teaching and learning and quality assurance centres, often staffed by those who had previously worked in student support.

A second impact of the first cycle of institutional audits was the development of policies related to teaching and learning. In some institutions, the monitoring of the implementation of these policies was the responsibility of the quality assurance centres. In others, monitoring was much more diffuse and was characterised by a 'lighter touch'. If we draw on the framework on which we have based this book, it can be seen that the 'cultural domain' of the institution was very influential here. If the dominant culture was one where academics were 'trusted' to do what was appropriate because they were understood to share a common set of values, or where academics were likely to resist quality assurance by calling on 'academic freedom', the institution was much less likely to implement a strong quality assurance regime (McKenna & Boughey 2014). But if the institutional culture was very hierarchical and academics were seen to need tight management, there followed the formation of well-staffed quality assurance centres, the implementation of numerous quality assurance policies, and the close monitoring and reporting thereon being made compulsory.

Yet another impact of the first cycle of quality assurance work was the appointment of key agents responsible for 'managing' teaching and learning, in the form of deputy vice-chancellor-, dean- and director-level positions. This particular development was also related to the funding of higher education, the subject to which we will now turn.

Funding higher education

We have already alluded to some of the different ways funding was allocated to institutions under apartheid, noting that historically white institutions were much better funded than their black counterparts. It was not only the amount of funding that differed, as Bunting (2002) points out. Historically black institutions, both universities and technikons, received funding as a result of negotiating a budget with the relevant government department (or, indeed, 'government' in the case of the so-called 'homeland' institutions). Historically white institutions, in comparison, were subject to a standardised funding formula which meant that they enjoyed considerably more independence than their sister institutions.

The funding of historically white institutions was according to a formula developed in 1982, which took into account, amongst other things, student numbers, subject groupings and course levels. Once money was allocated to an institution using the formula, it could not be removed, and an institution was able to budget and build reserves accordingly. Historically black universities, on the other hand, were required to return any unspent funds at the end of a financial year, the consequence of which was a tendency towards 'fiscal dumping' in order to ensure that the allocation was completely spent so as not to impact on the following year's budgeting cycle. This also meant that an institution was unable to build financial reserves.

These disparities in funding led to a great deal of unhappiness with the result that, from 1988 onwards, versions of the standardised funding formula began to be applied more widely. As Bunting (2002) points out, although the application of the standardised formula brought historically black institutions more autonomy in the control of their financial affairs and, initially, benefited them as student enrolments were growing, the need to catch up with the backlog of resourcing meant that money was still scarce. Moreover, as student enrolments at the historically black universities started to fall away once universities opened their doors to all following the shift to democracy in the early 1990s, many historically black universities began to suffer real financial constraints as the decade wore on.

In 2004, a new funding formula for higher education was introduced (Ministry of Education (MoE) 2004). The National Commission on Higher Education (Venter-Hildebrand 1996), established by Nelson Mandela soon after taking up the position of the first democratically elected president of South Africa, had identified four principles for the funding of public higher education. These were that funding would need to employed (i) to allow for equity and redress in order to make the system more equitable; (ii) to make the higher education system more responsive to the needs of a developing economy in the context of globalisation; (iii) to ensure that the system met its goals at the least possible cost; and (iv) to ensure that the cost of higher education was shared between the state and those who would benefit from it.

The 2004 funding formula (MoE 2004) attempted to manage these principles through the increased use of incentive-based funding to steer the system. Key to the

framework was the linking of funding to institutional- and system-level planning through the introduction of three-year rolling plans in which institutions and the Ministry would agree on, amongst other things, enrolment targets for different areas of study. Subsidy for teaching was linked to actual enrolments and was incentive-based in the sense that a part of the subsidy was withheld until graduation. This then meant that the longer an institution took to graduate a student, the less the subsidy that student would have accrued per annum. This partly incentive-based funding then contributed to discourses constructing the need for teaching to be 'managed' which had also emerged in relation to the introduction of quality assurance and which had led to the appointment of key agents working in this area.

Teaching was not the only area to be 'incentivised'. Thanks to the new funding formula, institutions were also to receive funding based on their research outputs. Postgraduate graduations and accredited publications were counted as 'outputs' and, as a result, came to be perceived as particularly lucrative across the system.

Historically, research and postgraduate supervision had taken place at a relatively small number of South African universities thanks to the way the historically black universities and technikons were constructed under apartheid. The incentivising of research in the new funding formula was intended to promote research and postgraduate supervision across the entire sector and, in turn, can be seen to be tied to the notion of the knowledge economy. It can be linked to the award of 'university' status to all institutions thanks to the reorganisation of South African higher education that took place from 2002 onwards. Once the formula was in place, all institutions began to promote the need for research and, effectively, to chase research output. As a result, key agents such as deputy vice-chancellors responsible for research and development came to be appointed and research and innovation offices were established at all institutions.

In order to increase research outputs, however, many institutions first needed to upgrade the qualifications of their staff who, particularly in the new universities of technology which emerged out of the former technikons, often had not even achieved master's degrees (Gumbi & McKenna 2020; Kraak 2009; Powell & McKenna 2009). As a result, South African academics came to face pressure from all directions as demands for 'increased throughput' of students were supplemented by demands for research outputs which often required academics' own research capacity to be developed. We will return to these demands and the impact on the nature of the academic workforce at various institutions in Chapter Six of this book.

Another element of the new funding formula was the use of 'earmarked' grants as levers for improvement and to achieve specific objectives. For example, teaching development grants and research development grants were initially introduced for those institutions not meeting 'output norms' in both areas, and even after these grants were extended to all universities, they continued to be calculated on the basis of institutional efficiencies. As with quality assurance, funding came to be used as a lever of the state to drive outputs in the system and to size and shape it to try to meet the demands related to both equity and efficiency.

Reorganising the system

When the newly elected government took office in 1994, the South African higher education system comprised 36 institutions split along the lines indicated in this chapter. As policy work began, one of the main aims was to produce a single system which would provide quality higher education for all South Africans, regardless of their social group, and which could serve the needs of the nation as well as of individuals. We have already described some of the main policy developments impacting on higher education: the SAQA Act, the introduction of quality assurance, and the introduction of the new funding formula in 2004. One further policy-related development was the National Plan for Higher Education (MoE 2001).

One of the most significant features of the National Plan was the goal of increasing participation in higher education from 15% to 20% over a 10- to 15-year period in an attempt to address inequity in participation. The assumption was that if the total participation rate was increased, then more black South Africans would gain access to higher education.

However, one of the main characteristics of the National Plan was its focus on the need to make the higher education system more efficient. Having 36 institutions split along the lines of race, language, institutional type and so on, with at least two institutions separated by nothing more than a wire fence, was clearly highly inefficient. Under apartheid, these 36 institutions had been funded by different government departments within the Republic of South Africa and different 'governments' if situated in the 'homelands'. After 1994, all came under the auspices of the Department of Education. Duplication and difference at the institutional level needed to be addressed.

The National Plan identified a number of needs in relation to the reconfiguration of the institutional landscape. These were the needs: (i) to reduce duplication in both programme- and service-delivery; (ii) to enhance responsiveness at both regional and national levels for programmes, research and community development; (iii) to help build administrative and academic capacity across the system; and, finally, (iv) to refocus the culture and missions of the different institutions. The refocusing of the 'culture and missions' of the institutions comprising the system was, of course, at the heart of 'transformation' as understood by many people (McKenna & Quinn 2016; Quinn & Boughey 2009). It is important to note that the concept of 'transformation' is strongly embedded in the relationship between the state and the higher education sector (Naidoo & Ranchod 2018). There is a strong focus in the South African National Plan on using higher education to serve national economic needs, just as there is in the plans of other nations on the continent, including that of Kenya.

In 2000, the Council on Higher Education made a set of recommendations related to how such reconfiguration could be implemented. The CHE proposal was that the system should be restructured to comprise three institutional types: (i) research institutions offering a full range of programmes up to doctoral level; (ii) a second group offering programmes up to master's level with doctoral-level programmes in a few niche areas; and (iii) 'bedrock' institutions focusing on undergraduate programmes. This proposal

was widely contested by institutions who saw it as continuing the inequity of apartheid since most historically black universities had limited postgraduate offerings.

The minister did not take the advice of the CHE regarding institutional type, rather advocating in the National Plan a process of institutions identifying particular niches for themselves and working towards these using the system of three-year rolling plans introduced in relation to funding. He also appointed a working group to identify possible mergers and incorporations in the system, warning that the system was not regulating itself voluntarily as hoped and that he would need to exercise the full regulatory powers at his disposal in terms of the Higher Education Act (RSA 1997 Act 101) to effect change.

The 'Report of the Working Group' (MoE 2002), which eventually determined the shape of the system, was important not only because of the reduction of the 36 public institutions of apartheid into 23 post-apartheid institutions but also because of its identification of three 'institutional types'. These were (i) the 'traditional' universities offering a range of formative and professional discipline-based programmes; (ii) the universities of technology offering mainly vocational programmes at diploma level; and (iii) the 'comprehensive' universities offering a mix of discipline-based and vocational programmes at both degree and diploma levels.

If a higher education system in any country is to meet the demands placed on it by the state, industry, students and other stakeholders, it needs to be differentiated (Singh 2008). Because no single institution can meet all the calls made upon it, a sector needs to embody differentiation of type (as exemplifed in the case of South Africa above) and, within broad types, the identification by individual institutions of a particular niche for themselves. This niche would be made evident in an institution's mission and vision statements and the values and purposes it identifies for itself. More specifically it would inform its academic project.

The Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework

As indicated at the beginning of this section, one of the most important pieces of legislation impacting on higher education was the National Qualifications Framework Act. Work on the higher education portion of the framework began in the early 2000s, with a version gazetted in 2004 as the Higher Education Qualifications Framework, but it was fairly extensively revised and it was only in 2012 that the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) was eventually gazetted. The time taken to develop the sub-framework for higher education was largely due to deliberations and work on the nature of knowledge itself (see Muller 2009, as an example) which we explore in greater detail in Chapter Five of this book.

The publication of the HEQSF resulted in universities having to re-submit qualifications and the programmes leading to them to the CHE for accreditation. In the universities of technology in particular, this required a lot of recurriculation work in relation to bachelor's level qualifications. Previously, a Bachelor of Technology (BTech) degree had been available as a one-year 'top up' qualification on a National Diploma to

'convert' it into a degree. The new HEQSF abolished the BTech degree, leaving instead only the bachelor's degree which could be either generally or professionally orientated.

The need to implement the framework could have presented an enormous opportunity to engage with questions of knowledge – whose knowledge is included or excluded and to what ends the knowledge is meant to serve. But this is not what happened. The process of applying the framework happened alongside engaging with complex mergers and incorporations and was generally undertaken in a superficial process of compliance. That we did not use this as an opportunity to delve deeper into issues of knowledge and transformation is something that we have already lived to regret.

Conclusion

At this point, our framework requires us to consider the changes that have occurred in the policy landscape since the early 1990s.

As we hope our analysis above has shown, in the years since the shift to a democracy, policymakers have drawn on dominant global discourses related to the role of universities in our societies and economies, as well as to those related to the need for South Africa to develop an entire raft of new policies and frameworks to guide the higher education system. In Archer's terms, we could thus say there has been enormous change in the structural system through the development of policies and the implementation of mergers. At this point, we will not attempt an evaluation of the changes that have taken place. That will be left for the final chapter of this book. Instead we turn to reflect on how students have been positioned and have enacted their agency across this same time period.