Language, Ethno-nationalism and the South African university

Author:

Lloyd Hill – Stellenbosch University, South Africa

University of Hradec Králové
Philosophical Faculty

LANGUAGE, ETHNO-NATIONALISM, AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY[1]

Lloyd Hill

Abstract: This article presents a conceptual analysis of the relations between language, ethnicity, and nationalism – within the domain of the university. While an analytical distinction is commonly made between "ethnicity" and "nationalism," here "ethno-nationalism" is used to highlight aspects of cultural continuity between these constructs and to draw attention to problematic "telementational" assumptions about the vehicular role of "languages" in influential modernist theories of nationalism (notably Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson). The empirical focus of the article falls on long-run institutional changes in the South African university system; and on the deployment of ideas about ethnicity, nationalism, language, and race. While assumptions about the vehicular capacity of languages have deep roots in the colonial and apartheid periods, these also feature prominently in post-apartheid debates on the transformation of the university system.

Keywords: *language politics, nationalism, ethnicity, universities, South Africa*

Introduction

To what extent does the progress of universities still "measure" nationalism? To pose this question seriously – as I do below – requires an exploration of the changing nature of the university and the political claims associated with various forms of "ethno-nationalism." I use this term deliberately, to problematise the numerous attempts to distinguish "ethnicity" and "nationalism." "Ethnicity" and "nationalism" are first and foremost English words used in metalinguistic / academic discourses that index a wide

---

range of contexts. Even in Anglophone contexts identity conflicts and the associated political claims need to be "translated" into an academic idiom. In this article I am concerned with "ethnicity" and "nationalism" as "categorical modes of identification" (Brubaker 1996) or what Bourdieu (1985: 725) calls "classes on paper." Categories begin life "on paper" in the figurative sense – as language-based constructs – but the extent to which they are realised as "probably classes" in a given context is a matter of empirical investigation. In the argument that follows, I explore aspects of cultural continuity in the use of the constructs "nation" and "ethnic group" and focus particular attention on problematic "telementational" assumptions about the vehicular role of "languages" in both the construction of groups and the communication of academic discourse. The argument focuses specifically on the influential language-based theories of nationalism developed by Benedict Anderson (1983) and Ernest Gellner (1983; 1997 and 1998).

The second part of the article presents a schematic history of the South African higher education system between 1850 and 2019. This ambitious periodisation is motivated in terms of two caveats. First, my objective is principally conceptual: to explore the manner in which "languages" have been used to frame ideas about nationalism and ethnicity – in both local and international literatures – and to re-examine the long-run significance of these concepts in South African higher education. Second, given this objective, the historical narrative focuses on broad institutional changes over time and the manner in which these have been framed in terms of language, ethnicity, and nationalism. I can also not do justice to the range of post-1994 developments that have shaped South African universities. Given the focus on institutional change, the final discussion foregrounds three thematic developments of the post-1994 period:

- the 2002–2005 institutional mergers, which reduced the number of tertiary institutions from 36 to 26;

- the student protests of 2015–2016;

- the post-1994 decline of Afrikaans – expedited after 2015 – as a medium of both research and teaching.

These events and trends are used to contextualise my theoretical argument with respect to the relationship between language and ethno-nationalism.

Nations, ethnic groups, and groupism

In this article I use the term "ethno-nationalism" to communicate a certain unease with the manner in which "nations" and "ethnic groups" are frequently distinguished. On the one hand, this reflects a Bourdieusian concern to critically examine the ontological status of collectives by focusing on the politics of group-making (Bourdieu 1985; Brubaker 2004; Wacquant 2013). On the other, it reflects ambiguities in the South African context, where – depending on the political register – "nation" can refer to: the "national population;" a "population group" (the census term for "race"[2]); an ethnic group; or a social class. The hyphen is used deliberately to distinguish my usage from Connor's (1996: 71) "ethnonationalism," which denotes an ethnopsychological concept of nationalism as a subconscious sense of consanguinity. My use of this term is also not intended to convey any sense that ethnicity is a historically antecedent category, as in Anthony D. Smith's "ethnosymbolic" approach. This approach has been influential in South African debates on ethnicity (see Bekker 1993; and more recently Orman 2008).

In what follows "nationalism" and "ethnicity" are conceptualised in a manner broadly consistent with a number of leading "modernist" theorists. Both are relatively modern "categories of equivalent persons" (Calhoun 2007: 70) and, like Anderson (1983: 168), I emphasise the historical significance of the national census in constructing social categories. Whereas "ethnicity" is commonly defined in terms of "cultural" attributes, including sets of symbols, belief in a common origin and a shared sense of a group boundary (Maré 2017: 169), "nationalism" – following Gellner (1983: 1) – is commonly understood to be a "theory of political legitimacy," in terms of which ethnic boundaries should correspond with political

---

2   All post-apartheid censuses (1996, 2001 and 2011) have included the variable "population group," consisting of the attributes "Black African," "Coloured," "Indian or Asian," "White" and "Other." In this article I adopt the common post-apartheid practice of using "Black" in a broad sense (including "Black African," "Coloured," and "Indian or Asian") and "African" to refer to "Black African."

ones. I am not convinced by this distinction, for reasons that relate to the tendency to assume "languages" as givens or core differentiating "cultural" aspects of both ethnic groups and nations. My analysis of the university context, therefore, deploys a more communication-orientated theory of language and – by extension – ethno-nationalism.

Nations and ethnic groups are frequently conceptualised as groups or relatively objective "units" of analysis. My analysis draws on Brubaker's (2004) notion of "groupism" and his elaboration of the distinction between "concepts" and "groups." Groupism can be defined as the tendency to treat "groupness" as a constant property of constructs such as "nation," "ethnic group" and "race." Whereas this tendency is a common feature of "ethnic common sense" – and hence an important form of data – the social analyst must break with "vernacular categories" and treat groupness as a variable (Brubaker, 2004: 9). Bourdieu's (1985) distinction between "classes on paper" and "probably classes" corresponds with Brubaker's (2004: 19) distinction between "real" and "rhetorical" groupness: at issue is the extent to which categories are channelled to constitute variable forms of groupness, manifested in events, organisations, networks and collective consciousness. In the sections that follow, I explore a particular form of linguistic groupism and show how this is particularly problematic within the domain of the university.

Ethno-nationalism, language, and communication

Theorists within the dominant "modernist" tradition of nationalism studies (notably Anderson 1983; Gellner 1983; and Hobsbawm 1990) assert that "nations" are relatively recent phenomena, constructed by nationalist movements that emerged in the wake of the industrial revolution. While I situate myself within this broad tradition, I take issue with a particular modernist orientation to the role of language in the construction of both "nations" and "national" education systems – with universities at the apex of these systems. Within nationalism studies – where historians, sociologists and political scientists predominate – this orientation is fairly standard, but it is also evident in "old school" anthropological studies of ethnicity. I explore two key weaknesses in the mainstream image of nationalism. The first is the geographic and temporal specificity of this image: the focus on

endo-national "majority" culture within a territorially contiguous state tends to underemphasie the technologically mediated exo-nationalism of powerful states and former colonial powers, along with the complicating role of migration and racialised ethnicity. The second is a telementational model of language and communication that commonly underpins both the idea of a "national language" and – after 1945 – language-laden notions of "ethnicity."

Both "national university" and "national language" are core notions within a widespread model of nationalism, which rests on a body of theory and widespread common sense (manifested most clearly in the conflation of "nation" and "state" in the quotidian use of the term nation-state). A key weakness of this model is the extent to which it is built on the experiences of archetypal early movers in the "nation-state" game. These include the older states of Western Europe, the "old colonies" of North and South America and notably exceptions in other parts of the world (e.g., Japan). The demonstration effect associated with powerful western-European nation-states (notably France and Germany) has had clear temporal and geographic limits and the recognition of these gave rise to influential, but problematic, taxonomies of nationalism. Kohn's (1944) distinction between "civic" and "ethnic nationalism" is the most well known of these, but also worth mentioning is Gellner's (1983: 94–98) second category of nationalism – which he terms "Habsburg (and points east and south) nationalism" and which he subsequently described as a "generic African type." O'Leary (1998: 48) designates this category "ethnic nationalism" in a reconstruction of Gellner's typology. Brubaker (2004: 133) argues that the tendency to categorise regions in this fashion has a "neo-orientalist flavour." He notes the analytical and normative ambiguities implicit in attempts to theorise the distinction between ethnic and civic nationalism. His suggested alternative distinction – between "state-framed and counter-state understandings of nationhood and forms of nationalism" (Brubaker 2004: 144) – is useful in the South African context, as I argue below.

The standard model also fails to do justice to the complexity of the post-1945 global political economy and associated "identity politics." Eriksen (2007: 3) notes that Gellner's work tends to underemphasise "the emergent cultural complexities caused by the twin forces of the new information age and communication technology, and large-scale

migration from poorer to richer countries." Many contributions to the literature on nationalism tend to ignore the parallel literature on migration, ethnicity and race – particularly in states that emerged after the Second World War. It is noteworthy that the English term "ethnicity" gains currency in the 1950s, around the time that "race" loses its scientific credentials and "ethnic group" replaces "tribe" in the anthropological lexicon (Hutchinson and Smith 1996: 15; Tonkin 1996: 22). Sensitivity to what is currently called the "intersectional" politics of identity emerged within the context of post-1960 ICT-based capitalism and has been accentuated by internet-based social networks and the post-2008 transition to "platform capitalism" (Srnicek 2017).

Beyond the challenge of "keeping up" with changing communication technologies, more basic problematic assumptions about language and communication underpin the dominant image of nationalism. The second problem relates to the theory of language that underpins many modernist accounts of nationalism. Two of the most influential modernist theorists of nationalism – Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner – place great store by languages as vehicles for the spread of nationalism. Both Gellner and Anderson's theories of nationalism deploy what Harris (2003; 2005) calls a "telementational" approach to language – the idea that languages are mental channels with ontological status prior to their emergence in communication.

Benedict Anderson's book *Imagined Communities* – the most cited text on nationalism – presents a theory of nationalism built around "languages-of-state," which function as vehicles for "modularly imagined" nations (Anderson 1983: 113). For Anderson, nations are not the product of languages *tout court*, but a historically specific form of language produced by print capital and subsequent "space-transcending communications technologies" (Calhoun 2007: 64). Anderson's term "imagined community" breaks the sharp contrast between "nation" and "empires" (Calhoun 2007: 33), which is useful for tracing historical continuity between these forms – particularly within the context of African colonialism. Anderson (1983: 98) argues that, "as the parcellization of Africa at the Congress of Berlin (1885) showed, great nations were global conquerers." More specifically, the term "official nationalism" – the "willed merger of nation and dynastic empire" – is useful to the extent that it highlights problems associated with the enduring Eurocentric distinction between "ethnic" and "civic"

nationalism. Contrasting official nationalism and "linguistic European nationalism," he notes how the official nationalism of many colonial states deployed "European languages-of-state" (Anderson 1983: 113).

Focusing particular attention on (pre-electronic) print-capital, Anderson's work overemphasises the role of "vernaculars" as channels for communicating uniform or "modular" ideas about nationalism. "Language is not an instrument of exclusion," he argues, "in principle, anyone can learn any language." Rather, what is at issue is "whether the administrative and educational systems, particularly the latter, can generate a politically sufficient diffusion of bilingualism" (Anderson 1983: 134). These statements – along with his argument that more recent electronic communication technologies are "allies" (Anderson 1983: 135) to print – reflect simplifying assumptions about the relationship between language and communication.

Ernest Gellner's numerous works on nationalism (notably 1983, 1997 and 1998) deploy what Harris (2005: 3) calls a "psychocentric" version of telementational language. For Gellner (1983: 1), nationalism is "primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent" and where the term "national" is synonymous with "ethnic" (Eriksen 2007: 3). Ethno-linguistic integration is assumed and Gellner (1983: 45) uses the Latin phrase "cuius regeo, eius lingua"[3] to summarise his position: the "high cultures" that emerge to unify discrete national territories are quintessentially "national languages."

Orman (2017) notes Gellner's affinity with the work of Noam Chomsky – arguably the most influential linguist of the twentieth century. For Chomsky, language is essentially a tool of cognition, which is to say, principally a means of formulating individual though.

> "Gellner is therefore a fully paid-up subscriber to the thesis of what Reddy (1979) called the "conduit" model of language and iconoclast linguist Roy Harris (1981) termed "telementation", namely the idea that linguistic communication involves the neat transference or copying of mental content (theorised variously as impressions of the soul, ideas, concepts, mental representations) from the mind of

---

3   This is a play on "*cuius regio, eius religio*" (whose realm, his religion), the Latin phrase associated with the religious settlement established by the Peace of Augsburg (1555). Gellner's phrase therefore connotes both linguistic and religious uniformity.

one party to another via the mechanism of a communal linguistic code" (Orman 2017: 390).

Telementational approaches to language assume, first, the relatively uniform ontological status of "languages" and, second, the taken-for-granted status of language as a condition for communication. Languages are, however, better conceived of as "byproducts of communication" (Pennycook 2004: 6). This has important implications for the conceptualisation of ethnicity and nationalism. While the term "imagined community" neatly sidesteps the rigidity of many attempts to distinguish "nation" and "ethnic group," it does so at the cost of ignoring many of the contrasting criteria for group membership that these labels frequently convey. Whereas Gellner overstates the cultural uniformity of national education systems, Anderson tends to underplay these. Both of these writers overstate the "vehicular" role of languages and their theories of nationalism therefore rest on an implicit linguistic groupism.

"National language" is a highly variable concept. As Bourdieu notes, in the absence of objectification – in writing and subsequent communication technologies – spoken languages exist only in a "practical state." At issue is the extent to which "a language" has emerged to unify a market for communication:

> "Only by transposing the representation of the national language is one led to think that regional dialects exist, themselves divided into sub-dialects – an idea flatly contradicted by the study of dialectics [...] And it is no accident that nationalism almost always succumbs to this illusion since, once it triumphs, it inevitably reproduces the process of unification whose effects it denounced" (Bourdieu 1991: 46).

"National languages" and "dialects" are therefore "codified" not simply through writing or printing, but through the integration of markets for communication. If one considers the approximately 200 years of electronic communication, one of the key challenges facing theorists of nationalism and ethnicity is the need to account for a certain path dependence in the development of "languages." Languages "standardised" after 1945 somehow do not function quite like the national languages that emerged after the revolutions of 1848

– and even the early standards have been undermined by the global growth of English. This is one of the trends that various taxonomies of nationalism have tried to capture, and higher education is one of the domains in which this path dependency has been most obvious.

The modern university as a national ideal

Not unlike the nation state, the modern university tends to exaggerate its history, projecting an image of system autonomy and temporal continuity. This is no coincidence as both are relatively recent phenomena; both emerged in contexts of rapidly expanding industrialism and capitalist accumulation. While many prestigious universities trace their histories back hundreds of years, all universities in the world today are the products of nation-states – built or rebuilt in the aftermath of the post-1810 Humboldtian synthesis of teaching (humanities) and research (science) (see Fuller 2003; Cooper 2011). Universities are therefore "modern" to the extent that they manifest this synthesis – typically in the minimal form of a science faculty and a humanities faculty – and form part of state-based education systems.

Universities have also been central to the dominant image of nationalism, outlined above. Thus, Hroch (cited in Paterson 2009: 163) emphasises the role that national universities play in defining a national culture through research and teaching. In a similar fashion, Gellner's (1983) influential theory of nationalism places particular emphasis on hierarchical national education systems as incubators of national consciousness. National education instills "high culture": a "level of literacy and technical competence, in a standardized medium, a common conceptual currency..." Nations, for Gellner, are the minimal units of "exo-socialization"; it is "not the guillotine, but the (aptly named) *doctorat d'etat* [that] is the main tool and symbol of state power" (Gellner 1983: 33).

The following extract (from Anderson 1983: 71) contains an interesting comment on the historical link between languages and universities:

> "Bilingual dictionaries made visible an approaching egalitarianism among languages – whatever the political realities outside, within the covers of the Czech-German/German-Czech dictionary the paired languages had a common status. The visionary drudges who

devoted years to their compilation were of necessity drawn to or nurtured by the great libraries of Europe, above all those of the universities. And much of their immediate clientele was no less inevitably university and pre-university students. Hobsbawm's dictum that 'the progress of schools and universities measures that of nationalism, just as schools and especially universities became its most conscious champions,' is certainly correct for nineteenth-century Europe, if not for other times and places."

To what extent does the progress of universities still "measure" nationalism? Surely the use of an "indigenous" national language within a higher education system is still a measure of national power – or "cultural capital" in Bourdieu's (1986) sense – within the global state system? To the extent that "the progress of schools and universities" was a commonplace measure of [linguistic] nationalism, after 1945 this has become an index of waning cultural sovereignty. Germany led the "second industrial revolution," not simply through the production of chemicals and steel, but also through the export of ideas associated with the Humboldtian model of the university – notably the emphasis on the public status of university-based knowledge production (Cooper 2011). But while Germany remains a major industrial and technological hub, it is now adjusting to the "decline of German as a language of science" (Ammon 2001). With the rise of information-based capitalism – the so-called "third" and "fourth" industrial revolutions – the United States is the most conspicuous exporter of ideas and technologies that are reshaping university systems. The cultural power of American and other Anglophone universities is not simply channelled through "English," but rather through the institutional spaces – connected by successive waves of communication technology (from the telegraph to the internet) – that have reconditioned English to serve as the dominant form of second-language cultural capital within a global network of "research universities."

The markets for university-based research and postgraduate teaching that currently span the planet are – in Gellnerian terms – too "high" to be reproduced by national "high cultures." But this formulation risks re-stating the trend in cognition-oriented identity terms. University researchers and teachers face a difficult choice when using a language. On the one hand, there is the speaker-centric "cognitive" need to express thoughts as precisely as possible – for most people this would

entail the use of the native language or "mother tongue." On the other, there are the reader-centric or "socio-economic" constraints imposed by an audience or market for scientific discourse. Gordin (2015: 4) refers to these as "identity" and "communication" respectively, and shows how the emergence of English as the global scientific "vehicular language" is, in this sense, the product of highly specialised contexts of communication. While this broad trend tends to stratify universities in similar ways, it also masks contextual struggles associated with what Brubaker and Cooper (2000: 3) refer to as "identitarian claim-making." South Africa provides an interesting context to explore this further.

The changing South African university system

The South African university system traces its origins back to the nineteenth century: to the period after 1806, when the British took control of the Dutch Cape Colony. British rule at the Cape marked a shift from a mercantile to a fully industrial form of imperialism, made possible by the rapid development of the technologies that underpinned what Carey (1983: 3) terms "the effective separation of communication and transportation." These provided the metropole with an unprecedented capacity to both rule and influence from afar. A key emergent source of both institutional power and cultural influence during this period was the university – or rather modern university systems. In the sections that follow I provide a broad-brush account of the post-1850 development of the South African university system, focusing particular attention on how universities have been framed in national and ethnic terms. This history can be summarised in terms of four periods:

1850–1918: The emergence of an extremely elite British colonial and monolingual English higher education system centred on the University of the Cape of Good Hope in Cape Town;

1918–1959: The transition to an institutionally bilingual English-Afrikaans university system – the product of the post-Union pact between white English and Dutch speakers and the subsequent growth of Afrikaner nationalism;

1959–1994: The formal extension of apartheid into higher education, as the NP government took control of Fort Hare University College and

new ethnolinguistically defined "black" universities were established in Cape Town, Durban and "self-governing" rural territories;

1994–present: the post-apartheid transformation of higher education, including the 2002–2005 mergers that reduced 36 universities and technikons to 23 (subsequently 26) universities, comprehensive universities and universities of technology.

While nineteenth-century British official nationalism was replaced by Afrikaner nationalism in the twentieth century, I argue that Afrikaner nationalism after 1948 functioned as a kind of official nationalism – for two reasons. First, white English speakers were simultaneously drawn into the social structure of the new nation and kept at arm's length from the cultural inner sanctum of Afrikanerdom. White English speakers were included socially – notably through the bilingual structure of national education – and culturally, to the extent that they learned Afrikaans and became materially and culturally invested in the apartheid project. Within the domain of higher education, however, white English speakers remained culturally dominant – by virtue of the status they drew from their colonial past and connections within the wider Anglophone university network. In the language of the Bourdieu extract cited above, English was the transposed standard that mediated the emergence of national "dialects."

Second, grand apartheid constituted a kind of post-dated official nationalism, as the cultural exclusion of the racialised "other" coincided with limited social inclusion in the racially fragmented and highly unequal national education system. In the transition from the Cape Colonial higher education system to the twentieth-century national system, "race" and "language" became increasingly central to contrasting groupist discourses on "nations" (among white colonials) and "the national question" (among Black intellectuals associated with the African National Congress and other congress movements). Race was constructed through the official colonial languages, but particularly through English after the first census in 1865. Official language categories were not only enumerated much later – in 1918 for white respondents and in 1946 for African respondents – they were screened in terms of race. From 1946 on, "African" respondents were only presented with African indigenous languages, while "white," "coloured" and "Asian" respondents were presented with a choice of

English or Afrikaans. The first post-apartheid South African census in 1996 was also the first to present a uniform language question to the entire population (Christopher 2004: 146). The official language categories were therefore racialised from the outset.

Cape Colonial official nationalism and the examining university

In the Cape Colony, the need for colonial administrative capacity was the initial driver of higher education. In 1850, a Board of Examiners of Candidates for Government Service was established. Eight years later, this body was replaced by a Board of Public Examiners in Literature and Science (BPELS). As the titles of both entities suggest, they were examining institutions, which is to say they set and examined a curriculum taught by other institutions. The inspiration for this examining model came from the University of London, established in 1836 with a federal examining structure and a secular mission that set it apart from Oxford and Cambridge. The University of London therefore provided the benchmark for BPELS examinations: the 1st, 2nd and 3rd class certificates were based on the University of London's MA, BA and Matriculation examinations, respectively (Hill 2008). One indicator of the extremely elite nature of this early system – even within the dominant white Anglophone community of the Cape Colony – was the late introduction of the entry level 3rd class certificate (1864).

When the University of the Cape of Good Hope (UCGH) was officially established as an examining institution in 1873 – partly in reaction to the University of London's attempts to recruit students in the colonies – it effectively assumed the examining and accrediting mantle of the BPELS. In terms of the Higher Education Act passed by the Cape Parliament in 1874, tertiary education (i.e., the curriculum of UCGH) could be provided at selected high schools. These subsequently became known as "colleges" and the largest of the early providers were the South African College (SACS) in Cape Town and the Stellenbosch Gymnasium (which after Queen Victoria's jubilee in 1887 became known as the Victoria College). The University Extension Act (1875) extended the UCGH's mandate into the two Boer Republics and the second British colony of Natal.

Before the unification of the South African state in 1910 therefore, what passed as higher education was not just British colonial and Anglophone, it was also centred around the activities of two Cape colleges – which enrolled by far the majority of students who sat for the annual UCGH exams. The official nationalist character of nineteenth-century Cape Colonial higher education can be seen in the close correspondence to processes in the metropole. The University of London provided a model for both the administration of college-based higher education and the seeding of new universities (Simpson 1983). This broke the monopoly that Oxford and Cambridge had traditionally enjoyed and provided a blueprint for limited social opening – both in the colonies and the "home nations" of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The establishment of the UCGH, therefore, formed part of an empire-wide process of "university extension." New universities based on the London federated-college model emerged in England and Wales (Paterson 2009) and in Canada and India (Boucher 1973).

In the Cape Colony, social extension was accompanied by a degree of cultural opening as selected colleges from across the Colony sought to prepare students for the new university's examinations. But the key cultural constraints were race and language. English was the exclusive medium of examination throughout the nineteenth century and a racialised proto-nationalist distinction between "white" Dutch and English speakers emerged during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Proto-white nationalism and the post-Union university system

The period between the first Anglo-Boer War (1880–1881) and the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910 saw the emergence of proto-white South African nationalism. While Afrikaner nationalism is commonly dated from S.J. Du Toit's establishment of the Genootskap van Regte Afrikaners (GRA or Fellowship of True Afrikaners) in 1875, this is misleading. Kriel (2010: 402) notes that neither "S. J. du Toit [nor] the founding father of the National Party (NP), J. B. M. Hertzog, was an Afrikaner nationalist in the ethnic/linguistic exclusive sense of the word (even though both were white supremacists)." Hertzog spoke

of "English speaking Afrikaners" and "Dutch speaking Afrikaners," which – following Moodie (1975: 85) – suggests that at this time "Afrikaner" gave priority to a racial "civic" association with the state rather than an "ethnic" attachment. The tendency to overstate the significance of language consciousness vis-à-vis race consciousness is a practice that has migrated from Afrikaner nationalist discourse to the academic literature on Afrikaner nationalism. In Bourdieusian (1991) terms we see the conflation of early language products (new Afrikaans texts) with the widespread circulation and recognition of these products in a cultural market – where "culture" includes, *inter alia*, an emerging sense of "white languages." Benedict Anderson provides a good example of this conflation:

> "Elsewhere, in the latter portion of the nineteenth century, we find Afrikaner nationalism pioneered by Boer pastors and litterateurs, who in the 1870s were successful in making the local Dutch patois into a literary language and naming it something no longer European" (Anderson 1983: 75).

This statement is curious, given the centrality of the "European vs. non-European" binary to both white English-speaking South African (WESSA) and Afrikaner social closure. This cultural process began in the nineteenth century and can be traced, to some extent, through the etymology of "Afrikaner." The first record of the term "Afrikaner" is Hendrik Bibault's declaration "…*ik ben een Africaander*" ("I am an Africaander") in Stellenbosch, 1707 (Du Toit 2008: 572). Bibault's claim has been used as evidence of early Afrikaner nationalism, but this is doubtful. Giliomee (2003: 22) notes that "at the beginning of the eighteenth century 'Afrikaner' was applied to indigenous people or to the offspring of 'natives' and slaves or free blacks." By the end of the nineteenth century, however, "Afrikander" had been appropriated by white colonials and was increasingly used in a manner akin to the original sense of "creole," i.e., to denote colonial-born (white) settlers and distinguish them from their "home" or metropole-born compatriots. The term therefore designated a wider white in-group than the subsequent "Afrikaner" and was particularly prevalent in the domain of sport. The following photo[4] – one of two images depicting

---

4   This is one of two photographs documenting the match – both housed in the Port Elizabeth main library (Hill 2011).

the first recorded football match in South Africa – provides an early indication of this proto-white nationalism.

FOOTBALL.
Colonial Born Team.
— 1862. —
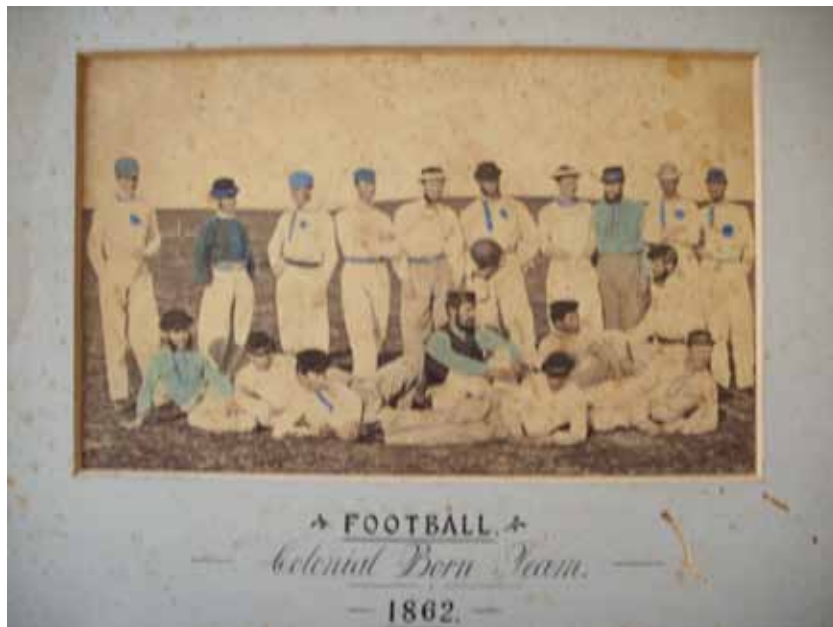
University sport is a well-documented vector for nationalism. In South Africa, an important early vehicle for both Afrikaner and WESSA nationalism was the "Ikeys vs Maties" (University of Cape Town vs Stellenbosch University) rugby match – an annual event since 1911. The third and current sense of "Afrikaner" – designating white Afrikaners and associated with "Afrikaner nationalism" – therefore emerged after the Union and was mediated by the institutionalisation of two "white" national languages: English and Dutch became official languages in 1910 and were the only languages enumerated during the first "national" census in 1918.

Distinct white subnationalisms were also facilitated by the development of a new national university system. Legislation passed in 1916, and implemented in 1918, established three new universities: the University of the Cape of Good Hope was transferred to Pretoria, where the examining model was re-established as the University of South Africa (Unisa); and two Cape Colleges were granted autonomous

teaching status, forming Stellenbosch University and the University of Cape Town. The three universities established in 1918 became vehicles for post-1910 white "nation-building," in terms of which the geographic extension of higher education and the social inclusion of white Afrikaans speakers coincided with the development of a racially segregated and institutionally bilingual higher education system. The 1910 Union had established the territorial boundaries of the South African state, by integrating the two British colonies and the two Boer republics. While the Union manifested a compromise between white British and Dutch interests, "Dutch speakers" constituted a far more ambiguous category: the official status of Dutch belied the reality of a growing diglossic gap between written and spoken Dutch.

While the roots of race- and class-based inequality in the South African higher education system can be traced to the dominance of the two Cape Colonial colleges, Unisa played a pivotal role in the post-1918 development of what became effectively a parallel medium university system (Hill 2008; 2009). With a monopoly on academic accreditation in most of the country, Unisa facilitated the development of new Afrikaans institutional space and fostered demand for the certified use of Afrikaans in academic and professional domains that had previously been dominated by white English speakers. This process began soon after 1918 and unfolded in two ways.

First, like the University of London, Unisa functioned as an incubator of new universities – until 1951, when the federal college-based structure ended (Boucher 1973: 192). Unisa-affiliated colleges that later become autonomous universities included: Wits (autonomous in 1922), Pretoria (1930), Natal (1948), Orange Free State (1950), Potchefstroom (1951) and Rhodes (1951). Stellenbosch, Pretoria, Bloemfontein and Potchefstroom therefore constituted the initial nodes in a network of Afrikaans tertiary institutions. The establishment of Rand Afrikaans University in 1967 brought the number of monolingual Afrikaans universities to five. At most of these institutions, individual and institutional bilingualism played a key role in the transition to monolingualism.

Second, as more colleges became independent universities, Unisa's orientation shifted to "external students," i.e., students not registered at a Unisa-affiliated college. While the Division of External Studies

– established in 1946 – comprised mainly bilingual white Afrikaans speaking staff members, for a brief period it was an important higher education access point for black South Africans. The college vs. external student distinction coincided with early race- and class-based inequality. External students were generally poorer and about one third of these were black, including students at the South African Native College (later Fort Hare University) (Boucher 1973). During the first half of the twentieth century, Fort Hare became renowned as the only southern African institution available to African students. Consequently, it was the most significant source of African intellectuals and nationalist leaders – the latter including Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Robert Mugabe and Nelson Mandela.

By 1951 four English medium and four Afrikaans medium institutions had achieved full university status. The compulsory study of English and Afrikaans to matric level in the white public school system underpinned the emergence of dual-language tertiary education. After 1951 only two universities sustained institutional bilingualism for a prolonged period of time: Unisa's reorientation to distance education involved parallel medium instruction, while the University of Port Elizabeth (UPE, established in 1964) opted for dual medium instruction. UPE provides an interesting case study of the economic trade-off between apartheid language planning and racial segregation. The discipline-based model of dual medium instruction that prevailed until the early 1990s was at the outset not the preferred choice of local white Afrikaans speakers. The government's plans to extend apartheid to higher education rendered both the monolingual Afrikaans and the parallel medium options too costly (Hill 2009).

By the mid-twentieth century a white bi-national university system, providing functionally equivalent tertiary training in both English and Afrikaans, had replaced the Anglophone colonial system. In insider terms, Afrikaner nationalism – and, implicitly, WESSA nationalism – were presented as successful "European" linguistic nationalisms, but the social and cultural costs of excluding most of the population produced a system with all the hallmarks of post-dated official nationalism. The extension of apartheid to higher education therefore coincided with a shift in apartheid mode: from an initially rather crude form of white supremacy or "baasskap" to Verwoerd's "grand apartheid" (Geldenhuys 1981: 7) The latter sought

to operationalise mid-century discourses on "ethnicity" and "national self-determination," which were subsequently channelled through the universities.

Apartheid and the post-1959 establishment of 'ethnic' universities

The formalisation of official ethno-linguistic categories during the post-1948 apartheid period built on a deep antecedent cultural logic: missionary codification of African languages. Anglophone missionaries played a significant role in establishing English as the dominant educational medium in the Cape Colony. Particularly significant was the Christianisation of slaves: English education not only undermined Dutch, through the medium of the Roman alphabet it also undermined an early Muslim Afrikaans tradition using Arabic script (Davids 2012). Beyond the Cape, other European missionary societies were very influential. Unlike British and American missionaries, continental missionaries were committed to teaching and proselytising through the mother tongue (Hartshorne 1987). When the first set of official "African languages" were enumerated in 1945, this marked the consolidation of both missionary linguistic taxonomies and the European nationalist epistemology that had divided the mission field along linguistic lines.

Not only did the missionaries create new languages, they unwittingly laid the ground for an entirely different linguistic class system. As Harries (1988) observes, in Europe linguistic classification enabled industrial bourgeoisies to impose "national" languages on provincial linguistic minorities. Located far from the emerging industrial cities, the mission-based codification of African languages followed a different trajectory:

> "The emergence of African written languages like Gwamba (Thonga or Tsonga) was not, as in Europe, a product of the class needs of an emerging bourgeoisie […] whereas in Europe it was the vanquished who learnt the language of the victor, in Africa it was the victor, in the shape of the various branches of the colonial state, who learnt the language of the defeated" (Harries 1988: 41).

The disjunction between European ideas and missionary practice congealed into what Beck (1996) calls a "reified language-ethnicity-territory nexus," which had a profound effect on the manner in which "nations" and "ethnic groups" were imagined – by both white colonials and the influential class of Black intellectuals that emerged after 1910.

Within the various anti-apartheid movements, debates on nationalism, race and ethnicity have traditionally been framed in terms of "the national question" (Webster and Pampallis 2017). The largest of these – the congress tradition led by the African National Congress – constituted a largely extra-university intellectual tradition. The various congresses[5] were divided along "national" – i.e., racial – lines, and prior to the establishment of the ANC Youth League in 1949 were united by a broadly multi-racial ethos. The ANC remained formally "African" until 1985, when membership was opened to all races. Callinicos (2017: 72) notes the negative connotation that "ethnicity" acquired within this tradition – the product of debates on the leadership role of white communists and Mangosuthu Buthelezi's mobilisation within the Bantustan system.

Within universities, scholarship on ethnicity played a significant role in de-linking race and asserting "language" as the primary marker of ethnicity. Central to this process were the two sub-fields of anthropology – social anthropology and Volkekunde – that emerged at English and Afrikaans universities respectively (Sharp 1980). Volkekundiges were central to the post-1945 conceptualisation of apartheid institutions. Skalnik (1988) notes how a particular groupist concept of ethnicity – etnos – influenced post-World War II anthropological research in both South Africa and the Soviet Union:

> "If the American, British or Western literature in general treats ethnicity as a mere ingredient – however important it may be – of social processes, in South Africa and in the Soviet Union (including its satellite countries) one notices that ethnicity is invested in groups – which have acquired a name, etnos – that are considered

---

5   The Congress Alliance, launched at the Congress of the People in Kliptown (1955), included the African National Congress, the South African Indian Congress, the Coloured People's Congress and "the tiny [white] Congress of Democrats." The fifth affiliate was non-racial and class-based: the South African Congress of Trade Unions (Callinicos 2017: 66).

objective phenomena, acting in a real world" (Skalnik 1988: 159 – my translation).

While Volkekunde was the most influential "cultural script" emerging from the universities during the second half of the twentieth century, Anglophone social anthropologists "trained in 'liberal' structural functionalism" (Sharp 1980) – along with empiricist academics in other social disciplines – established ethnicity as a growing quasi-scientific field of study. As Sharp (1980: 14) notes, by taking group boundaries as given and failing to explore cultural phenomena in terms of wider processes of political economy, empiricist social scientists tacitly took as units of analysis the categories enshrined in apartheid legislation. This intellectual justification underpinned the extension of apartheid to higher education after 1959.

The so-called Extension of University Education Act (No. 45 of 1959) provided the blueprint for the "grand apartheid" reconfiguration of higher education. The Act defined most of the established universities as "white" and prepared the ground for the creation of "non-white" institutions. These were further subdivided to serve designated "ethnic groups," where ethnicity was defined in terms of both race and language. In the immediate aftermath of 1959, Fort Hare was redefined as a "Xhosa institution" and four other such institutions were established: the University of Zululand; the University of the North; the University of Durban-Westville (UDW); and the University of the Western Cape (UWC). UDW was established as an "Indian" university, while UWC began as an Afrikaans medium university intended to serve the "coloured" population of the Western Cape.

Between 1959 and 1994, twelve new universities were established on the basis of apartheid "ethnic" criteria (see Table 1 below). Similar categories defined the technikons that were established in the 1980s. Among the universities designated "white," only two (the Universities of Cape Town and the Witwatersrand) defied their apartheid classification and continued to enrol black students – albeit in small numbers. While they were commonly referred to as the "open universities," black students were typically enrolled by means of a permit system for degrees not available at black universities.

The cultural project associated with grand apartheid was articulated in terms of a commitment to "national" self-determination and linguistic autonomy, for both of which "mother tongue" instruction was considered essential (Hartshorne 1987; de Klerk 2002). But the cultural ethic was little more than a thinly veiled attempt to mask white interests. Most of the "black" universities were established in impoverished rural regions, which were subsequently granted self-governing status. With the initial exception of UWC, all of these institutions taught in English. When a number of these territories were granted nominal independence, university jurisdiction was transferred to the new "homeland." Thus, for example, Fort Hare became the responsibility of the Ciskei Government after independence in 1981. White South African staff members who taught at Fort Hare were given "foreign" status in the Ciskei, which benefited them in terms of pensions and housing allocations.

Table 1: Major public tertiary institutions (circa 1994)

	Universities	Apartheid racial designation	Medium of instruction	University status
1	University of South Africa	White	Bilingual	1918
2	University of Cape Town	White	English	1918
3	University of Stellenbosch	White	Afrikaans	1918
4	University of the Witwatersrand	White	English	1922
5	University of Pretoria	White	Afrikaans	1930
6	University of Natal	White	English	1949
7	University of the Orange Free State	White	Afrikaans	1950
8	Rhodes University	White	English	1951
9	Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education	White	Afrikaans	1951
10	University of Port Elizabeth	White	Bilingual	1964
11	Rand Afrikaans University	White	Afrikaans	1966
12	University of Fort Hare	Black	English	1970
13	University of the North	Black	English	1970

14	University of the Western Cape	Coloured	English	1970
15	University of Zululand	Black	English	1970
16	University of Durban Westville	Indian	English	1972
17	Medical University of Southern Africa	Black	English	1976
18	University of the North-West[6]	Black	English	1977
19	University of Transkei	Black	English	1977
20	Vista University (8 campuses)	Black	English	1981
21	University of Venda	Black	English	1982
	Technikons	Apartheid racial designation	Medium of instruction[7]	Technikon status
22	Cape Technikon	White	Bilingual	1979
23	Technikon Natal	White	English	1979
24	ML Sultan Technikon	Indian	English	1979
25	Technikon Pretoria	White	Bilingual	1979
26	Technikon Mangosuthu	Black	English	1979
27	Vaal Triangle Technikon	White	Bilingual	1979
28	Technikon South Africa	White	Bilingual	1979
29	Port Elizabeth Technikon	White	Bilingual	1979
30	Technikon Witwatersrand	Black	English	1979
31	Technikon North West[8]	Black	English	1979
32	Technikon Orange Free State	White	Bilingual	1981
33	Technikon Northern Transvaal[9]	Black	English	1981
34	Peninsula Technikon	Coloured	Bilingual	1982
35	Border Technikon	Black	English	1987
36	Eastern Cape Technikon[10]	Black	English	1991

---

6   Previously the University of Bophuthatswana.
7   Du Plessis (2006: 99) notes that by 1994 there were no Afrikaans medium technikons. He claims that seven technikons were bilingual at this stage. My reference to "bilingual" technikons is however tentative, as policies and practices would have varied considerably.
8   Previously Setlogelo Technikon.
9   Previously Technikon Mabopane East.
10 Previously Transkei Technikon.

In the years after 1959, an elaborate apartheid higher education system was established. Table 1 gives a sense of this system: all major public sector tertiary institutions established before 1994 are listed, and the table includes columns for the post-1959 racial designations, the main medium of instruction, and the year in which each institution obtained full university or technikon status. Keys aspects of social stratification that underpinned the apartheid higher system are summarised as follows.

Functional differentiation: the apartheid period (post-1948) coincided with what Wallerstein et al. (1996: 33) describe as the "extra-ordinary quantitative and geographic expansion of the university system everywhere in the world." South Africa formed part of this expansion, both in terms of new universities and new fields of study. Relative to the colonial period, the apartheid system expanded the university-going demographic, but this came at massive material and qualitative costs associated with the internal duplication of institutions – a requirement in terms of the anti-African urbanisation logic that gave rise to "the apartheid city." As in other countries, a functional distinction between "academic" institutions ("universities" – concerned with "basic research") and technical or "applied" institutions emerged. From 1979 leading technical colleges became known as "technikons." This basic-vs-applied distinction was an aspect of class inequality.

Racial geography: After 1959 university construction was governed by the geographic logic of grand apartheid. "African" universities were initially built in self-governing or nominally sovereign "homelands," which were located on the rural fringes of the industrial economy. "White" universities were typically urban and located in white "group areas." During the late 1970s it became clear that apartheid "influx control" – the attempt to stem African in-migration to cities – was failing. The National Party relented and in 1981 established the Vista University federation of urban African campuses.

Language: The grand apartheid language agenda was initially formulated in terms of the "mother tongue" needs of all officially designated "ethnic groups." The sheer cost of developing English and Afrikaans, as parallel mediums within a racially segregated system, soon gave the lie to this founding narrative. All of the "black" and nominally "ethnic" universities taught in English. The contradictions

within this system – set against the backdrop of the rise of English as a global scholarly medium – had particular implications for the status of Afrikaans as a university medium of instruction. In a sense, the decline of Afrikaans began soon after 1959, as white academics trained at Afrikaans universities increasingly took up positions at "Bantustan" universities – where they were compelled to teach in English.[11]

Post-apartheid transformation and internationalisation

The first Constitution of the democratic era – adopted in 1996 – recognises eleven official languages[12] and, noting the "historically diminished use and status of the indigenous languages," enjoins the state to "take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of these languages." While the multilingual language provision has generally been lauded as progressive and democratic, one linguist has noted the essential continuity with the languages established during the apartheid period. Makoni (2003: 135) argues that "the framers of the South African Constitution have, unwittingly, perpetuated the misclassification of old and given it renewed credibility." The multilingual language clause emerged during the negotiated political transition that culminated in the first democratic election of 1994. The National Party had, during this process, insisted on retaining the official status of Afrikaans, along with a more general assertion of the need to protect group rights. The new institution of official languages has, however, come in the form of a constitutional state (*regsstaat*), in which individual rights prevail and in which group rights are considered a matter for freely associating individuals (Moodie 2017: 125). This poses a particular problem for the defence of "languages" framed in groupist terms.

Many language activists have argued that the "positive measures to elevate the status" of languages, referred to in the Constitution, should include the development of the official languages as "scientific mediums" – often minimally understood to require their use as undergraduate mediums of instruction at South African tertiary institutions. Thus, on the one hand, there has been a raft of policy

---

11 I am indebted to the anonymous reviewer who emphasised this point.
12 The official languages listed in Section 6(1) are Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu.

statements[13] on language development, both at the national level and at many universities. On the other, the overall trend has been the decline of Afrikaans and near universal adoption of English as the tertiary level medium of research and teaching. This trend can be explained in terms of a state-driven initiative aimed at the transformation of the higher education sector, which has – both wittingly and unwittingly – dovetailed with the re-orientation of institutions of higher learning towards the wider international domain of science, technology and higher education. Among the numerous state-led initiatives, by far the most significant was the 2001–2005 wholesale restructuring of the system by means of institutional mergers. Table 2 presents the intuitions that emerged from this process.

Table 2: Major[14] public tertiary institutions (circa 2019, post-2001-2005 mergers)

	New institutions	Official category	Old / merged institutions	Medium of instruction	Research status
1	University of Cape Town	University	2	English	1
2	University of the Witwatersrand	University	4	English	2
3	University of Stellenbosch	University	3	Bilingual[15]	3
4	University of KwaZulu-Natal	University	6,16	English	4
5	University of Pretoria	University	5,20	English	=6

13   These include the Language Policy and Plan for South Africa (Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology 2000), the Language Policy Framework for South African Higher Education (Council on Higher Education 2001) and the Language Policy for Higher Education (Department of Education 2002).

14   My analysis focuses on the major public institutions of higher learning, excluding the numerous public and private Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges.

15   The 2016 policy ensures that "all information is conveyed at least in English," which means that Afrikaans is still a parallel medium option in some undergraduate modules. Afrikaans interest groups have litigated and a Constitutional Court case is pending.

6	Rhodes University	University	8	English	
7	University of Johannesburg	Comprehensive	11,20,30	English	=6
8	University of the Western Cape	University	14	English	=6
9	Tshwane University of Technology	Technology	25,31,33	English	=17
10	University of South Africa	Comprehensive	1,20,26	English	=30
11	University of the Free State	University	7,20	English	
12	North-West University	University	9,18	Bilingual[16]	
13	Nelson Mandela University[17]	Comprehensive	10,20,29	English	
14	University of Fort Hare	University	12	English	
15	University of Limpopo	University	13	English	
16	University of Zululand	Comprehensive	15	English	
17	Sefako Makgatho University	University	17	English	
18	Walter Sisulu University	Comprehensive	19,35,36	English	
19	University of Venda	Comprehensive	21	English	
20	Cape Peninsula University of Technology	Technology	22,34	English	
21	Durban University of Technology	Technology	23,24	English	
22	Mangosuthu University of Technology	Technology	26	English	

23	Vaal University of Technology	Technology	20,27	English	
24	Central University of Technology	Technology	20,32	English	
25	University of Mpumalanga	Comprehensive		English	
26	Sol Plaatje University	Technology		English	

This table is designed to be read in conjunction with table 1: they provide a general sense of the attempt to deal with the racially stratified and highly fragmented apartheid higher education system. The numbers in the column titled "Old/merged institutions" refer to the numbered institutions in Table 1. Overall, the 36 major public universities and technikons were reduced, initially, to 23 institutions. Table 2 also lists three institutions that were created subsequent to the mergers. One is the product of a demerger, as the old Medical University of South Africa (Medunsa) was re-established as Sefako Makgatho University. Two new institutions were created to serve the two provinces (out of nine provinces created after 1994) that had no public tertiary institutions: these are the University of Mpumalanga (Mpumalanga 2013) and Sol Plaatje University (Northern Cape 2014).

The mergers recast the old functional division between universities and technikons into three new categories:

- Universities: the unmarked use of "university" signifies a category containing institutions that are relatively high status and research orientated. Most of these institutions (8 of 12) were not involved in mergers and have thus retained longstanding corporate identities.

- Comprehensive universities: this category consists of institutions that emerged as the product of a merger between a former university and a technikon. This new category was inspired by

---

16 The 2018 language policy commits the University to "functional multilingualism" in English, Setswana, Sesotho and Afrikaans, but in practice English and Afrikaans have been used in undergraduate teaching.

17 Between 2005 and 2017, this institution was known as Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU).

intercalary institutions in the major industrial countries: the land-grant universities in the USA, the British new universities (old polytechnics) and the German *Gesamthochschulen*. These mergers were motivated in terms of the need to provide "a diverse range of academic programmes (vocational, career-focused, professional and general formative) of both university and technikon type" (Department of Education 2004).

- Universities of technology: this category includes the former technikons, which now offer degrees but remain technology orientated. Like the former polytechnics in the UK, South African technikons were originally very closely aligned to the needs of industry. During the 1990s, as post-fordist production reduced the need for narrowly skilled technicians, South African technikons began to redefine their curricula and – after 1993 – offer degree programmes (Winberg 2005).

The institutional mergers constituted an ambitious state-driven attempt to restructure the higher education system, the success of which has been the subject of considerable debate. One key factor that has been invoked to explain the mergers was the slow pace of new enrolments (or "massification") during the 1990s. Jansen (2003: 305) notes the particular impact that this had on historically black universities, as "middle class and above-average black students were drawn to the former white institutions." The mergers have therefore weakened the historical distinction between white English and Afrikaans universities, but have facilitated the emergence of a new racialised class distinction between "historically white" and "historically black" institutions. This trend has been aggravated by the internationalisation of the top research-orientated universities.

The institutions listed in Table 2 are ranked in approximate order of research status: the column titled "Research status" is based on three research criteria. First, the colour coding reflects categories used in a 2010 study conducted by the Centre for Higher Education Transformation (CHET). This study used a composite of input and output data[18] to produce three clusters of institutions. The "red"

---

[18] The input variables included: percentage of headcount enrolment in science, engineering and technology; masters and doctoral enrolments; student to staff ratios; permanent staff with doctoral degrees; private and government income; and student fee income. The output variables included: student success rates;

cluster consists of five research-intensive universities, which have high proportions of academic staff with PhDs, high research outputs, high income and low staff-student ratios. They are all historically white institutions, but at the time of the study produced 45% of black PhDs. The "green" cluster comprised both historically white and black institutions, including former research-intensive institutions whose performance had declined following mergers with historically disadvantaged institutions. The "blue" cluster comprised two rural historically black universities and six universities of technology. Institutions in this category had relatively lower postgraduate enrolments, graduation rates, highly qualified staff and research outputs, as well as high staff-student ratios. Second, the numbers in the final column indicate positions on the 2019 Times Higher Education list of ranked African universities (Times Higher Education 2018). Finally, the top six universities listed in Table 2 are members of the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA), which was established in 2015.

Another key indicator of the emerging post-1994 class structure is the extent to which English has become the established language of both research and teaching. Table 2 also provides an estimate of undergraduate medium of instruction – circa 2019 – soon after the game-changing student protests of 2015/2016. Facilitated by social media (Twitter and Facebook), the protests began in early 2015 with the #Rhodesmustfall student movement at the University of Cape Town. Here a call for the removal of a statue of Cecil John Rhodes inspired similar movements advocating cultural transformation on other campuses and sparked the nation-wide #feesmustfall protests later in the same year. At Stellenbosch University black students mobilised under the banner of Open Stellenbosch and released a video called "Luister" (the Afrikaans word for "listen") (Contraband Cape Town 2015) that recounted experiences of exclusion on the predominantly white campus. They also called for the introduction of English as the undergraduate medium of instruction. Open Stellenbosch placed language on the emerging "Fallist" agenda at other historically Afrikaans universities and within a year the mainly parallel medium language policies at these institutions became the subject of protests. All of the affected institutions have subsequently

---

graduation rates; and weighted research output units per permanent member of staff (MacGregor 2010).

revised their language policies – shifting to English as the exclusive or predominant medium of instruction at undergraduate level. Afrikaans interest groups took the matter to the courts, but on 29 December 2017 the Constitutional Court ruled in favour of the University of the Free State's decision to shift to English.[19]

The intersectional debates and conflicts associated with the 2015-2016 student protests placed the spotlight clearly on institution culture – at individual institutions and within the university system as a whole. While both historically white English and Afrikaans universities are being scrutinised, the status of English as a medium of teaching and research is widely accepted. Afrikaans, on the other hand, has declined significantly as a university medium – but not as a more general economic and cultural medium (Steyn 2016). Post-1994 attempts to sustain the "national" status of Afrikaans as a "non-racial" medium of undergraduate instruction focused on various institutional bilingual models. After 2015, these have more or less collapsed and the Constitutional Court judgement has probably sealed the matter. This judgment, and the events that preceded it, reflect more than the decline of Afrikaans in higher education. They also reflect the decline of a post-1994 idea: university-level language planning based on the telementational assumption that the eleven official languages are ready-made channels for academic discourse.

Conclusion

In this article I have explored the long-run development of the South African university system, using "ethno-nationalism" as an umbrella term to cover a range of identity claims associated with "ethnicity" and "nationalism." I have used this term critically, i.e., not as a collective noun for "things" called "ethnic groups" and "nations" but rather as short-hand for the processes that convert these labels into more or less reified social objects. More specifically I have focused on the manner in

---

19 The ruling states that parallel medium instruction has had the undesirable consequence of fostering not only "racially segregated lecture rooms but also racial tensions." The judgement (AfriForum and Another v University of the Free State 2017) is available online: https://collections.concourt.org.za/handle/20.500.12144/34583. The Constitutional Court has also recently made English its language of record.

which ideas about "languages" have shaped ethno-nationalist politics in and through South African universities.

"Languages" – or the associated notions "dialect" and "patois" – have historically been treated as givens – as core differentiating features of both ethnic groups and nations. "Nations," "ethnic groups" and "languages" should, however, be treated as objects of discourse – in the first instance. "A language" originates as a "class on paper" – typically as a name-come-ethnonym penned by a missionary or a linguist. At issue is the extent to which a category has the potential to be mobilised to function as a "probable class" (Bourdieu 1985), i.e., as an institutionalised category that channels "contact probabilities" through networks that may have varying degrees of groupness (Brubaker 2004: 26). While categories are embedded in systems of communication, the notion that discrete spoken languages present themselves as channels for communication is highly problematic. This is what Harris (2003) calls a "telementational" view of linguistic communication – the idea that languages are structured systems designed to "transmit" words from one mind to another. A telementational approach to ethno-language takes the probable class status of an ethnic group (or "nation") for granted, by presuming the communication of identity (e.g. Afrikaner or Zulu) "through" a language (e.g. Afrikaans or isiZulu). Missing in this view are (1) the political economies through which (unequal) class or categorical action is realised and (2) the changing role of communication technologies in shaping categorical action.

Telementational assumptions have deep roots in proto-linguistic ideas of nineteenth-century European nationalism. These ideas – brought to southern Africa by colonial administrators and European missionaries – shaped the thinking of both colonisers and colonised. My argument focused particular attention on the complex interplay between ideas about "language" and "race." Whereas the cultural "scripts" associated with "race" and "language" have deep roots in both Dutch and British colonial experiences, during the twentieth century these fed into more institutionalised discourses on "races" and "nations" (before 1945) and "races," "nations" and "ethnic groups" (after 1945). I noted the particular significance of universities in shaping post-1945 debates about ethnicity. During this period "ethnicity" was increasingly valorised as a research topic by both English liberal and

Afrikaner nationalist academics. Anthropologists – and particularly Volkekundiges at Afrikaans universities – were particularly influential in distilling a particular language-based theory of ethnicity (ethnos theory), which underpinned the post-1959 extension of apartheid to higher education.

Deep-seated or "doxic" cultural assumptions (Bourdieu 1991) about "language" and "race" – institutionalised over time as "census data" – have tended to underpin more malleable, contested and changing uses of "nation" and "ethnic group." Post-1959 university development "extended" higher education in a demographic sense – relative to the British colonial period, but it did so by means of a particular projection of "ethno-nationalism" onto the higher education landscape. Grand apartheid ideology took "ethnicity" as given, but "race" and "language" had to be marshalled into the construction of "ethnic" institutions of higher learning. While university discourses on ethnicity were influential in the post-1959 development of higher education, these built on a deeper colonial legacy: concealment of the material interests that lay behind a veil of naturalised "nations," "races" and "languages." Outside of the university, the main anti-apartheid Congress movement – the African National Congress – also tended to foreground race in its deliberations on "the national question," but here too "nation" functioned as an amalgam of "race," "class" and – more selectively – "language."

The post-apartheid political dispensation was codified by way of negotiations held between 1990 – following the unbanning of the ANC – and the 1996 adoption of the new Constitution. These deliberations established South Africa – formally – as a constitutional state, where individual rights are entrenched and "group rights" are exercised by freely associating individuals. This position was nevertheless offset by NP-ANC consensus on the need to protect "language and culture" and the parallel commitment to maintaining rural traditional leadership structures. This consensus constituted a repackaging of the census-mediated race-language synthesis – discussed above – in the early 1990 deliberations on "nation-building." In recent years, however, this diffuse consensus has been ruptured – as a state-framed "national" discourse foregrounds racial redress and trans-class black

consciousness, while groupist language activism is increasingly framed in counter-state terms.[20]

The new cultural synthesis of race and language that was the defining feature of Mandela's term of office – and crisply summarised in Archbishop Desmond Tutu's "rainbow nation" – is now breaking down and higher education is one of the leading contexts for this trend. One of the problematic issues in the post-1994 multicultural compact was the telementational assumption that the eleven official languages were simply "available" to channel access throughout the educational hierarchy. The growing status of English is therefore paradoxical, to the extent that it reflects both a new emerging class structure and a second-language bridge to national and transnational academic resources. Post-1994 university transformation has tended to focus on the more positional and quantifiable aspects of change, such as institutional mergers and demographic representativity. Since 2015 the focus has shifted to institutional culture. A comparison of the two tables presented above suggests the extent to which the rise of English as the dominant academic medium masks continuities with respect to inequality across the historically black and white institutional divide. While the residual white binational and bilingual character of the elite research universities is rapidly being dismantled, high levels of inequality within the wider educational system will ensure that universities remain a key site of ethno-national contestation.

References

Afriforum and Another v University of the Free State. 2017. The Constitutional Court of South Africa, CCT101/17. Available at: https://collections.concourt.org.za/handle/20.500.12144/34583. (Accessed 4 June 2019).

Ammon, Ulrich. 2001. "English as a Future Language of Teaching at German Universities? A Question of Difficult Consequences, Posed by the Decline of German as a Language of Science." In Ulrich Ammon (ed.) *The dominance of English as a language of science: Effects on other languages and language communities*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 343–361.

Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.

---

20 Here I have both market and privatisation-orientated Afrikaner interest groups (such as Afriforum) and para-state traditionalists (represented by the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa or Contralesa) in mind.

Beck, Rose Marie. 2016. *Africa, language research*. In Hilary Callan (ed.), *International encyclopaedia of anthropology*. London: Wiley Blackwell.

Bekker, Simon. 1993. *Ethnicity in Focus – The South African Case*. Durban: Indicator SA.

Boucher, Maurice. 1973. *Spes in arduis: A History of the University of South Africa*. Pretoria: University of South Africa.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1985. "The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups." *Theory and Society* 14:723–44.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1986. "The Forms of Capital." In John G. Richardson (ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. New York: Greenwood Press, pp. 241–258.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1991. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Brubaker, Rogers and Cooper, Frederick. 2000. "Beyond 'Identity'." *Theory and Society* 29(1): 1–47.

Brubaker, Rogers. 1996. "Civic and Ethnic Nations in France and Germany." In John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (eds.) *Ethnicity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 168–173.

Brubaker, Rogers. 2004. *Ethnicity without Groups*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Calhoun, Craig. 2007. *Nations Matter: Culture, History and the Cosmopolitan Dream*. New York: Routledge.

Callinicos, Luli. 2017. "Oliver Tambo and the National Question." In Edward Webster and Karin Pampallis (eds.) *The Unresolved National Question: Left Thought under Apartheid*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, pp. 60–76.

Carey, James. 1983. "Technology and Ideology: The Case of the Telegraph." *Prospects* 8: 303–325.

Christopher, Anthony. 2004. "Linguistic Segregation in Urban South Africa, 1996." *Geoforum* 35:145–56.

Connor, Walker. 1996. "Beyond Reason: The Nature of the Ethnonational Bond." In John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (eds.) *Ethnicity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 69-74.

Contraband Cape Town. 2015. *Luister*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sF3rTBQTQk4&t=28s (Accessed 4 June 2019).

Cooper, David. 2011. *The University in Development: Case Studies of use-oriented research*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.

Council on Higher Education. 2001 Language Policy Framework for South African Higher Education. Council on Higher Education (CHE). B.m.: Council on Higher Education.

Davids, Achmat. 2012. *The Afrikaans of the Cape Muslims*. Pretoria: Protea Boekhuis.

de Klerk, Gerda. 2002. "Mother-tongue education in South Africa: The Weight of History." *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 154: 29–46.

Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology. 2000. "Language Policy and Plan for South Africa (Final Draft)." Pretoria: Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology.

Department of Education. 2002 Language Policy for Higher Education. B. M.: Department of Education.

Department of Education. 2004. "Creating Comprehensive Universities in South Africa: A Concept Document." Pretoria: Department of Education.

du Plessis, Theo. 2006. "From Monolingual to Bilingual Higher Education: The Repositioning of Historically Afrikaans-Medium Universities in South Africa." *Language Policy* 5(1): 87–113.

du Toit, André. 2008. "'Afrikaander circa 1600': Reflections and Suggestions Regarding the Origins and Fate of Afrikaner Nationalism." *South African Historical Journal* 60(4): 562–578.

Eriksen, Thomas Hylland. 1996. "Ethnicity, Class, Race and Nation." In John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (eds.) *Ethnicity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 28–31.

Eriksen, Thomas Hylland. 2007. "Complexity in social and cultural integration: Some analytical dimensions." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30(6): 1055–1069.

Eriksen, Thomas Hylland. 2007. "Nationalism and the Internet." *Nations and Nationalism* 13(1): 1–17.

Fuller, Steve. 2003. "Can Universities Solve the Problem of Knowledge in Society without Succumbing to the Knowledge Society?" *Policy Futures in Education* 1(1): 107–124.

Geldenhuys, Deon. 1981. *South Africa's Black Homelands: Past Objectives, Present Realities and Future Developments*. Johannesburg: SAIIA.

Gellner, Ernest. 1983. *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Gellner, Ernest. 1997. *Nationalism.* London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson/New York: New York University Press.

Gellner, Ernest. 1998. *Language and Solitude: Wittgenstein, Malinowski and the Habsburg Dilemma*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Giliomee, Hermann. 2003. *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.

Gordin, Michael. 2015. *Scientific Babel – How Science was Done before and after Global English*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Harries, Patrick. 1988. "The Roots of Ethnicity: Discourse and the Politics of Language Construction in South-East Africa." *African Affairs* 87(346): 25–52.

Harris, Roy. 2003. "On Redefining Linguistics." In Hayley Davis and Talbot Taylor (eds.) *Rethinking Linguistics*. London: Routledge, pp. 2-68.

Harris, Roy. 2005. *The Semantics of Science*. London: Continuum.

Hartshorne, Kenneth. 1987. "Language Policy in African Education in South Africa, 1910–1985, with particular reference to the issue of medium of instruction." In Douglas Young (ed.) *Bridging the Gap between Theory and Practice in English Second Language Teaching*. Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman, pp. 59-82.

Hill, Lloyd. 2008. Language and Higher Education in South Africa. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Warwick.

Hill, Lloyd. 2009. "The Decline of Academic Bilingualism in South Africa – A Case Study." *Language Policy* 8(4): 327-349.

Hill, Lloyd. 2011. "Reflections on the 1862 Football Match in Port Elizabeth." *South African Journal for Research in Sport, Physical Education and Recreation* 33(1): 81-98.

Hobsbawm, Eric. 1990. *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hutchinson, John and Smith, Anthony D. (eds). *Ethnicity.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jansen, Jonathan. 2003. "The State of Higher Education in South Africa: From Massification to Mergers." In John Daniel, Adam Habib, Roger Southall (eds.). *State of the Nation: South Africa, 2003–2004*. Cape Town: HSRC Press, pp. 290-311.

Kohn, Hans. 1944. *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in its Origins and Background.* New York: Macmillan.

Kriel, Mariana. 2010. "Culture and Power: the rise of Afrikaner Nationalism Revisited." *Nations and Nationalism* 16(3): 402–422.

MacGregor, Karen. 2010. South Africa: New University Clusters Emerge. *University World News*, 24 May. Available at: https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20100523104119724. (Accessed on 4 June 2019)

Makoni, Sinfree. 2003. "From Misinvention to Disinvention of Language: Multilingualism and the South African Constitution." In Makoni, Sinfree; Smitherman, Geneva; Ball, Arnetha and Spears, Arthur (eds.) *Black Linguistics: Language, Society and Politics in Africa and the Americas*. New York: Routledge, pp. 132–151.

Maré, Gerhard. 2017. "The National Question confronts the Ethnic Question." In Edward Webster and Karin Pampallis (eds.) *The Unresolved National Question: Left Thought under Apartheid*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, pp. 163–180.

Moodie, Dunbar. 1975. *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid, and the Afrikaner Civil Religion*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Moodie, Dunbar. 2017. "Vicissitudes of the National Question: Afrikaner style." In Edward Webster and Karin Pampallis (eds.) *The Unresolved National*

Question: Left Thought under Apartheid. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, pp. 112–129.

O'Leary, Brendan. 1998. "Ernest Gellner's Diagnoses of Nationalism: A critical overview, or, what is living and what is dead in Ernest Gellner's philosophy of nationalism?" In John Hall (ed.) *The State of the Nation – Ernest Gellner and the Theory of Nationalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 40–88.

Orman, Jon. 2008. *Language Policy and Nation-Building in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. Berlin: Springer.

Orman, Jon. 2017. "The Linguistic Thought of Ernest Gellner." *Social Epistemology* 31(4): 387–399.

Paterson, Lindsay. 2009. "Universities and Nations in Britain in the Twentieth Century." In Frank Bechhofer and David McCrone (eds.) *National Identity, Nationalism and Constitutional Change*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, pp. 163–188.

Pennycook, Alastair. 2004. Performativity and Language Studies. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies: An International Journal* 1(1): 1–19.

Sharp, John. 1980. "Can We Study Ethnicity? A critique of fields of study in South African anthropology." *Social Dynamics* 6(1): 1–16.

Simpson, Renate. 1983. *How the PhD came to Britain: A Century of Struggle for Postgraduate Education*. Guildford: Society for Research into Higher Education.

Skalnik, Peter. 1988. "Union soviétique – Afrique du Sud: les 'théories' de l'etnos (The Soviet Etnos 'Theory' and its South African Parallel)." *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 110, 27(2): 157–176.

Srnicek, Nick. 2017. *Platform Capitalism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Steyn, Adriaan. 2016. "Afrikaans, Inc.: The Afrikaans Culture Industry After Apartheid." *Social Dynamics* 42(3): 481–503.

Times Higher Education. 2018. "Best Universities in Africa 2019." 26 October. Available at: https://www.timeshighereducation.com/student/best-universities/best-universities-africa (Accessed 4 June 2019)

Tonkin, Elizabeth. 1996. "History and Ethnicity." In John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (eds.) *Ethnicity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 18–24.

Wacquant, Loïc. 2013. "Symbolic power and group-making: On Pierre Bourdieu's reframing of class." *Journal of Classical Sociology* 13(2): 1–18.

Wallerstein, Immanuel et al. 1996. *Open the Social Sciences – Report of the Gulbenkian Commission on the Restructuring of the Social Sciences*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Webster, Edward and Pampallis, Karin. 2017. *The Unresolved National Question: Left Thought under Apartheid*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.

Winberg, Christine. 2005. "Continuities and Discontinuities in the Journey from Technikon to University of Technology." *South African Journal of Higher Education* 19(2): 189.