



Introduction: Student Activism, Structural Adjustment and the Democratic Transition in Africa

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Abstract

University students in the period following independence were a transitory social group, who held well-founded expectations of rewarding and high-status employment after graduation. In the 1970s many of these assurances began to erode as countries that had attempted to implement state-led development faced international recession and internal corruption and decay. State funding of higher education by the late 1970s was being targeted for restructuring by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Student activism was affected: while students clung onto a self-conscious elitism, the reality of student poverty and the financial crises of African universities transformed their activism. As well as seeing their status as a privileged group collapse, there was an unprecedented 'convergence of forces' between students and the popular classes. This introduction surveys the role of students, the nature of their protest and their relationship with civil society in the processes that brought about a wave of multi-party elections and democratic struggles in Africa. The article critically intervenes in some of the most important debates on the role of student activism on the continent and introduces the contributions in this special issue devoted to student activism.

Résumé

Les étudiants formaient, dans la période qui a suivi l'indépendance, un groupe social transitoire porteur d'attentes tout à fait fondées de rétribution et de statut social élevé après l'obtention du diplôme. Les années 1970 ont commencé à réduire nombre de ces assurances, alors que les pays qui avaient tenté de mettre en place un développement dirigé par l'Etat se trouvaient confrontés à la récession internationale, à la corruption intérieure et à la décomposition. Le financement

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par l'Etat de l'enseignement supérieur était, dès la fin des années 1970, la cible des restructurations imposées par la Banque mondiale et le Fond monétaire internationale (FMI). L'activisme étudiant devait en subir les effets : en même temps que les étudiants se raccrochaient à un élitisme auto-satisfait, la réalité de la pauvreté étudiante et les crises financières des universités africaines transformèrent leur activisme. En plus de l'effondrement de leur statut de groupe privilégié, il y avait une 'convergence de forces' sans précédent entre les étudiants et les classes populaires. Cette introduction examine le rôle des étudiants, la nature de leur protestation et leur relation avec la société civile dans le processus qui amena une vague d'élections multipartismes et de luttes pour la démocratie en Afrique. L'article intervient de façon critique dans certains des débats les plus importants sur le rôle de l'activisme étudiant sur le continent et introduit les contributions à cette édition spéciale consacrée à l'activisme étudiant.

Following independence in Africa, university students were part of a privileged and transitory social group, waiting to be allotted graduate employment in an expanding civil service and across the state sector. Some describe a social pact between students and the State, seen as an implicit guarantee that had ensured employment in the formal economy for university graduates (Foucher 2002). The period corresponded to a brief moment of State-led development across much of the continent, with university students overwhelmingly living comfortably on government grants and scholarships.

University students enjoyed generous grants, lived comfortably in subsidised accommodation and ate like kings. As one student remembered about the 'payout' (grant) in the 1980s at the University of Zimbabwe:

Materially we never had any issues, we had disagreements here and there about payouts but by and large there was enough food. Actually it was excessive, in the Halls of Residence. We used to throw away bread. We use to call it, 'Christmas every day'. When you go to Varsity it is Christmas every day. In the rural areas, Christmas Day would be when you had rice and chicken. But at Varsity you would have rice and chicken everyday (Arthur Mutambara, interview, 10 July 2003).

The university was a rarefied space of material privilege and political debate. In Zimbabwe during the 1980s these payouts allowed students to build houses for their parents in the rural areas. This picture of campus comfort was repeated across much of the continent.

But in a very brief period they became oppositional, regarded in the commentary of the day as 'rival politicians rather than students' (Hanna 1975:13). Student militants frequently fuelled the early protest movements that questioned the legitimacy of the new states. Many commentators regarded them as a demo-

cratic vanguard, powered by left-wing ideology (see for example, Cockburn and Blackburn 1969; Weaver and Weaver 1969; Crick and Robson 1970; Lipset and Schaflunder 1971).

By the mid-1970s many of these assurances were eroded as countries that had attempted to implement state-led development faced international recession and internal corruption and decay. Moreover, as Nyamnjoh (2007) notes, Africa was attempting to embrace a model of liberal democracy that was ill-suited to the realities of the continent. He uses the concept 'Barbie democracy' to explain how an unrealistic model of democracy is being upheld as the ideal to which every country should strive, regardless of its own internal specificities. In the same way that an obese person buys into the idea that slimness is a measure of success, Africa has tried to force its bulky shape into a streamlined version of liberal democracy, with certain of its 'excesses' having to be sloughed off. Higher Education was but one of the areas that was forced to go on a starvation diet. State funding of higher education by the late 1970s was being targeted for restructuring. Student activism was affected: while students clung onto a self-conscious elitism, the reality of student poverty and the financial crises of African universities transformed their activism (Bathily et al. 1995). These processes, however, were inherently contradictory. As well as seeing their status as a privileged group collapse, there was an unprecedented 'convergence of forces' (Kagoro, interview, 23 June 2003) between students and the popular classes (Seddon 2002). The ivory tower had been turned inside out by the austerity imposed by structural adjustment and national governments. This convergence was expressed in the waves of resistance from the mid-1970s and later the 'democratic transitions' that swept the continent from the late 1980s and 1990s.

This introduction surveys the role of students, the nature of their protest and their relationship with civil society in the processes that brought about a wave of multi-party elections and democratic struggles in sub-Saharan Africa. The discussion focuses specifically on student activism and protest, although it is acknowledged that this activism brings into play many other factors. The context in which students become political actors in contemporary Africa is tied to the transformation of higher education in Africa, often under the auspices of the IMF and World Bank-led reform. The introduction asks a number of related questions: Have university students become a marginalised social group? If their status as a pampered post-colonial elite has collapsed, has there been a convergence of the student and the urban population? And how has this impacted on their activism?

It is vital to stress that the topic of university students and the struggle for democracy in Africa is a large field, and one that warrants further research. We hope that this collection will add to our understanding of student activism on the

continent and contribute to an important existing body of research. This research is best represented by the superb volume on students and higher education in Africa in the *African Studies Review* (Nyamnjoh and Jua 2002). The first sections of the introduction explore the changing nature of higher education in the political economy of Africa, focusing on the changed circumstances that student activists have been forced to negotiate in the last twenty-five years. The final sections discuss the involvement of students in the 'convergence of forces' and the popular protests that were typical of the democratic transitions and some of the ways this activism has been characterised in the recent research.

Universities in crisis

There is considerable controversy over the number of university students in Africa. According to one study of a continental population of about 500 million, fewer than 500,000 are enrolled as students in higher education (Caffentzis 2000:9). This figure is, however, unreliable. Mama (2005:98) states that, 'Gross enrolment in African universities increased dramatically ... to over 1.75 million in 1995 and is still growing fast in most places.' Caffentzis states that in 1986 the enrolment rates for higher education were about 2 per cent of the pertinent age group; this had reached 3 per cent by 1995 (World Bank 2000:107). This means that Africa has among the lowest enrolment rates in the world, much less than Latin America's 12 per cent, and 7 per cent for the developing world as a whole. However, there are no reliable figures for Africa, and Mama's enrolment numbers are contested by Altbach and Teferra (2003). This is largely due to the fact that under the impact of World Bank and IMF reforms in the 1980s cash-strapped universities stopped producing their own statistics. But at the same time these organisations demanded figures on student enrolment in order to assess the progress of reforms. Often institutions were left to 'create' numbers that had previously been collated by the university administration (Lebeau, personal communication, 14 May 2005).

Universities have been analysed as a site of contestation where the democratisation process took place, incorporating a range of political forces and agency (Akam and Ducasse 2002). Much of the commentary, however, finds unanimity in the description of the university as a neglected institution, a crumbling edifice housing impoverished students and lecturers. The physical decay of higher education is a feature common in many African universities. In 2002 Femi Aborisade, Nigerian academic and trade unionist, identified a number of problems at institutions of higher education in Nigeria typical in many parts of the continent:

First, infrastructural facilities are inadequate, yet student numbers increase annually. Second, higher education is grossly understaffed. Third, libraries are inadequate and books are outdated. Moreover, many students are too poor to buy their own books. Fourth, remuneration is sometimes delayed and not always paid in full, leading some lecturers to acquire bits of money through other means, such as charging students for photocopied lecture notes. Fifth, the supply of basic services such as water, electricity and sanitation is erratic. Upon occasion, lecturers and students have had to relieve themselves in nearby bushes. Finally, many of the problems experienced by institutions of higher education can be attributed to under-funding (Interview, 24 September 2002).

In Malawi, Kerr and Mapanje (2002:90) note that the physical collapse of the University of Malawi, the non-payment of staff and declining facilities for students have helped to create an 'atmosphere of marginalisation' that has often led 'students to anti-social behaviour'. Nkongolo (2000:96-98) describes a similar 'set of frustrations' and the humiliation experienced by students at the University of Lubumbashi in the early 1990s:

Us, students and tomorrow's elite of Zaire, the youth of the *Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution* (JMPR) were compelled to go to the toilet in the bush, like animals. We went there every day, in the hot and rainy season. The night like the day ... even the 'largest library in central Africa' was not saved, and was used as a WC ... The outside world must know the extent that Mobutu had humiliated us.

While it is important not to generalise uncritically from these observations, there is a remarkable symmetry in the decay of African universities over the last twenty five years: countries thousands of miles apart experienced the same 'erosion' of higher education. Piet Konings (2002:181) writes about the crisis of the University of Yaounde in Cameroon in the 1990s:

[F]irst and foremost, there was growing dissatisfaction with the deepening crisis within the university and the lack of employment prospects for university graduates. Mockingly, students referred to their university as 'the bachelors' cemetery'.

Konings goes on to describe how student numbers have swelled from 10,000 in 1982 to more than 42,000 ten years later, even though the university infrastructure was only built to cope with a maximum of 7,000 students. Consequently,

lecture rooms, libraries, laboratories, and office space for lecturers were inadequate and lacked necessary equipment. The university hostel could offer accommodation to a limited number of students, often on the basis of patronage or ethnic criteria, and the vast majority of students were compelled to look for accommodation themselves (Konings 2002:181).

Even at Makerere University, regarded as a model for the rest of Africa, half of the students questioned in a survey failed to attend lectures because there were not enough seats (Musisi and Muwanga 2003:43). Alternative, private accommodation was invariably in overpriced 'mini-cities' surrounding the university.

The same pattern of decay affected Kenya's university system. Maurice Amutabi (2002) argues that the resulting impoverishment of student life has radically altered their position in Kenyan society. They are now, he maintains, 'bedfellows' of the population as a whole. They share the same economic crisis and live the same poverty. Students, though, still have a role as 'societal watchdogs' and only their vigilance will ensure that the gains of multi-partyism and democratisation are maintained.

The conditions of higher education in Africa seen from the perspective of the university's physical infrastructure and the pauperisation of staff and students declined steeply in the 1980s. The effects of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) that have greatly exacerbated the withdrawal of state funding for universities, teaching staff and students (Konings 2002; Alidou *et al.* 2000). These policies deprioritised higher education in Africa, compelling national governments to slash state support for university budgets and insisting on the introduction of tuition fees and 'levies' on students.

Reform of higher education in Africa

From the early 1980s to the early 1990s the World Bank produced a number of important studies stressing the importance of higher education reform. These studies advocated the dramatic reduction of higher education expenditure in Africa. The most important of these reports, *Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa*, which became known as the Berg Report, was produced in 1981. It focused on the general priorities for African development and prescribed policy reforms to deregulate national states. These reforms included the wholesale reconfiguration of university education in Africa. The report, which has become the subject of considerable and mostly hostile discussion (Sandbrook 1993; Diouf and Mamdani 1994), determined the approach of donor agencies to education in Africa. The problem was simple; too much money was being spent on education (World Bank 1981:81-82).

The report recommended fundamental reforms that centred on 'cost-analysis', which pitted the economic returns of primary education against those of

the tertiary sector. The report explained the rationale behind the calculation: 'Given Africa's extreme shortage of fiscal resources and the many claims on revenue, all educational strategies must have a key objective of greater efficiency in resource use' (World Bank 1981:82).

The report provided the blueprint for higher education reform in the 1980s. Even so the reforms did not go far enough for some. At the 1986 Conference of African Vice-Chancellors in Harare, the World Bank questioned the very existence of universities in Africa (Imam and Mama 1994:73). Another conference two years later described the bleak state of higher education, ravaged by structural adjustment. The conference – *Human Dimensions of Africa's Economic Recovery and Development* – noted that far from structural adjustment increasing the rate of primary school enrolment, the opposite was the case as all sectors of education had suffered. After five years of SAPs, social spending in sub-Saharan African countries had declined by 26 percent (between the years 1980 to 1986). Governments already facing financial crisis were under pressure to cut subsidies to secondary and tertiary level students (Caffentzis 2000).

Still the World Bank continued to argue that, unlike higher education, the primary sector had a higher return on investment, 28 per cent against 13 per cent for tertiary education. As Caffentzis (2000:5) explains, 'In other words university graduates received about two and half times more income over outlay than the government; and they received from the government thirty times more than what primary students received.' Reports pointed out that while the 'white collar sector' comprised 6 per cent of the population they received in state revenue more than 27 per cent of the education budget (Caffentzis 2000:5). The World Bank maintained that the thrust of their policies was to ensure a more egalitarian allocation of funding. By reallocating funds from 'urban elites' an educational egalitarianism could be achieved.¹

Makerere University is an example of higher education in Africa celebrated by the World Bank. According to research (Musisi and Nansozi 2003), the university managed to extricate itself from a crisis in the early 1990s, returning to its former pre-eminence as one of the foremost universities in East Africa. The Bank highlights how the university has managed to increase enrolment rates and the number of students paying fees: almost 70 per cent of the student population was contributing towards their fees by the end of the 1990s. Where previously the university was funded completely by the national government, today 30 per cent of revenue is raised 'internally' (World Bank 2000:54-5). The World Bank emphasises the case of Makerere to stress the importance of 'releasing' universities from state funding and control in Africa: 'The Makerere accomplishment has lessons for other universities in Africa that face similar resource constraints. It shows that expansion – and the maintenance of quality – can be achieved simultaneously in a

context of reduced state funding. It puts to rest the notion that the state must be the sole provider of higher education in Africa' (2000:55).

Given the importance placed in the experience at Makerere University, it is worth considering the reform of the institution. Makerere is not the success suggested by the WB, where private funding has supplanted public money. In a wide-ranging study, Mamdani (2007) explains that the state exchequer paid the university 3 million shillings per government-funded student (US\$1,785), while for the same year, 2003-4, private sponsors only provided 1.2 million shillings per student (US\$714), less than half. Private sponsorship is not the cash-cow celebrated by market reform (Mamdani 2007:viii). Mamdani also shows that the effect of the penetration of the market has forced down the quality of educational standards, so 'market forces unleashed sharp competition between Faculties, Institutes and Departments ... the forces of self-interest amplified by commercialisation eroded the institutional integrity of the university from within' (2007:x).

Nevertheless a series of academic studies emphasises the importance of WB reform of higher education in Africa, claiming that the only future is in emulating the commercialisation of several key African universities.² As the preface to the series describes:

[Africa's] universities – once the shining lights of intellectual excitement and promise – suffered from enormous decline in the government resources for education. In the last half of the last decade however this began to change in a number of countries ... Our interest was captured by the renewal and resurgence that we saw in several African nations and at their universities brought about by stabilisation, democratisation, decentralisation and economic liberalisation (Musisi and Muwanga 2003).

What is remarkable about this quotation is the absence of concern for the role of external factors in the sub-continent's decline. Indeed, the case studies that make up the series are highly contradictory.³

The reality of life for students and lecturers in much of the continent could not contrast more with the image of higher education as 'spoilt' and 'over bloated' that the WB presents. Higher education in Africa does not thrive, but in many places faces a battle for survival. If the objective is to 'streamline' higher education then the question that demands answering is: where from? Africa has the lowest enrolment rates in higher education of any region in the world; further restrictions would limit access to higher education to an almost imperceptible minority of privileged and 'elite' students.⁴

This has led Caffentzis (2002:9) to comment that 'any policy that lowers enrolment rates – hovering now near zero – can be seen as a policy of academic

exterminism.' There is also a further dimension to the debate. The WB is correct to maintain that there is 'excessive demand' for higher education in Africa. The university system is seen by youth as a crucial entry point to a world of greater opportunity and a way to escape poverty. The effect of the crisis that has gripped many African economies is to leave 'youth' without the prospect of work. Politicised youth, or the 'youth factor' (Richards 1996:2002), has fuelled conflict in Africa; where youth have been recruited to movements of social breakdown in Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, Senegal and Zimbabwe. 'Youth' in this context has not, as Richards argued, supplanted 'ethnicity', but has often turned secessionist and political conflicts in Africa into 'ethnic-youth' movements. The deprioritisation of higher education in the Third World has been an important contributing factor to these conflicts (Krueger and Maleckova 2002).

Some commentators argue that there has been a 'major shift' in Bank thinking on the role of higher education. Moja (2004:23) cites a report from 2002 by Richard Hopper for the WB, which argues that higher education, contrary to almost two decades of Bank thinking, does have an important role to play in development. This apparent shift in Bank thinking can, as Pithouse (2006:xvi-xvii) explains, 'best be understood as part of a broader shift by the Bank towards a rhetorical commitment to participation and empowerment', to seek more effective methods of structural adjustment implementation. There are few signs that the Bank or IMF are willing to help reverse the devastation wrought by more than twenty five years of reforms that they helped orchestrated across the continent.

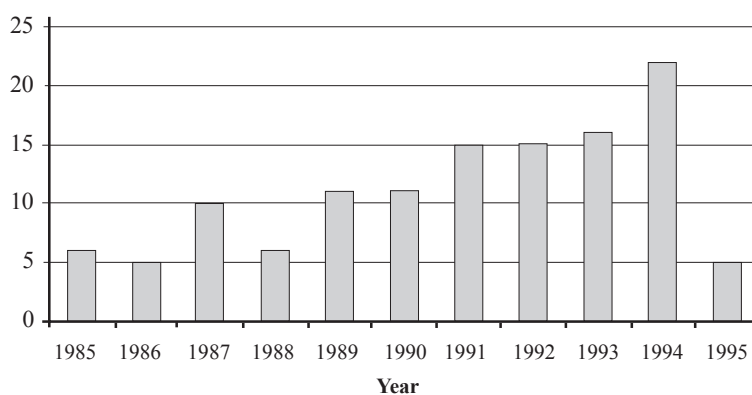
Students and the democratic transition

What has been the impact of this unprecedented period of adjustment in higher education on the incidents and nature of student activism in Africa? In his celebrated popular history of student resistance, Boren (2001:240) notes that the last decade of the millennium saw students in Africa play a leading role in the democratic transition: 'In the wake of Eastern European revolutions against Communism, and the rampant local economic difficulties, many African students increased pro-democracy efforts and campaigned for the establishment of multiple-party political systems.' Commentators celebrated the student revolts across Africa: 'political liberalisation, starting at the end of the 1980s unleashed an unprecedented wave of student rebellion on university campuses in West and Central Africa' (Konings 2002:180). News reports of the day were replete with analysis of the democratic struggles in Africa, often questioning the role of students.⁵ Still, there is a recognised lack of serious research on the role of students in democratic transition (Buijtenhuijs and Thiriot 1995; Mills 2004:671).

Students were part of the broad and popular alliances that developed between opposition groups during, and immediately after, the processes of democratic change (see Figure 1). Some commentators state that the origins of these movements are found in the first wave of ‘bread riots’ in Egypt in 1977 and early anti-SAP revolts (Walton and Seddon 1994; Marfleet 2000; Alexander and Renton 2002). These are the arguments explicitly made by Caffentzis, Federici and Alidou in this collection.

The shared nature of the economic crisis gripping Africa brought these movements together (Saul 2001). This period also saw complex political transformation. The dismantling of the regimes in Eastern Europe and Russia undermined both the states in Africa politically connected and funded by the USSR, and the political confidence of militants and intellectuals whose ideological moorings had been tied to Stalinism. While these events might have broken the confidence of an older generation of activists, they gave new life to student politics that many argued had collapsed irredeemably into ‘corporatism’ and ‘factionalism’.

Figure 1: Number of incidents of student activism per year, 1985–95



Source: Adapted from Federici (2000:112).

In 1989, the movement started in the West African state of Benin when students demonstrated against the government in January, demanding overdue grants and a guarantee of public sector employment after graduation. The government, crippled by financial scandals, capital flight and falling tax revenue, thought it could respond as it had always done, by suppressing the protest. But the movement grew during the year to incorporate trade unions and the urban poor. Half

way through the year in the hope of placating the demonstrators President Mathieu Kérékou invited a human rights campaigner into his government. In a pattern followed by other countries he set up a commission that would eventually create a 'national reconciliation conference' that included the opposition movement, trade unions, students and religious associations (*Jeune Afrique* 1991).

Students at the University of Kinshasa in Zaire were the first to initiate the protests that almost unseated Mobutu, and led to a largely urban protest movement and transition that lasted into the middle of the 1990s (Martins 2002; Renton et al. 2006). They demonstrated on 5 May 1990 asserting that the reforms announced by the dictator ten days previously were 'irrevocable'. The demonstration ended violently, after security forces attacked it. The students immediately issued an appeal for other universities and colleges across the country to rise up in solidarity, '[D]o not cross your arms. Follow our example. The dictatorship is finished. We cannot go back. Take on the State. Demonstrate! March!' (Nkongolo 2000:182).

The call to arms was answered. Students at the University of Lubumbashi demonstrated daily in the city and at the university from 9 May. On 11 May the student uprising in Katanga (the southern most region of Zaire) was brought to a swift and violent end. A 'squadron of death' was sent to the university by the president. Several accounts suggest that dozens of students who had led the strikes and demonstrations were killed, and their bodies disappeared. Their parents were unable to complain. Without wider protests the students could be picked off, killed and isolated. For thousands the massacre in Lubumbashi exposed the reality of Mobutu's 'reforms'. There was strong condemnation of the massacre from humanitarian organisations, and the Belgian government announced the immediate suspension of official bilateral assistance to Zaire. After some procrastination and strenuous denial of the reports, Mobutu authorised an official parliamentary enquiry, as a result of which a provincial governor and other senior local officials were arrested and charged with having organised the killing of one student and the injury of 13 others. Despite a news blackout, it emerged that the massacre had sparked serious clashes between students and government forces in other towns, including Kisangani, Bukavu and Mbanza-Ngungu. The massacre was in many ways pivotal to the early stages of the transition in Zaire, and it is still the subject of controversy and debate (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002:155-156; Munikengi and Sangol 2004:99).

Students were crucial to spearheading resistance in Zimbabwe. In 1989 a student leaflet denounced the Investment Code that further facilitated foreign investment in Zimbabwe, viewing it 'as a further entrenchment of capitalism in Zimbabwe ... an acquiescence to the IMF and World Bank sponsored programmes

... and incompatible with the doctrine of socialism' (quoted in Tengenende 1996:389-92). Many students attended the May Day rallies in Harare, whilst the Students Union condemned the suppression of a strike by doctors: 'The use of force which was exercised on Doctors while they were airing their clear, legitimate grievances is really an authoritarian and neo-fascist tendency and hence it has to be condemned.' When the university was closed on 4 October 1989 following the arrest of Students Union leaders for organising a celebration of the previous year's Anti-Corruption Demonstration, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) General Secretary, Morgan Tsvangirai, denounced the closure in strong terms and was detained for over four weeks (Gwisai 2002b). At the 1991 May Day celebrations, the ZCTU organised the event under the theme 'Liberalisation or Liberation'. Workers paraded with banners denouncing SAP: 'Employers liberated, workers sacrificed'; 'Are we going to make 1991 the Year of the World Bank Storm?'; 'The Year of the People's Misery'. Meanwhile the Ministry of Labour distributed its own leaflets telling workers to 'Suffer Now and Benefit later' (quoted in Tengenende 1996:427). The criticism of the ZCTU mirrored that of the University of Zimbabwe Students Union (Gwisai 2002b).

In Mali it was not university students but young unemployed college graduates who initiated the first protests on the 15 October 1990 against the one-party state. The mobilisation was small, roughly 15 young men marched through the centre of the capital with banners that declared 'Down with the UDPM' [*Union Démocratique du Peuple Malien*]. The demonstrators were attacked and arrested by the police. As Brenner (2001:242) contends, 'their initiative immediately preceded, and may well have helped to precipitate, the emergence into public of the clandestine opposition movement which had been actively organising and plotting for some years against the regime of Moussa Traoré' (see also Buijtenhuijs and Thiroit 1995).

The collapse into sectarian factionalism affected the student body when the transition was frustrated or after it had been achieved. The examples of Mali and Cameroon are illustrative of these processes. Mali experienced a period of 'democratic transition' at the same time as other countries in the region. There had been major demonstrations against the regime of Moussa Traoré in January 1990, when thousands were involved in street protests demanding political reform and an end to Traoré's 22-year rule. The government was finally brought down in April 1991. The central role of students inside the *Association des Elèves et Etudiants du Mali* (AEEM) in the democratic transition is widely recognised (Brenner 2001; Smith 1997).⁶ A 'memorandum' was issued listing student demands in return for an immediate end to strikes. It included a 50 per cent rise in the scholarship, followed by a further 25 per cent in six months, the

expansion of the scholarship to include secondary school students and physical improvements to the university and schools. While there was a widely recognised appreciation of the justness of these demands there was a similar understanding by the government that they could not hope to meet them (Smith 1997). Within a short space of time the new government of Alpha Oumar Konaré confronted the wrath of his erstwhile political allies.⁷

By 1993 students in AEEM were calling for action against the government for failing to honour the promises made in the Memorandum. Class-boycotts, strikes and demonstrations punctuated the following years. In 1993 the leadership of AEEM was divided between those supporting the government and those arguing for more militant action. The government was keen to exploit these divisions: 'In response to this unrest, the government attempted to manipulate divisions within the AEEM leadership by funding a "palace coup" in which a faction of the student leaders ... tried to replace the elected leader' (Smith 1997:249).

The government carried out their manipulation of the student movement thoroughly, providing scholarships to foreign universities for several leading members of AEEM. By 1995 the student union was so divided that it had lost the support of the population and could only rely on the fractured and intermittent loyalty of its own members. AEEM even split at one point with a new organisation calling itself 'Friends of the Schools' who, amid accusations that it was funded by the government, argued for the opening of schools and the resumption of classes. The rupture with the ruling party was complete by the time of the next elections, and the damage to the AEEM seemingly irreparable. Student protests were broken up by tear gas and students who had previously declared their love of Alpha 'burned campaign posters of Konaré and banners of the ADEMA party' (Smith 1997:263).

The experience of 'democratic transition' in Cameroon contrasts with many of the examples already given. The process of political liberalisation was protracted and violent, yet it provided students with a space to express themselves (Konings 2002). This expression took both a party and ethnic line. The government exploited these differences, which resulted in the emergence of two groups at the University of Yaoundé. The student body was divided between 'strangers', students organised in the Student's Parliament aligned to the opposition, and the 'indigenous' Beti students, loyal to the ruling regime and organised in the Committee for Self-Defence and the Beti Militia. The nature of the 'democratic transition' led to the violence and disruption at the university that continued practically unabated between 1990 and 1996.

Student numbers at the University of Yaoundé exceeded 40,000 in 1992 although the conditions for students and staff were diabolical (Konings 2002:182). The processes of political liberalisation in the 1990s combined with deep

dissatisfaction at the deterioration of conditions under the impact of SAP. The introduction of multi-partyism did not cleanse the regime of undemocratic habits but led them to use the 'liberalisation' to divide the student body. As early as March 1991, *Jeune Afrique* had noted the contradiction in the progress of the 'democratic transition' in Cameroon; one article was titled *Le pluralisme en marche au Cameroun, mais l'Etat est en panne*.⁸

The first political crisis at the university occurred in 1990, when students marched in favour of the opposition SDF and multi-partyism. This led to the permanent presence of gendarmes – or ninjas as they were called by students – on the campus. Students used the political opening allowed in the country at the time to set up their first autonomous organisations that, as we have seen, quickly became polarised. By 1991, along with the opposition, students called for a sovereign national conference, a political formation that was a popular demand during the 'democratic transitions' in many parts of the continent at the time. The year ended with a prolonged student strike at the late payment of scholarships. As the chaos on the campus escalated over the next few years the university authorities resorted to further desperate measures. In 1993 the university Chancellor Peter Aghor Tabi ordered the Beti militias on the campus to step up their attacks on students (Zeilig and Seddon 2002).

By 1996 another group directly affiliated to Biya's party, PRESBY ('President Biya's Youth'), had replaced the self-defence groups. Like earlier formations, this group was a constellation 'composed mainly of university students and other sections of the educated youth either engaged in informal-sector activities or unemployed, including a number of university graduates and drop-outs' (Konings 2002:201). The process of political liberalisation in Cameroon demonstrates diverse patterns of political behaviours and activism in the period of 'democratic transition'. Current patterns of student activism in Cameroon, hollowed out, to some extent, of the earlier hope for political change, are illustrated in this special issue by Woudammike's article. Students do not appear here as heroes or as a permanent political avant-garde, but rather as contradictory social actors, prone to political manipulation and division. The defining elements in student protests in these examples are the wider configurations of political forces involved in the 'democratic transition'.

New student movements or the descent into corporatism?

There is the danger of exceptionalising the experience of higher education in Africa, that the university system is uniquely affected by catastrophe and crisis. This is an important consideration when examining the state of student activism in higher education in Africa (see Obono's article on France in this collection). The commentary tends to emphasise the same 'tragedy', with students and youth

seen as the quintessential 'lost generation' (O'Brien 1996). Can we speak, as Barkan (1975:128-130) did 30 years ago, of an 'African pattern' dividing the behaviour of African university students and European and American ones? Federici (2000:103) is unequivocal about the question: 'We can speak today of an international student movement, and that African students are paying by far the heaviest cost for the effort this movement is making to reverse the corporate agenda by which education is being reshaped worldwide.'⁹ The argument finds a parallel in Boren (2001) whose global survey of 'student resistance' makes a case for the same pan-student approach.

There is an important divide in the research on student activism that has ramifications for understanding student politics not just in the current period but historically. One strand of opinion was propagated by the editorial board of the American activist newsletter *Committee for Academic Freedom in Africa (CAFA)* that has recently been suspended, and summarised in a collection of essays by the same authors of the newsletter *A Thousand Flowers: Social struggles against structural adjustment in African universities*. They have provided a running critique of the policies of the WB and IMF in Africa from the point of view of popular protest and student resistance (CAFA 1991; CAFA 1996). CAFA has been an important organisation of scholars and activists chronicling student unrest on the continent while campaigning against WB policies. The story of CAFA is described in this collection by its founders (see Caffentzis, Federici and Alidou).

CAFA maintained that in the escalation of student protest since the introduction of SAPs in Africa from the early 1980s there has emerged a new 'pan-African student movement, continuous in its political aspirations with the student activism that developed in the context of the anti-colonial struggle, and yet more radical in its challenges to the established political power' (Federici 2000:88). The effects of SAPs have massively proletarianised the African student body, breaking them from their past as members of the elite (Federici 2000:93).

The partial withdrawal of the state from higher education in Africa has altered the nature of elite formation at the university. Much of the research confirms these arguments. Mamdani (1994) saw a similar development as part of a process transforming the African class system, where the limited expansion of the African 'middle classes' after independence has been reversed as state-directed initiatives receded from the 1970s onwards. The impact on higher education was clear:

the growth in a State-financed higher and secondary education sector, whose enrolment came less and less from affluent families, went along-

side shrinking opportunities for middle class advancement in a crisis-prone economy (Mamdani 1994:258).

There has been a process of ‘institutional liberalisation’ that caused the explosions in student activism in recent years. The new *proletarianised* student population that has resisted the policies of SAPs and their application to higher education have created a qualitatively different form of student activism. This allows us to view the ‘present phase of student activism not as a set of separate struggles but as one pan-African student movement’ (Federici 2000:96).¹⁰

Some writers and activists argue that there was a ‘convergence of forces’ between previously privileged – now proletarianised – students and the urban poor. The case is put most forcefully by the former student leader at the University of Zimbabwe, Brian Kagoro (2003), referring to a period of activism in the mid-1990s:

so you now had students supporting their parents on their student stipends which were not enough, because their parents had been laid off work. So in a sense as poverty increases you have a *reconvergence of these forces*. And the critique started ... around issues of social economic justice, [the] right to a living wage ... students started couching their demands around a right to livelihood (interview, 23 June 2003).

Seddon (2002) raises many similar themes, defining these ‘new’ popular forces as including the urban and rural working classes broadly defined as well as other categories, including the so-called ‘lumpenproletariat’, day-labourers and the unemployed, workers in the informal sector, small (and sometimes medium) peasants, small retailers, craftsmen and artisans, petty commodity producers (see also Seddon and Zeilig 2005). If we extend Kagoro’s argument we can say that the social expectations (and pauperisation) of students ‘converged’ with these ‘forces’ during the period of structural adjustment.

These arguments contrast with much of the commentary: for example Bathily *et al.* (1995:401) reverse the categorisation made by *CAFA* and *A Thousand Flowers*. It is necessary, they argue, to separate student activism from its perceived heyday in the 1960s and 1970s to the disintegration of the movement during the last twenty years. Today students are written off, ‘left with their daily corporatism and the inefficiency of their fights.’ Yesterday they were harbingers of a brighter future: ‘If prior to World War II students tacitly accepted being petty bourgeois with colonial linkages, up to the mid-1970s they claimed a left vanguard status’ (Bathily *et al.* 1995:401). They make their argument by charting the evolution of student activism:

But at the end of the day, they only managed some vigils with hardly any support. They appeared at most as the enlightened conscience of their people on the path to complete emancipation and modernisation. They managed to shift from their role as supporters of the Western system ... to that of rejecting it totally... By the late 1970s ... students saw themselves [as] ... political and economic failures (Bathily et al. 1995:401).

The argument asserts that with the collapse of the post-colonial 'social pact' student engagement has become 'corporatist', daily ones, concerned only with issues of 'bread and butter'. In the case of Senegal, 'By the late 1970s Senegalese students saw themselves more modestly as symbols of the independent stalemate, of the political and economic failure of a regime which was unable to provide them with clear survival prospects.' Students, following this argument, have lost their status, 'from providers of modernity they became aid applicants' (Bathily et al. 1995:405).

While this argument tends to avoid the heroic discourse with students 'counter-posing and confronting the abuses of state power' (Boyer 2002:210), it misses the 'novelty' in the wave of popular protest that has swept Africa in the last fifteen years. Far from understanding the role of students in the democratic transition as part of a generalised revolt, these arguments tend to dismiss the significance of student revolt. There is also an important generational element to this demarcation of student activism, between a perceived ideological heyday and a 'bread and butter' present. As Bianchini has explained (2004:372): 'From the view point of older generations who have "made" the student movement, the natural inclination is to valorise the student movement of their youth to the detriment of the one that followed.' Student activism is permeated with similar generational judgements where former activists considers that the contemporary movement has become 'corporatist', lacking the ideological and political clarity of their generation.

In contrast Federici (2000:101) sees 'students struggle to defend education as "an inalienable right" they are fighting not in defense of a privilege or a corporatist interest, but against it.' Students are, on the contrary, attempting to 'reverse the corporate agenda by which education is being reshaped worldwide' (Federici 2000:103). However, we would argue that there may be a tendency in *CAFA* and *A Thousand Flowers* to downplay the ambiguity of student protest. While they describe the significance and celebrate the resistance of the student population in Africa they miss the way student movements have become, in certain respects, depoliticised and subject to manipulation and co-option. They capture the importance of the new resistance among students but neglect the new directions that this activism can take (see Sikwebu's article in

this collection). Students today are 'situated in a complex field of societal power, class interest ... and moral positions' (Boyer 2002:211) that create, in conditions of social breakdown, unique and challenging forms of activism.

New activism?

Students were not isolated political actors behaving simply as a democratic vanguard; they were neither 'demons nor democrats' as some commentary has expressed the distinction (Smith 1997). Their role in the 'democratic transitions' was complex because it was inextricably tied to the liberalisation of political space and the manipulations of these processes by incumbent governments and political parties. The 'success' of student activism was linked to the wider social forces that they could help animate and identify with, this was tied to their ability to 'converge' their struggles with broader popular forces. Mamdani (1994) is correct to recognise that when students were effective they succeeded in 'forcing an opening up' even if they lacked an alternative strategy: 'Its possibilities depended far more on the character of forces that student action succeeded in mobilising than its own internal energies' (Mamdani 1994:259).

Popular mobilisations were a response to widespread disaffection with the policies of austerity and structural adjustment, yet these movements were responding in new ways. Class structures in Africa had been transformed, and resistance did not simply take old forms (Alavi and Shanin 1982; Cohen 1982). The processes of class alignment and resistance brought in new and heterogeneous forces (Harrison 2002; Seddon 2002; see also Seddon and Zeilig 2005). As we have seen Seddon (2002) defines the role of the 'popular classes' in Africa, describing a shifting constellation of political forces that include the unemployed, informal sector traders and trade unionists. This introduction argues that students, and unemployed graduates, have become an important part of the popular classes.

Higher education reforms, as we have seen, have transported student identity into the maelstrom of the structural crisis. Mamdani (1994:258-9), in an important study on class and the intelligentsia, has seen these processes at work: 'previously a more or less guaranteed route to position and privilege, higher education seemed to lead more and more students to the heart of the economic and social crisis.' Using Nyamnjoh's (2007) notion of 'Barbie-isation', institutions of higher education became a 'bazaar to which millions are drawn but few rewarded or given real choices.' Students are no longer the transitory social group waiting to be allotted government employment; on the contrary they have become pauperised, converging more and more with the wider urban poor: social groups that they had historically regarded as their 'responsibility' to liberate.

There is an international dimension to these developments that should not be ignored. Across the world, student movements have grappled with the changing nature of university education. Nowhere is this clearer than in France illustrated by the anti-CPE protests described by Obono. Here, there is a direct symmetry in the lives and experiences of students and the working class. This is explained by the Marxist writer Daniel Bensaïd (2006) in his description of the differences between the current period and the so-called high-point of student unrest in 1968:

The present movement is directly based on a social question – the destruction of workplace regulations and the generalised casualisation of employment, which is common both in education and to workers. The question of the link, and not just solidarity, between the two is therefore immediate.

Finally, the fundamental difference is with the general context and in particular with the way unemployment weighs on things. In 1968, the unemployed were counted in tens of thousands in a period of great expansion, so students had no worries about the future.

Students were a privileged part of this stable economic milieu. However in France today, Bensaïd continues, ‘six million people are either without work or causally employed.’ This has impacted enormously on the identity of students today, who require no ideological leap to connect their activism to the labour movement. The link is immediate. Students do not simply dabble in the social world outside the university campus – committed as they might have been in 1968 to building the bonds of solidarity with the labour movement – they are a central component of it. Often this connection is explicit in terms of student involvement in the labour force, but there is also a political dimension to these changes, as Kouvelakis (2006:6) notes:

This ‘great transformation’ has, of course (in comparison with 1968) not only made easier the link with workers, but, above all, has given this an ‘organic’ character, the character of the building of a common struggle, and not of an alliance or solidarity between separate movements.

These comments could as easily be made about the experience in much of Africa, buffeted by the same blows of globalisation. However, student activism is still instilled with an important element of elitism, though now tempered by the realities of campus poverty. Students maintain their ability to mobilise in relatively autonomous urban spaces, achieving an organisational coherence that is rarely matched by other social groups. The power of students to set off wider social protests was again vividly demonstrated by French students in 2006.

These processes have been described fairly unsatisfactorily as the ‘proletarianisation’ of student status; the implication is often that students have become an homogenous body of ‘poor militants’. Though these have been inherently uneven processes, and vary hugely across the continent, and between Europe and Africa, the reprioritisation of higher education can be witnessed internationally. It is precisely for this reason that France is such an interesting example. University students in the anti-CPE protests even adopted the ‘methods’ traditionally associated with the trade union movement. Universities were ‘*bloquée par des piquets de grève*’, literally blockades defended by ‘pickets’. The language of the student movement seems to have explicitly adopted the vernacular classically associated with working class protest: student mobilisation is now carried out by ‘*étudiants grévistes*’ (student strikers). The ‘*blocage*’ closes the university, ensuring that those students who receive grants will not have them suspended for their involvement in the protest (*Rouge*, 29 November 2007).¹¹

These developments partly express a new reality that has linked students to the precarious world of work, where students are frequently forced to survive on the margins of society. The recent scandal of student prostitution in France expresses many of these developments (Clouet 2007). These have various effects in Europe that mirror in many respects the changes in higher education and student politics in Africa. Only recently have researchers begun to analyse this transformation. In France two sociologists, Laurence Faure and Alain Girard, have discussed how university students, ‘often live in an extended high school life’, forced by financial necessity to remain in the parental home and to study at the provincial university. Students are, therefore, forced to delay the ‘cultural and social break’ that has previously been associated with going to university (cited in *Le Monde*, 21 November 2007).

In choosing to attend regional universities close to their parental homes, students save twenty percent in educational costs. A third of these students ‘*de proximité*’ decide to stay at home, and those who stay at the university pay a fraction of the cost of moving to Paris and other large cities in France. In total thirty seven percent of university students in France stay with their parents (*Le Monde*, 21 November 2007). This phenomenon has been labelled the ‘prolongation of adolescence’ in the United Kingdom. These changes have an impact both on the development of student activism and the nature of contemporary university education; these are global processes involving the liberalisation of higher education.

In the context of the rapid and deleterious effects of externally supported university, and societal reforms on the continent, students have been forced to

negotiate a world of collapsed hope. Student activism has evolved to fill this gap; some of the liveliest initiatives have been driven by ex-students and graduates who are confronted by seemingly unending unemployment. One example graphically illustrates some of these new forms of activism that speak of the 'convergence of forces' in conditions of the transformation of national economies. Since 2004 in Togo the *Unions des Chomeurs Diplômés* (Union of Unemployed Graduates) from a range of national universities and institutions have grown into a national movement. Developing a set of six principal demands the UCD has organised a number of protests, including hunger strikes, sit-ins and demonstrations. The interregional reach of the UCD has ensured that a number of unemployed graduates have been pulled into activism, while the classic tactic of state control has still been the cooption of student leaders, upon graduation, into the diminishing ranks of the civil service or to overseas scholarships. The UCD has attempted to resist these manoeuvres and 'negotiated a real solution for unemployed graduates while insisting on their right to maintain an independent organisation' (*Afriques en Luttés*, November 2007). These graduates, along with student activists still at university, played an important role in the national protests against election irregularities in 2005 in Togo. Whether these initiatives are capable of finding sustainable solutions to the prolonged crisis of the Togolese state is questionable, but they do show us some of the current contours of student activism. Clearly more research needs to be conducted into the nature of these changes and the development of new forms of activism.

Conclusion

This introduction has concentrated on the neo-liberal reform of education across the continent in the 1980s and 1990s and the patterns of student resistance and activism. One of the central factors influencing student politics was the ability to contest the ideological foundations of structural adjustment. The capacity of student organisations to confront the 'world view' presented by their governments (before and after the transitions) and the IFIs, helped shape their political agency. But their ability to do this was influenced by wider political forces in society, and they were disabled by the lack of a coherent ideological alternative to neo-liberal reforms. Students found themselves buffeted together with the popular classes, by the resumption of a more or less unopposed politics of adjustment and austerity after the 'transitions'.

Student activism has been affected by the vacillations in the popular movements that they have helped to mobilise. Once new governments had been installed (Senegal, Mali) or old regimes revived (Cameroon, Zimbabwe), the tempo of resistance and student activism receded, often returning to the 'corporatist'

and piecemeal demands that many commentators have wrongly interpreted as representing a new phase in student activism. The ‘corporatism’ – or economism¹² – of student politics is not symptomatic of a new and qualitatively different student movement, nor, as Bathily et al. (1995:401) imply, of a slide into irrelevance. According to this account, the only barrier preventing students from assuming their full role as ‘actors/initiators’ is their temporality. However, the status of ‘student’ – at university, as graduate, as a ‘*cartouchard*’¹³ and part of the mass of unemployed – is not impermanent (and nor, as we hope this collection shows, always limited to Africa). The crisis for students in Africa is precisely because they are not in ‘transition’; on the contrary they are increasingly permanent artefacts in the post-colonial impasse. Their activism – always complex and contradictory – retreats into a routine of ‘economic’ and factional contestation when wider popular and democratic movements in society decline or are frustrated.

In Malawi, students at the university together with academic staff were important in the mobilisations that eventually toppled the Banda regime in the multiparty elections in 1994. As Kerr and Mapanje (2002:86, 90) have stated, ‘students and staff marched in protest against the regime during the demonstrations sparked by the Catholic Bishops’ Pastoral Letter of March 1992 and during the riots of May in the same year.’ Although they note a wave of activism during the transition from 1991 to 1993, they also lament the decline of student politics into ‘corporatist’ concerns after this period. By 1994 there were even cases of male students at the university attacking and ridiculing female students and lecturers. They describe the increase in sexual assaults on female students and lecturers from 1994 as a ‘cowardly attempt among male students to find an easy scapegoat for a much broader set of frustrations.’

After the victory of Bakilli Muluzi and his United Democratic Front, the Malawian government participated uncritically in the project of structural adjustment and economic liberalisation that had given resistance to the previous regime such impetus. The ‘lassitude’ that Kerr and Mapanje claim affected students after the elections in 1994 were tied to the resumption of economic structural adjustment programmes after a period of democratic transition. The same disillusionment and ‘lassitude’ gripped student politics in dozens of campuses across Africa as governments that had emerged from the ‘transition’ committed themselves to implementing IMF and WB reforms. The predominance of neo-liberalism across the continent after the democratic transition ensured a quick death for the African renaissance and the movements that had heralded it.

The collection that follows illustrates the diversity of student activism across the continent and some of the important new research that is being carried out. We have attempted to assemble a collection of articles that highlight many of the

important themes in the evolution of student activism. This includes the involvement of the World Bank in the restructuring of higher education in Burkina Faso, and the development of student activism – in many diverse forms and new organisations – in South Africa. Each of the contributions in this collection demonstrates the sense of profound change, with university students forced, in divergent settings, to confront a world irrevocably changed by the blows of political transition and the neo-liberal transformation of higher education on the continent. Some of the contributors were student and university activists themselves in many of the strikes, movements and organisations described in this collection. The paralysis, confusion and successes of their activism have compelled them to delve into the meaning of student protests and draw the lessons for other activists. This auto-critique seems particularly apposite for a special issue that seeks to understand the meanings and consequences of activism.

Pascal Bianchini and Gabin Korbéogo's article provides us with a detailed account of the origins of the student movement in Upper Volta and Burkina Faso. Consistent with student activism in much of the continent, early activism took place in the colonial metropolis, in organisations like FEANF (*Fédération des Etudiants d'Afrique Noire en France*). The article takes us through the various periods of activism, and shows a number of distinct factors that have always been characteristic of student action: ideological disputes, political cooption and organisational change. Bianchini and Korbéogo refuse the clichéd analysis of student action on the continent, that delineates a period of 'pure ideological' struggle in the 1960s and 1970s with the collapse into bread and butter politics today. But equally they avoid glorifying the contemporary 'proletarianisation' of university students, and do not see an unambiguous period of radical activism. However the authors describe the impressive resuscitation of the student movements 'counter-hegemonic' tradition in the early 1990s, and conclude that student activism in Burkina Faso continues to witness: 'a combination of specific claims connected to student conditions and broader political aspirations.'

The intervention by Caffentzis, Federici and Alidou charts the history of CAFA, which we have discussed briefly in this introduction, and the continental revolt against higher education adjustment. Their article draws out the international nature of the commodification of higher education, and describes how CAFA came about as an attempt to provide solidarity for African students and scholars resisting the 'dismantling of public education demanded by the World Bank', while drawing attention to the devastating effect of these reforms for American students and academics. Impressively CAFA launched a campaign in the 1990s to stigmatise the participation of American scholars and universities in World Bank initiatives. Caffentzi, Federici and Alidou trace some of the

original strands of the anti-capitalist movement to the university student and lecturer struggles in Africa in the 1980s and 1990s (long before the battle of Seattle). We believe that CAFA played an important 'consciousness-raising' role in drawing attention to the devastation brought by higher education reform, and the extraordinary resistance to it.

In some important respects the experience of higher education in South Africa is distinct from the rest of sub-Saharan Africa. South African universities have not suffered the same collapse and tertiary education has expanded since the end of apartheid. Even if South African student activism since 1994 has been characterised by the same battles over the provision of grants and for access to free education (see Pithouse 2006), race and ethnicity remain important fault lines and the salience of so-called 'cultural' politics plays a vital part in the lives of university students today.

Addressing the question of student activism in higher education institutions in SA, the contribution by Mlungisi Cele examines the effect of institutionalised student protest activity or 'constructive engagement' on governance structures within the university. Cele suggests that participation by student leaders in decision-making structures has provided them with a broader understanding of the way the institution functions. He counter poses this constructive engagement approach with 'the narrow student perspective', which generally contests management and encourages more direct forms of student protest.

The article by Dinga Sikwebu complements Cele's work in that it also shifts the focus away from street protest and direct political action towards an alternative arena for student activism. In so doing, Sikwebu examines ethnic identity as the centripetal force in student organisation. While these organisations maintain that their membership is open, the evidence suggests that the ethnic identity of each group is distinctive. It does not appear that membership of these organisations has deepened ethnic cleavages among students or provided a catalyst for ethnic conflict. A more marked division is apparent between the cultural and political student organisations on campus. Sikwebu contends that these cultural organisations have emerged within a context where political organisations have failed to effectively capture the imagination of students and that the ethnic student organisations provide rural students in particular with a feeling of belonging and sense of purpose.

Both of these papers provide us with an important warning not to limit our understanding of student action to the protests against structural adjustment, and to broaden the conception of activism away from explicit anti-government mobilisations. Daily activism for most students does not take place on the street or on demonstrations and riots but frequently in cultural and social organisa-

tions. The adhesive glue of the anti-apartheid and nationalist movement has given way to post-transition uncertainties in a political and economic world increasingly dominated by the exigencies of the commercialisation of higher education.

Joseph Woudamike's article on two important student strikes at the Université de Ngaoundéré, describes some of the contours of contemporary student action in Cameroon. Woudamike situates student activism in the higher education reforms in 1993 that saw several new universities established across the country. He argues that this was partly a strategy to disperse unruly students across the country from the one national and turbulent centre of student activism at the Université de Yaoundé. As Woudamike explains this 'has not been the expected panacea. On the contrary it has contributed in exporting ... student protests'. Student activism in Ngaoundéré, where the author was a student leader, has adapted to their relative geographical isolation by using their proximity to the national highway as a problematic site for their protests, these developments seem to be common in other countries on the continent (Zeilig and Ansell 2008).

Finally Danièle Obono's paper lures us away from the continent and focuses on the anti-CPE (*Contrat Première Embauche*) protests in France in 2006. The CPE reforms were part of a broader legislative attempt to introduce further flexibility into French employment practices, and specifically youth employment. Obono, who was involved in the movement at the Sorbonne, provides us with an anatomy of the student protests that challenge many contemporary shibboleths of youth activism. Far from representing students as an apolitical mass, brainwashed by mobile phones, video games and 'lobby' politics, the anti-CPE movement thrust youth and students into the political arena. Though a political alternative beyond the anti-CPE protests was not found, the movement defeated the government and buried the lie of post-ideological student apathy. When Obono describes the '*galère en milieu étudiant*' (student nightmare) we believe that this expresses important international transformations among students and, more importantly for this collection, the experiences over the last twenty five years for African students.

We must, of course, explicitly justify the presence of a paper on student activism in France in a journal special on African student activism. Though we believe many of these justifications are evident in the article and this introduction, we think that Obono's contribution allows us to reach some interesting general conclusions about contemporary student activism, of which the anti-CPE protests have been the global highpoint in recent years. The idea of the 'mass student' dislodged from their relatively privileged position and now occupying a far more 'popular' and precarious space in society is an international phenomenon with crucial consequences for student activism (Kouvelakis 2006).

Student movements and activists across the world will have to confront the opportunities and challenges of these transformations.

Notes

- 1 In Senegal, despite almost two decades of structural adjustment, and a concerted effort in the 1990s from the World Bank and IMF to force the government to reduce the enrolment of students into higher education, enrolment had increased (some estimate that there are now more than 30,000 students at Université Cheikh Anta Diop (UCAD) in Dakar). The higher education sector by 2001 was still absorbing roughly 27 per cent of the national education budget, whereas primary education received 38.4 per cent of the budget (Niang 2004:67). World Bank and IMF reforms have been unsuccessful often under the pressure of student protests.
- 2 Five countries were nominated as case studies, all apparently showing positive signs of such liberalisation. These countries were: Uganda, Ghana, South Africa, Tanzania and Mozambique.
- 3 How the experience of Makerere University in Uganda demonstrates the benefits of ‘democratisation’ in higher education in a country that has specifically outlawed ‘democratisation’ is never explained.
- 4 However the great majority of privileged students are not sent, and will not be sent, to improved and more selective national universities. On the contrary the trend is to educate the children of a wealthy elite in the United States (the country of preference for everyone), France (particularly for students from Senegal) and the UK. In Zimbabwe, South Africa is a closer and far cheaper option, with a large number of relatively well-funded universities. This suggests that South Africa is at variance with some of the arguments made in the introduction.
- 5 ‘La démocratie envers et contre tout’ *Jeune Afrique* 27 March–2 April 1991; ‘Que veulent les étudiants?’ *Jeune Afrique* 11–16 July 1991.
- 6 The slogan of the AEEM conjures up the atmosphere of the period *Oser lutter, c’est oser vaincre, la lutte continue* (To dare to fight is to dare to overcome, the struggle continues).
- 7 It is worth noting that Zeric Kay Smith (1997:264) interviewed members of the donor community who unanimously maintained that AEEM had a negative impact on the country’s democratic governance: “This negative view was also amply evident in interviews I conducted with members of the World Bank mission in Mali.”
- 8 ‘Multi-partyism makes progress in Cameroon but the State has broken down’.
- 9 There are, of course, additional dangers of conflating the behaviour of African students with their European and American counterparts. It is hard to see any point in investigating African student movements if they are simply elements of an already existing international student movement as Frederici et al. (2000) contend. To what extent do students – in Africa and Europe – regard them-

selves as part of such an ‘international movement’? Or are these categories imposed on essentially national ‘movements’? While it is possible to argue that they are linked to an international wave of resistance to structural adjustment (Walton and Seddon 1994) and neo-liberalism, for this resistance to be part of a ‘movement’ – let alone an international one – surely these links have to be conscious and explicit among the students themselves?

- 10 However, it is important to caution against generalising about the proletarianised status of students. The picture varies across the continent. A survey of students at the national university in Maputo in Mozambique revealed the over-representation of Maputo students at universities and a correlation between prestigious degree courses and family status (Mario and Fry 2003:31). Mills (2004) suggests that the elite status of students in higher education in Mozambique is demonstrated at Eduardo Mondlane University in Maputo where 80 percent of students speak Portuguese as a first language.
- 11 If these students are absent three times from their classes they risk the loss of their grants. ‘Amplifier la mobilisation’ interview with the spokesperson for the *Coordination Nationale Etudianté* in *Rouge* 29 November 2007.
- 12 Interestingly the same criticism of ‘economism’ is made of the trade union movement, forgetting that an umbilical cord connects political and economic struggles. This was a point made powerfully by Rosa Luxemburg (1906) in her book *The Mass Strike*.
- 13 Term used by in Senegal to describe a student who has exhausted almost all of their chances (literately their ‘cartridges’) giving them just one more chance in the annual exams (Bianchini 2002:368).

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Le syndicalisme étudiant, des origines à nos jours : un acteur permanent dans l'évolution socio-politique du Burkina Faso

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Résumé

Issu de la matrice de la Fédération des étudiants d'Afrique noire en France (FEANF), le syndicalisme étudiant voltaïque s'est d'abord organisé à l'extérieur, en France dans les années 50 et à Dakar dans les années 60. Puis, le militantisme étudiant s'est développé à l'Université de Ouagadougou, avec des phases d'activisme et de politisation intense (dans les années 70) puis, de repli relatif (dans les années 80 et leurs régimes d'exception). Dans les années 90, on a assisté à un regain des mobilisations dans un contexte caractérisé par la montée des revendications en faveur de la démocratisation du système politique et de l'opposition aux politiques d'ajustement structurel qui remettaient en cause la situation « privilégiée » des étudiants. Cette permanence du militantisme étudiant s'explique à la fois par des déterminismes sociaux (des origines sociales encore prolétaires et rurales) et culturels (des dispositions acquises dans les expériences antérieures). Il faut aussi invoquer la singularité de la trajectoire politique burkinabé puisque la classe dirigeante a toujours dû composer avec des contre-pouvoirs significatifs en particulier syndicaux. Le mouvement étudiant s'inscrit ainsi dans un complexe de forces contre-hégémoniques. Il y joue même un rôle crucial puisqu'il contribue à soutenir ces forces par un double apport : direct en tant qu'avant-garde des mobilisations, et indirect en tant que pépinière du militantisme de ces forces d'opposition syndicales et politiques.

Abstract

Emerging from the pre-independence student union, the Fédération des étudiants d'Afrique noire en France (FEANF), the first student organisations in Upper Volta (Burkina Faso) were organised outside the colony in France in the 1950s and

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Dakar in the 1960s. Student activism developed at the University of Ouagadougou, with phases of activism and intense politicisation (in the 1970s) and then a relative downturn (in the 1980s and the 'emergency regime'). During the 1990s one saw the renewal of student mobilisation in a context characterised by the increase in demands for the democratisation of the political system and opposition to structural adjustment programmes which threatened the 'privileged' status of students. This 'permanent militancy' can be explained both by social factors (the working class and rural background of students) and cultural (experiences formerly acquired). It is necessary also to consider the particular trajectory of politics in Burkina Faso since the ruling class has always been compelled to incorporate certain important opposition forces, especially unions. The student movement is part of these complex counter-hegemonic forces. It has played a crucial role in supporting these elements in two respects: directly as an avant-garde in popular mobilisations and indirectly as a seed-bed of activism for the political and trade union opposition.

Introduction

Les travaux de recherches sur les mouvements étudiants africains sont encore rares. Cette remarque que l'on trouve déjà sous la plume d'auteurs anglophones, serait encore plus justifiée dans le cas des pays de colonisation française, en particulier dans le cas du Burkina Faso, Pourtant la permanence du mouvement étudiant à la fois en tant que creuset de nouvelles générations politiques et comme pierre angulaire de forces « contre-hégémoniques » semble ici particulièrement observable¹. Cette étude sera constituée d'une première longue partie qui envisagera la trame historique de ce syndicalisme étudiant afin de mettre en évidence cet enracinement dans le jeu socio-politique de cet État sahélien, puis d'une seconde partie qui montrera les causes structurelles de cet « activisme » étudiant.

Première partie : Une (brève) histoire politique du mouvement étudiant voltaïque

Où situer l'origine du mouvement étudiant voltaïque ? La réponse à cette question préalable, apparemment simple, peut varier selon la perspective retenue. On peut distinguer deux fils conducteurs qui s'entrecroisent souvent mais divergent aussi parfois : l'histoire des organisations estudiantines avec leurs enjeux internes, d'une part, et d'autre part, l'histoire des mobilisations menées par les étudiants, depuis qu'ils ont été à même d'apparaître sous la forme d'un mouvement social.

Si l'on considère le premier aspect, il faut faire remonter l'histoire des associations étudiantes voltaïques avant l'indépendance, notamment avec la création de l'Association des étudiants voltaïques en France (AEVF), apparue en 1950, soit la même année que la Fédération des étudiants d'Afrique noire en

France (FEANF) (Diané 1990 ; Traoré 1985). Dès l'origine, ces associations ont été des lieux de socialisation politique « radicale ». Ainsi, cette politisation du syndicalisme étudiant va faire de la question de la « ligne » du mouvement étudiant – en pratique, celle du contrôle exercé sur l'association étudiante par des formations partisans souvent clandestines - une trame qui s'impose pour reconstituer cette histoire contemporaine.

En adoptant cette première clé de lecture, on peut distinguer plusieurs phases : dans un premier temps, jusqu'à la fin des années 60, l'organisation étudiante connaît des rivalités internes relativement limitées ; puis dans les années 70, les clivages s'exacerbent jusqu'à la décennie suivante, marquée par une sorte de « militarisation » de ces lignes de fracture partisans issues du mouvement étudiant ; enfin, la dernière période est plus ambivalente, dans la mesure où l'apparition de nouvelles organisations concurrentes a permis de constater le rôle toujours incontournable de l'organisation « historique » du mouvement étudiant, dont la « ligne » demeure toujours inspirée par le même courant politique depuis la fin des années 70.

En parallèle, l'histoire événementielle des mobilisations a connu une alternance de phases hautes et de phases basses. Si les mobilisations à Ouagadougou ne commencent que vers la fin des années 70 (surtout à partir de 1978-79), il faut avoir à l'esprit que les Voltaïques ont participé activement au mouvement étudiant de Dakar des années 60 (au prix d'un certain nombre d'expulsions ...). Par la suite, l'arrivée de pouvoirs d'exception, notamment le CNR à partir de 1983, a eu pour conséquence un recul des manifestations étudiantes oppositionnelles et des tentatives concurrentes de mobilisation des étudiants par le pouvoir révolutionnaire. Cette période prend fin au début des années 90 – de manière paradoxalement violente – avec l'instauration d'un semblant de pluralisme politique à usage externe, et la mise en place des politiques d'ajustement structurel, ce qui suscite une nouvelle dynamique de contestation.

En raison des décalages éventuels entre ces deux trames (celle de la politisation du mouvement et celle des mobilisations), ainsi que du choix d'une perspective socio-historique et non purement historique, il est apparu plus approprié de diviser cette étude en deux grandes parties :

- l'évolution antérieure du mouvement, des origines à la période révolutionnaire durant les années 80 ;
- la phase contemporaine des mobilisations étudiantes au cours de la décennie écoulée.

La radicalisation politique du mouvement étudiant voltaïque des années 60 aux années 80

Les prémisses organisationnelles

En 1950, apparaît la première association d'étudiants voltaïques, l'AEVF, entre les deux congrès constitutifs de la FEANF. Son premier président est Joseph Ki-Zerbo, une figure majeure de la vie politique et intellectuelle du pays, qui milite alors au sein de la FEANF tout en animant l'Association des étudiants catholiques africains, antillais et malgaches en France (Sanwidi 1981 : 278 ; Pajot 2007 : 39). L'AEVF constitue d'ailleurs une des sections territoriales de la FEANF, laquelle va servir de modèle organisationnel à l'Union générale des étudiants voltaïques (UGEV) apparue plus tard en 1960. Durant cette période, les comités exécutifs de la FEANF, largement dominés par les Sénégalais, ne comportent pratiquement pas de Voltaïques. C'est d'ailleurs à Dakar, davantage qu'à Paris, que s'effectue la politisation des étudiants voltaïques, au sein de l'Association des scolaires voltaïques (ASV), créée en 1956, qui regroupe les étudiants voltaïques à Dakar. C'est également depuis Dakar, qu'est annoncée en 1958, la création d'un nouveau parti voltaïque, le Mouvement de libération nationale (MLN) qui appelle à voter non au référendum sur la communauté franco-africaine. En outre, c'est parmi les étudiants voltaïques de cette université, que se constitue le noyau fondateur du Parti africain de l'indépendance (PAI), avec Amirou Thiombiano, puis Adama Touré, influencés par des militants sénégalais de ce parti, qui se voulait à l'origine supraterritorial (Touré 2001 : 24-25, 33). En parallèle, ces militants se retrouvent aussi dans le cadre de l'Union générale des étudiants de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (UGEAO) dont les activités sont à peine tolérées par le pouvoir sénégalais, jusqu'à son interdiction en 1964.

En 1960, est créée l'Union générale des étudiants voltaïques (UGEV). *Jeune Volta*, l'organe de l'AEVF, apparu en 1958, devient alors l'organe de l'Union. Dès cette époque, l'organisation étudiante naissante se positionne sur le terrain politique. Ainsi, elle ne craint pas de prendre une position de refus du cadre monopartisan instauré par le chef de l'État, Maurice Yaméogo :

Votre gouvernement ne respecte pas les principes démocratiques, principes qu'il aurait dû observer, ne serait-ce que dans un désir de conservation ; faute de le faire, il s'expose à ne pas savoir quel est le degré de mécontentement du peuple, mécontentement qui fera tout sauter, un jour à la grande surprise de certains (Balima 1969 : 134-135).

Le ton de cette mise en garde prémonitrice demeure empreint de modération par rapport à l'évolution à venir. Cependant pour des raisons de sécurité, sous la

lère République, le siège de l'UGEV est transféré à Paris. Puis de 1965 à 1968, il se situe à Dakar (Sissao in D'Almeida-Topor & al. 1992 : 185). Parmi le noyau fondateur de l'UGEV, on trouve Raphaël Médah devenu, en 1963, ministre de Maurice Yaméogo ainsi que Charles Tamini, ministre RDA dans le gouvernement de 1970, dans lequel les politiciens civils effectuent un retour en force après le régime militaire ayant suivi le renversement du régime de Maurice Yaméogo en 1966. C'est dire, qu'à cette époque, le processus de radicalisation du militantisme étudiant n'est pas sans équivoque puisque l'on retrouve ainsi des cadres issus de l'UGEV naissante sur le point d'être cooptés au sein de l'élite au pouvoir.

La domination du MLN sur l'organisation étudiante dans les années 60

Cependant, déjà dans cette phase originelle, ce sont les forces de gauche, contraintes à la clandestinité, qui animent le syndicalisme étudiant. Ainsi, en 1964, le deuxième congrès de l'UGEV est interdit ainsi que la diffusion du journal *Jeune Volta*. Mais les clivages politiques, déjà perceptibles, sont alors atténués par les relations interpersonnelles nouées au sein d'un milieu restreint d'étudiants exilés. Ils sont même parfois susceptibles de s'effacer derrière d'autres référents, tels que la séniorité et l'expérience militante (Talrou 2001).

En 1965, l'UGEV s'enrichit de deux nouvelles sections, l'Association des étudiants voltaïques en Côte d'Ivoire (AECI) et surtout, l'Association des étudiants voltaïques de Ouagadougou (AEVO), avec la création du Centre d'études supérieures (CESUP). Mais le centre de gravité de l'organisation se situe pour de nombreuses années encore, à l'extérieur du pays. Les débats vont se focaliser sur la situation politique issue du « soulèvement populaire » du 3 janvier 1966 qui a chassé Maurice Yaméogo du pouvoir. La position de la direction de l'UGEV sur ces événements est formulée à travers la thèse de la « Révolution du nouvel an ». Ce faisant, elle ne fait que s'aligner sur le MLN qui a choisi de participer au gouvernement mis en place par des militaires. Dans les années suivantes, c'est l'AEVF, où l'influence des militants du PAI est plus sensible, qui va adopter une position critique vis-à-vis de ce gouvernement qui pratique une politique d'austérité budgétaire, surnommée la « garangose ». Cependant, le contrôle du MLN sur la direction de l'UGEV, est maintenu grâce à une forte implantation à Dakar. Même au niveau de l'AEVF, les années 1966-71, caractérisées par une stagnation des effectifs étudiants ainsi que par une dégradation du pouvoir d'achat de la bourse, ne constituent pas une période faste (Sissao 1992 : 180). Par ailleurs, à la suite de la crise de mai-juin 1968 à Dakar et de l'expulsion des étudiants voltaïques, le siège de l'UGEV repart à Paris, une situation qui va se prolonger encore durant deux décennies. De cette situation de

type « diasporique » découlent un certain nombre d'effets induits qu'il importe de signaler :

- d'abord, elle met les étudiants en contact avec les mouvements et les idéologies qui se développent dans le monde durant les années 60 et 70 ;
- ensuite, elle met relativement hors d'atteinte les militants étudiants des velléités répressives du pouvoir voltaïque ;
- enfin, elle entretient la cohésion du groupe social constitué par les étudiants à travers la prise en charge de l'individu tant sur le plan matériel que relationnel.

Toutefois, ces mécanismes de socialisation n'ont pas empêché le développement de clivages de plus en plus marqués au sein du syndicalisme étudiant d'autant plus que le contrôle de l'organisation est devenu un enjeu majeur pour les formations politiques « clandestines » qui recrutent alors parmi les étudiants.

La radicalisation du mouvement au début des années 70

Même si la radicalisation politique des étudiants ne fait que s'amorcer, au début de cette décennie 70, sur fond d'une normalité africaine qui tend à se confondre avec l'instauration du parti unique et l'interdiction des organisations qui n'y font pas allégeance, les étudiants voltaïques à l'étranger passent déjà pour des fauteurs de trouble. En novembre 1970, les étudiants à l'Université d'Abidjan, à l'instar des scolaires voltaïques à Ouagadougou, veulent manifester contre la tentative de renversement du régime guinéen, attribuée à des mercenaires portugais: ils sont alors renvoyés collectivement dans leur pays d'origine. En représailles, quelques mois plus tard, en mai 1971, lorsque le président Houphouët-Boigny se rend en visite officielle à Ouagadougou, son cortège est pris à partie par une manifestation d'étudiants et de scolaires (Touré 2001 : 51 & entretiens 1995).

Cette expulsion de plus de 200 étudiants voltaïques d'Abidjan a aussi eu pour conséquence d'accélérer la transformation de l'embryon d'enseignement supérieur en une véritable université (Sanou 1981 : 201). L'année suivante, c'est au tour du gouvernement sénégalais d'expulser 43 étudiants. Alors que dans la décennie 60, la politique préconisée par la coopération française, avait été celle de grandes universités régionales, les crises qui éclatent sur ces campus (Dakar puis Abidjan), où se côtoient des étudiants venus de différents pays africains, tendent à redistribuer dans l'espace national la gestion de la « question étudiante ». Les étudiants voltaïques apparaissent donc aux yeux des régimes pro-occidentaux de l'Afrique de l'Ouest comme des champions d'une politisation subversive dont il s'agit d'éviter la contagion. Ainsi, la création de l'Université de Ouagadougou intervient en 1974. Mais même après cette date, les expulsions

d'étudiants voltaïques se poursuivent durant plusieurs années, notamment du Niger en 1979 et du Togo en 1981.

Cette radicalisation croissante au sein de la communauté des étudiants voltaïques va influencer aussi la « ligne politique » de l'UGEV. Le Ve Congrès, tenu en août 1971, reprend le mot d'ordre de l'« intégration aux masses », adopté par la FEANF lors de son congrès de 1966. Cette affirmation volontariste, voire phraséologique, doit être décryptée de la façon suivante :

- d'abord, au plan interne, le contrôle de l'organisation passe du MLN au PAI au cours de ce congrès;
- ensuite, l'UGEV se pose désormais ouvertement en avant-garde politique dans la lutte contre le « régime néocolonial » relativement ménagé par la direction MLN, durant les années antérieures.

Durant cette décennie 70, surtout les premières années, les prises de positions politiques de l'UGEV tendent à éclipser son action revendicative en matière sociale. Après avoir contesté le caractère démocratique du rétablissement des institutions avec l'instauration de la Seconde République en 1970, l'UGEV a pris position sur d'autres questions politiques marquantes de cette période. Elle s'oppose ainsi à la tentative du général Lamizana d'instaurer un régime monopartisan avec le Gouvernement de renouveau national en 1974 et 1975. Après l'échec de cette tentative de restauration autoritaire, la mise en place de nouvelles institutions républicaines, avec la création d'une commission constitutionnelle en 1976 est également dénoncée (Sissao in D'Almeida-Topor & al. 1992 : 188).

Une autre orientation significative de l'UGEV est la condamnation du « régionalisme », phénomène politique assez mystérieux de cette décennie 70, identifié à travers la diffusion de tracts signés du « Mouvement autonomiste de l'Ouest » ou du « Front des minorités » (*Jeune Volta* spécial vacances 1976 : 55-56). On peut d'ailleurs penser que l'absence de réflexion approfondie concernant la définition de la culture nationale et, subséquentement le silence sur le sujet des langues africaines dans l'enseignement, s'explique aussi par le souci de ne pas vouloir aborder cette question délicate, de peur de réveiller le « tribalisme ». Toutefois, le nationalisme territorial s'efface aussi devant le panafricanisme : à l'occasion du conflit frontalier avec le Mali en décembre 1974, l'UGEV a tenu à se démarquer du « nationalisme chauvin » et de toute autre justification de cette guerre « étrangère aux intérêts des masses populaires ».

La montée des luttes revendicatives à la fin des années 70

D'une certaine manière, cette deuxième moitié des années 70 apparaît comme l'« âge d'or » du syndicalisme étudiant voltaïque, dès lors que la dynamique du

militantisme demeure importante à l'extérieur (en France notamment) tandis que se développent les premières mobilisations spécifiques à l'Université de Ouagadougou.

En France, le militantisme à l'AEVF constituait la règle pour tout étudiant qui débarque du pays. Les militants avaient à cœur d'accueillir le nouveau venu à l'aéroport ou à la gare. Il était guidé dans ses premières formalités administratives et hébergé pour quelque temps en cas de besoin. Par la suite, en marge des activités strictement syndicales, l'AEVF organisait des activités sportives (matches de football notamment) ou culturelles (chorale, théâtre ...). Sur ce plan, le militantisme étudiant se situait dans une sorte de « prolongement naturel » des activités périscolaires organisées par les mouvements de jeunes voltaïques, confessionnels ou laïcs, à partir des années 50. A contrario, l'étudiant qui – soit par désaccord politique, soit par « carriérisme » – ne participait pas aux activités de l'association, s'exposait, en retour, à la mise en quarantaine par ses compatriotes; cette sanction visant les manquements à la norme du groupe était formalisée explicitement, le terme consacré étant celui de « démarcation physique » (Entretiens 1995). C'est ainsi que les étudiants voltaïques en France étaient régulièrement amenés à soutenir des luttes revendicatives en matière de logement ou de bourses dirigées contre l'ambassade de Haute Volta, ou encore l'Office de coopération et d'aide universitaire (OCAU), l'organisme habilité à s'occuper des problèmes sociaux des étudiants africains en France, en particulier ce qui concernait la bourse et le logement. Ce rôle social du syndicalisme étudiant en France prend toute son importance dans la mesure où les effectifs considérés ont connu une forte augmentation de 1973 à 1979, pour culminer à environ un millier (Sissao in D'Almeida-Topor & al. 1992: 180). Dans ce contexte, l'AEVF – et plus généralement l'UGEV – est demeuré pour les autorités voltaïques l'interlocuteur incontournable, représentatif de la communauté de ses étudiants.

La jonction entre cette dynamique du militantisme étudiant à l'extérieur, et les mobilisations dans le pays a eu lieu en mai 1976, à l'occasion de l'expulsion de trois étudiants africains – dont deux Voltaïques – de la résidence Lucien Paye à Paris. Les 21 et 22 mai, ils sont accueillis en héros par des manifestations de protestation à Ouagadougou. Une autre mobilisation a lieu l'année suivante lorsque quatre militants de l'Association des étudiants voltaïques au Togo (AEVT) sont expulsés de Lomé.

Au cours de l'année 1978-79, apparaît la première mobilisation étudiante d'envergure à Ouagadougou autour de revendications liées aux conditions de vie et d'études: en novembre a débuté une première grève pour protester contre le retard dans le paiement des bourses, puis, en avril, à partir de l'École supérieure des sciences économiques et de comptabilité (ESSEC), pour protester contre la sélectivité des examens. L'année universitaire est perturbée par un

boycott des examens qui s'achève en octobre 1979, par la satisfaction de la plate-forme revendicative. Deux ans plus tard, une nouvelle épreuve de force s'engage avec l'avènement d'un Comité militaire de redressement pour le progrès national (CMRPN). Résolu à ne pas tolérer les prises de position de défiance à son endroit, le régime militaire procède à l'interpellation de militants de l'association des étudiants voltaïques de Ouagadougou (AEVO) durant les premiers mois de l'année 1981. En réaction à ces détentions sans jugement, les étudiants se mettent en grève, ce qui provoque en retour, de la part du CMRPN une nouvelle escalade : l'exclusion de plus de 300 étudiants de l'Université. Ce n'est qu'avec la chute du CMRPN en novembre 1982, qu'une détente provisoire intervient sur le campus de Ouagadougou.

Au cours de cette période, l'AEVO se structure sur un mode nécessairement différent de celui de l'AEVF, hérité de la FEANF. Puisqu'il n'y a pas de sous-sections territoriales, la subdivision interne de l'organisation étudiante à Ouagadougou s'effectue selon les écoles ou les facultés au sein de 'corpos', mais aussi selon les lieux d'habitation dispersés dans la capitale. Cette organisation territoriale permet à l'AEVO de continuer de fonctionner durant les périodes de répression où la présence sur le campus est difficile voire impossible (Entretiens 1995).

La « lutte de ligne » au sein du mouvement étudiant à partir de 1975

La domination du PAI sur l'UGEV a été finalement de courte durée. Dès le congrès de 1975, on observe déjà une prise de distance avec le courant prosoviétique, à travers le refus de soutenir la guerre contre le Mali voisin et également le choix de références idéologiques empruntées au maoïsme, comme la « Révolution nationale démocratique et populaire (RNDP) » (UGEV 1975 : 74). Le congrès de 1977 se livre à une condamnation explicite des étudiants de la LIPAD-PAI, assimilée officiellement à un « nouveau courant réformiste » (NCR) – pour les distinguer de l'« ancien courant réformiste » (ACR), terme qui vise les militants du MLN – traités aussi parfois de « réformistes impénitents » (UGEV, *Jeune Volta* spécial VIIIe congrès, 1977 : 94-102) Ces joutes idéologiques se déroulent d'abord en France dans le cadre de la FEANF, où les Voltaïques sont alors largement représentés. En 1977, l'hégémonie du marxisme-léninisme au sein de la FEANF et de l'AEVF, se traduit sur le plan politique par l'apparition de l'Organisation communiste voltaïque (OCV).

Mais peu de temps après, on assiste à une rupture au sein du noyau dirigeant de cette organisation, entre ceux qui se rallient au modèle du communisme albanais d'Enver Hodja, comme Drissa Touré, et ceux qui le récusent, comme Valère Somé et Basile Guissou. Le premier courant va fonder en 1978, le Parti communiste révolutionnaire voltaïque (PCR), tandis que leurs contradicteurs vont créer

l'Union de luttes communistes (ULC). L'affrontement politique se prolonge logiquement par une scission au sein de l'UGEV, à la suite d'une pétition en date du 21 juin 1978, dénonçant le 'sectarisme' de la direction de l'UGEV et réclamant la tenue d'un congrès extraordinaire. Les dissidents que l'on appelle ainsi parfois le M21, sont implantés au sein de l'AEVF, notamment à la sous-section de Paris qu'ils contrôlent. Cependant, ils sont minoritaires dans l'ensemble des sous-sections de l'AEVF. Par ailleurs, ils sont majoritaires à Dakar et en URSS. Le IXe congrès tenu en août 1979 entérine cette scission de l'UGEV entre deux courants qui s'« excommunient » mutuellement : le M21 est ainsi traité de « nouveau courant opportuniste et liquidationniste » (NCOL), tandis que le courant représenté par la direction de l'UGEV est qualifié de « mouvement national populiste » (MONAPOL) (UGEV-M21 1979). A la même période, le mouvement étudiant à Ouagadougou connaît une autre tentative d'organisation dissidente, avec l'Assemblée générale des étudiants de Ouagadougou (AGEO), à l'initiative de militants du PAI, mais de moindre envergure que la scission du M21.

Ces débats idéologiques, voire « théologiques », peuvent apparaître comme une logomachie dictée par des influences idéologiques externes, si l'on s'en tient à une lecture profane et littérale. Mais cependant, ils ont eu des conséquences effectives sur les champs politique et syndical voltaïques. En effet, c'est au sein de cette dissidence du mouvement étudiant (UGEV-M21) que l'on va retrouver les idéologues de la révolution sankariste, en particulier Valère Somé, tandis que le courant majoritaire contribue de façon déterminante au renouvellement du paysage syndical à partir des années 80. Au regard de l'histoire politique ultérieure, un clivage important est apparu entre les militants issus du mouvement étudiant ayant accepté de nouer des relations avec des militaires dans le cadre d'un projet révolutionnaire passant par la conquête du pouvoir d'État – les militants du PAI et de l'ULC – et ceux qui ont rejeté cette alliance, au profit d'une stratégie de plus longue haleine, tendant à la construction de contre-pouvoirs, dans le cadre de ce que l'on n'appelait pas encore la « société civile » – ceux du PCRV. Il existe ainsi une véritable bifurcation entre deux itinéraires possibles du syndicalisme étudiant africain, dont la Haute Volta constitue une sorte de cas d'école : le premier conduit à l'exercice d'un pouvoir révolutionnaire avec l'expérience du sankarisme ; le second s'inscrit dans une attitude contre-hégémonique, caractérisée par une alliance avec des syndicats de salariés, où l'on retrouve souvent, parmi les fondateurs et les dirigeants, d'anciennes figures du mouvement étudiant.

Le mouvement étudiant face aux régimes militaires et à la Révolution du 4 août

Après avoir connu une phase intense de 1978 à 1981, la mobilisation des étudiants voltaïques marque ensuite une pause. Cela peut se comprendre en raison du contexte des coups d'État successifs et de la répression exercée par des régimes militaires, plus enclins aux mesures autoritaires que les politiciens civils. De façon plus générale, tout processus de militarisation des conflits politiques tend à éclipser les autres types de mobilisations socio-politiques ou du moins, à les instrumentaliser en tant que soutien à l'une des factions en présence.

À cela, on peut ajouter une explication interne : les mobilisations de l'AEVO durant la période de 1978 à 1981 ont permis à la tendance majoritaire soutenue par le PCRV d'affirmer sans contestation possible, son hégémonie sur le mouvement étudiant. L'ULC déjà affectée par des tensions internes est dissoute par son leader au début de l'année 1981 (Martens 1989: 132). Dès lors, l'UGEV-M21 tend à se désagréger.

Toutefois, la « conjoncture politique » demeure particulièrement « fluide ». La direction de l'UGEV voit se développer une situation qui, dans une large mesure, lui échappe. La popularité du capitaine Sankara ne fait que croître parmi la jeunesse scolarisée, surtout après sa démission en direct à la télévision, le 12 avril 1982, de son poste de ministre de l'Information du CMRPN. Nommé premier ministre dans le nouveau gouvernement militaire du Conseil de salut du peuple (CSP), le 7 novembre 1982, il est à nouveau mis aux arrêts le 17 mai 1983. Mais lors des journées des 20 et 21 mai, des manifestations de rue en sa faveur, où l'on retrouve au premier plan la jeunesse scolarisée, obligent ses rivaux au sein du CSP à le faire libérer. À cette occasion, des tracts sankaristes commencent à circuler sur le campus. Malgré cette pression des événements, la direction de l'UGEV refuse de s'associer à la mobilisation.

Avec l'avènement du nouveau pouvoir en août 1983, sous la forme d'un « Conseil national de la Révolution (CNR) », la tendance ULC de Valère Somé, réapparaît sous le nom d'ULC « reconstruite » (ULC-R). À partir d'un noyau de militants étudiants ayant appartenu à l'UGEV-M21, sont créés les premiers Comités de défense de la révolution (CDR) à l'Université. Dans un premier temps, ces CDR vont chercher à investir l'AEVO, pour en chasser la direction. Cependant, le projet d'évincer les dirigeants de l'AEVO – qui devient ensuite l'Association nationale des étudiants burkinabés (ANEB) – de la tête du syndicat, s'avère impossible à mettre en œuvre pour les CDR. La situation se durcit encore après le 28 janvier 1985, lorsqu'une opposition de gauche au CNR s'affirme à travers la proclamation d'un Front syndical. Désormais les dirigeants de l'ANEB évoluent dans une semi-clandestinité tandis que le siège de l'UGEV (devenue UGEB) demeure plus que jamais à Paris.

Mais, durant cette période révolutionnaire, le conflit pour le contrôle de l'Université n'a pas eu lieu uniquement entre les CDR et l'ANEB. À partir d'août 1984, une nouvelle organisation politique soutenant le régime révolutionnaire fait son apparition : l'Union des communistes burkinabés (UCB). Très vite, elle entre en concurrence à l'Université avec l'ULC-R pour la direction des CDR. Ce conflit connaît plusieurs rebondissements, entre autres, le 1^{er} septembre 1986, la suspension par le secrétariat général des CDR, du bureau des CDR de l'Université, jusqu'alors dominé par l'ULC-R. Dès lors, jusqu'au dénouement de la crise avec l'élimination physique du chef de l'État le 15 octobre 1987, l'Université apparaît comme un théâtre d'ombres où se déroulent les luttes intestines sans merci entre les différentes fractions civiles et militaires du pouvoir révolutionnaire. Dernier épisode de ce conflit fratricide, après la chute du CNR, une tentative de manifestation des étudiants sankaristes le 17 mai 1988, est impitoyablement réprimée (Somé 1990: 15-17).

Au total, le bilan de l'activisme des CDR à l'Université demeure contrasté. Il y a d'abord le souvenir négatif des dérapages répressifs qui n'ont pas manqué. Plus qu'ailleurs, la présence d'éléments armés dans l'espace universitaire a été contestée et décriée comme une remise en cause flagrante des franchises universitaires et du droit à la différence d'opinion. La contestation de cette délégation 'illégal' du monopole d'usage de la violence physique aux étudiants CDR a constitué le ressort de la légitimité de l'ANEB durant cette épreuve de force. Cependant, malgré son aspect autoritaire, voire militaire, la socialisation politique réalisée à travers certains CDR a pu, surtout pour la nouvelle génération des années 80, contribuer à la perpétuation d'une tradition militante « radicale ».

La réapparition de ANEB dans le contexte d'une crise d'identité du régime

La chute du CNR a fait place à un régime dit de « Front populaire » censé opérer une « rectification » du processus révolutionnaire. Toutefois dans les faits, cette « rectification » a débouché sur une nouvelle escalade dans le recours à la violence pour régler des différends entre factions politiques. Ce régime du « Front populaire » a aussi connu un problème de définition idéologique. Dans un premier temps, il s'est agi de poursuivre la construction d'un parti unique, tâche qui n'avait pu être menée à terme sous le régime précédent à cause des rivalités entre organisations révolutionnaires. Cet objectif s'est concrétisé à travers la création en avril 1989 de l'Organisation pour la démocratie populaire - Mouvement du travail (ODP-MT). Mais, du fait des bouleversements géopolitiques au cours de l'année suivante, le régime opère un nouveau tournant en prônant un

retour à l'ordre constitutionnel avec la mise en place d'un régime civil. En parallèle, il est contraint de négocier avec le FMI et la Banque mondiale pour se voir imposer un ajustement structurel que le CNR avait toujours trouvé les moyens de refuser.

C'est dans un contexte caractérisé par une perte d'identité d'un régime se proclamant encore « révolutionnaire », par un bouleversement des repères géopolitiques à l'extérieur, et par une atonie des organes de mobilisation populaire comme avaient pu l'être les CDR des premières années de la révolution, qu'est survenue la crise étudiante de mai 1990, la plus importante depuis les années 70, et qui constitue toujours une référence majeure pour le mouvement étudiant d'aujourd'hui. Le conflit éclate à l'Institut des sciences de la nature et de développement rural (ISN-IDR) dirigé par Alfred Traoré, à partir de revendications portant sur la sélectivité des examens. À la suite de l'utilisation d'un amphithéâtre sans l'autorisation du directeur, les dirigeants étudiants du Comité exécutif de l'UGEV et de la Corpo de l'école, sont exclus le lendemain de l'Université. En fait, derrière le déclenchement d'une lutte corporatiste, l'enjeu est alors bel et bien le contrôle du campus, qui, depuis des mois, échappe de plus en plus aux Comités révolutionnaires (CR) – créés en remplacement des CDR – au profit de l'ANEB. Le 16 mai, la manifestation des étudiants est brutalement réprimée par la police et les commandos de la garde présidentielle. Des militants de l'ANEB sont enlevés et torturés dans les locaux de la Sécurité présidentielle. L'un d'eux, Dabo Boukary disparaît à jamais dans ces circonstances dramatiques (UGEV-ANEB 1991). Considéré comme un martyr de la lutte syndicale, il constitue de 1990 à nos jours le symbole de l'engagement étudiant. Dans toutes les plateformes ultérieures, figure désormais la revendication adressée au pouvoir, d'indiquer le lieu où repose le corps de Dabo Boukary. L'épisode de la disparition de ce leader étudiant constitue donc un moment charnière entre deux périodes historiques relativement distinctes :

- la première est caractérisée par l'existence d'un « syndicat unique » représentant la communauté étudiante (malgré quelques tentatives de scission) face à un système politique instable (avec une alternance de politiciens civils et de militaires);
- la seconde est marquée par une éclosion d'organisations syndicales et une effervescence cyclique de la contestation étudiante et scolaire face à un pouvoir politique qui tend à s'exercer de manière monopolistique, au-delà d'une démocratisation institutionnelle apparente.

La permanence et le renouvellement du mouvement étudiant burkinabé dans le contexte des années 90

Les incidences de l'ajustement structurel et l'émergence d'un pluralisme dans la représentation syndicale étudiante

À partir de 1990, le gouvernement burkinabé négocie avec le FMI et la Banque mondiale un programme d'ajustement structurel (PAS). Le système d'enseignement est directement concerné. « En fait, ce secteur est le nœud gordien, le noyau dur du PAS au Burkina Faso » (Zagré 1994: 212). Le fonctionnement du secteur éducatif est jugé trop coûteux par les experts de ces institutions financières. Est en particulier visé, l'octroi de la bourse (37 500 F CFA par mois) à la grande majorité des étudiants. Un système de contingentement des bourses est mis en place, limitant à 500 chaque année, les nouvelles attributions. Les étudiants privés de bourses se voient proposer l'attribution d'un prêt de 125 000 F CFA par le Fonds national pour l'éducation et la recherche (FONER). Le nombre de boursiers qui était de 6123 en 1991-92 (soit environ 86% du total des étudiants) est ramené à 3045 en 1995-96 soit 35% du total des étudiants) (MESSRS 1996: 217). En parallèle, le nombre de prêts accordés par le FONER est passé de 1000 en 1993-94 à 4925 en 1999-2000.

D'autre part, on assiste à partir de 1990 à une remise en cause du monopole syndical de l'ANEB-UGEB mais qui demeure en fait relativement limitée. Un grand nombre d'organisations apparaissent dont il est parfois difficile de mesurer la représentativité, ainsi le Mouvement des étudiants non-boursiers (MONENB), le Rassemblement des étudiants non boursiers (RENBO), l'Amicale des étudiants (AMIE), et l'Union des scolaires et étudiants du Burkina (USEB). En novembre 1991, l'ANEB signe une plate-forme revendicative commune, en compagnie de six autres associations étudiantes pour s'opposer aux mesures d'ajustement, et plus particulièrement, au contingentement des bourses. C'est l'acte de naissance du Collectif des organisations démocratiques étudiantes (CODE). En 1992-93, le CODE se lance dans une action revendicative afin de faire aboutir sa plate-forme. Toutefois, cette phase d'émergence des luttes contre l'ajustement, a aussi révélé les limites de la démocratisation au sein du mouvement étudiant : l'expérience du CODE a tourné court. L'ANEB en a tiré un bilan plutôt négatif et a préféré ensuite agir seule en se référant à sa légitimité maintenue malgré les tentatives d'affaiblissement de la part du pouvoir. Le monopole n'est cependant pas total: suite à l'échec du CODE, une nouvelle organisation, la Fédération des étudiants et des scolaires burkinabés (FESBU) a tenté de déborder l'ANEB par une stratégie plus activiste. En dehors des méthodes de lutte, le clivage entre l'ANEB et d'autres organisations

s'est également cristallisé sur la question du prêt FONER dont l'ANEB a toujours refusé le principe, au contraire de ses rivales.

Une autre mobilisation importante a eu lieu en 1997 avec une grève durant plus de sept semaines qui a nécessité l'intervention du médiateur du Faso, Marc Tiémoko Garango. L'ANEB a réclamé l'abandon du système de prêt et l'octroi d'une aide de 160 000 F CFA par an pour les étudiants non boursiers. Cette grève s'est terminée par un compromis que la « base » de l'ANEB a accepté difficilement. Après cette issue du conflit où l'ANEB a eu à faire face à des accusations de « capitulation » de la part de certains étudiants, une nouvelle organisation concurrente est apparue l'Union nationale des étudiants du Faso (UNEF).

En 1998, lors des élections des représentants de facultés, les résultats ont été les suivants : 73,70% à l'ANEB ; 16,50% à l'UNEF ; 1,74% à « Lumière » (liste protestante) et 4,45% pour les candidats indépendants. Le taux de participation a été de l'ordre de 35%, ce qui dénote une certaine apathie de la participation syndicale des étudiants.

Malgré la concurrence nouvelle inhérente au pluralisme syndical lié à la « transition démocratique », l'ANEB demeure toujours l'organisation la plus populaire auprès des étudiants, ce qui s'explique par son expérience acquise au fil des générations militantes, sa régularité sur les fronts revendicatifs et aussi par sa structuration rigoureuse. En position d'outsider, l'UNEF, recrute beaucoup ses militants parmi les nouveaux étudiants et tire principalement sa force de mobilisation de la question des prêts d'étude FONER. La faiblesse du score de la liste religieuse illustre bien l'absence de confusion entre les registres des affiliations syndicales et confessionnelles.

L'intensification de la concurrence syndicale transforme souvent les rapports de forces symboliques en des rapports de forces physiques. Ainsi, en janvier 2001 on a assisté à des disputes armées entre militants ANEB et UNEF. Un responsable de l'ANEB témoigne :

Depuis 1997, jusqu'en janvier 2000 là, c'est-à-dire trois ans d'expérience d'existence de l'UNEF, chaque année au moins, ils agressent un de nos militants. A propos des mouvements spontanés, on a dit non, il ne faut pas faire comme ça. Si on veut vous frapper, on va vous frapper, vous n'êtes pas nombreux, vous n'êtes qu'une poignée (Rires).

La « correction » administrée par l'ANEB, en réponse aux agressions subies selon les propos de ses dirigeants, est destinée à réaffirmer son pouvoir censorial. C'est le moyen légitime

d'un pouvoir qui, non seulement ne se cache pas de s'exercer directement sur les corps, mais s'exalte et se renforce de ses manifestations physi-

ques, d'un pouvoir qui s'affirme comme pouvoir armé et dont les fonctions d'ordre ne sont pas entièrement dégagées des fonctions de guerre ; d'un pouvoir qui fait valoir les règles et les obligations comme des liens personnels dont une rupture constitue une offense et appelle une vengeance ... (Foucault 1985).

Dernière illustration de son rôle avant-gardiste, le mouvement étudiant se radicalise une fois de plus sur le front politique à la faveur de l'émotion provoquée par la mort du journaliste Norbert Zongo le 13 décembre 1998. À l'appel spontané d'un groupe d'étudiants, le 15 décembre, un cortège formé sur le campus est venu prendre d'assaut le siège du parti au pouvoir. À la suite de cette manifestation violente, s'amorce un processus de contestation de masse sous la direction du Collectif des organisations démocratiques de masses et de parti politiques (CODMPP) qui conduit le pouvoir à concéder la mise en place d'une commission d'enquête indépendante. Cette dernière remet un rapport au mois de mai, dans lequel elle établit qu'il s'est agi d'un attentat et non d'un accident de la circulation et que des « suspects sérieux » figurent parmi des éléments de la Garde présidentielle. À nouveau, on assiste à une effervescence chez les étudiants et les scolaires durant les jours qui suivent la parution du rapport, avec des violences à l'encontre des représentants de l'État.

En 1999-2000, a lieu une nouvelle longue grève des étudiants se situant à la fois dans le prolongement de ce cycle de contestation politique et comme un nouvel épisode des mobilisations contre la politique de contingentement des bourses. La riposte autoritaire du pouvoir est alors inédite: dissolution des facultés et 'refondation' de l'Université, ce qui entraîne un nouveau conflit cette fois-ci avec les universitaires, qui perçoivent cet acte comme une provocation destinée à museler l'institution en tant que foyer de contestation du pouvoir en place (Bianchini in Akam & Ducasse 2002).

Le mouvement étudiant depuis la « refondation » de l'Université de Ouagadougou

Au cours des premières années ayant suivi la « refondation », l'actualité syndicale s'est caractérisée par une accalmie relative tant la débauche d'énergie et la nouvelle expérience de lutte tempèrent les ardeurs militantes. Aussi, les opinions restent-elles contrastées quant au dénouement de la lutte: si certains saluent la fermeté de la position de l'ANEB, d'autres par contre condamnent ce qu'ils appellent un « jusqu'au-boutisme ». Toujours est-il que ce temps de pause a été essentiellement marqué par des luttes sectorielles au niveau des UFR et par une permanence de la vie des structures syndicales estudiantines. De plus, chaque association s'emploie à faire vivre ses structures internes à travers la tenue des assemblées générales, congrès, conseils syndicaux et séminaires de forma-

tion de ses militants. Si cette vitalité organisationnelle est insoutenable pour l'UNEF (Union nationale des étudiants du Faso), le MEFA (Mouvement des étudiants du Faso) l'UNARES (Union nationale pour la renaissance estudiantine et scolaire) et l'UESB (Union des élèves et scolaires du Burkina), l'ANEB tout comme l'UGEB dont elle fait partie, se distinguent positivement par la tenue régulière de leurs instances. En effet, après 47 ans d'existence l'UGEB a tenu en août 2007 son 23^{ème} congrès ordinaire, soit un congrès tous les 2 ans. Avec l'ouverture des universités à Bobo Dioulasso et à Koudougou, on a enregistré la naissance de sections régionales des syndicats parmi lesquels l'ANEB apparaît toujours en véritable accapareuse de la représentation et de la visibilité en termes de luttes. Au cours de la période 2002-2007, hormis les contestations annuelles plus ou moins timides dont les points d'achoppements sont toujours l'amélioration des conditions matérielles et morales et l'installation d'une police spéciale des universités (PSU), il y a eu deux mouvements significatifs dont ceux de 2002 et de 2007 autour des plates-formes revendicatives sensiblement similaires. Si en 2002, le mouvement de grève a été relativement bref, en 2007, les grèves qui se sont déroulées entre les mois de février et mai se sont soldées par près de trois semaines d'arrêt des activités académiques. Des assemblées générales, des sit-in, une impressionnante marche sur la présidence de l'université se sont succédé pour exiger la satisfaction de la plate-forme revendicative. Au regard de l'évolution du mouvement et l'insuccès du dialogue entre protagonistes, on a pu voir le spectre de l'année invalidée. Cette situation a contraint le gouvernement à accélérer les négociations et à lâcher du lest. Le conseil des ministres du 16 mai 2007 a ainsi décidé, en autres décisions, de l'ouverture d'une université dénommée Ouaga II dans le quartier Kossodo dès la rentrée 2007-2008, l'augmentation du taux de l'aide de 130 000 francs CFA à 150 000 francs CFA, le doublement du nombre de bourses qui passe de 500 (depuis 1992) à 1000 par an, la revalorisation de la bourse de 8%, etc. Ces différentes luttes furent conduites par l'ANEB et permirent d'isoler les autres syndicats qui ne sont visibles qu'à quelques occasions (contre-déclarations et timides contre-meetings à ceux de l'ANEB) et qui passent d'ailleurs dans l'opinion étudiante comme des opportunistes proches du pouvoir. Les sections syndicales de l'ANEB bien que relativement moins expérimentées comme celle de Koudougou sont aussi actives. Outre les revendications communes d'ordre matérielles, elles se battent surtout autour de questions académiques comme le système d'évaluation jugé très sélectif et une meilleure planification des activités académiques.

Si cette stratégie autoritaire de 'pacification' semble avoir provisoirement réussi notamment en ce qui concerne les universitaires où le contre-pouvoir syndical du SYNTER a connu un recul, il demeure que sur l'ensemble de la période considérée (depuis 1990), la dynamique des mobilisations étudiantes ne semble

pas vraiment faiblir. La perspective d'un déclin historique du mouvement étudiant n'est donc pas vraiment à l'ordre du jour. Même si sur le plan idéologique, la période n'est pas aussi « rougeoyante » que dans les décennies 70 et 80. Il reste donc à éclairer les raisons de la pérennisation de cet activisme étudiant au fil des générations.

Deuxième partie: La signification sociologique de la permanence historique du mouvement étudiant

Une des particularités du mouvement étudiant burkinabé c'est sa permanence. Contrairement à la situation qui prévaut dans d'autres pays, depuis près d'un demi-siècle, c'est la même organisation (l'UGEV devenue l'UGEB) qui constitue le cadre de mobilisation des étudiants. C'est pourquoi on doit aussi envisager des explications plus « structuralistes » de cet enracinement des mobilisations.

Les déterminismes sociaux de l'engagement militant

Le discours ordinaire sur les étudiants comporte souvent des images sociales contradictoires : soit les étudiants sont présentés comme des privilégiés qui ont les moyens de revendiquer des droits dont ne bénéficie pas la grande masse de la population, soit ils apparaissent désormais comme une catégorie prolétarisée, ce qui expliquerait leur activisme. Pour répondre à cette question récurrente, il est alors nécessaire de dépasser ces visions trop généralisatrices pour saisir les propriétés sociales distinctives des étudiants engagés dans le militantisme étudiant.

Or à l'inverse de certaines idées reçues, lorsque l'on compare l'origine sociale des militants syndicaux à celle de l'ensemble des étudiants, on constate que les étudiants sont d'autant plus enclins à s'engager dans l'action syndicale qu'ils sont d'origine rurale et modeste.

Le tableau 1 issu de deux échantillons d'étudiants de la faculté de médecine et de celle de lettres – même s'il porte sur un effectif réduit – semble assez significatif du fait des écarts importants qui apparaissent, notamment entre le taux d'adhésion des enfants de cultivateurs et de ceux de fonctionnaires. De même, c'est à la faculté de lettres (30 sur 40) que le taux de participation au syndicalisme est le plus élevé comparativement à celui de médecine (14 sur 40), où le recrutement social est plus élevé.

Tableau 1: L'adhésion syndicale des étudiants suivant l'origine sociale

| Catégorie socio-professionnelle | Effectifs totaux | Effectifs d'adhérents |
|---------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Commerçants | 15 | 7 |
| Fonctionnaires | 24 | 8 |
| Ouvriers | 9 | 5 |
| Cultivateurs | 18 | 15 |
| Retraités | 14 | 9 |
| Total | 80 | 44 |

Source: Korbéogo (1999: 42-43).

Tableau 2: L'adhésion syndicale des étudiants suivant la filière de formation et l'origine sociale

| Catégorie socio-professionnelle | Facultés des sciences de la santé (FSS) | Faculté des lettres arts sciences humaines et sociales (FLASHS) |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
| Commerçants | 15 | 7 |
| Commerçants | 9 | 6 |
| Fonctionnaires | 17 | 7 |
| Ouvriers | 3 | 6 |
| Cultivateurs | 5 | 13 |
| Retraités | 6 | 8 |
| Total | 40 | 40 |

Source: Korbéogo (1999: 36-37).

Cette origine sociale populaire se caractérise par la faiblesse des revenus; et l'une des stratégies de conjuration de cette indigence originelle qui s'offre à eux, est l'investissement conjoncturel dans certaines activités rémunératrices. Mais cette stratégie n'est pas exclusive et coexiste avec la participation aux mouvements collectifs. L'inventivité lexicale propre aux étudiants nous montre que les clivages sociaux ne sont pas ignorés par les étudiants: ainsi le terme

péjoratif de ‘gâteaux’ est parfois utilisé pour désigner les étudiants issus de milieux aisés ou proches du parti au pouvoir, peu enclins à s’engager dans des actions revendicatives.

Outre les effets mobilisateurs de la précarité, l’engagement étudiant s’explique aussi par les dispositions acquises dans la socialisation antérieure. Il peut s’agir de la socialisation primaire dans le cadre familial mais aussi dans le cadre du milieu scolaire.

Sur un plan religieux, la population étudiante est historiquement marquée par une surreprésentation des catholiques, liée au rôle majeur de l’Eglise catholique dans la production de l’élite voltaïque durant la période coloniale. Cependant, de nos jours, à l’Université, se retrouvent des étudiants de toutes origines confessionnelles, lesquelles semblent influencer de façon différentielle sur la propension au militantisme syndical.

En effet, nos observations montrent que les étudiants chrétiens sont les plus activistes dans les organisations suivies des étudiants ‘animistes’ et enfin des étudiants musulmans. L’avance syndicale des étudiants chrétiens est liée à la spécificité des procédures de socialisation religieuse. Cette souplesse dans l’inculcation des normes libère les aptitudes créatrices des croyants. De même, les conversions religieuses juvéniles qui s’opèrent par le truchement de mouvements, tels que les « Cœurs Vaillants et Ames Vaillantes », la Jeunesse étudiante catholique, le scoutisme, permettent à l’enfant d’acquérir des expériences culturelles convertibles dans l’espace syndical étudiant. Toutefois, l’influence religieuse sur les représentations et les pratiques syndicales diverge selon l’ancrage social et le niveau de pratique des religions. Cette précision interdit toute extrapolation de notre analyse, et l’expérience syndicale dans des universités de pays fortement islamisés comme le Nigeria, le Niger, l’Algérie, etc. conforte cette invitation à la contextualisation de nos résultats d’enquêtes.

Les confessions religieuses peuvent ainsi être analysées comme des « organisations symboliques », c’est-à-dire des systèmes de représentations, d’attitudes, de normes, à forte charge affective, en fonction desquelles se structurent des perceptions, des valorisations, convictions et conduites qui informent les pratiques quotidiennes des acteurs. Autrement dit, l’influence des rationalisations religieuses sur les comportements syndicaux est à prendre en compte. Ainsi, certains attributs religieux comme la fidélité, la solidarité interactive et le maintien de l’harmonie interne peuvent être des dispositions transférables pour constituer des habitus de militants syndicaux.

D’autre part, l’influence de la socialisation antérieure s’observe en fonction de la provenance géographique des étudiants. On doit ici distinguer trois groupes: les étudiants de la diaspora burkinabé, les ruraux et les citadins.

Les étudiants burkinabés, nés à l'étranger, en Côte d'Ivoire, que l'on appelle ordinairement les « diaspos » ont souvent donné l'image d'une certaine radicalité dans les modes d'action. L'éloignement du milieu d'origine, accentué par les difficultés d'adaptation au nouveau contexte social les placent en situation d'« anomie » relative. Ils peuvent rechercher des réponses à cette situation anémique à travers l'engagement syndical. Le stock d'expériences reçues au cours des luttes scolaires à l'étranger génère aussi des dispositions pratiques militantes. C'est ce que soutient un responsable syndical qui est par ailleurs un « diaspo » :

Ils ont une appréhension beaucoup plus âpre pour la lutte. Ils sont prêts effectivement à des actions spectaculaires. Cela est dû simplement au fait que la Côte d'Ivoire en particulier a connu ces dernières années-là une grande intensité de la lutte estudiantine et scolaire. Beaucoup d'élèves ont participé à des hautes luttes là-bas. Et lorsque les gens viennent effectivement, on constate que l'esprit d'éveil est assez important par rapport à ici.

Les « ruraux » ou « provinciaux », provenant de milieux populaires, sont confrontés à l'individualisme citadin, destructeur de certaines formes de solidarité collective. En plus des désavantages sociaux, ces deux catégories d'étudiants sont victimes de déséquilibres dans l'attribution des bourses et dans l'orientation dans les filières les moins prestigieuses socialement. Par contre les « citadins » sont généralement issus de milieux sociaux favorisés, et bénéficient de formations scolaires héritées et légitimes. L'appartenance à ces positions sociales supérieures explique la désaffection de beaucoup de citadins par rapport au syndicalisme étudiant. C'est, en substance, le motif du schisme qui conduit les non-syndiqués citadins à produire des rationalités qui ne collent pas aux logiques syndicales.

Enfin, on doit évoquer la sous-représentation des filles au sein de ce militantisme syndical. Sur le plan des causes immédiates, on peut invoquer la crainte suscitée par la répression policière et les effets de l'autorité familiale. Une responsable syndicale témoigne :

C'est dans toutes les activités hein ! Les filles ont peur. C'est la pesanteur sociale et tout. Et puis qu'est ce que les gens vont penser d'une fille qui est tout le temps devant les hommes. Mais en grande partie c'est la famille

Le manque d'intérêt apparent des filles s'explique également par certains avantages dont elles bénéficient. Elles seraient moins sollicitées par la demande économique familiale, et ont des possibilités de recours nées des formes de conjugalité

dans lesquelles elles sont engagées (relations de copinage, fiançailles, mariages, etc.)

En tout cas, cette 'violence symbolique' qui tient les étudiantes en retrait de l'engagement militant, n'est guère prise en considération par les cadres syndicaux, ou en tout cas ne suscite pas une réflexion et des actions spécifiques pour favoriser la participation féminine.

La (ré)invention du politique en milieu étudiant

Toujours sur le plan des propriétés sociales qui sont constitutives des clivages internes au milieu du syndicalisme étudiant, on peut opposer la figure de l'« élite » des dirigeants à celle des adhérents de la « base ». Les premiers se signalent par l'ancienneté dans l'organisation et le niveau d'étude. Ces caractéristiques sont le gage d'une expérience acquise sur le plan de la maîtrise d'un savoir-faire organisationnel, comme le montrent des itinéraires individuels où l'occupation de postes de responsabilités a souvent débuté avant l'Université, dans des organisations de jeunesse. En outre, leur situation dans le cursus des études (en fin de deuxième cycle voire de troisième cycle) est le signe de la probabilité d'une insertion socio-professionnelle, de type méritocratique. Le leadership de l'organisation repose ainsi sur des individus, qui, du fait de la position occupée et des dispositions acquises, sont mieux armés pour résister aux éventuelles sollicitations matérielles, auxquelles il faut s'attendre, de la part de l'adversaire, pour acheter la reddition du collectif étudiant.

La base qui constitue le « cœur » du mouvement est conditionnée par l'éthique corporatiste. Cette 'masse étudiante' qui ressemble à une « foule solitaire » est pourtant composée par des segments dont les intérêts sont parfois divergents. Les nouveaux « clients » des facultés (1^{re} et 2^e années) sont les plus engagés à cause de la relative précarité de leur position dans la configuration scolaire et syndicale. On y rencontre aussi des « cartouchards »² en situation transitoire de 'déclassement scolaire' qui espèrent se légitimer de nouveau à travers l'action revendicative.

Les procédures d'arbitrage des oppositions d'opinions entre une élite 'légaliste' et une base 'frénétique' suppose un recours aux règlements de l'organisation, dont la flexibilité des usages sociaux est source de légitimation. Les procédures de prises de décisions représentent des procès de marchandage entre des logiques antagonistes. La gestion de la parole lors des rencontres syndicales révèle les conflits interpersonnels ou collectifs pour la production du discours légitime. La libération de la parole dans le cadre des structures du mouvement étudiant a pour objectif d'éviter ce déchirement. On peut parler ici d'une stratégie de fabrication du consensus. De façon complémentaire, le réseau d'informa-

tions constitué par les canaux interpersonnels, les tracts, les passages des délégués dans les amphithéâtres, les rencontres d'information, constitue un enjeu majeur du jeu syndical. L'élaboration des plates-formes revendicatives, moyen de collectivisation des intérêts étudiants, est au fondement des luttes syndicales. Les assemblées générales, les meetings, les marches, les congrès et séminaires de formation syndicale sont autant d'occasions où se cristallisent les affiliations syndicales.

C'est ainsi que le mouvement étudiant burkinabé opère comme un puissant dispositif de socialisation politique où se perpétuent certains clivages majeurs (entre gouvernement en place et opposition intellectuelle, et éventuellement entre forces politiques d'opposition en filigrane du mouvement étudiant) tandis que d'autres se trouvent subsumés (les clivages ethno-régionalistes notamment).

Les effets politiques à long terme du mouvement étudiant : l'émergence de contre-pouvoirs

Le débat public consécutif à l'affaire Zongo, véritable moment traumatique de cette histoire politique récente, a fait incidemment surgir la question du rôle historique du mouvement étudiant burkinabé et a révélé des clivages politico-générationnels significatifs. Dans le rapport de la « Commission des sages », nommée suite à la Commission d'enquête indépendante sur l'assassinat de Norbert Zongo, pour faire la lumière sur les 'crimes impunis' commis depuis 1960, le mouvement étudiant figure au détour d'une page en position d'accusé :

En effet, la majeure partie de la classe politique dirigeante de notre pays, toutes tendances confondues, est issue du militantisme étudiant de la Fédération des étudiants d'Afrique noire (FEANF) et de ses démembrements. Cette génération notamment celle issue de l'éclatement de l'Union générale des étudiants voltaïques (UGEV) est marquée par une culture politique de guerre froide faite de radicalisme, d'exclusion et de lutte des classes à outrance sur le plan intérieur et, par le partage du monde en révolutionnaires amis du peuple et en capitalistes réactionnaires ennemis du peuple.

Devenus leaders politiques, les étudiants d'hier n'ont pas su effectuer la mutation nécessaire pour devenir des hommes d'État, tant et si bien que des valeurs telles que le patriotisme, l'humanisme et le respect de la vie humaine, la morale, les us et coutumes qu'incarnait l'ancienne génération de politiciens, ont cédé la place à la violence politique avec les assassinats, les disparitions, le vandalisme, les tortures et les autres actes répréhensibles comme la corruption, les détournements, etc. (« Rapport du Collège des Sages », *Le Pays*, édition spéciale, 3 août, 1999 : 3).

Comme une réponse à ce jugement sans appel, un colloque a eu lieu en mars 2001 pour commémorer, avec un peu de retard, le quarantième anniversaire de la création de l'UGEV. Se sont ainsi retrouvées la plupart des anciennes figures du mouvement étudiant des années 60 à nos jours, parmi lesquelles un nombre significatif de dirigeants de syndicats de salariés et d'autres organisations de la « société civile ».

C'est en effet de l'UGEV, que sont issues la plupart des organisations syndicales venues déborder par leur radicalisme, celles nées sous la période coloniale. Cela a d'abord été le cas avec la création du Syndicat des travailleurs de la santé humaine et animale (SYNTSHA) en 1965, le Syndicat unique voltaïque de l'enseignement secondaire et supérieur (SUVESS) en 1972, puis avec la constitution de la Confédération syndicale voltaïque (CSV). Après cette première vague qui correspondait à l'entrée dans l'arène syndicale de la génération étudiante du PAI, on a assisté avec l'irruption de groupes marxistes-léninistes, en particulier le PCRV en 1978, à une nouvelle dynamique syndicale. Celle-ci s'est en particulier constituée autour de la création du Syndicat des travailleurs de l'enseignement et de la recherche (SYNTER) en 1981. Ensuite à partir de l'opposition au CNR au sein d'un Front syndical, s'est constituée un nouveau pôle syndical avec la Confédération générale du travail du Burkina (CGT-B). Dans les années 90, c'est cette dernière qui incarne la résistance à l'ajustement structurel et au monopole politique de facto, que continue d'exercer l'équipe au pouvoir malgré les apparences de démocratisation.

Au cours de cette même décennie 90, s'ouvre un nouveau terrain de prédilection pour les militants issus du syndicalisme étudiant, celui des droits de l'homme. La création et l'implantation du Mouvement burkinabé des droits de l'Homme et des peuples (MBDHP), dominé par la figure de Halidou Ouédraogo, qui a également joué un rôle moteur au sein de l'Union interafricaine des droits de l'Homme (UIDH), symbolise la réussite de cette stratégie de 'reconversion' militante.

Un autre domaine où s'est affirmé un contre-pouvoir significatif est la presse avec le rôle tribunitien de *L'Indépendant* l'hebdomadaire fondé par Norbert Zongo. Lui-même, par son parcours (élève, instituteur, étudiant, puis journaliste et romancier) incarnait de manière idéaltypique la posture contre-hégémonique et avant-gardiste souvent adoptée par le mouvement étudiant. Au cours d'une table ronde organisée avec les étudiants, il revendiquait ainsi pour la presse, « le rôle de faiseur d'opinions, c'est-à-dire pour pouvoir aider le peuple qui est là à avoir une opinion sur les leaders qu'il s'est choisis. » (*L'Étudiant burkinabé*, 17, mars 1994: 10).

Dans le cas du Burkina Faso, comme l'illustre tragiquement le cas de Norbert Zongo assassiné le 13 décembre 1998, la violence politique persistante au-delà de la fin des régimes d'exception a contribué à maintenir de façon claire, la ligne de démarcation séparant la classe dirigeante et les contre-pouvoirs de la « société civile ». Ces derniers peuvent être perçus comme autant de concrétisations de la critique multiforme de l'arbitraire du pouvoir politique interne et des ingérences de la part de puissances étrangères, formulée depuis des décennies par le syndicalisme étudiant. Par ailleurs, sur les individus à la tête d'organisations moins critiques à l'encontre du régime en place, qualifiés de « dialogueurs » pèse souvent le soupçon d'une inféodation secrète au système de pouvoir en place. Mais, à l'inverse, pour leurs détracteurs, ce conglomérat d'organisations issues historiquement du syndicalisme étudiant, n'est qu'un dispositif instrumental s'inscrivant dans le cadre d'une stratégie menée par un état-major clandestin (le PCRV) qui avance masqué en utilisant les 'organisations de masse' ou celles de la « société civile » comme autant de faux-nez.

Conclusion

Ainsi, jusqu'à nos jours, en raison de l'importance des enjeux qu'elle implique, l'histoire socio-politique du mouvement burkinabé demeure encore un objet de connaissance problématique. Néanmoins, malgré les difficultés d'une appréhension objective du fait de la réactivation persistante de tels enjeux historiques, il est possible de cerner ce qui fait la singularité de cette trajectoire collective.

D'une part, le terrain voltaïque a été particulièrement favorable au développement et à l'enracinement d'une tradition syndicale étudiante. On peut insister sur cette référence au syndicalisme dans la mesure où elle révèle un véritable travail d'institutionnalisation, construite autour de relations d'interdépendance avec le syndicalisme de salariés ce qui lui confère une puissante légitimité historique. En amont, cette trajectoire historique peut aussi s'expliquer par des facteurs permissifs à la fois internes – la faiblesse politique de la classe dirigeante au moment de la création de l'État voltaïque – et externes – la faible valorisation stratégique de ce territoire dans le dispositif colonial puis néo-colonial du côté français.

D'autre part, derrière la permanence organisationnelle, on a assisté à des évolutions importantes liées au contexte idéologique ainsi qu'à l'évolution du statut des étudiants. Si, dans un premier temps jusqu'aux années 80, on peut établir une corrélation évidente entre l'intérêt positionnel des étudiants en tant que 'bureaucrates potentiels' (« would-be-bureaucrats ») face à la 'bourgeoisie bureaucratique' en place, et la logique de radicalisation politique allant du MLN au PCRV (Sanou 1981 : 94), ceci n'est plus le cas à partir de la parenthèse

révolutionnaire. Celle-ci a hypostasié les clivages issus de cette période 'idéologique' des années 70. Néanmoins, malgré l'hypothèque militaire durant les régimes d'exception des années 80, le militantisme étudiant « contre-hégémonique » a survécu. Dans les années 90, il a retrouvé une nouvelle dynamique autour de la défense du statut d'étudiant boursier, que le projet d'ajustement structurel s'emploie toujours à faire disparaître. C'est pourquoi l'opposition entre une période contemporaine 'corporatiste' et celle « idéologique » des années 60-70, n'est pas si évidente puisque les aspects politico-idéologiques sont toujours présents durant cette décennie 90, du début – avec le débat sur la démocratisation des institutions – à la fin – avec la thématique de « l'impunité » au sujet de la violence politique exercée par le régime à l'encontre de membres de l'opposition ou de la « société civile ». Le Burkina Faso, même s'il a évité jusqu'ici le niveau de violence politique de certains pays voisins en proie à la guerre civile, ne connaît donc pas pour autant une arène socio-politique pacifiée dans le cadre d'une transition démocratique consolidée.

Dans un contexte structurellement inchangé, il faut s'attendre à ce que l'action oppositionnelle des étudiants continue à s'exercer. D'hier à aujourd'hui, l'efficacité des mobilisations étudiantes découle justement d'une combinaison de revendications spécifiques à la condition étudiante et d'aspirations plus globales concernant le jeu politique, pour lequel le rôle du mouvement étudiant en tant qu'espace de socialisation, est bien connu des acteurs en présence. En fin de compte, l'état actuel du mouvement étudiant, largement dominé par l'organisation historique des étudiants, est un véritable révélateur de l'enracinement de l'attitude « contre-hégémonique » parmi les couches intellectuelles scolarisées, et, a contrario, de la superficialité de la démocratisation des institutions de la IVe République dont les leviers du pouvoir sont en réalité monopolisés par la même faction politico-militaire depuis une vingtaine d'années.

Notes

- 1 Cette expression a été utilisée et explicitée dans des travaux antérieurs (Bianchini 2002, in Diop).
- 2 Un « cartouchardé est un étudiant qui, ayant redoublé l'année précédente, est condamné à réussir ses examens de fin d'année.

Liste des sigles

| | |
|------|---|
| AEVF | Association des étudiants voltaïques en France |
| AEVO | Association des étudiants voltaïques de Ouagadougou |
| AEVT | Association des étudiants voltaïques au Togo |
| ANEB | Association nationale des étudiants du Burkina |
| CDP | Congrès pour la démocratie et le progrès |
| CDR | Comité de défense de la révolution |
| CNR | Conseil national de la révolution |

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| CR | Comité révolutionnaire |
| CENOU | Centre national des œuvres universitaires |
| CMRPN | Comité militaire de redressement pour le progrès national |
| CSP | Comité de salut du peuple |
| CODE | Collectif des organisations démocratiques des étudiants |
| CODMPP | Collectif des organisations démocratiques de masses et de partis politiques |
| FESBU | Fédération estudiantine et scolaire du Burkina |
| FONER | Fonds national pour l'éducation et la recherche |
| FEANF | Fédération des étudiants d'Afrique noire |
| MEFA | Mouvement des étudiants du Faso |
| MLN | Mouvement de libération nationale |
| M21 | Mouvement du 21 juin (UGEV) |
| MONENB | Mouvement national des étudiants non boursiers |
| OCV | Organisation communiste voltaïque |
| ODP –MT | Organisation démocratique et populaire – Mouvement du travail |
| PAI | Parti africain pour l'indépendance |
| PCRV | Parti communiste révolutionnaire voltaïque |
| RENBO | Rassemblement des étudiants non boursiers |
| SYNTER | Syndicat national des travailleurs de l'enseignement et de la recherche |
| UGEB | Union générale des étudiants du Burkina |
| UGEV | Union générale des étudiants voltaïques |
| ULC | Union de luttes communistes |
| UNEF | Union nationale des étudiants du Faso |

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‘We no go sit down’: CAFA and the Struggle Against Structurally Adjusted Education in Africa

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Abstract

This paper is a short history of the Committee for Academic Freedom in Africa (CAFA) since its founding in 1991 to the present. It describes CAFA documentation of the formation of an Africa-wide student movement against the structural adjustment of African universities. It also details some of CAFA’s campaigns in defence of student struggles against both the World Bank’s role in propagating the introduction of tuition fees and the cutting of housing and food subsidies to students and the repressive action of the African governments against protesting students. We argue that academic freedom also includes the right to be involved in the production of knowledge and hence to have access to the means of its production. To deny Africans such a right in this period in history is to condemn them to the fate of being the damned of the earth once more and to put the ability of Africans to manage their own resources in peril.

Resumé

Cet article est un résumé des activités du Comité pour la Liberté Académique en Afrique (CAFA) depuis sa fondation en 1991 jusqu’à aujourd’hui. Il reprend les informations du CAFA sur la formation d’un mouvement étudiant à l’échelle du continent africain contre les ajustements structurels dans les universités africaines. Il détaille également certaines campagnes du CAFA en défense des luttes étudiantes contre le rôle de la Banque Mondiale dans la mise en place progressive de droits d’inscriptions et les coupes dans les subventions de logement et de nour-

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riture aux étudiants et l'action répressive des gouvernements africains contre la protestation étudiante. Nous prétendons que la liberté académique inclut aussi le droit d'être engagé dans la production du savoir et donc d'avoir accès aux moyens de cette production. Refuser un tel droit aux Africains dans cette période historique revient à les condamner au destin d'être à nouveau les damnés de la terre et à mettre en péril la capacité des Africains à contrôler leurs propres ressources.

Preface

We are the coordinators for the Committee for Academic Freedom in Africa (CAFA). CAFA was founded to promote a critique of the World Bank's plan for education in Africa and to support the mobilization of African students and teachers against it. We believe such a plan, which is now the model for education internationally, violates the universal right to study and the right to have access to the resources enabling Africans to produce knowledge about their lives and communities and thereby plan their future. This article is our reflection on CAFA's theoretical and practical work and its relation to the African student movements. There have been many contributors to CAFA's efforts during these seventeen years of its existence. We do not specify them by name in this brief article, but we thank them all.

CAFA: 1991–1993

CAFA was formed in 1991 by academics coming to the US after teaching in African universities, preoccupied by the developments they had witnessed in these institutions at the hands of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Teaching in Africa in the 1980s was for many of us a life-changing experience. These were the years in which the continent's social and political life was undergoing a historic transformation, under the impact of the 'debt crisis,' prolonged negotiations with the World Bank and IMF, and the introduction of the first austerity plans soon to be dubbed 'structural adjustments.' The universities were at the centre of this process and the resistance to it, both because of the heated debates and anti-IMF mobilizations these policies generated within them, and because, from the start, they were one of the main targets of the cuts in public funds introduced in the name of paying the debt.

Already by 1984, on many African campuses, student protests – against the cuts of student allowances and the repression of student activism – were the order of the day.¹ By the late 1980s, when the African governments introduced the first structural adjustment programs (SAPs) (often justified as 'home-grown' measures), the confrontation between students and government had become open and the students' protest was increasingly repressed by force. At least 30 students were massacred on May 5, 1986 in response to a peaceful demonstration on the Nigerian campus of Ahmadu Bello University (Zaria).² By the time those

of us who had taught in Nigeria left the country, its universities, when not shut down, were turning into battlefields, because Nigerian students were among the first main opponents of structural adjustment and the dismantling of public education demanded by the World Bank. Demonstrations, strikes, blockades, confrontations with police and armed forces invading the campuses, quickly became part of the campus experience in every African country. Public investment in education was gutted, users' fees were introduced, and programs were restructured so as to boost a technocratic knowledge appropriate for the tasks of economic liberalization. Appropriately, the whole project was promoted by the World Bank under the racist title of 'Africa Capacity Building.'

It was seeing our students beaten, tear-gassed, and expelled, that led us, on returning or moving to the US, to organize around education in Africa. New York, where the first CAFA meetings were held, was the ideal place for this initiative. The diaspora that was triggered by the crisis of African universities combined the growing interest in multiculturalism in the US, and guaranteed a constant flow of African scholars/activists to the city allowing for contacts, exchanges, and new forms of collaborations. Indeed, CAFA would not have been possible except for the support, cooperation and direction provided by African students and teachers, and their organizations. They kept us informed of developments and events on their campuses, sent us newspaper clippings, flyers, documents, reports, their bulletins and newsletters, told us what was most needed, and helped us interpret new policies and trends.

Our objective in founding CAFA was to mobilize the North American campuses in support of students' and teachers' struggles in Africa, and denounce the World Bank's plan for African education. 'As academicians in North America' – we wrote in our first newsletter – 'we cannot remain indifferent to what is happening on African campuses. We need to let our African colleagues know we will not remain silent as they are driven to jail, have their offices ransacked, and their lives and studies constantly endangered.' (CAFA 1991).

It was apparent, moreover, that the attack on the schooling system carried out through structural adjustment was part of a broader attack on African workers and of what many in Africa defined as a 're-colonization' project.

More than a decade later, we see that our analysis was correct. The dismantling of Africa's higher education systems has played a strategic role in foreign investors' and international agencies' redefinition of the place of Africa in the international division of labour as a producer of raw material and 'cheap' labour-power for the international labour market. It has also assisted their expropriation of Africa's 'natural' resources (copper, coltan, oil) and Africans' 'indigenous knowledge' (especially genetic and pharmacological knowledge), by undermining the ability of African countries to protect this knowledge, and al-

lowing transnational corporations to present themselves to the world as the institutions best equipped and entitled to preserve and control Africa's wealth (Caffentzis 2000:10-11).³

Today, the devastating effects of SAPs are recognized, though much remains to be done to assess to what degree the devaluation of higher education has affected African political economies. When CAFA was formed, however, identifying structural adjustment as a major violation of human rights was going against the grain. The early 1990s saw a growing attack on the African nation-state, determined in part by the popular opposition to autocratic governments, and in part by the anti-statist requirements of the neo-liberal agenda. It was in this context that human rights organizations like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International focused their attention on African governments' violations of academics freedom, university students being among the staunchest supporters of political multi-partyism.⁴

In our view, however, the Mobutus and Babangidas were but the most visible executors of repressive action (to shoot, beat, arrest and torture protesting students and faculty) logically rooted in the economic plans designed in Washington and London, for which international agencies were responsible. In other words, we held that institutions like the World Bank – part of the UN System and expressing the interest of international capital – were the primary agents in the repression of academic freedom in Africa, African autocrats being their immediate accomplices. In this sense, our choice of the concept of academic freedom to qualify CAFA's mission was somewhat polemical. But we also chose the 'academic freedom' label, despite its traditional elitist connotations, because of the new meaning that was being given to it in the debates taking place on the African campuses.

While human rights organizations and the UN appealed to 'academic freedom' to condemn governmental interference in African education, African educators and students meeting, on the 29th of November 1990, in the capital of Uganda, issued a Kampala Declaration that identified the primary intellectual right and freedom with 'the right to education,' i.e. the right to have access to the means of knowledge production and circulation. We embraced this idea because it fitted our task and unambiguously indicted the World Bank and its supporting international 'donors' as violators of intellectual/academic rights.

This approach radically differentiated CAFA from other human rights organizations. We also did not have the resources available to them as CAFA was always completely self-financed through the contributions and donations of its members, most of who were university teachers. Nevertheless, we believed we could be quite effective. We recognized that our opponents had one vulnerability: they depended on academics to do their research and strategizing. That meant

they had to maintain a humanitarian and scholarly façade, one reason why, starting from this period, increasingly the World Bank began to define itself as a 'knowledge bank' fit to pontificate on any subject from education, to oral history and gender. It became, then, our task to tear this façade apart and delegitimize the Bank as an institution that self-respecting scholars may wish to work for.

CAFA's delegitimizing efforts at first had two major venues: the African Studies Association (ASA) and the Third World solidarity activist circles. In both places, we found a natural ally in the Association of Concerned Africa Scholars (ACAS). The ASA annual meetings were a gathering point for many African scholars the World Bank wished to recruit. Thus, our first Newsletters and public presentations were directed at the ASA and the academic world around it. However, we also addressed the activists involved in Third World liberation movements' support networks, who were familiar with student struggles in Latin America and China (the Tiananmen Square massacres had taken place in 1989) but knew little about the African students killed, injured and arrested in their struggles for the right to study. To fill this gap we first constructed in 1993 a chronology of African university students which we periodically updated, showing not only that the bulk of student struggles in the period were against the consequences of SAPs (both on campus and nationally) but that what was being fought for was akin to a second independence movement. For the ultimate issue at stake in the question of the right to education was the possibility of national, regional and continental self-determination.

As we showed through this chronology, not only did student fight around their immediate interests, saying 'No to tuition fees,' 'No to cuts in books, stationary, transport allowances,' 'No to starving while studying.' They also organized protests against the consequences of the education cuts for all campus workers, mobilizing in support of strikes called by teachers and non-academic staff workers, as well as to obtain the release of jailed comrades, their reinstatement when rusticated and the un-banning of student unions. Most important, very soon student struggle took on a political dimension, extending beyond the universities and making the link between the cuts in education budgets and the re-colonization project perpetrated through structural adjustment. From the mid-1980s on, across Africa, students went to the streets to join with market women, unemployed youth, and unionized workers in anti-government, anti-IMF demonstrations, contributing to a re-composition of the African 'proletariat' that was unprecedented since independence.

It is more than symbolic that, in 1989, in Benin City (Nigeria), in the course of a mass mobilization against SAP, since then known as the 'anti-SAP riots,' student liberated 809 prisoners from jail and then brought the food they took

from the jail pantry to the nearby Central Hospital, to feed its patients (*Newswatch*, 6.12.89:18). The anti-SAP campus struggle for a time undermined the hierarchies built through the educational system, contributing to the growing call for a democratization of the political process. By the same token, it was again the student who most helped to demystify the campaign for 'multi-partyism', 'popular participation' and 'human rights' that the U.N. and other international institutions launched in the 1990s as part of the liberalization of the African state. For as we wrote 'students demonstrated that no democracy is possible where people are denied the basic means of survival and the possibility of being autonomous producers of knowledge' (Federici et al. 2000:99).

The Anti-globalization Movement and the New African Student Movement, 1994–1999

A turning point for CAFA was the formation in 1994 of '50 Years is Enough', a coalition of groups, from all sectors of the global justice movement, joining to protest the coming 50th anniversary of the founding of the World Bank and IMF and the policies of these institutions. Networking with other groups critical of globalizing capitalism (e.g., the anti-sweatshop and the Jubilee 2000 anti-debt campaigns), this coalition began targeting the gatherings of the World Bank and IMF in Washington and around the world in what now appears to us as the beginning of the anti-globalization movement. CAFA too joined this mobilization, adding its knowledge of the effects of structural adjustment on education to the 'convergence meetings' of the movement. In this process, our work was projected on a broader stage, as we came in contact with campus activists from other parts of the world, and we began to understand the attack on public education in Africa as part of a global trend.

CAFA's protest against the World Bank peaked with its campaign to prohibit it from organizing panels at the ASA annual meetings. An arbitrary procedure, only explainable on the basis of the Bank's political clout and the new alliance being forged in the 1990s between business and academe, these panels offered the Bank a propaganda platform and a tool for neo-liberal indoctrination. In 1995 we decided that enough was enough and circulated a petition urging the ASA Board to put an end to this practice and calling for a 'World Bank-free ASA.' We argued that 'The World Bank is a bank: it is neither a scholarly nor an educational institution. It has been especially responsible for the degradation of the university system in Africa. Therefore it is neither academically nor morally qualified to participate in the ASA' (CAFA 1995). This effort was quite successful and for a period there was a noticeable reduction in these panels.

But our most important effort in this period was our support work for the struggles African university teachers and students, like the Kenyan university

teachers strike of 1993-4 (against the government's refusal to register its union), and the Nigerian university teachers' strike of 1995. It was through CAFA that a wide spectrum of US academics and political activists learnt about teachers' unions in Nigeria or Kenya or Tanzania, or African students' organizations like National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) or the National Union of Ghana Students, among others. Compatibly without limited resources, we mobilized support, wrote to and petitioned African vice-chancellors and embassies, called on colleagues, students, labour unions in the US; urged them to protest killings, arrests, rustications, show solidarity in the case of strikes, and pressurize the authorities involved. To do this we broadened our communications with faculty and student organizations in Africa. This was especially true for the often-banned but never defeated Academic Staff Union of Universities in Nigeria (ASUU).

The period 1994–1999 was a peak period of intense activism in African universities. Student struggles varied depending on local situations. Nevertheless, the demands students put forward across the African campuses very clearly indicate these were anti-SAP struggles. As we wrote in our Newsletter in the Spring of 1996, 'No to tuition fees', 'No to starving while studying', 'No to cuts in books, stationary, transport allowances', 'No to SAP and the re-colonization of Africa' are slogans that have appeared on every campus from Cairo to Lusaka ... providing the deepest bond among students who are often seen as irremediably divided on ethnic or religious grounds' (CAFA No.10, Spring 1996, p.8). Protests were also organized in support of strikes called by teachers and non academic staff workers, to obtain the release of jailed comrades, to demand that they be reinstated when rusticated, to demand the un-banning of student unions, or the removal of army and police from the campus premises. Extending beyond the universities very soon this protest took on a broader political dimension.

The CAFA Newsletter was distributed on several campuses and CAFA members spoke at academic and movement events. Thus, when the international media finally recognized the existence of the anti-globalization movement during the 'Battle of Seattle' in November 1999, CAFA's campaign against the 'enclosure of knowledge in Africa' had a small, but definite place in the worldwide effort to turn back the neo-liberal model of economic and social life. In preparation for and immediately after the anti-WTO Seattle demonstration, many activists used CAFA's *Chronicle of African Student Struggles* (Federici and Caffentzis 2000:115-150) to show that the struggle against globalization was not a US-based creation, but a worldwide phenomenon maturing over more than a decade and mostly in the so-called 'third world.'

A Thousand Flowers, 2000–2003

The importance of making the demands of the African university struggles an element in the anti-globalization movements led CAFA's coordinators to propose to Africa World Press a book collecting the most significant materials in our newsletters, ranging from analyses of the World Bank's education 'reform' program to the struggles against 'adjustment' in Niger, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Senegal, Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, and Malawi.

Titled *A Thousand Flowers: Social Struggles Against Structural Adjustment in African University* (Federici, Caffentzis and Alidou 2000), the book was a milestone for CAFA as it coherently presented the struggle against the privatization of education in Africa at a time when the anti-globalization movement was shaping up as an alternative planetary presence against the institutions of global capitalism. The meetings of these institutions were no longer the pleasant, little-noticed 'private' affairs they had previously been. Outside the bankers', world leaders', and finance ministers' conference halls, activists were blockading, and samba-ing, holding counter-conferences where their every move was critically analyzed. *A Thousand Flowers* helped us bring the story of African students' resistance to SAPs to these gatherings and make a case for the abolition of the World Bank and the IMF. This was originally a minority position in the anti-globalization movement, but as the movement grew it became the dominant one, gaining ground hand in hand with a new campus movement we fully supported to convince academic institutions to stop buying World Bank bonds.

By 2000, many in the movement believed the globalization process was in crisis. Then came September 11, 2001 and the military response to the crisis, with the invasion of Iraq in March 2003. These events had a profound, demoralizing effect on 'the global justice movement', as it now called itself. Parallel to these developments, CAFA's confidence in the possibility to roll back SAPs was also tested. Though struggles against SAPs have continued on African campuses, no breakthrough has been forthcoming. Throughout Africa the killing of protesting students by police and military has continued. CAFA Newsletters described the growth of 'campus cults' in Nigeria that physically attack anti-SAP student organizations with impunity and the struggle of migrant African youth, many of them former students, in the US.⁵

On the African campuses, the struggle against structural adjustment reached a stalemate in this period. The World Bank had not succeeded in reducing the number of universities or students, which in fact had increased absolutely and relatively in the 1990s, though at a lower rate compared to the 1960s and the 1970s. But public investment in higher education had been dramatically cut, and university education had been privatized and commercialized, with devastating

effects as far as learning, research, and the coherence of the university project were concerned. African universities today operate on a two or three-tier basis, each with different sponsors, funding (or lack thereof) and goals. Some units directly financed by foreign ‘donors’ for their own commercial purposes are well equipped while other literally next door are left to disintegrate. Meanwhile, the World Bank now admits that universities are necessary after all for a country’s political and economic life. But it is always the case. When the Bank sheds crocodile tears for its deeds, no one seems capable of making it accountable for its alleged ‘mistakes’.

Rethinking the CAFA project, 2004–present

Taking into account this new situation, after the publication of our last Newsletter in 2004, the CAFA coordinators decided to temporarily stop its production. Since then, the committee has been responding to requests from students and faculty groups and organizations in Africa for support and assistance, but we have not launched any new initiatives. Our main project in this period has been our cooperation in the publication of a book produced by Richard Pithouse and other comrades in South Africa, titled *Asinamali: University Struggles in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, published in 2006 by Africa World Press (Pithouse 2006).

We have begun a rethinking of our work which we hope will be useful to other edu-activists, in the growing international struggle against the commercialization of education. Retrospectively, we can say that CAFA never succeeded in spurring on the North American campuses the type of mobilization we had envisaged. With few exceptions, the response to the anti-SAP students’ and teachers’ struggles in Africa has been tepid. US universities have capitalized on the defunding of Africa’s tertiary educational system, through the boom of study abroad programs that have often brought North American students to campuses that had been shut down by strikes or by government cuts. However, despite its failure to mobilize the North American campuses, we think that CAFA made important contributions to the struggle over education in Africa:

- For more than a decade, the CAFA newsletters have documented the experiences of student and teachers’ struggles on various African campuses, circulating information about strikes, demonstrations and other forms of protest, in addition to publishing and circulating the materials they produced. Through this activity, CAFA has been a vehicle through which people in and out of Africa have first become aware of the existence of an African student/teachers movement and of the role of education in the restructuring of Africa’s political economies.

- CAFA has been used by teachers' and students' organizations in Africa to get their demands and materials 'out' to students and educators abroad, and later to the 'anti globalization' movement. In this process, CAFA's experience was instrumental in generating a type of North/South cooperation that we now see as indispensable in all our political work.

Because of its cooperation with edu-activists in Africa, for more than a decade CAFA has provided an ongoing analysis of (a) the policies of international financial institutions (especially the World Bank) and the African states with regard to education in the context of the restructuring of the global economy, and (b) the implications of these policies for Africa's economic, political and social life. Our analysis has particularly focused on:

- the World Bank's 'adjustment' of education in Africa; and its function in the restructuring of Africa's place in the 'global economy' and international division of labour;
- the connection between the decline of the African university system and the difficulty African countries face in protecting their 'intellectual property rights' from gene-hunters and pharmaceutical prospectors;
- students and teachers' anti-adjustment struggles and the relation between students' and teachers' organizations and the state;
- the structural adjustment of African education and the migration of African labour, starting with the migration of African youth to Europe and North America.

Conclusion: CAFA's Future

Organizations should not perpetuate themselves once the objectives for which they were formed have been achieved or the conditions that made them useful no longer exist. This is why in 2004 we suspended the publication of our Newsletter. It is clear, in fact, that the struggles against the structural adjustment process in Africa have suffered a setback and a restructuring of African universities along more divisive class lines has passed. Many student and teachers organizations (especially those which were crucial reference points for CAFA's work) have been criminalized or no longer exist. Thousands of former students and activists have been expelled, many have migrated abroad, some are now employed in foreign universities, most work on assembly-lines or in garages or in distribution networks in Europe or the US. Nevertheless, 'aluta continua.' Campus enrolment in Africa has not decreased, and new forms of struggles are emerging. Most important, the adjustment of education we first observed in Africa is now becoming a reality across the world, including Europe and North America. This means that there are new possibilities calling for new organizational projects.

Indeed, we are more than ever convinced that the universities are a crucial site of resistance and struggle and are interested in connecting with the experiences of students and activists internationally, especially in the fight against the commodification of education and its restructuring along elitist lines. We are also interested in exploring how to expand, create, and support alternative forms of education within and outside the present institutions, and connecting with networks/projects/organizations working on education and gender.

Meanwhile, we are reconstructing our website where we will soon post a complete set of CAFA Newsletters and other relevant articles and documents. We are also organizing an archive with the materials produced by African teachers/students organizations (journals, bulletins, petitions etc.) that we will make available to anyone who wishes to consult it.

Last, we include a Code of Ethics we formulated in collaboration with a number of African activists, motivated by the irresponsible way in which North American educators often behaved when going to African campuses. We had no illusion that it would halt this kind of behaviour, but we found it a useful consciousness-raising tool.

Notes

1. On the anti IMF and anti-SAP struggles in African universities see above all CAFA (2000). 'We no go sit down,' was a slogan of the National Union of Ghana Students against the World Bank's Structural Adjustment Policy supported by the Rawlings government. According to this scheme, students would be 'bonded' for five years after graduation to pay the tuition fees. If they defaulted, they would be liable for the full cost of tuition fees, plus 30 percent interest.
2. On the massacre at Ahmadu Bello University see Academic Staff Union of Universities (1986).
3. There is now a huge literature on 'gene hunting' and corporate bio-piracy throughout the former colonial world. For Africa the classic is Juma (1989).
4. A good example of the 'human rights' organizations' approach to the violation of academic freedom in Africa in the early 1990s see Africa Watch (1991).
5. See CAFA (2001), and CAFA (2002).

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Appendix

Globalization and Academic Ethics

*The Coordinators of the Committee for Academic Freedom in Africa
[Published in Federici, Caffentzis and Alidou 2000: 239-241]*

One of the consequences of economic globalization has been the internationalization of US higher education institutions and universities. International studies, study abroad programs, international cultural exchanges have become a 'must' on most American campuses. In the last decade, a number of major U.S. educational organizations have asked that 'provisions should be made to ensure that at least 10 percent of all students who receive baccalaureate degrees in this country will have had a 'significant educational experience abroad during their undergraduate years' (Laubscher 1994). Equally momentous have been the efforts by U.S. administrators and funding agencies to turn American academic institutions into 'global universities' i.e. global educational centres, recruiting from and catering to an international student body.

We have also witnessed the growing engagement of US academicians and colleges in the restructuring of academic institutions in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the former socialist countries, and the management in these same regions of private, generally English speaking universities, unaffordable for the majority of aspiring students.

All these developments constitute the most substantial innovation in US academic life over the last decade. They have been promoted and hailed as a great contribution to the spread of 'quality education' and global citizenship. The reality, however, may be quite different. We call on our colleagues to ponder on the implications of these changes, especially for African universities, and to oppose the mercenary goals that often inspire them. Consider the following:

1. The internationalization of the curriculum and academic activities is often conceived within a framework of global economic competition that turns multicultural awareness into a means of neo-colonial exploitation rather than a means of understanding and valorizing other people's histories and struggles.
2. As the National Security Education Program (NSEP) has demonstrated, the Pentagon and the CIA are the most prominent government agencies promoting and financing the internationalization of U.S. academic education. This prominence is inevitable since they, more than ever, need cosmopolitan personnel at a time when the U. S. government is openly striving for economic and military hegemony in every region of the world.

3. The globalization of U.S. universities has been facilitated by the underdevelopment of public education throughout the Third World, upon recommendations of the World Bank and IMF in the name of 'rationalization' and 'structural adjustment.'
4. In some African countries where universities have been shut down, the idle facilities are often used by American study abroad programs. These programs benefit from the cheap cost of study, and the program directors can even hire at very low wages laid off teachers and former students as helpers/facilitators.
5. U.S. teachers and college administrators are being financed by USAID to intervene in several third world and former socialist countries to (a) set up private universities; (b) restructure entire departments, schools, programs, curricula. In other words, U.S. academics are being presently employed by the U.S. government to carry on cultural/educational work abroad that suits its economic, political, and ideological objectives.

Considering the above developments, we believe that the time has come for U.S. academics to show our colleagues in Africa and other third world regions the same solidarity that would be expected of us by colleagues on our own campuses.

It is in this context that we are proposing the following 'University Teachers Code of Ethics for Global Education in Africa.' We urge you to circulate it among colleagues in the institutions where you work, at conferences, and other academic events and ask people to comment upon it. Please send your comments to one of the coordinators of CAFA as soon as possible. They will help us in the coming months to construct a final code of ethics that can be subscribed to by a substantial number of people involved in 'global education in Africa.' We intend to present the code to the organizations involved in financing or overseeing global education initiatives as well. Even more important, we want to use this declaration – amended as it might be – to promote solidarity with our African colleagues and campaign to reverse the recolonization of African universities.

University Teachers' Draft Code of Ethics for Global Education in Africa

We are university teachers and we publicly declare our adherence to the following principles of academic ethics in our work in Africa:

- we will never, under any circumstance, work (as researchers, with a study abroad program, or in any other capacity) in an African university where students or the faculty are on strike or which has been shut down by students' or teachers' strikes and protests against police repression and structural adjustment cut backs.

- we will never take a position at, or cooperate with, the World Bank, the IMF, USAID, or any other organization whose policy is to expropriate Africans from the means of the production and distribution of knowledge and to devalue African people's contribution to world culture.
- we will never take advantage of the immiseration to which African colleagues and students have been reduced, and appropriate the educational facilities and resources from which African colleagues and students have been *de facto* excluded because of lack of means. Knowledge acquired under such conditions would be antagonistic to the spirit of multiculturalism and scholarly solidarity.
- we will consult with colleagues and activists in the countries where we carry on research, so as to ensure that our research answers the needs of the people it studies, and is shaped with the cooperation of people whose lives will be affected by it, rather being dictated by funding agencies' agendas.





The Contradictory and Complementary Relationship Between Student Constructive Engagement and Protest Strategies in South African Higher Education¹

Mlungisi Cele*

Abstract

Some claim that the present democratic state has made enormous progress in transforming South African society in general and higher education in particular. On the contrary, there is persistent and widening social inequality reflected in all spheres of life affecting predominantly poor, African and working class strata of society. On average, about 25 per cent of students leave higher education institutions annually in South Africa because they are excluded on academic and financial grounds. To reduce dropout/exclusions student boycotts and protests are common despite the institutionalisation of student participation (commonly referred to as ‘constructive engagement’) in higher education (HE) governance in 1997. The paper explores the dimensions of various protests and examines some of the effects of student participation in HE governance structures.

Résumé

Certains prétendent que l’Etat démocratique actuel a fait des progrès énormes dans la transformation de la société sud-africaine en général et dans l’enseignement supérieur en particulier. En fait il y a, bien au contraire, des inégalités sociales persistantes et croissantes qui se reflètent dans toutes les sphères de la vie, affectant de manière prédominante les classes pauvres, africaines et ouvrières de la société. En moyenne, près de 25 per cent des étudiants quittent chaque année les institutions d’enseignement supérieur en Afrique du Sud parce qu’ils sont exclus sur des bases académiques et financières. Pour réduire les abandons et les exclusions, les boycotts et les protestations de la part des étudiants se sont répandus malgré

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l'institutionnalisation de la participation étudiante (habituellement appelée 'l'engagement constructif') dans la gestion de l'enseignement supérieur en 1997. L'article explore les dimensions des diverses protestations et examine certains effets de la participation des étudiants aux structures de gestion de l'enseignement supérieur.

Introduction

This paper examines the two dominant strategies (that is, constructive engagement and protests) that students use in tackling financial and academic exclusions. During the national struggle against apartheid and after the 1994 elections, students have continued to contribute to social and political change in general and higher education in particular. At the same time students' contribution, role, success or even failures should be analysed and understood in relation to the conditions under which students struggle. On the one hand, democratic dispensation has ensured the institutionalization and formal recognition of the student voice and involvement in governance structures and decision making. On the other hand, neo-liberal triumphalism has ensured the emergence of managerialism and marketisation which reduced the political space which was to be managed through participatory democracy (with students participating as key actor) and gave rise to a technocratic and expertise-led decision making process. Examples of this are democratic structures such as institutional forums, which remain toothless while task teams are often set to deal with issues as they emerge.

The higher education sector is experiencing employment inequalities. For instance, in 2006 black (African, Coloured and Indian/Asian) staff had only a 37.7 per cent (6,057) share of permanently appointed academic (instruction and research) staff posts while female staff had a 42.2 per cent (6,791) share of permanently appointed academic staff posts (Department of Education 2008:42).

According to the non-profit organisation the International Education Association of South Africa (IEASA) (2007:33), higher education receives around 2.6 per cent of total government spending, a commitment that compares favourably with other developing countries. However, for many years university funding declined in real terms. In response institutions compensated by raising tuition fees which adversely affected poor students who could not afford them. Consequently this contributed to the increasing student debt, a continuing high drop-out rate of 50 per cent, especially among black students (IEASA 2007:32), and general worsening of student conditions (leading to squatting problems, failure and exclusions).

Students have tended to address their concerns by engaging (constructively) first and if no solution is found, then through protest actions which continue to

manifest in some institutions even in 2008. Between 2002 and 2004, about 69 student protests focused on academic and financial exclusions.² These were the two dominant issues of student protests, which attracted brutal and violent police response, negative media coverage and strong condemnation from university managers, and government.

Methodology and approach

The data used include 82 interviews focusing on student protests and conflicts and the impact of student participation in governance on financial and academic exclusions between 2002 and 2004. The interviews were conducted after student elections or during or within two months of specific protests. The questions focused on recent changes in student governance, patterns characterizing student involvement in institutional decision-making and the nature of recent learning disruptions. The purpose was to construct a chronology of events leading up to and following student protests to better understand changes in student politics. Because protest accounts sometimes differ, interviews targeted leaders from different student political organizations, SRCs, student deans, deputy vice chancellor student affairs, unions and academic staff.

The protest and conflict incidents (a total of 149: 104 at historically black institutions and 45 at historically white institutions) were identified from newspaper coverage or through interviews and were thereafter examined in greater detail. These protests and conflicts were later sub-divided in terms of the primary groups they targeted: the state, student leaders and institutional grievances. While almost all protests and conflicts focused on multiple issues, they were also sub-divided in terms of the primary focus students designated.³ The protests and conflicts comprise of a mixture of one-off events and more sustained actions. The one-off events generally involved a placard demonstration and a march. Protests and conflicts that involved a series of actions generally included a combination of memos and placard demonstrations, marches, violence, and vandalism. The institutions⁴ we examined consisted of 6 historically black universities (4 African, 1 Coloured and 1 Indian), 6 historically white universities (including 1 distance university), 6 historically black technikons (4 African, 1 Coloured and 1 Indian) and 2 historically white technikons.

Table 1 indicates the sample of institutions that were involved in the study. The study adopted a comparative descriptive approach that sought to sketch the main changes that have occurred in student politics since 1994 across 12 universities and 8 technikons. That is, the research methodology involved an institutional comparative approach that examined changes in student governance, student responses to institutional efforts to minimize academic and financial exclusions, and differences in student participation in governance structures.

This *inter alia* involved examining the tactics and strategies used by different SRCs to increase their chances of securing victories for students when negotiating with institutional managers and researching the mechanisms student leaders use to exercise power and maintain democracy.

Table 1: Institutions involved in the study

| Western Cape | Gauteng | KwaZulu Natal | Other |
|----------------------------------|----------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| University of Western Cape (UWC) | Wits | Natal (Durban) | Northern Gauteng Tech |
| University of Cape Town (UCT) | RAU | Durban Westville | North West Technikon |
| Stellenbosch | Pretoria | Natal Tech | Technikon South Africa |
| Cape Technikon | Medunsa | ML Sultan Technikon | UNISA |
| Peninsula Technikon | Wits Technikon | | Rhodes Fort Hare |

The study involved a combination of participant observation, qualitative interviewing and quantitative work. In some institutions participant observation embodied anthropological fieldwork. At other higher institutions, detached observation and independent data gathering involving the use of strategic informants, and augmented by interviews, occurred along with tabulations of institutional totals and comparisons. More broadly, the research involved collecting primary data at twenty institutions, a review of published and unpublished sources on student politics and elections in South Africa and a repeat probability survey (prospective panel) administered to students at five institutions.

In addition, a literature review was conducted which included a perusal of archival material stored at universities and technikons, discussion documents, internal reports, newspaper articles and material drawn from student newsletters. We also examined past research on students in South Africa, and international literature describing trends in student politics following significant transitions.

Situating the student role within a political context

The present democratic state emerged out of a negotiated settlement which occurred at the time neo-liberal triumphalism was at its high point but increasingly challenged globally. The failures of structural adjustment programmes and global popular resistance to the policies of the IMF, World Bank, and of the domi-

nant forces within the World Trade Organisation led to massive social movement protests. Progressive states in the South, including South Africa, began to align strategically in an attempt to transform the global multilateral institutions. Electorates in many parts of the Third World, not least in Latin America, rejected governments that had implemented neo-liberal policies. In the developed capitalist economies, working class and progressive forces continued to resist the attempts to undermine hard-won worker and social rights.

Some people tend to characterize the SA negotiated transition as a miracle and exceptional. Others tend to view it in terms of the liberal paradigm⁵ which conceives 'elite pacting' as the function of a 'few great men and women'. On the contrary, the South African negotiated transition, like others that occurred in developing countries (Africa, Latin America and Asia) in the 1980s was characterized by low intensity conflicts, warfare, and attempts by the old ruling bloc to exploit differences (ethnic, religious, language, class, gender and racial contradictions) among oppressed people. Their intention was to fragment and weaken the democratic and oppressed forces to produce a particular kind of product, apartheid-promoted violence and they attempted to create a hatred of democratic movement among the oppressed themselves.

The only major historical moment that made the SA transition unique is that it took place against the backdrop of the dissolution of the Soviet bloc of countries, and the end of the Cold of War, but which did not mean a freer and conflict-free world, as the advocates of benign globalization and 'end of history' ideologues would lead everyone to believe (Nzimande 2004).

South Africa's transition was in fact a product of a long protracted national struggle against colonial and apartheid spanning over three centuries which saw downtrodden masses making enormous sacrifices. Cronin (2004) argues it was also considerably (if unevenly) mass-driven, with popular organisation (self defence units, shop stewards councils, the African National Congress and its Alliance branches) and popular mobilisation like mass stayaways (the most significant being in the aftermath of Chris Hani's assassination) playing a critical role. Contrary to liberal opinion, these mass-driven features of our democratic transition were not destabilising anomalies. They were important factors both in driving forward the process, particularly in moments of impasse or crisis, and in laying down the foundations for a relatively durable democracy.⁶

Notwithstanding its mass character, the dynamics of the negotiation process had the effect of rendering politically marginal previously important social groups such as black students and youth (Badat, Barends, Wolpe 1995:13, see also SASCO Political Report 1996). Generally these groups became the spectators and followed the process on television. Consequently it could be argued that this situation contributed (maybe as an unintended consequence) to the reduction of

social consciousness, apathy and challenge to redefine the role of students and youth post-1994. The negotiated settlement involved a compromise and trade off between inclusive political democracy while leaving economic structure intact (Nzimande 2004). Basically South Africa achieved a democracy with political power but no economic power. However, this political power entailed numerous conditionalities or compromises, such as the creation of a government of national unity, the entrenchment of some of the rights of the existing public service, including the security forces, the judiciary and parastatals and establishment of provinces with original powers.

Key shifts in a socio-economic trajectory

The 1994 electoral platform of the ANC-led alliance, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), had envisaged a close integral connection between growth and development; growth had to be developmental. In practice, the new state increasingly separated these critical pillars of the RDP, into a capitalist-led growth programme, the Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) that would then, subsequently, provide the resources (primarily fiscal resources) to deliver, top-down, 'development'. And development tended then to be conceptualised as a series of government 'delivery' targets. This separation of growth and development, and the assumption that development was wholly dependent on capitalist development, has also been reinforced by the tendency to imagine that South Africa has 'two economies' in SA, rather than a persisting Colonialism of Special Type accumulation path that constantly reproduces under-development.

GEAR was adopted immediately following the first sharp fall in the value of the Rand in 1996. Business argued that the basic reason behind the fall in the value of the Rand was 'negative sentiment' arising from the fact that the government allegedly had no coherent macro-economic policy (read neo-liberal macro policy) and urgently needed to formulate one (Cronin 2004). GEAR was clearly, in large part, a response to such pressures.

The tendency to separate growth (i.e. capitalist growth) from development has meant that the first decade since 1994 has been characterised by some significant 'delivery' achievements, but it has tended to be delivery without transformation. And this has meant that well-meaning delivery is often seeking to ameliorate an expanding crisis of underdevelopment as capitalist growth retrenches and generally marginalises millions more South Africans.

Having managed to achieve its targets on macro-stability, GEAR failed to meet the targets of 6 per cent growth and the creation of 400,000 new jobs in 2000. Market messages then emerged suggesting that the problem was the absence of other complementary policies, such as a sufficiently ambitious pro-

gramme of privatisation of state-owned enterprises (Cronin 2004). At the same time the active role of the State in the mainstream economy was seen to be largely confined to creating a macro-economic climate favourable to investors and capitalist-driven growth.

Consequently numerous attempts were made on major restructuring of the economy, including the labour market through mass retrenchments, casualisation, informalisation, privatisation, and the fragmentation of the public and parastatal sector (see Nzimande 2004; Desai and Pithouse 2004:845; Cronin 2004). In this regard women had borne most of the brunt of retrenchments and casualisation in two ways. The damaging impact of right sizing the public sectors is still being felt on key developmental professions, including teachers and health-care workers. Following strong opposition, massive anti-privatisation campaign and general strike led by the Congress of Trade Unions (COSATU), in around 2001 dominant policy in government began to shift towards a much greater emphasis on building state capacity, and towards supporting the idea of a developmental state playing an active role in the economy, particularly in driving infrastructural development and an industrial policy.

However, these shifts did not necessarily mark a decisive break with a paradigm that envisaged a dichotomy between capitalist-driven growth on the one hand, and a more or less separate and technocratic development programme, dependent on capitalist growth on the other. It is possible for two quite different strategies to be lurking behind the agreement on the need for an active developmental state.

Persisting social inequalities and challenges

Since 1994 democratic government has ensured a very significant expansion of social grants, and millions of low cost houses, water, electricity and telephone connections. In fact the poorest households depend on social grants as their primary source of income. However, some people had their water disconnected, according to national government surveys, and ten million were also victims of electricity disconnections (see Bond 2004; Desai and Pithouse 2004).

Bhorat and Oosthuizen (2007:391) argue that while the number of jobs has increased during the past decade, the rate of growth has not been nearly sufficient to absorb the increase in the number of jobseekers entering the labour force (see also Bond 2004). Consequently, narrow unemployment has risen substantially, from 17.6 per cent in 1995 to a peak of 30.4 per cent in 2002, although it seems to have stabilised around 27 per cent since 2004.

Unemployment has strong racial and gender dimensions in South Africa as in many other countries. Amongst Africans and women, unemployment rates are above the 38.8 per cent national mean, at 44.8 per cent and 46.6 per cent respec-

tively. Unemployment amongst African women, though, is more severe than for any other group, with 52.9 per cent of African women being unable to find employment. There are even higher rates of unemployment in the country's rural areas. Borhat and Oosthuizen (2007:393), citing the International Labour Organisation (2004:2), find that approximately 60 per cent of rural African women in South Africa were broadly unemployed.

Further, Borhat and Oosthuizen (2007:398) state that overall, 9.7 per cent of individuals with tertiary qualifications are unemployed according to the expanded definition in 2005. However, amongst those with diplomas and certificates, the unemployment rate is 13.2 per cent, compared to a rate of 4.4 per cent amongst those with degrees. Thus individuals with degrees appear to be able to find work more readily than those with diplomas and certificates.

Citing Moleke (2003), Borhat and Oosthuizen (2007:399) argue that race and type of institution attended (either historically black or historically white) had a significant impact on graduates' employment prospects. The evidence suggests that the proportion of white graduates who immediately found employment was higher than that of Africans, coloureds and Asians. At the same time, graduates from historically black universities (HBUs) were slower to find employment than their counterparts from historically white universities (HWUs).

The latest Stats SA Income and Expenditure Survey (IES) results indicate that while 10 per cent of the population continues to earn more than 50 per cent of household income in the country, the poorest 40 per cent of the population accounts for less than 7 per cent of household income, with the poorest 20 per cent accounting for less than 1.5 per cent of income (based on income from work and social grants).

It is also reported that the black African population group accounted for 79.4 per cent of the population (76.8 per cent of households), and received 41.2 per cent of household income from work and social security grants. The white population group accounted for 9.2 per cent of the population (12.8 per cent of households), and received 45.3 per cent of income. The coloured population group accounted for 8.8 per cent of the population (7.8 per cent of households), and received 8.6 per cent of income. The Indian/Asian population group accounted for 2.5 per cent of the population (2.5 per cent of households), and received 4.8 per cent of income. Thus, the white population's share of household income was 5 times their share of the population, and that of Indians/Asians was almost twice their population share, while black Africans' share of household income was approximately half their population share. Only for coloureds were the shares of household income and of the population closely aligned.⁷

According to the Presidency, the racial imbalance is further reflected in the irony that 50 per cent of Africans live in households of four or more people compared with only 30 per cent of whites. Yet in terms of the number of rooms available to households, 73 per cent of Africans have four or less rooms (including kitchens and where applicable, toilets) while 86 per cent of white people have four or more rooms in a household.

Accordingly, the ten-year review makes the following observation:

If all indicators were to continue along the same trajectory, especially in respect of the dynamic of economic inclusion and exclusion, we could soon reach a point where the negatives start overwhelm the positives (2003:102).

Inherited higher education

The situation in South Africa's higher education is well documented and known.⁸ The democratic state inherited higher education that was characterised by gross material and functional inequalities between historically white institutions (HWIs) and historically black institutions (HBIs). Wolpe and Schoole (1995:3) argued that vast disparities existed in financing, material resources, staffing, undergraduate teaching loads, quality of students, availability of courses and so forth. The functional differentiation of historically black universities (HBUs) and historically white universities (HWUs) had its origins in the different conceptions of the roles of these institutions.

HWUs were conceived of as providing the human resources and knowledge required by the advanced industrial, social and dominant political order enjoyed by the white population. By contrast, the HBUs were shaped to provide the human resources deemed to be necessary for the occupations available in the urban areas to black people and to the 'development' of the Bantustans. This was unrelated to any broad conception of the knowledge and skills required for their 'real' economic and social development (see also Bunting 1994; NCHE 1996; NCHE Finance Task Group 1996; Department of Education 1997).

For Badat (2002:3) both HWIs and HBIs were in different ways and to a different extent deeply implicated in the subordination and domination. Higher education still reflects huge disparities. The serious contemporary under-representation of black and women students in particular fields and at postgraduate level and the domination of the academy and knowledge production and of high level occupations and most professions by white and male South Africans are eloquent testimony to this past (see also Department of Education 2001a; Science and Technology R&D Strategy, Cohort Report 2004; DoE 2008). For instance, in 2006 black (African, Coloured and Indian/Asian) staff had only a

37.7 per cent (6,057) share of permanently appointed academic (instruction and research) staff posts while female staff had a 42.2 per cent (6,791) share of permanently appointed academic staff posts.

The demographic composition of the student body has changed significantly since 1980 and is beginning to reflect the composition of the national population. Compared to 40 per cent in 1993, 60.8 per cent of all students in the public higher education system in 2006 were African. Concomitantly representation of white students in the higher education system fell from 47 per cent in 1993 to 24.9 per cent in 2006. Overall 55.1 per cent of the students (408,718) in the system were female in 2006. Inequalities of outcome continue to exist in the higher education system; in 2006, the average success rate of Black African students in undergraduate programmes was only 72.2 per cent compared to an average of 85.3 per cent for white students.

Whether HE institutions actually take in more black and women students than they hope to retain because students have demanded that the 'doors of learning and culture' should be opened in order to increase access into HE is of course an open question. HE institutions have a clear financial incentive to increase student numbers and equity profiles. Enrolment numbers have for many years figured in the state subsidy allocations. The state has also promoted the idea of a massified HE system and put pressure on institutions to swell participation rates of black students to over 15 per cent (DoE 2001a). In response, some institutions that experienced enrolment declines from 1996 to 2001 lowered their admissions policy to take in more students who would normally not qualify. Thus, while some institutions have maintained an annual undergraduate 'dropout rate' of 25–30 per cent and graduation rate of 16–20 per cent (Subotzky 2003), they also have mostly managed to recruit students. Moreover, they were exhorted by the state in 2004 to grow by 5–10 per cent, only to be told that their faster than anticipated growth now calls for a moratorium on enrolment increases.

However, while institutions have floundered in their efforts to respond to the cacophony of growth rate rhetoric that surround efforts to steer South Africa's national HE system, and the need to secure a high volume of high skill labour to promote economic expansion, HE institutional and student leaders have also had to grapple with the problem of students not wanting to leave HE institutions after having run up huge debts, or not having performed well academically. The pressure on HE institutions in post-1994 South Africa to balance their books and to be run like profitable businesses, while at the same time being unable to rely on the state to underwrite their debt with banks, has indeed forced institutions and student leaders to 'sort' students into those who can complete their studies and who cannot. In doing this, they have generally adopted criteria for financial exclusions. This mechanism ensured that students who both fail aca-

demically and owe money would be excluded, while students who pass academically, but owe money, were allowed to continue with their studies, provided that they make suitable loan repayment arrangements.

At most institutions, the trend before reaching this conclusion involved student leaders rejecting, engaging, protesting and then accepting exclusions in the name of political realism. On the other hand managerial efforts have generally involved attempts to show their empathy with the plight of students and explanations of how they are forced to exclude students due to economic realities. Faced with protest, managers have attempted to first 'bully' student leaders through police involvement and then through consultation to win them over and bind their future actions to support the exclusion of students from poor and mainly working class and rural communities.

The merging of institutions further deepened and in most cases exacerbated student situations. The March 5–12, 2004 *Mail & Guardian* Edition, reported that:

the SRC President of the Soshanguve campus (part of Tshwane University of Technology) said that many students could not be registered this year because tuition fees had suddenly increased and the practice of accepting instalments on fees had been halted. However, De Ruyter said that students from all three institutions had been part of the consultation process and had accepted the new terms for fees...

Some merged institutions introduced a differential fee increment approach and increased harsh debt collection measures to deal with defaulting students. For example, at the University of KwaZulu Natal, the 2004 registration fee was R4,000, slightly more than at the former University of Durban Westville (UDW) last year, but less than at the former University of Natal (IOL 13 February 2004). Students were told to pay R2,000 on the registration day and the balance over four instalments. It was stated that students would be financially supported through bursaries and NSFAS if they could not afford the new fee. However like in many institutions, students with outstanding fees were not allowed to register. As a result some students have had to drop out or face hefty fines as their debts are handed over to attorneys for collection. Examination results of indebted students are also withheld and students are not allowed to graduate until a settlement agreement has been reached.

Constructive engagement and student protests

There is a general expectation (nationally and institutionally) that negotiations and peaceful protest should constitute the acceptable face of political behaviour. For this reason, the violent way in which student leaders at times addressed

forced academic and financial exclusions generally raised the ire and evoked the same kind of outrage that often showed when students protested against apartheid policies. Viewed longitudinally, protest behaviour and student tactics show many fading characteristics. Between 1970 and 1994, SRCs played a pivotal role in the political upsurge that occurred in South Africa, in organising and leading student activities, in raising general consciousness about the disabling effects of apartheid, and in promoting ideas about a class-free society. Since several student groups promoted non-collaboration and conflict on campuses from the early 1970s as a way to increase social consciousness about social inequalities, the question of how they conducted themselves raised fierce debates. In the 1980s, clashes with police on campuses and clashes about whether students should participate in graduation ceremonies or other institutional activities were not uncommon at some institutions.⁹

While some student groups continued to favour non-collaboration, the 1980s also brought increasing realisation that boycotts and protests were means to an end, and that peaceful protest and negotiation were also vital instruments in pursuing change. For many years this view firmly contradicted the view that student boycotts and protests alone were justifiable ends since justice required that elite groupings in South Africa engage in moral opposition to apartheid. Accordingly, in the 1990s, along with the realisation that participation held rewards, protest actions dissipated as distrust of university authorities waned and students argued that the transformation of South African higher education required their involvement in governance structures. With this loss of the political momentum that carried student militants to many concessions when negotiating with HE managers around institutional resource crunches from 1990 to 1994, student political organisations also began to change their tactics. Principally, student militants opposed to participation were cast in the role of obstructionists hindering effective management, while participation and what some refer to as 'constructive engagement' emerged as the favoured means by which to influence institutional thinkers about problems facing students.

Student participation or 'Constructive Engagement'

Student participation in governance structures and student protest are world-wide standard features at higher education (HE) institutions. In South Africa, historically participation often focused on student elections and direct protest action, rather than on involvement in decision-making, although the genesis of student participation can formally be traced to the election in 1906 of a student representative council (SRC) to represent student interests at what later formally became the University of Cape Town. From this time onwards, the political implications of student agitation around fees, bursaries and academic mat-

ters related to teaching and learning gradually contributed to student leaders representing their peers in academic forums like faculty committees and senates. Starting from this base, students generally attempted to gain a greater say, often through protests, in other institutional matters like the admission of black students, social integration on campuses, the formulation of employment and student recruitment policies. Developments at several institutions also show that students have historically tackled the quality of student life, policy around academic promotions, and, ultimately how an institution is governed.

All of this raises questions related to the type, and choice of means students use to extend their influence. The need to extend influence arises from the view that the powerful seek consent to legitimate their actions. Consequently those involved would want to consult and this opens the possibility of checks and balances on the exercise of power and possibility that the less powerful may influence the decisions of the more powerful. In line with this, students have articulated the idea that they have a basic right to protest and to nominate or elect leaders to raise views on their behalf and have debated the desirability of participation in institutional governance. Key questions implicated in this debate include how significant participation is, what form participation takes, which governance structures students participate in, what information can they access, what representation and influence are gained by students gain through participation, and what can be gained from participation. As this list shows, the debate in student ranks, for good social and political reasons, largely focused on effective participation; that is, how students can use participation to effect change that benefits them.

The South African student participation debate has not been entirely lopsided as well. One characteristic feature includes the likelihood that participation would be symbolic and lead to students only providing consent and legitimacy to institutional managers. Until recently participation in governance structures at HE institutions in South Africa was associated with apartheid control. Along with this, the dominant managerial approach involved the executive over-ruling student actions. This management strategy was augmented with manipulation (appointing SRC members and unilaterally determining their constitution and functions) and excluding students from meaningful decision-making processes and structures.

An historical case in point concerns the experiences of the University of Durban Westville where the first SRC was formed in October 1971 in line with a constitution drawn up by the Rector, Professor S. P. Olivier. This followed on from the rejection by the UDW management of a constitution drawn up by students. The management constitution set out the roles and responsibilities of SRC leaders to management. This required students to obtain the prior approval of

the University council to be able to ‘publish a student newsletter’, ‘make press statements’, ‘affiliate to any national student organization like South African Student Organisation (SASO) or National Union of South African Students (NUSAS)’, or to ‘have branches of SASO or NUSAS on campus’ (*The Leader* 1972).

However, since this undermined their independence and provided effective control to the University Council, students in 1972 decided to disband the SRC on the assumption that participation could only legitimate an apartheid institution. An important consequence was that the main source of student political influence at UDW (and at other historically black universities) before 1990 arose from protest politics, their rejection of institutional policies and their anti-management stance. These strategies at HBUs carried few risks, negated co-optation, and indicated that protests and non-participation in formal structures was a means of signalling opposition, and of hampering actions that students do not support.

Notwithstanding this, popular student sentiment did not favour protests as a long-term strategy because it disrupted academic activities and did not always achieve its objectives. So protest politics over time practically promoted consultation as a means of resolving conflict. The form consultation took at HBUs varied. At some institutions, it was infrequent and simply related to negotiating and mediating institutional conflicts. Indeed, consistent student involvement was largely limited to ad-hoc negotiations with university and technikon leaders around material protest issues such as student fee increases, overcrowding in residences, and the quality of residence food, academic exclusions and protests against apartheid policies. At other institutions, consultation was more frequent, varied and formal. For example, at the University of the Western Cape in the late 1980s and early 1990s consultation involved unofficial meetings between members of the university executive and student leaders, information sharing, occasional joint protest action, and some student participation in actual decision-making processes. More recently, consultation has also been formalized with most institutions holding weekly or bi-weekly meetings between SRCs and senior institutional executives.

Structured student participation in HE governance is an important contemporary feature of the institutional landscape and a recent development in this country. In one sense, the seed for this is also not local, but is rather embedded in the structure of public HE worldwide. Indeed, democratic co-operative governance involving stakeholders constitutes a general feature of the managerial revolution that swept through fairly young European HE institutions a few decades ago. In another sense, there is a local base to student participation since democratic governance, involving students in decision-making roles, was a central

student demand in the Apartheid period. The seeds for this no doubt lay in the important role students played in challenging their exclusion from governance structures at universities during apartheid and in the authoritarian nature of HE governance in South Africa prior to 1990. This meant that management showed little public accountability to students and that fundamental legitimacy weaknesses characterised decision-making.

Historically, these weaknesses included the perception that there was a lack of participation and transparency in how decisions were made at HE institutions. Other weaknesses included the view that management at several institutions enjoyed little student and academic staff support. The source for this view varied. At some institutions, it encapsulated the idea that an inner circle with ties to the previous government tended to steer several higher education institutions. At other institutions, it related to the view that conservative liberals tried to control and limit the pace of change. Consequently, since the composition of executive leaders did not bode well for HE restructuring post-Apartheid, students along with other groups argued strongly that executive leadership at several HE institutions had to be overhauled. They also argued for new governance arrangements (for example, Broad Transformation Forums) that included students in order to exercise some restraint on managerial influence.

In this regard, legislatively, the formal genesis for student participation is found in arrangements contained in the 1997 White Paper. This document commits institutions to formally recognise SRCs, to establish procedures for their operation, and to give student leaders representation on a wide range of institutional committees, including Councils and Institutional Forums. Before the 1997 White Paper, student participation in institutional governance at especially black institutions did not include participation in planning, budget, teaching and service, equity, quality assurance and ICT committees. However, the 1997 White Paper provided for convergence between student participation at historically black and historically white institutions in South Africa and for more extensive involvement in institutional committees.

The answer to why the shift occurred is complex. Viewed from an institutional standpoint, the antecedent roots for student participation clearly concerns the reciprocal responsibilities students and institutional leaders have. It further relates to the fact that student protest became endemic at several institutions during the early 1990s and helped destabilise academic and managerial approaches. Indeed, struggles against financial exclusions, over food, squatting and the demographics of institutions 'obstructed social stability' at many HE institutions up to now. Therefore, to resolve ongoing student protests, given that the material conditions that inform most student protest still exists, institutional leaders had to channel student political activity into institutional structures and

promote structured political engagement. For this, institutional leaders clearly had to accede to student leaders that they be formally recognized as important stakeholders and become involved in decisions that affect students. What further informed the shift was the idea that resolving the competing claims of HE interest groups through bargaining and consensual decision-making was central to establishing the legitimacy of institutional leaders and to restoring stability at conflict ridden institutions.

Beyond this, for unstable HBUs, political stability through an end to student protest and a decrease in political activity were key objectives. Another objective involved making decisions more realistic to students by involving them in decision-making. Student assistance in addressing the vexed questions that surround the material issues that give rise to student protest was another carrot. For HWUs, untroubled by political instability, the answer is less obvious, given that the involvement of students in decision-making were always likely to produce its own complications. Student involvement in more governance issues, in the context of devolving executive authority to lower levels, rather held the promise of extending indirect executive control over students.

From the student perspective, participatory co-operative governance provides some advantages. Amongst others, participation suggested that consultation must precede policy enactment. This participation offered student leadership access to institutional information. Participation also promised an implicit constraint on unilateral management decision-making and policy implementation. In other words, participation enhanced the status of SRC members as co-decision-makers and as potential powerbrokers. Related to this, participation implied a dilution of management's power and more fluid decision-making.

Additionally, seats on Councils and recognition as important stakeholders offered the prospect of student participation in processes leading to the election of Vice-Chancellors and of other senior executives. This necessarily meant that student support could play a vital role in institutional battles and could be used to increase student influence. Equally important for students and HE managers, participation implies that opposition and 'cat and dog' relationships need not define their engagement. Instead, participation meant that bargaining about issues that affect students could form the cornerstone of their engagement. Another possibility was that students could form temporary alliances with other stakeholders and so extend their influence. Yet another dimension provided by participation was that student leaders and HE managers had opportunities to strike a balance between the interests of institutions and those interests student leaders represent.

Viewed from a political standpoint, the emergence of co-operative governance must equally be placed in the context of the shift in national power rela-

tions that accompanied the increasing adoption of co-operative governance, democracy and stakeholder involvement in decisions as cornerstones for HE transformation in South Africa. What underpinned this shift in power relations was essentially the idea that students were clearly agents of transformation and that democracy in HE presupposes student participation. The answer also partly lays in government and institutional recognition that student voices need to form a crucial part of efforts to implement policies in HE. What helped facilitate government recognition was no doubt the fact that many government policy makers in 1994 included education activists who bore the brunt of undemocratic institutional decisions during the 1980s.

What also played an important role was the centrality of negotiations and bargaining in providing a basic platform for consensus on how restructuring in South African society would manifest. Therefore, the inclusion argument and switch to corporate type governance emphasised that institutions needed to promote democratic values, function more democratically, be more transparent, and allow for greater participation. In other words, nationally, policy makers put forward the precise mechanisms used to foster a co-operative transformation spirit and to stabilise national government relations as a solution to managerial and institutional instability at HE institutions. Along with this, it was hoped that participation would lead to consultation, consensus and greater stability by allowing groups with competing interests the opportunity to discuss and debate issues and to reach a common ground.

Reflections and experiences of student participation or ‘Constructive Engagement’

During interviews student leaders further indicated that participation in governance structures has largely involved a focus on adhering to procedures and not really addressed outcome issues. At all the institutions, the main emphasis involved adapting to the changing organizational context and trying to learn what student organizations should do. For student leaders this adaptation has generally involved paying much greater attention to management issues since their roles, at one extreme, appear to involve considerable office functions.

Indicative of this, student leaders we interviewed indicated that the SRCs they participate in have more formal bureaucratic features than before, are generally understaffed, and involve an increasing number of official activities. For them this means that they perform a wide range of administrative duties and act as ‘professional counsellors to those who voted for them’ and as ‘management consultants’ to the university executive who they keep informed of student decisions and possible actions. Since student leaders interact with HE management they are knowledgeable about institutional policies and in a position to inform

other students. Second, they are trusted – because they were elected – and are believed to act in the interests of students, whereas other university officials are widely viewed as putting bureaucratic interests first. Third, their involvement in institutional meetings involves carrying student views and putting student perspectives on issues.

Students have not always participated equally. One reason relates to poor attendance. This is attributed in some institutions to ‘leaders not showing enough responsibility’ and in other institutions to student leaders being ‘overworked’ since they mostly remain full-time students, but sometimes serve on more than 10 institutional committees, while also being involved in SRC activity and in the work of their student organisation.

However, poor attendance in meetings also relates to the fact that student leaders sit on consultative structures that lack decision-making powers. For example, one common student comment highlights that Institutional Forums were toothless and only active when faced with senior appointments or the re-naming of buildings and structures. A second gripe involves students’ difficulty in dealing with issues, documents, and deliberations in Senates that do not deal with ‘fancy issues’ such as governance, but with hard academic issues, which in most instances would have gone through long interactive processes, from departments up to Senate, and merely require endorsement.

In these cases, university managers highlighted a central criticism that SRCs are only for advancing mandated positions from the student body or speak more on issues which are in line with the general student body and do not contribute to general issues. A further perceived expectation relates to a perception that student participation in governance structures is exploited to legitimate decisions since their limited voting power does not provide veto rights, while they often have no real chance of influencing decisions. For this reason, some academic staff members evaluated student participation as not being robust and as characterised by silences on issues in which students are expected to speak on. In general, they speak mostly on issues which have direct impact on students such as fees, access, and the appointment of senior management especially the vice-chancellor etc. There was also a feeling that students reserve their comments for things that they are comfortable with.

A further disconcerting issue raised by some student leaders concerned the role of Student Development Offices (SDOs). Such offices exist at most institutions since their functioning is inscribed in the Higher Education Act. Overall, they are supposed to provide ‘student service support’ and to ensure that gaps in resource provisioning and in capacity building of student leaders is redressed. In practice, student leaders argued that:

Student development officers – particularly those without student politics background – tend to be problematic in a sense that they see student leaders as rebellious, only capable of sewing conflict. As a result these officers have neglected the aspect of resourcing the SRCs, simply because they still view them as confrontational structures of the past. SRCs are equally guilty, because most of them do not trust anyone from management structures of the institution (Pentech SRC September 23 2002).

Those student development officers with previous student politics background are less willing to give space and opportunity for newly elected SRC members to lead the way they want. In this, student development officers would expect things to be done the way; perhaps they used to do during their student leadership era (UCT SRC January 31, 2002).

These examples seem to indicate that SRC members view the Student Development Offices (SDOs) as structures that aim to limit or control SRC activities. At the same time student development officers complained about the lack of resources and infrastructure to support their activities and about efforts from SRCs to undermine their role. These invariably involved SRC members trying to bypass procedures or continuing to deal with senior management representatives who dealt with SRC issues before SDOs were established. Collectively, this has undermined the role and influence of SDOs, since senior management officials have tended to intervene in disputes in favour of SRC members. The broader result is that the SDO structures that were primarily established to provide greater resources to student leaders and to improve their knowledge over student service issues are largely bypassed by both students and management and that the capacity challengers that SRC and other student leaders faced in the past have largely remained the same.

What have students achieved through participation?

This question elicited varied responses. Mainly staff and students suggested that students have displayed mature leadership and shown that protest was not the sole means through which change could be effected. For them, this change in tactics produced several results across institutions. Student leadership has worked with management in establishing common frameworks around which future negotiations around student access, retention, exclusion and individual financial difficulties could be addressed. This involved extended negotiations for several years in forums outside Council, Senate and IFs, but was greatly helped by participation in such forums since students participated in relaying the outcome of negotiations. The ‘pacts’ in turn provide a platform for future engagement around

issues and implies that 'institutional memory' and not 'strength' will determine the outcome of future engagements around access, retention and exclusion.

Student leaders have continually provided a student perspective on issues and highlighted historical trajectories with respect to how some issues affect students and how they have historically been handled differently. This, in the view of students, has contributed to several important victories. For example, all institutions have lately raised tuition and residence fees substantially, but student leaders feel that they have been able to contest the scale of tuition fee increases and are responsible, in some cases, for lower than envisaged increases.

Students and university management have established joint social and civic responsibility projects. The SRC at the former Medical University of South Africa (Medunsa) organised off-campus health clinics for 16-year-olds, whereas the SRC at the former University of Durban Westville (UDW) organised Academic Support Project (ASP) which supported matriculants and offered supplementary classes for Grade 11 and Grade 12 learners and the UWC SRC in 2002 mobilised volunteers to promote youth employment. In this way, while students tend to go into higher education to obtain a qualification and learn a skill, activism continues to make a vital contribution to societal development with students sometimes functioning as what Altbach (1998) referred to as a 'conscience' on what needs to be done to promote national development.

Student leaders have gained from the presentation of institutional pictures in forums and a greater appreciation for long-standing institutional efforts to promote student welfare. Students indicated that they specifically gained greater insight into budgetary concerns and issues that impact on institutional performance. As a result they developed a broader institutional perspective rather than a narrow student perspective. This in turn meant that they defended student interests in a more guarded manner, which in some cases would imply that they did not necessarily contest issues that the larger student body viewed as crucial.

Student leaders also represented foreign students at various institutions. In general, they consistently tried to advance student interests and improve students' situation. Student leaders improved their administrative and policy skills. They gained familiarity with national priority issues confronting institutions such as the Size and Shape debate and the development of three-year strategic plans, and they have helped shape the vision embodied in institutional responses to state-wide developments.

However, others expressed discontent and disillusionment with their participation in policy and institutional governance issues. They described their participation as debilitating since their views are often not taken very seriously. This is most forcibly expressed in the following argument:

Student participation is a joke. There is a mentality that students are about protests. We are capable of causing violence and bringing institutions into turmoil. We are not seen as intellectually capable to contribute to transformation, but are expected to listen to senior professors. Most of the time students attend to get information about what is happening. No agenda is given. No preparation takes place. No mandate is carried. Although we don't fully participate, it is really better to get access to information, than to abstain and remain ignorant. Sometimes we don't understand the issues under discussion. With finance issues we wait for stuff around students and then contribute. Otherwise our views don't matter. Some see us as delaying decision-making (UCT SRC January 31, 2002; Pentech SRC member September 23, 2002).

Arranged opposite these are comments indicating that student leaders are expected to participate equally in committee meetings and to be actively involved in deliberations, but are hamstrung by the onerous demands of full participation. Several interviewees noted that while unevenness exists across institutions, leadership and policy training was essential, research expertise necessary and official skills require improvement. Further complicating their tasks, in some cases, previous SRCs tended not to keep adequate records. As a result their successors lack information about the terms of agreements reached with university management; and that little continuity marked the handing over of positions.¹⁰

SRC members are not always fully prepared for the responsibilities they need to take and the tasks they have to perform. Many also lack experience in staffing organisations and lack a clear idea of what they need to do in their various portfolios, or what possible strategies they could follow to improve organisational performance. As a result members conceded that they often flounder in meetings with university management, feel powerless in representing students and need training in organisational procedures and university protocols.¹¹

In their defence, several also noted that both past and present SRCs experienced similar bureaucratic difficulties, except that formal demands for financial accountability and reporting were great. For them, the enormity of this adaptation requires socialisation into new organisational practices. Thus, whereas lax accounting procedures were sometimes tolerated in the past, audited statements brought tighter controls and formal accountability in performing tasks in order to prevent mis-spending.

Others noted that besides administrative difficulties, it is arduous to mobilise students in support of actions and unlikely that protest action could be sustained for a few days without incidents of violence. While it happened in 2003 that protest action at the University of Fort Hare and Witwatersrand Technikon lasted

for extended periods, this partly related to institutions being closed to take the sting out of protest and to limit the damage caused by newspaper reports of disruptions. Flowing from this, interviewees intimated that SRCs were responding to pressure from small groups when mobilising students and that proper representation of concerns through appropriate channels is time consuming, frustrating and exhausting.

Further compounding administration and governance difficulties is the fact that portfolios were not always neatly aligned with emerging responsibilities, but that constitutional changes were difficult to make as apathy made it difficult to get quorums.¹² SRCs conceded that inherited organisational features which inhibit or make their responses haphazard or characterised by inaction as it was not always clear who was responsible for taking up specific issues or how this should be done. Also while SRCs are now more involved in policy considerations than before, they lack knowledge of legislative frameworks and policy processes. Nor do their budgets allow for commissioned research or other assistance when engaging in policy actions, yet, they, and other student representatives, are expected to participate in committees dealing with appointments, employment equity and transformation issues. In consequence, several SRCs have requested that leadership skills, project management, entrepreneurial management, skills training and capacity building programs should be institutionalised and that they receive training in administrative, management and policy related issues.

Student protest patterns at Historically Black Institutions

Student protest remains common at various campuses despite the involvement of student leaders and student bodies in co-operative governance. A sampling of cases over the last seven years shows that protests and disruption of academic activities occurred at a multitude of institutions. In February and March 2008 students engaged in protests against financial exclusions, fee increment, accommodation fees and general student conditions (such as racism and security) at the Durban University of Technology (DUT), University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), Tshwane University of University (TUT) and University of Free State.

In the case of DUT, for more than a week, students protested against registration fees, accommodation fee increment, poor accommodation facilities and security and demanded that student debt be rolled over for students, especially those receiving financial assistance. The university said that the total student debt was R175 million of which R72 million was accumulated during the 2007 academic year. According to the university spokesperson the institution agreed to allow students to formalise loan agreements with financial aid offices and then register without paying the first instalment.

In 2003/2004 and 2007 students at the University of Witwatersrand (Wits) and University of Johannesburg (UJ) embarked on protest against fee increases and privatisation of accommodation. In the recent case of Wits, students opposed the 18 per cent fee increase for 2008 and privatisation of residences. The protest lasted for three days and involved students storming into lecture theatres, and disrupting classes. The police responded with rubber bullets to disperse students. Consequently students forced the university to reduce the 18 per cent fee increase to 8. This represents a partial victory for students considering that they had demanded a zero increment.

In the case of UJ, students embarked on a protest against the 14 per cent fee increment for 2008. The university received a court interdict to prevent students from demonstrating. According to a university spokesperson, Sonia Cronje, the interdict was considered necessary because the university would not tolerate the disruption of academic activities and the threatening or intimidation of students and staff. Police fired rubber bullets and walked into the buildings where, in full view of the public, they kicked doors and arrested some students (including the SRC President and Deputy President) (IOL 08 October 2007). For students, the action taken by the university management was nothing but a continuous trend by certain administrators of higher education in order to commodify education as a basic need of the South African people (IOL 08 October 2007). Students called for state intervention which resulted in several meetings between the national department of senior education officials, university management and students. Consequently students suspended their protest actions. At the same time the Minister of Education pleaded with Vice Chancellors and Councils to curb fee increases, especially given the improved financing of higher education that was a result of this year's budget.

In 1999 and 2000 students at the University of KwaZulu Natal (the former UDW campus) protested against the exclusion of fellow students for financial reasons. In 2000 the student protest only ended after state intervention. State intervention contributed significantly to the appointment of a commission to investigate student and management actions and the appointment of a mediator to moderate the engagement between students and management, but it also dispatched senior officials to mediate – in fact the student leadership attributed the resolution of the conflict to the involvement of the Director General. This followed public outrage after a student was killed.

Concessions made at the UDW in 2000 to 'restore calm' and re-start classes exceeded student demands. On that occasion, student bodies dug in, highlighted their mistrust of university leaders, and used 'non-collaboration' and violent protest on behalf of students threatened with exclusion. University authorities

also agreed to re-register large numbers of previously excluded students and to reschedule repayment deadlines and amounts.

In 2003 lengthy interruptions to academic programs also occurred at the University of Fort Hare where close to 1,000 students were excluded for failing to pay fees. In defence of their failure to reverse the exclusions of these students, student leadership argued that they had earlier forced the university to re-instate about 900 students and therefore could not stretch themselves any further. In other words, students here (like in many other institutions) accepted arguments from the university that each individual case of threatened exclusion should be examined on its own merits. In this manner they provided a rationale for treating a general student problem (financial security and aid) and a national education problem (exclusions) as problems that afflict individuals (Koen, Cele and Libhaber 2006:409).

In 2002 and 2004, students (from the former UDW, ML Sultan, Eastern Cape Technikon institutions) protested against the idea of merging black and white universities and technikons which was dismissed as misguided, but quickly changed to looking at the impact of mergers on the labour market value of qualifications and how mergers will affect individual study costs (Cele 2004). What is important about these individualistic financial and merger related concerns is that it partly signals a shift in student ranks away from contesting state interventions in HE to the pursuit of narrower interests and the defence of students who are likely to be most affected by changes. Further, in 2002 the former Medical University of South Africa closed for one week in February and one week in March and the University of the North closed for one week in May because students in these instances questioned the authoritarian leadership of newly appointed university executives.

Students have also protested against their own student leaders. In 2002 students at the University of the North burned barricades and alleged the misappropriation of funds by members of the SRC. From 2001 to 2003 students at the University of Venda protested against corruption and misspending by SRC members. In 2001, Fort Hare students protested following accusations that SRC leaders benefited from nepotistic institutional practices. In 2001, students also protested about the inactivity of SRC members at the former Peninsula Technikon.

Overall interest in anti-state (or dissatisfaction) action has largely dissipated, barring two exceptions. The first exception concerns a series of marches by SASCO members mainly in the Western Cape – including members of other student political bodies such as the Anti-Privatization Forum – to the national Parliament. These marches showed political discontent about the size of state financial aid awards and reflected problems encountered in accessing financial aid. Overall state financial aid provided through the National Student Financial

Aid Scheme (NSFAS) has increased from R667 million in 2003 to R776 million in 2005, but remains inadequate.

According to Koen, Cele and Libhaber (2006:408), NSFAS provides between R2,000 and R30,000 per annum to about 120,000 mainly undergraduate students who receive 40 per cent of this as a loan and 60 per cent as a bursary. These allocations, to about 16 per cent of HE students, are based on a disadvantaged student index (DSI) and a full cost of study (FCS) index. Financial aid bursaries allocated by HE institutions, bank loans, and donor support to science students in particular complements this state aid. However, this has not impacted significantly on reducing dropout rates because many students receive no financial aid and because individual NSFAS allocations amount to less than 20 per cent of the study costs. As a result, the marches coincide with annual meetings of the Parliamentary Education Portfolio Committee and its discussions on higher education funding and largely function as a measure that increases public awareness about the financial difficulties that students encounter.

Conclusion

The advent of democracy created new opportunities, possibilities, ambiguities and contradictions across all spheres in South Africa. In higher education it meant that governance and decision making should be managed through participatory democracy involving all key stakeholders such as students and workers. However, globally, the emergence of managerialism and the rampant neo-liberal agenda began to erode the political space and influence the content of change that had to be pursued. To illustrate this point, higher education institutions are increasingly being forced to operate like businesses, whereby they need to have strategic plans and cost-recovery mechanisms, generate extra revenue, and apply user-charge fee and strident fiscal policies. There is an increasing view that students, parents and taxpayers must share the cost burden of higher education. What this means is that if you do not have money, you cannot access higher education. It also means if you owe money, you either settle up or drop out.

As demonstrated in this discussion, students continue to fight for access to higher education. They also fight for the space in which their voice can be heard, hence their continuing participation in decision making, even though they do not receive adequate support from institutions. It is critical to think of student participation as essential to the democratisation and transformation agenda of the country and continent, critical also in curbing early seeds of dictatorial tendencies. It is also about increasing and promoting active citizenship. However, the article shows that student participation or constructive engagement can only succeed where there is strong mobilisation and direct and continuous interactions between the student body and leadership. Currently most institutions are

suffering from student apathy and are actually characterised by a wide social distance between the leadership and the mass body.

The discussion also demonstrated that contrary to the widely held view that protest actions should be a thing of the past, many institutions, if not all, have experienced student protests since 1994. In general students have embarked on protest after constructive engagement has failed or as a complimentary strategy to it, in the way that the ANC-led Alliance used mass mobilisation as a tactic to gain concessions and tilt the balance of forces during pre-1994 negotiations. In fact I argue here that protests opened doors for the student voice to be heard and taken seriously.

Student protests represent the inability of HE managers and student leaders to reach a consensus during negotiations. Students have used protests almost as an annual ritual to fight against financial and academic exclusions, to lower proposed fee increases, promote democracy, and negate racism. Again student protests depend on the nature of the relationship between the leadership and mass body. Sometimes it is the mass that initiates and forces the leadership into protest actions, sometimes against the very same decisions taken with the consent of leadership. Student protests should be viewed as critical in developing a political and social consciousness of society and necessary as a mobilisation tool to advance, deepen and defend the democratic rights of citizens.

Higher education needs to recognise the significance and relevance of the student voice, rather than dismissing it. It needs to provide all the necessary and sufficient resources to empower students so that they can meaningfully and effectively participate in decision-making processes as equals. This is critical in order to ensure that decisions are reached through participatory democracy as opposed to technocratically and that it is an expertise-led process. At the same time students should properly organise themselves so that they can become a serious force. Student protest is a necessary tactic and strategic tool to mobilise and increase the social and political consciousness of students in order to become active citizens. Higher education remains a contested site of struggle and students should be in a position to struggle for their rights and needs.

Notes

1. This paper is based on the student governance and democracy study conducted by the Centre for the Study of Higher Education (UWC) and the Education Policy Unit at the University of Witwatersrand from 2002 to 2004. It also draws from my current PhD project which analyses student funding over a twenty year period in South Africa.
2. Financial exclusions occur when students have not settled their account during a study year and fail to enter into an agreement to settle that debt by a given date. Academic exclusion occurs when a student fails to make satisfac-

tory progress and cannot account for this using emotional, health, or psychological reasons. This is either based on a credit criterion (not having passed 40 per cent of courses), a major course criterion (not passing majors), a repeat-fail criterion (continuously failing courses), or on a period-rule criterion (not showing sufficient progress over a specified period). However, while exclusions can occur on any of these grounds, most commonly students are excluded when debt and non-satisfactory academic progress coincides, and when institutions fail to raise extra money to assist students who experience financial difficulty, but show satisfactory academic progress.

3. It is evident that students and management do not always agree on the main cause of protest. For example, newspaper reports in 2002 indicated that students at the University of the North went on a rampage because management opposed the allocation of additional money for a party. For management, the basic problem was that the SRC had exceeded its budget.
4. The study started before the restructuring of higher education institutions announced in December 2002 by the Minister of Education, Kader Asmal. Asmal announced that within the next two years the number of South African higher education institutions would be reduced from 36 to 23 (21 higher education institutions and 2 National Institutes for Higher Education). The 21 institutions include 11 universities, 2 of which would be expected to develop career-focused technikon-type programmes to address regional needs, 6 technikons (or universities of technology) and 4 comprehensive institutions, 3 of which would be established through the merger of a technikon and a university and 1 through the redevelopment and refocusing of an existing university.
5. This paradigm is beloved by liberal think tanks in the US, and espoused locally by a number of leading political commentators and academics (Deborah Posel, Frederik Zyl Slabbert, Alistair Sparks).
6. cf. Jeremy Cronin, 'Sell-out, or the culminating moment? Trying to make sense of the transition', University of the Witwatersrand, History Workshop, July 1994.
7. In 2003 the Cabinet decided to undertake a country/macro-social analysis which resulted in the discussion document entitled 'A Nation in the Making.'
8. The list is not exhaustive or comprehensive in its coverage: Asmal, K. (2000, 2004); Academic Planner, University of Cape Town (1993); Academic Planning Committee, University of the Western Cape (1992); Balintulo, M. (2002); Biraimah, K. (2000); Boughey, C. (2002); Breier, M. and R. Osman (2000); Centre for Higher Education Transformation (2001); Cloete, N. and I. Bunting (2000); Cooper, D. and G. Subotzky (2001); Cosser, M. (2002); Education Policy Unit (1994); File, J. (1994); File, J., S. Saunders and N. Badsha (1994); Griesel, H (2001); Hames, M. (2002); Howell, C. and S. Lazarus (2001, 2003); Howell, C., L. Potts and G. Subotzky (2000); Howell, C. and G. Subotzky (2002); Koen, C. (2001); Mabokela, R.O. (2003); Maharasoia, M. (2003); Mandew, M. (ed.) (2003); Mbabane, L. (2001); McKenna, S. (2003); Mehl,

- M.C. (2000); Mkhwanazi, V. and N. Baijnath (2003); Norris, B. (2000); Ntshoe, I.M. (2003); O'Connell, B. (1993); Peacock, K.S. (1993); Pillay, P. and N. Cloete (eds) (2002); Portnoi, L. M. (2003); Potgieter, C. (2002); Potts, L. (2000); Scott, I. (2001); South African Universities Vice Chancellors Association and Committee of Technikon Principals (2003); Strydom, A.H. and M. Fourie (1999); Subotzky, G. (1997, 1998, 1999, 2001); Van Zyl, M., M. Steyn and W. Orr (2003); Volbrecht, T. (2003); Zulu, C. (2003). Bunting, I. (2002); Cloete, N. (1998, 2001); Committee of Technikon Principals (CTP) (2002); Council on Higher Education (CHE) (2001); Department of Education (2001, 2003); Department of Education and Department of Labour (2001, 2002); Department of National Education (1988, 1989, 1990, 1993); Fisher, G. (1998); Gordon, E. (2001); Jansen, J. (2001); Kilfoil, W. (2003); Ministry of Education (2002); Language Policy for Higher Education, Moja, T. and Hayward, F.M. (2000); National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) (1996); *Report: A Framework for Transformation*. Pretoria: HSRC Publications, Olivier, N. (2001); Porteus, K. et al. (2001); Saunders, S. J. (1995); South African Institute of Distance Education (SAIDE) (1996, 2001); South African Qualifications Authority SAQA (2001); Universities and Technikons Advisory Council (AUT). Working Group (1995); Wolpe, H (1995); Badat, S. (2003); Bhorat, H. and P. Lundall (2002); Brown, R., B. Blake, J. Brennan and S. Bjarnason (2002); Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE) Round Table (1998, 2000); Commonwealth Secretariat (1991); Council on Higher Education (2002); Crouch, L. (1997); Day, B. and T. James (2002); Education Policy Unit (1998); Favish, J. (2003); Griesel, H. (2002); Humphreys, J., and J. Conlon (2003); Koen, C. (2003, 2004); Kraak, A. (1996); Kruss, G. (2002); HSRC. (1999); Lundall, P. (2003); Maharasoja, M. and D. Hay (2001); Naidoo, P. and L. Lange (2003); Research Programme on Human Resource Development, Human Sciences Research Council (2003); Simkins, C. (2002); Van der Walt, T.J. and D. Kaplan (1996); Yeomans, J.A.(2002); Young, M. (2003); Badat, S. (2003); Bunting, I. (1994); Cloete, N. (1998, 2002); Fataar, A. (2003); Jansen, J.D. (2002); Kraak, A. (2001); Cloete, N. et al. (2002); Kraak, A. and M. Young (eds). (2001); Marais, H. (1998); Ministry of Education (2001); *National Plan for Higher Education*. Pretoria: Department of Education, Barnes, (2004); Makgoba (2004).
9. See Hardy, C., Langley, A., Mintzberg, H. and Rose, J. (2001) 'Strategy Formation in the University Setting' in Jenniskens, I. (eds.) *Management and Decision-Making in Higher Education Institutions*, CHEPS and CHERI, pp. 293-325.
 10. Here UCT SRC represented the sole exception. Most notably minutes of last year's meetings are logged on an Internet site and are available along with other historical information and information from newsletters.
 11. Interviewees at all institutions expressed this sense of powerlessness. In addition, interviewees at four institutions indicated uncertainty about tasks. SRC

members at three institutions revealed that they were particularly unsure about demands since they had no idea what was expected of them in some forums (that have existed for several years).

12. These factors have especially been cited at Wits and at UWC with the latter being forced to operate with a draft constitution adopted in 1997.

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A Search for Post-apartheid Collective Identities: Ethnic Student Organisations at a South African University

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Abstract

Scholarship on higher education decries the levels of student activism in post-apartheid South Africa. It argues that student organisation is sporadic, fragmented and unrepresentative of broad student layers. Because of its emphasis on political identities as well as the failure to define activism broader than protests, this assessment fails to recognise the myriad of organisations such as cultural and religious bodies in South African universities today. By ignoring these forms of organisation, the literature that emphasises the decline in student activism after the demise of apartheid not only ignores initiatives where students are organising around their ‘new’ identities, but also fails to appreciate how historically these ‘hold-over’ organisations connected one wave of protest to the other. Using the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) as a research site, this article focuses on ethnic identities as a significant feature around which a section of the student population is organising. The paper looks at how the disappearance of legal apartheid, the new political environment as well as the failure of traditional political student movements to organise around their constituency’s multiple identities, have provided space and impetus for new forms of organisation.

Résumé

La recherche académique sur l’enseignement supérieur sous-estime les niveaux d’activisme étudiant dans l’Afrique du Sud d’après l’apartheid. Elle prétend que l’organisation des étudiants est sporadique, fragmentée et peu représentative des larges couches étudiantes. Du fait de l’accent mis sur les identités politiques aussi bien qu’à cause de l’échec à définir l’activisme de façon plus large que ses manifestations sous forme de protestations, cette estimation ne parvient pas à reconnaître

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l'importance de la myriade d'organisations culturelles et religieuses qui existent dans les universités sud-africaines. En ignorant ces formes d'organisation, la littérature qui insiste sur le déclin de l'activisme étudiant après la fin de l'apartheid ne se borne pas à ignorer les initiatives dans lesquelles les étudiants s'organisent autour de leurs 'nouvelles' identités, elle ne parvient pas à apprécier comment, sur le plan historique, ces organisations 'persistantes' ont pu connecter une vague de protestations à une autre. Utilisant l'Université de Witswaterstrand (Wits) comme site de recherche, cet article se concentre sur l'identité ethnique en tant que caractéristique signifiante autour de laquelle une section de la population étudiante s'organise. L'article s'intéresse à la façon dont la disparition de l'apartheid légal, le nouvel environnement politique aussi bien que l'échec des mouvements politiques étudiants traditionnels à s'organiser autour des multiples identités de leur base, ont fourni un espace et une impulsion à des formes d'organisation nouvelles.

Introduction

In 2007, there were ninety-one student organisations and clubs at Wits. These organisations fell into the following categories: representative student bodies such as faculty councils; political organisations such as the South African Student Congress (SASCO), the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) and Young Communist League (YCL); religious groups; sports bodies; hobby clubs; career-oriented societies; solidarity movements and interest-based groups. Among this array of organisations are seven cultural societies: the Bapedi Students Society (BSS), the Basotho Student Association (BASA), Ekhaya Cultural Union of Students (ECUS), Maitazwitoma Student Society, Khomanani Society, Thari e Ntsho and the Zulu Students Cultural Society (ZSCS). What is distinctive about these seven organisations is that all of them were established after 2000. Secondly, the membership of each of the cultural organisations is characterised by a concentration of a single language group, although all their constitutions provide for open membership. In 2007, 87.2 per cent in BSS spoke Sepedi as their first language, 91.0 per cent in BASA had Sesotho as their first language, 85.2 per cent in ECUS had IsiXhosa as their home language, 95.0 per cent in Khomanani were first language Shangaan/Tsonga speakers, 95.0 per cent in Maitazwitoma were registered as Tshivenda first speakers, 83.9 per cent in Thari spoke Setswana as their first language and 89.2 per cent in ZSCS were IsiZulu first language speakers. Thirdly, women's membership in the majority of the associations was lower than the 42 per cent which is the average percentage of women students at Wits. Women's membership in the cultural groups varies between 33 per cent and 50 per cent - BSS (37.2 per cent), BASA (38.0 per cent), ECUS (42.3 per cent), Maitazwitoma (39.0 per cent), Khomanani (50.0 per cent), Thari (33.0 per cent) and ZSCS (35.1 per cent). Fourthly, since inception the seven cultural organisations have

forged relations with similar student movements at other South African universities. Fifthly, none of the organisations had students from other countries in the region as members. The fact that the majority of members of Thari shared the Tswana language with students from Botswana was not strong enough to pull them into one organisation. The students from Botswana have a separate organisation. Similarly, the students from Lesotho have a separate organisation from the Basotho Student Association (BASA).

The emergence of these cultural organisations has been met with derision and ambiguity within the university and broader activist circles. A senior administrator at the university's student affairs department described the existence of the cultural organisations as 'ridiculous' and raised doubts about the groups' contribution to integration at the university. Taking a slightly different note, a former leader of the South African Students Congress (SASCO) and president of the Student Representative Council (SRC) in 2004 and 2005 feels that the student political organisations have been equivocal in their attitude towards the ethnic-based student organisations (Shivambu, interview, 24 October 2007). Shivambu was criticised by SASCO for his involvement in one cultural organisation. He recalls that in 2004 a decision was taken by the SRC to disband all the cultural student organisations and form one unified cultural body. He also remembers how despite the doubts about the political wisdom of organising along ethnic lines, SASCO never took a stance against the existence of the cultural student organisations. As a student political organisation, SASCO saw the cultural groups as important to garner support in SRC elections (Shivambu, interview, 24 October 2007).

Considering the history of student organisation during apartheid, the contemptuous and indeterminate responses are understandable. Although they followed different ideological strands, black student organisations jettisoned ethnic identities and frowned at any mobilisation along ethnic lines. In fact, it is the South African Students' Organisation (SASO) that pioneered within the nationalist movement the definition of 'black people as those who are by law or tradition, politically, economically and socially discriminated against' (Badat 1999:377). In terms of this definition, the emphasis among African, coloured and Indian students was on 'blackness', disenfranchisement and discrimination as opposed to ethnic identities. A survey of identities among students at five ethnically-defined universities conducted in the 1980s found that national and continental identities superseded ethnic loyalty and identification (Töttemeyer 1984). Until 1993 when black student groups agreed for the first time to participate in SRC elections, organisations among students at Wits mirrored the main fissures in South African society, with black and white students belonging to separate student groupings. African, Coloured and Indian students

organised outside of the SRC under the umbrella of the Black Student Society (Shear 1996).

The form of student organisation that existed at Wits before the 1994 democratisation was not different to what happened on other campuses. Student organisations at higher education institutions took an overtly political character, participating in militant campaigns against ‘on-and-off’ campus segregation, appalling conditions at university residences, financial and political exclusions. Another characteristic of the pre-1994 form of student organisation was alignment to political and national liberation movements. In a biography of Thabo Mbeki, Gevisser (2007:97-98) refers to rivalry that existed at the University of Fort Hare between the ANC Youth League and Society of Young African that was aligned to the Non-European Unity Movement. In a study of the most influential student organisation in the 1980s and 1990s, Badat (1999) reveals how there was a struggle within the Azanian Student Organisation (AZASO) – the organisation that replaced the banned SASO in 1979 – to jettison the movement’s black-consciousness orientation in favour of the ANC’s political approach. In the five decades of student organisation that precedes democratisation in South Africa, there is no evidence of ethnic-based student movements.

Using data obtained from semi-structured individual interviews with office-bearers of the cultural organisations, a focus group with two committee members from each of the associations, an interview with a senior administrator at the university’s student affairs department, an interview with the head of residences, a student development practitioner with the Student Leadership and Development Unit (SLDU) and information from the university’s Academic Information System Unit (AISU), this paper firstly tells the story of Wits cultural student organisations, when they were established and what they do. Secondly, it attempts to answer the question of whether the emergence of these organisations marks the ethnicisation of student politics in post-apartheid South Africa. Thirdly, the paper locates the emergence of this form of student organisation within the context of a contest over space and place within the university and broadly within South Africa after the demise of apartheid. While acknowledging that ethnic-based student organisations have emerged in other African countries after the latter gained political independence, this paper eschews postcolonial meta-narratives where trajectories of different countries are stitched according to a single pattern. The main argument is that the emergence of ethnically-based student organisations at South African universities is part of a broader search for post-apartheid collective identities. The paper concludes with a call for a move away from equating student activism with protest. Student activism is broader than overt political involvement in movements organised along ideo-

logical lines and encompasses political student organisations and a range of voluntary anti-establishment groups. The appeal is for a concrete look at how students are currently organising around new identities.

The genesis and *raison d'être* of ethnic student organisations at Wits

The first cultural organisation to be established is Ekhaya Cultural Union of Students (ECUS). It was established in 2001 and has a twofold objective. Firstly, ECUS aims to 'create a home away from home' for its members. Secondly, the association has an objective to 'promote culture among our diverse Xhosas and to uphold Xhosa values' (ECUS 2001). At the time that ECUS was established the main political student movement SASCO had been banned by the SRC after allegations that the organisation was involved in an after-party ruckus that saw members raiding the canteen for liquor. According to Shivambu (interview 24 October 2007), 'ECUS was the most vibrant organisation on campus in 2002'. The rest of the associations grew between 2002 and 2006: Khomanani Society in 2003; Basotho Student Association (BASA), Bapedi Student Society (BSS) and Zulu Students Cultural Society (ZSCS) in 2005; and Thari e Ntsho and Maitazwitoma Students Society in 2006.

Paid-up membership of the cultural organisations varies from 40 to 185: BSS (172), BASA (100), ECUS (142), Maitazwitoma (159), Khomanani (40), Thari (118) and ZSSC (185). All the constitutions of these organisations state that membership is open to all students; something that informants emphasised in the interviews. In some cases membership was open to ex-members who have graduated. Those interviewed were at pains to emphasise that they encouraged their members to join other organisations on campus:

Being members of other cultural organisations allows us to learn other peoples' cultures. Many people grow up in KZN, without ever speaking any other language except Zulu. So if they join other societies, they learn the culture and language of other people (Dladla, interview, 2 November 2007).

But research shows a picture contrary to the one of openness that the interviewees profess. The data from AISU derived from subscriptions to clubs debited from student accounts reveals little of this cross-pollination. Only three students were members of both Maitazwitoma and BSS and only one jointly belonged to Maitazwitoma and BASA. Not a single member of Khomanani belonged to any other cultural organisation. In 2007, overlap in membership happened on a small scale between organisations whose membership majority comes from the same language family such as IsiZulu and IsiXhosa or Sesotho and Sepedi. Another feature of the cultural student organisations is that the ma-

majority of members come from areas outside of Johannesburg which is where Wits is situated: BSS (135 out of 172) BASA (68 out of 100), ECUS (111 out of 142), Maitazwitoma (128 out of 159), Khomanani (34 out of 40), Thari (102 out of 118) and ZSCS (139 out of 185). There is a correlation between where cultural groups draw the majority of their members and areas where there is a preponderance of certain language groups. For an example, 57.0 per cent of ECUS members come from the Eastern Cape, 63.8 per cent of ZSCS are from KwaZulu-Natal and 76.7 per cent of Maitazwitoma are from Limpopo's town of Polokwane and its surrounds.

Another important finding is that few of the members of the cultural organisation were paid-up members of student political bodies. Although a majority of members of cultural organisations belonged to other religious, academic and sports bodies; only 29 of the 916 belonged to political student organisations. AISU data shows that in 2007, 29 members drawn from the seven cultural organisations were also members of the Young Communist League branch on campus. Not a single member of the cultural groups belonged to the South African Students Congress (SASCO) or the ANC Youth League.

Although there is unevenness in the activity of the cultural groups, some common features are identifiable in their operations. In 2007, most groups organised seminars where they invited speakers to address members. The input at these gatherings ranged from topics such as the importance of language, histories of different ethnic groups in South Africa to themes on cultural practices such as *lobola*¹, marriage and rites of passage. All seven cultural societies have dance groups affiliated to them. The dance groups perform during orientation week and when the student bodies have their activities. The highlight of the cultural groups' calendar is Heritage Day which is celebrated in South Africa on 24 September. When asked on the significance of the day, the chairperson of BASA said:

On that day we have the time to participate in a cultural day. The Xhosas bring their dance and we bring our dance and the Zulus bring theirs. We also bring our own food and we taste what each other group eats. On that day we are united. (Lepese, Interview, 1 November 2007)

But some of the groups have gone beyond superficial multiculturalism. Both Khomanani and BSS assist members who have academic difficulties. In 2007, Khomanani ran a study skills workshop. Interestingly the person who the association chose to run the programme was a Shangaan lecturer from the university's politics department. BSS on the other hand runs a tutorial programme for students throughout the year. Students who are struggling academically approach the organisation for assistance and it is the task of the office-bearers to find

tutors. In appointing tutors, preference is given to BSS members. Whereas all the groups identify community outreach as part of their constitutional objectives only Khomanani and BSS had such programmes in 2007. Khomanani collected clothes and toys which it gave to two Soweto orphanages. The initial idea was to deliver the collections to orphanages in Limpopo but transport costs made this difficult (Koza, interview, 5 November 2007).

For three consecutive years, BSS has run career exhibitions in different parts of Limpopo. In May 2007, the association took a busload of members to Ka-Matlala where they gave career advice to 150 matriculants from 18 surrounding rural schools. The Wits students gave advice about study opportunities that exist around Gauteng:

When we came to Wits, we did not know about issues of finance and how to choose courses etc. It's a big challenge if you are from rural areas. The career exhibition is not only focusing on opportunities at Wits – but other tertiary institutions around Joburg. We take to the exhibitions brochures from University of Johannesburg and Wits Technikon. (Maubane, interview, 8 November 2007)

We make sure that we go to Limpopo every year to assist those in need. It is the ultimate thing that BSS does. We look at schools that are disadvantaged – far from town. We are aware that the Limpopo government has career exhibitions in the province's main towns. We choose schools in remote areas. We want people from these areas to know that there is Wits, University of Johannesburg, University of Pretoria and not just Turfloop. (Mphahlele, interview, 8 November 2007)

Although it's a cultural society in essence, in BSS we also deal with academic issues. The idea is that we are here to study but the other objective is that others from our areas must also come and study. (Moremi, interview, 8 November 2007)

The examples of BSS and Khomanani outreach work illustrate the connection between the cultural associations and their hometown and provinces. In addition to having alumni as members, some of the cultural organisations have forged links with institutions outside of the university. Thari e Ntsho receives financial support from the Bafokeng royal house. In 2007, the organisation received R10,000 from the royal house which was used to acquire *makgabe* – the attire that women wear when performing dance and in the society's other festivities. BSS works with the Limpopo provincial government's Department of Education in its organising of career exhibitions in the province. The association has also worked with Thobela FM – the radio station that broadcasts in

Sepedi – to stage a concert on campus. On the other hand, the ZSCS has a constitutional provision to act as ‘a link between KwaZulu-Natal government and our members through creating opportunities for financial assistance to needy students’ (ZSCS 2005:2). The association has links with Ukhozi FM; a radio station that broadcasts IsiZulu.

Most if not all of the cultural groups have links with similar bodies on other campuses. The informants from Khomanani confessed that the existence of a Shangaan student association at the Vaal University of Technology is what inspired them to establish their cultural student organisation at Wits. In 2007, Khomanani held a consultative meeting with representatives from other Shangaan student associations at the University of Limpopo. Represented at the meeting were groups from Wits, the University of Limpopo, Tshwane University of Technology, Vaal University of Technology and the University of Cape Town. The ZSCS has links with Zulu student associations at the University of Pretoria, Tshwane University of Technology and Vaal University of Technology. BASA has linked up with Basotho student organisations at the University of Johannesburg and at the University of the Free State. In the focus group when asked about the future of the cultural organisations, there was unanimity on the need for national organisations that brought the different organisations together (Focus group, 17 November 2007).

Contesting place and space on campus

The fact that a section of the student mass at Wits is organising around issues of language and culture is not accidental. As Harvey (1990) argues, one of the responses to modernism’s internationalism is the creation of place-bound identities as a form of individuation. In unfamiliar and uncertain places, individuals use spaces such as communities, ethnic groups or bodies as insurance against displacement and to make meaning of their new conditions. To do this, they invoke tradition and use nostalgia. No situation better demonstrates this creation of place-bound identities than that of migrants. In their search for stability and security migrants use reified culture and an imaginary past to define themselves. For the majority of students that are members of the seven cultural organisations, being at Wits means a change of place physically, economically and culturally. As the research shows, the majority of members are not from Johannesburg or areas around the university. This displacement introduces a longing for home among them. When asked why it is important for him to belong to a cultural student organisation, an officer bearer of BSS stated categorically; ‘My roots are in Limpopo. I can’t come here and abandon my roots. Being at a university is a 5-year or 6-year contract of another life. After suc-

ceeding it expires and you go back where you belong' (Maubane, interview, 8 November 2007).

Over the last fifteen years the demographics of the Wits' student population have significantly changed. Despite the institution's 'open' admission policy, until 1998, the majority of the university students were white (Nkoli 2003:19). But in the last ten years, the composition of the university significantly changed. Approximately 65 per cent of 16,393 students registered for undergraduate studies in 2007 were black. Using the university's classification the remaining 8 827 were white, coloured and Indian. Of all the undergraduate qualifications awarded in 2006, 61 per cent went to black students (Nongxa 2007). Another significant development in the composition of Wits' student population is the steady increase in the number of international students registered with the institution. An officer in the University's International Office confirmed that in 2007, Wits had about 2,000 students who came from countries outside South Africa. This is an increase from 2001 when there were 1,652 international students on study permits – 636 from SADC, 353 from the rest of Africa and 663 from the rest of the world (Van Zyl, Steyn and Orr 2003). A study that the university commissioned established that staff and students at Wits spoke no less than 76 home languages (University of Witwatersrand 2003:1). For a significant number of students, this cosmopolitanism of the university creates the sense of being in transit and some disorientation.

In explaining the emergence of cultural student organisations at Wits, a student development practitioner from the university's Student Leadership and Development Unit (SLDU) said:

Some of these kids went to multiracial schools, girls-only and boys-only white schools. In these schools you hardly speak your vernacular. If you come to Wits – a very cosmopolitan institution – you are bound to bump onto a Nigerian guy, Chinese or Ghanaian guy. In such a situation if you bump [into] a person who speak[s] your language you'll be attracted to that person. People yearn to speak their own languages. So when people hear their own language spoken, they are attracted to that corner. It's good because it means you can associate, because of the common ground that is language' (Nyuswa, interview, 5 November 2007).

Like other tertiary institutions in South Africa, Wits has had to confront challenges posed by South Africa's transition to democracy. Facing universities in South Africa since 1990 were not only domestic pressures, but also changes at an international level. Van Zyl, Steyn and Orr (2003:1-2) identify the following as the world that confronted Wits in the 1990s – internationalisation of knowledge, the challenge posed by the digital revolution, the rise in market-driven

research and reduction of public funds meant for tertiary institutions. The consequences of these trends were changes to criteria for recruitment of staff and students, increased pressure to embrace diverse cultures and other knowledge systems, the challenge to the location of universities posed by technological changes and a shift to cost-management programmes.

Since the early 1990s, Wits has adopted various plans and policies aimed at transforming the university. Prodded by the publication of the government's *Education White Paper 3 – A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education* and *Higher Education Act 101 of 1997*, Wits adopted in 1999 a plan called *Shaping the Future: Strategic Plan*. The aim of the plan was to re-orientate the university and restructure its organisation. The strategic plan proposed four key areas of intervention – reforming governance structures; restructuring of faculties and departments; curriculum changes; staff and student representativity; and outsourcing of support services. In terms of governance *Shaping the Future* had proposals to realign structures such as the university council and senate in line with state policy on representativity. The plan also proposed the establishment of institutional forum made up of university management, government, senate, council, staff representatives and students. At an operational level the plan proposed a reduction of faculties and re-arrangement of departments under umbrella schools. In relation to curriculum the focus was on interdisciplinarity and relevance of what is taught at the institution (Nkoli 2003).

But Wits' transformation policies have been highly contested, as far back as the early 1990s. In a collection of case studies on initiatives to transform South African universities after apartheid, Wits' transformation is described as the most tumultuous (King 2001:73). The efforts to change have often led to open conflicts. In August 1993 and on the eve of South Africa's first democratic elections, Wits was hit with what has been described as 'possibly the most destructive week' in the history of the university (Shear 1996:xxii). The students went on a litter campaign where they trashed the university and destroyed property. In this pandemonium, the university administration called in the police who broke up the protests and arrested a number of students. At the centre of the protests were calls for the democratisation of the university's governing structures and exclusion of students on financial and academic grounds. Similar protest occurred in 1994 and 1995.

But the most publicised conflict is the one that took place in 1995. A year after the first democratic elections, the University of the Witwatersrand was in the news when the first black deputy vice-chancellor resigned after allegations and counter-allegations of racism (Makgoba 1997). After ten years of plans to reposition the institution, the university adopted a strategy entitled: *A Univer-*

sity to call our own: Wits from 2005 to 2010. The plan was adopted in 2005 and spells out the institution's vision to be a leading institution in knowledge production. As part of this vision, Wits has set itself the goal of being in the 'Top 100 universities' category by 2022. What this means for student enrolment is a restriction in the number of undergraduate students and a focus on post-graduate studies. Since the promulgation of the Employment Equity Act of 1998, the university has developed three employment equity plans with measures and targets aimed at eliminating unfair discrimination and achieving a diverse workforce reflective of the country's demographics. Prompted by the Ministry of Education's *Language Policy for Higher Education* which enjoined institutions to decide on languages of instruction, measures to promote multilingualism and steps to be taken to develop those language that have not been used in academic studies before, Wits adopted a language policy in 2003. According to the policy, over time Wits will see English and Sesotho becoming the institution's languages of instruction (University of Witwatersrand 2003).

Regardless of these policies the majority of student interviewees found Wits an alienating space and place. They pointed to language, food at residences and general institutional culture, as some of the causes for them not to feel that they belong to Wits.

By having these organisations we are saying to this institution which is very white, we may all speak English but among us there are still Sothos, Tswanas and Xhosas (Focus group, 17 November 2007).

If you don't stick to your culture and you come to this life of Johannesburg whereby everything is English, then you have a problem. Where are you gonna go? How are you going to cope? (Maubane, interview, 8 November 2007).

The major influence around especially Gauteng is westernised and people seem to deviate from who they really are. They choose other people's identities whereas those other people are practicing their own identities (Moremi, interview, 8 November 2007).

Some students pretend. They are trying to fit into something that does not exist. They are the ones who are against us when at res² we ask for traditional food. They say *pap*³ bloats them and makes them lazy. In their American accents they say they prefer chicken mayo. It's fake' (Mphahlele, interview, 8 November 2007).

We joined this organisation because everywhere it's English – on TV it's English, at Wits it's English. You read the board, it's English. We want it in our own language' (Koza, interview, 5 November 2007).

At Wits we are forced to abandon our cultures. This is an English-dominated institution. Although we are a cultural organisation, we need to have our constitution in English. Even when we go to student development officers, we have to speak English. The administration at this university is a challenge to us. When we speak in our language in meetings we still have to record our minutes in English' (Morake, interview, 30 October 2007).

For most of us who come from rural areas, the first association that we get attracted to are those that operate along ethnic lines. If you come to Wits, not knowing anyone and you hear someone speaking Tsonga, the most natural reaction is: Oh! You also speak Tsonga. I also do (Shivambu: interview, 24 October 2007).

None of the students interviewed knew about the university's language policy. They also could not point to any evidence of elevation of Sesotho. According to the language policy, in the first phase of implementation that runs until 2010, the university commits itself to development of material and resources for the teaching of Sesotho at all levels of education. The university also commits itself to supporting staff who register to study Sesotho (University of Witwatersrand 2003).

The sense of alienation that the informants expressed was in the past echoed in numerous studies. Using the distinction between racism and everyday racism, Wood (2001:97) found that there was a feeling of alienation among black students at Wits. She discovered that in their everyday experiences and at micro-levels, black students experienced discrimination and alienation. Wood (2001:99-103) found that there was very little personal interaction between white and black students outside the lecture room, few white students lived on university residences leading to *de facto* segregation and practices of cultural intolerance. Another finding of the study was that white lecturers through references that were alien to black student experiences maintained an unwelcoming climate for the majority of black students.

Since Wood's study, some of the conditions at Wits have remained unchanged. The situation where residences are largely populated by black students has not changed. An official in the Office of Residence Life stated that since 2003 white students only constitute an average of 5 per cent of those in university residences. Although the university has met its employment equity targets, the majority of lecturers remain white. White academic staff makes up 71.6 per cent of all academic and only 48.4 per cent of those on the institution's payroll as academics are women. In their study of student activism in post-apartheid South Africa, Koen, Cele, and Libhaber (2006:411) identify racial integration, racism

and language policy as one of the triggers to student protests in the 1990s. Black students in historically-white institutions demanded representation on SRCs, something they were previously refused. There have also been conflicts around institutional cultures of different universities. Afrikaans-speaking students have taken up what they consider as marginalisation of their language, while black students pushed for a move from Afrikaans to English as a language of instruction.

At Wits, perceived or experienced alienation appears to be fostering ethnic identities as a solidaristic response. This response is not different to ethnic-based organisations among migrant workers that help newly-settled members from rural areas adjust in urban areas. Known as ‘hometown associations’, ‘tribal unions’ or ‘homeboys clubs’, these organisations provided information necessary for survival in towns. They provided security and other resources that eased the transition from the countryside to the city (Adelula 2005).

Experimentation and university life

It would be parochial to attribute the development of ethnic-based student organisations to alienation and not focus on the specificities of a university as a place and space. In his description of the modern university, Peters (2004:70-71) identifies the production of a legitimising culture as the key role of the university. This is done through an emphasis on the Kantian idea of Reason; free and rational discussion; and production of a reasoning citizen. Although Peters (2004) concedes that this role has been fractured by massification and the bureaucratic notions of excellence, he contends that the university’s role of knowledge production, albeit in a utilitarian manner still remains. It is this role of a university as a ‘space and place of ideas’ that has allowed institutions of higher learning to be hotbeds of student activism and organisation. At university, students experiment with ideas and test new forms of organisation. The scope that the university allows for students to do this did not escape some of the interviewees:

Not all of us were born in Lesotho or Free State. Some students are from Soweto and other places. So they are curious about the life of a herd boy, what is Basotho music, initiation and so on. In BASA we teach them (Lepese, interview, 1 November 2007).

At university is where you make or break your life. So while you’re here you need to find your base because when you are out of this place, you move into a company with its own culture – with its norms and values. If you did not have a chance to learn your language or culture because you were at a multiracial school, being at Wits gives you that opportunity. If you don’t use it, then you will be what they call a coconut for life (Nyuswa, interview, 5 November 2007).

In the focus group reference was made to how the cultural groups provide an opportunity for re-learning to students who grew up in areas that were dominated by cultures to which they did not belong; 'You have guys who are told that they are Sotho but speak Zulu because earlier on, their parents migrated to KwaZulu-Natal. So what happens is that such students will join a cultural group for Basotho to learn who they are' (Focus group, 17 November 2007).

Writing on the debate on whether the country's sub-national provinces were 'becoming instruments for the promotion of ethnicity', Fessha (2007) argues that in post-apartheid South Africa not only there has been a decline in ethnic parties, but no strong exclusive provincial identities have emerged. Unless the specificity of the university is factored into the analysis of the cultural student organisations, it will be difficult to explain why ethnic organisations have not emerged in other spheres of public life.

The search for post-apartheid collective identities

Clearly, the search for ethnic identities among students at Wits or any other university in South Africa is related to what happens outside of these institutions. Similar to the way society shapes the university, what happens in society also structures the process of identity formation. Nyuswa (interview, 5 November 2007), who worked in student affairs at Durban University of Technology and Vaal University of Technology before joining Wits in 2007, described the emergence of the cultural organisations as a post-apartheid phenomenon: 'Before 1994, everybody was doing sport, everyone was into religion and everyone was into politics. After 1994 people said, "Hang on, what about culture?" Democracy actually opened up a lot of things for many people.'

According to Nyuswa the fragmentation of old identities did not only manifest itself in the birth of ethnic-based cultural groups. Religious student groups also went through a similar process.

After 1994, people started to say: hang on, although I am a Christian but I'm also Catholic or Zion Christian Church or Lutheran. I can start my denomination's student group here on campus. I don't have to belong to a broad Student Christian Movement (SCM). When they were doing that someone said by the way I'm Zulu. Everybody wants to belong somewhere (Nyuswa, interview 5 November 2007).

The phenomenon of fragmenting old identities is not new or unique to students. So is the practice of students organising along ethnic lines. In a study of the Nigerian student movement Beckman (2006) points to how ethno-regional student organisations in that country operated parallel to other student movements organised on national and ideological lines in a non-competitive manner. Stud-

ies of Zimbabwean student movements show how different groups appealed to students' ethnic identities in elections for the student representative council. (Gaidzanwa 1993 and Zeilig 2006) In a history of the Senegalese student movement, Bathily, Diouf and Mbodj (1995:398) describe how in the 1970s the Senegalese student movement fragmented as 'a number of "associations" emerged on the basis of disciplines, institutions and nationalities'. A similar picture emerges in a case study of student organisation at Sierra Leone's Fourah Bay College. Rashid (2000) describes how ethnicity played a part in the contests for representation on the college's SRC.

The above examples of ethnicity within African student movements after independence can seduce one into a postcolonial narrative where ethnicity rears its head in post-liberation situations. Following this route will not be different from what Chabal (1996) describes as a 'retraditionalisation of Africa' paradigm, which he regards as a view that identifies the re-emergence of ethnic-based organisations or discourses as one of the features of the African crisis. These organisations and ethnic discourses are seen as a sign of reversion of 'old traditions'. The argument in this paper is that both approaches are unhelpful. The examples of resurgent ethnicities within African student movements are best understood through the historical specificities of each case. As Beckman (2006) shows, in the case of Nigeria, the emergence of competing ethnic student organisations was related to political acrimonies between the south-western dominated federal government and other regional minorities. At an education policy level this acrimony expressed itself in staffing and admission stances that different universities took. As part of the struggle against the centre, regional politicians and university administrators came up with policies aimed at ensuring that staff as well as the institutions' student population reflected territorial and ethnic constituencies. According to Gaidzanwa (1993) the ethnic divisions that erupted during SRC elections at the University of Zimbabwe coincided with division between the two major liberation movements – Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and Zimbabwe's African People Union (ZAPU). Zeilig (2006:107) also links the ethnic cleavages within the SRC to tensions that arose as a result of the Zimbabwean army's incursion into Matabeleland – the provincial home for the majority of the country's Ndebele people.

Kaufert (1977) adopts the same context-bound approach in his study on situational identity and ethnicity among Ghanaian university students. What Kaufert found was that spatial isolation and life in a culturally diverse setup intensified kin identity and familial ties. He also established how the students shifted between kin, hometown, ethnic and regional identities, depending on situation they found themselves in. Similarly, Bathily, Diouf and Mbodj (1995)

locate the emergence of a student movement organising along lines of 'nationalities' in Senegal, in the University of Dakar's shift from being a West African regional institution to a national tertiary institution. How then can one use a context-bound approach to understand the emergence of ethnic student organisations at South African universities?

Under apartheid, ethnicity was a political and ideological weapon in the hands of the state and in its quest for hegemony. The state promoted ethnic loyalties in its pursuit of the policy of separate development. According to the policy, different ethnic groups were accorded their 'homelands' within the South African polity. These groups also had different institutions of higher learning, different localities, separate schools and ethnic-based radio stations. It is no wonder that there was widespread rejection of this categorisation, as Töttemeyer (1984) demonstrated through his survey among university students. Using Castells' (2000:7) distinction between strong and weak identities, the ethnic loyalties that the apartheid state fostered, provided insufficient glue to bind university students. According to Castells, weak identities are built artificially, while strong ones develop over a longer duration and are based on shared experience.

The post-apartheid political dispensation is remarkably different from the apartheid order. The new constitution created a unitary state, abolished the homelands and made all citizens equal before the law. Within this framework, the institutional design of the new order created space for management of cultural diversity and difference based ethnicity, religion, language and region. A chapter in the constitution is dedicated to traditional leadership and customary law. The constitution also recognises eleven officials and calls on the state to elevate and advance the use of indigenous languages. According to the constitution, the official languages enjoy parity and must be equitably treated. Underpinning these constitutional provisions is a bill of rights that grants individuals the right to participate in the cultural life of their choice, the right to practice their religion, and the right to use their language. Recognising cultural, religious and linguistic communities, the bill of rights states that members of such associations have the right to form, join and belong to cultural, religious and linguistic associations of their choice.

The new constitution also creates a range of institutions aimed at managing diversity. Section 6 of the document calls for legislation to establish a Pan South African Language Board (Pan SALB) whose task is to promote the language rights enshrined in the constitution. As part of a number of institutions aimed at supporting democracy, the constitution established the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities. Although the demarcation was not meant to coincide with racial and ethnic divisions in the country, 'ethnicity and provincial boundaries do largely

coincide in three provinces – KwaZulu-Natal, the Eastern Cape and the North West – in each of which more than two-thirds of residents speak a single language’ (Simeon and Murray 2004:284).

These provisions and institutional designs have led to alarm bells being raised in some quarters. Alexander (2002:89) criticises the post-apartheid state’s policy that sees its policy of multilingualism as not contradictory to national unity. He equates some of the provisions in the constitution to ‘the constitutionalisation of ethnic politics in the post-apartheid dispensation’ and calls them the most explosive element of the post-apartheid order. Alexander argues that the sections in the constitution such as the one that gives the right of self-determination to linguistic and cultural communities will reinforce centrifugal tendencies leading to ethnic mobilisation as warring factions pursue separatist agendas. Although there is dispute on whether the new dispensation has led to increased levels of ethnic consciousness and ethnic mobilisation in South Africa, it is undisputed that the multilingualism policy only exists on paper and that ethnic identities remain salient. There is also evidence that certain language groups that felt marginalised have seized the opportunities available for enforcement of their language rights. Also, recent research shows the persistence, if not a rise, in sub-national identities. In an analysis of data obtained from the 2003 South African Social Attitudes Survey, Grossberg, Struwig and Pillay (2006:66) found that only 8 per cent of respondents saw being South African as their first choice of identity. Out of the sample, 29 per cent saw family as the first choice of identity. Race and ethnicity followed with 22 per cent of respondents. Those that saw occupation as primary in their self-identification constituted 17 per cent, while 10 per cent saw gender as first choice of identity. Only 6 per cent saw regional identities as primary.

In a study of the workings of the Pan South African Language Board, Perry (n.d.) argues that although South Africa’s constitution proclaims a policy of eleven languages there has been little implementation of this policy. According to him English has become a *de facto* language of power and that South Africa is characteristic of a linguistic elite closure i.e. the enshrinement of a minority language as the *de facto* or *de jure* official language of the state. In relation to the use of institutions such as Pan SALB, Perry found that the majority of the 215 complaints lodged with the board between February 1998 and September 2000 were individual rights assertions. Perry gives examples where language groups, although a minority, have gone to the statutory body to claim group rights. One case was that of the Northern Amandebele National Organisation which filed a complaint in March 1999 to have its members’ language developed and elevated in status. The second case was that of the VaTsonga TV Committee which complained in October 2002 to Pan SALB that by not having tel-

evision programming in Xitsonga and Tshivenda, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) was violating the language rights of Tsonga and Vhavenda people. In 2000, the committee wrote to President Mbeki raising the same issue.

What is interesting about the second case is that the issue of the SABC violating the language of Tsonga/Shangaan people was identified by one of the informants as one of the stimuli that led to the formation of the Khomanani Society.

There was a strong perception that Shangaans were marginalised. This perception was not only on campus and about university life. Points were raised about the absence of Shangaan on television (Shivambu, interview, 5 November 2007).

It would be foolhardy to imagine that the discourse and policies of multiculturalism of the post-apartheid state would have no resonance among students. When asked what the significance of the cultural organisations is, a number of informants said that it was about celebrating South Africa's cultural diversity. Many of the students expressed the importance of pride in one's culture. There was also missionary zealotry to convert those straying away from culture.

A Zulu born up here and a Zulu from KZN are really different. So it's important for the Zulus from Joburg, to know what the real Zulu culture is. You want the people to know how to behave and how to follow the culture. I want to know where I come from. I want to find my roots, my principles and who I am (Dladla, interview, 2 November 2007).

In this vein Morake (interviewed, 30 October 2007) proclaimed that 'Tswanas from Soweto are very different from the ones from North West. Unlike in Soweto where there are many cultures, in North West villages you only find Tswanas. We have a responsibility to teach culture to the Sowetans.' Great concern was expressed that some students say that they are Tswana but cannot speak the language. In response to the accusation that the organisations promoted tribalism, many informants picked up on themes of multiculturalism that spokespersons of the state regularly make.

We can't have a policy that says there are Zulus, Tswanas and Xhosas only on Heritage Day in September. These groups are there everyday and they need to come out (Morake, interview, 30 October 2007).

These groups also help to break from stereotypes. The fact that we grew up with the idea that Zulus like to fight, gets challenged when you see that not all Zulus are like that (Lepese, interview, 1 November 2007).

When some people get to the university, they forget about where they come and they change. Belonging to a cultural organisation means we don't want to forget about where we come from. We want to show that we are proud of our culture and heritage. There is also an education part to the organisation. For an example there are Xhosas from Johannesburg who don't know about customs. We teach to be proud of their Xhosa-ness (Kala, interview, 27 October 2007).

Vendas and Tsongas were afraid to speak their languages here on campus. It's only now that they are not afraid to speak their language in front of others. Now they are free. Now if we here Shangaan music, we don't say that this music is what-what or despise it (Lepese, interview, 1 November 2007).

There are still Shangaans here at Wits who are hiding. We wanna make sure that they become part of Khomanani to carry the culture forward. Being educated and believing in your culture is not something dirty. Most people associate culture with illiteracy. They don't value their heritage. They think that by being Western you are superior. Our feeling is that you can do both – be educated and believe in your own culture (Koza, interview, 5 November 2007).

By calling these identities post-apartheid identities does not mean to imply that their genesis can be found in the period after democratisation or that to deny the continuities between the period before 1994 and after. The 'post' indicates how identities that were submerged in the period before democratisation have become pronounced after the demise of apartheid. The post-apartheid characterisation of the identities is also an attempt to capture the fact that no trans-border identities have emerged. The cultural organisations are about national identities.

Ethnicisation of student politics?

In a stinging critique of theories that view ethnic groups not as social constructs, Eller and Coughlan (1993) identified three concepts that are the cornerstones of primordialism. These are what they term apriority, ineffability and affectivity. By apriority, Eller and Coughlan refer to the idea that ethnic identities are ascriptive and that their basis, such as language and culture, precede any social interaction. The second way in which primordialism defines ethnic groups is to attach to them coercive and overpowering sentiments. What this means is that practices such as custom, language and culture bind group members and have an ineffable character. Thirdly, primordialism sees bonds with ethnic groups as af-

fective rather than rational and instrumental. This affectivity stems from shared ancestry.

There is no doubt that the overwhelming majority of those interviewed have a primordial definition of culture. This leads to a view where ethnicities are seen as immutable groups. In the focus group discussions, participants spoke as if there was something called a pure Tswana, Zulu or Xhosa defined by different languages, customs, dress, food and social behaviour:

I don't think that the cultural societies are promoting tribalism or apartheid. What the cultural student societies reflect is what is real. In South Africa we have Tswanas, Zulus, Xhosas and things like that. These groups need to be exposed. The cultural societies are about our pride of being Tswanas, Pedis, Zulus and Xhosas (Focus group, 17 November 2007).

This is not tribalism. We are very different. Even with languages, we speak different languages. We are not mixed things. There is nothing wrong in identifying who you are. We don't resent other cultures. We just want to uplift our culture (Focus group, 17 November 2007).

If someone asks you: who are you? You can't say that you are an African - a general African. There is no such thing as a general African. If someone says I'm African, then it becomes difficult (Focus group, 17 November 2007).

The belief in distinctness of different ethnic groups was strongly expressed when the participants were asked why they rejected the SRC proposal of an umbrella cultural group:

If people from the Eastern Cape, Limpopo and KZN join one cultural organisation we will all serve different interests depending where one comes from. If we had one cultural organisation where will we take the career exhibition? Everyone will want it to go to his home province. There will always be differences (Focus group, 17 November 2007).

The interviewees from BSS referred to another proposal which they also rejected. The proposal was that their association should merge with Khomanani and form a Limpopo student organisation. As a sign of how ethnic identities were stronger than provincial ones, the proposal was rejected, although the view that the two could partner for sponsorship was entertained. Although the constitutions of the cultural associations project the policy of openness, speaking to the office bearers confirmed that the clubs had a strong ethnic basis of who the membership targets are:

Although the constitution states that the membership of Khomanani is open, from the beginning the aim was to target Tsonga students. Overtly Khomanani was an open cultural student body, but covertly it was Shangaan (Shivambu, interview, 24 October 2007).

Yes, anyone can join our society. But Bapedi are the main source of our membership (Mphahlele, interview, 8 November 2007).

The operation and activities of the seven student cultural organisations confirm what Werbner (1996:4) calls the use of ‘culturally nuanced resources of social memory for negation, for affirmation and for playful fun’ in the construction of identities. One example of the use of ‘culturally nuanced resources’ is the choice of the names of the associations. The name Ekhaya which is what ECUS is called, means ‘home’ in IsiXhosa. The name is meant to evoke a feeling of belonging and family. Thari E Ntsho is a Tswana idiomatic expression. Although the literal translation is ‘black blanket’, the expression is used to reflect indigeneity. Maitazwitoma derives its name from a Tshivenda idiom ‘*Maitazwitoma ha fani na madzulafhedzu*’, that indicates how making a start is better than doing nothing. Before becoming BSS, the Bapedi Students Society was named *Sebeshong le kgorong* which literally translates to ‘a homely gathering’. From interviews it is clear that in choosing their names, different cultural student organisations are determined not only to indicate the language and ethnic group that they target, but they draw heavily on the idioms of their language groups. Besides being signifiers of target groups, what is also significant about some of the names is how, in choosing the name, there is an attempt to create boundaries of who is the core membership and who is not. Language and its idioms are the best link with the past.

The second example of how culture is constructed to create identities came to the fore when the participants in the focus group were asked to explain the fact that in all the associations the majority were male students. What emerged as a response is what Pattman (2001:228) calls ‘problematism of women’. In a study of the formation of masculine identities at a teacher’s college in Zimbabwe, Pattman describes the use of apportionment of blame and eroticisation of women’s bodies as one of the ways male students constructed their identities. While no reference was made to women’s bodies, the focus group blamed female students for the low participation of women in the cultural organisations. One participant complained, ‘whenever people have to volunteer only the guys do so. That’s very depressing. Women don’t participate. Few women volunteer’.

With a little bit of probing this ‘problematism of women’ revealed deep-seated sexism, justified on the basis of culture:

We do discuss issues about the role of women. While we stick to the customs but we somehow realise that today's women are not the same as the ones in the olden days. We show them that although today's women try to be independent, this is impossible (Focus group, 17 November 2007).

We tell the guys to respect our women; that's the first thing. Then try to listen to each other. But still women should not try to overpower us because I think there is nobody who would allow that. It's unreasonable (Focus group, 17 November 2007).

If men can be respected, then everything will be fine. But today's women sometimes tend to be ambitious and want to control men and want to implement things that are impossible. That thing is still there. You can't accept a woman to control you. The main thing is respect. If women can respect their husbands and men respect their wives, then things will be fine. It's not that we say men must beat their wives. It's not like that. That one is not allowed (Focus group, 17 November 2007).

There are things that women cannot do. And those women who are real, they understand that there are things that women cannot do. In terms of gender equality, I think it is a good thing but it is has still to be open to what women can do or not do. Generally women are emotional although there are few who are strong. That's why the transformation process is slow (Focus group, 17 November 2007).

Whereas it is unquestionable that the student cultural associations are using ethnic identities as the basis of organisation, what is not clear is whether the emergence of this form of organisation is leading to ethnicisation of student politics. Although there is evidence that at Wits the establishment of other cultural organisations was a response to the existence of ECUS and perceived Xhosa chauvinism (Shivambu, interview, 24 October 2007), there is no evidence of ethnic mobilisation over resources between the different associations. But as Chabal (1996:49) argues whether the political impact of ethnicity is constructive or destructive depends on the specific historical context. Presently, unlike in Zimbabwe (Gaidzanwa 1993 and Zeilig 2006) and Nigeria (Beckman 2006), there is no evidence to show that ethnic competition has crept into student politics. This may be a result of a division of labour where inclusive student organisations take charge of politics and the ethnic ones are responsible for the so-called 'cultural' issues.

Ethnic and political identities

Probed in the course of the research was the way in which members of the cultural organisations perceived political student bodies. The first thing that came out of the research is that the majority of the interviewees saw the two forms of organisation as playing different roles. There is also an explicit understanding that culture is not political. A member of ZSCS was explicit about the separation when he said: 'We can't be held back by politics. We recommend that our members join other organisations. It's no politics in the cultural society. It's all about culture' (Dladla, interview, 2 November 2007). The position was further articulated when Mphahlele made the following distinction between student political bodies and cultural groups: 'One is culture and the other one is politics. It's a belief system in the cultural society versus political choices.' (Interview, 8 November 2007).

When asked why few members of the cultural groups belonged to political student organisations, some of the informants disputed the AISU statistics that reflected that not a single member of the cultural groups belonged to either the ANC Youth League or SASCO. They pointed to certain members of the cultural groups who were on the SRC and who also served in structures of political organisations. The secretary of ECUS who wore ANC Youth League T-shirt when interviewed asserted that many of the cultural societies' members had participated in campaigns against fee increases that took place in 2007. The second response was to admit that few members of cultural groups belonged to political organisations. The financial implications of joining more than one student club were raised as the reason why students who belonged to cultural groups were not registered with student political organisations. The membership fees for the cultural societies range from R30 to R200 per annum. Whatever the reason is for the situation where few cultural groups' members are paid-up members of political organisations, there is some basis to argue that many informants make a distinction between political and ethnic identities. In her study of student activism at Wits and one other South African university, Dawson (2006) identifies three student identities – political, ordinary middle class students and a struggling poor minority. What is interesting about these three identities is how little crisscrossing occurred.

To understand this it is vital to look at what has happened to student political organisations after 1994. In a study of public protests between 2002 and 2004 in 12 historically black institutions, Koen, Cele and Libhaber (2006:407) found that 'students no longer share core set of values or an organisation that binds them nationally'. Dawson (2006) makes the same conclusion in her study of student activism. According to her, while the South African Student Congress (SASCO) is the dominant organisation in the higher education sector, there is a

distance between the organisation and the majority of ordinary students. Like Koen, Cele and Libhaber (2006), Dawson (2006:293) concludes that in the post-apartheid period 'it would be inaccurate to suggest that there is evidence of an emerging or re-emerging mass student movement in South Africa' but suggests that 'the soil is fertile at present for such a movement to grow'. In this context it is plausible that cultural organisations have stepped in to deal with questions of alienation among students.

Conclusion

The student movement has definitely changed since the ushering in of the democratic dispensation in South Africa. By law, university students sit in governance structures of institutions of higher learning (see Cele's paper in this collection). Moreover, the landscape of higher education has changed with institutions that were racially segregated becoming more mixed. This has definite implications for student composition and nature of student organisation. As they participate in governance of universities, militant organisations of the past also begin to change. This is a process that is not only driven by intra-institutional changes. The changes at a political and socio-economic levels also influence the nature of student organisation at different universities. The story of the seven cultural organisations at Wits shows the various forms that student organisation can take depending on the nature of the institution; the attitude of students to authority inside and outside of the university; and the national and international socio-economic order.

There is a danger to equate student activism with political student organisations or protests around student grievances. As Dawson (2006:280-281) argues for an endeavour that plots student activism along a latent-manifest continuum, it is vital to realise the plethora of forms that student organisation can take. Also critical is to appreciate how varied the forms of organisations will be depending whether the period is one characterised as a political upsurge or lull. The ethnic-based cultural organisations that are emerging at South African universities are a form of student organisation. They need to be observed and studied.

Notes

1. Cattle that a woman's family asks from a man before agreeing that their daughter could marry. Presently, cash instead cattle is used as *lobola*.
2. Student slang for residence.
3. Cooked maize meal and a Southern African staple food.

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Contestations étudiantes à Ngaoundéré, répressions et insécurité des personnes et des biens sur la route nationale n°1

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Résumé

Cet article ambitionne d'analyser les contestations des étudiants de l'Université de Ngaoundéré (de 1999 à 2002), la gestion de ces mouvements d'humeur et de revendications par les autorités administratives et leurs incidences sur la circulation des personnes et de leurs biens sur la route dite nationale n°1 qui dessert non seulement les provinces septentrionales du Nord Cameroun, mais aussi deux pays enclavés de la sous-région d'Afrique centrale, à savoir le Tchad et la République Centrafricaine. Deux contestations d'envergure ont eu lieu dans cette institution universitaire dont la gestion par les pouvoirs publics a entraîné des débordements d'étudiants qui ont érigé des barricades sur la nationale n°1 bloquant ainsi toute communication entre les provinces du Nord, de l'Extrême Nord du pays et les deux pays précités. Le recours trop souvent des étudiants à cette stratégie empêche la libre circulation sous-régionale et constitue par ailleurs un obstacle au bon déroulement des activités économiques durant ces périodes. Des actes isolés de vandalisme issus de la deuxième contestation se sont soldés par des dégâts matériels chiffrés selon les estimations des autorités à plus d'un milliard de F CFA. Cette situation d'insécurité qui plane sur la voie publique constitue une équation difficile à régler et pose par ce fait un défi que l'État camerounais se doit de résoudre. Cette réflexion se propose d'analyser les origines des malaises des étudiants, le manque de volonté politique de l'État à tenir ses promesses et d'esquisser quelques ébauches de solutions afin de sécuriser la principale voie publique qui est source de développement sous-régionale.

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Abstract

This article considers the activism and protests of students at the University of Ngaoundéré and the response to these eruptions of anger by the state and university authorities. These incidences affect traffic on the major highway, Route Nationale No. 1, which has an impact not only on the Northern provinces of Cameroon, but also on two countries in the region Chad and Central African Republic. Two large-scale protests took place at the university in (1999 and 2002) that saw students set up barricades on the national highway blocking access to the region and both neighbouring states. The constant return of students to this strategy constituted an obstacle to commercial activities during the period of the strikes. Isolated acts of vandalism stemming from the second protest in 2002 ended in the serious damage to property. This situation on the public highway outside the university constitutes a serious challenge to the Cameroonian state and one which it is compelled to resolve. This article analyses the origins of the student malaise and the political failure by the state to keep its promises. The article includes several suggestions for a possible solution.

Introduction

L'Université de Ngaoundéré, située dans la partie nord du Cameroun, précisément dans la province de l'Adamaoua est née de la réforme universitaire de 1993 à travers le décret n°93/026 du 19 janvier 1993 portant création et transformation de certains centres universitaires en six universités d'État au Cameroun (MINESUP 2003:182). Au bout de quatorze ans d'une réforme qui a engendré la décentralisation de l'ancienne et unique Université de Yaoundé, les conditions de vie des étudiants de l'Université de Ngaoundéré à l'image des cinq autres universités ne sont guère reluisantes. Ainsi, les relents d'une création précoce et d'une réforme mal menée n'y vont pas sans préjudice pour les étudiants non boursiers, mais aussi acculés par la pauvreté poussée et accrue. Manquant d'alliés et souvent incompris des dirigeants universitaires, les étudiants n'ont pour seule voie de recours que la grève, souvent spontanée, inorganisée et sans cohérence. Ce qui engendre des dégâts mettant ainsi les autorités administratives dans l'embarras, incapables de gérer les débordements sinon par voie de répression avec des méthodes tant loyales que déloyales qui ne contribuent qu'à rendre les étudiants davantage radicaux et impulsifs. Ces derniers n'ont pour stratégie que d'ériger des barricades sur la route nationale qui malheureusement passe devant l'entrée principale du campus. Dès lors, l'on est en droit de se demander quels sont les mobiles de ces grèves étudiantes, en quoi est-ce qu'elles constituent une source d'insécurité permanente pour la circulation des hommes et des biens en convergence vers les villes du nord, de l'Extrême Nord et les deux pays de la sous région Afrique centrale et quelles sont les solutions qui ont été envisagées? Répondre à cette préoccupation centrale re-

vient à examiner les conditions de vie des étudiants et les raisons de leurs contestations, la relative gestion de leurs revendications et leurs impacts sur la circulation et la sécurité des hommes. L'étude nécessite pour l'essentiel les documents écrits, les sources iconographiques et les témoignages oraux auprès des parties prenantes (étudiants, responsables universitaires et administratifs) bien que beaucoup ont requis l'anonymat.

Conditions de vie des étudiants dans les universités camerounaises, facteurs des révoltes

De manière générale, le processus démocratique en Afrique en 1990 s'est accompagné dans les universités des grèves intempestives, des années dites blanches et de la suppression des bourses dans certaines universités africaines. Au Cameroun, le campus de l'ancienne et unique Université de Yaoundé, non seulement n'a pas échappé à cette réalité, mais a joué un rôle capital dans la parturition démocratique et est demeuré

un lieu où se cristallise un désir de changement inassouvi. En effet, l'aspiration au renouveau, révélée au début des années 1990, était telle que, inconsciemment ou consciemment, [...] les étudiants ont rejoint le front politique, structuré autour de la conquête du pouvoir. Ainsi, leurs revendications corporatistes, habituellement dominées par l'exigence d'une amélioration matérielle de leurs conditions d'existence, se muèrent en revendications politiques. (Aghali 2005 : 35).

Au Cameroun, plus précisément en 1991, l'Université de Yaoundé connaît des troubles dont les instigateurs ou les leaders principaux ont été organisés autour de trois leaders charismatiques de la branche du « Parlement² » à savoir : Talla Corentin dit Général Schwarzkopf, Waffo Wambo Robert connu par son pseudonyme de Colin Powell et Yimga Yotchou Blaise alias Abu Nidal. Au-delà des problèmes réels de l'Université, ils réclamaient aussi la tenue de la « conférence nationale », reproduisant les griefs de l'opposition politique au régime de Paul Biya. Ainsi, leur combat avait pour objectif d'aboutir à la convocation d'une conférence nationale où ils pourraient poser et débattre leurs problèmes :

Notre combat avait un certain nombre d'objectifs parmi lesquels la conférence nationale. Parce que nous pensons que la solution à nos problèmes passe par là. [...] Nous pouvons accepter de perdre un an, deux ans pour résoudre ces problèmes nationaux [...] l'Université a été politisée [...] nous avons voulu résoudre nos problèmes académiques, mais puisqu'il y a une main politique qui vient s'interposer, nous avons alors jugé que le système politique est pourri. Donc, pour résoudre nos problèmes académiques, il fallait d'abord détruire ce système. Et détruire ce sys-

tème revient pour nous à réclamer la conférence nationale. Qu'on remette les bases pour résoudre les problèmes de tout le monde. C'est ainsi que nous avons mis sur pied le parlement étudiant qui a depuis lors reçu le soutien d'institutions [...] les masses camerounaises et nous leur en sommes reconnaissants. (Foupoussi et Ben N'diaye 1991:7).

Malgré l'immixtion des étudiants dans l'arène politique, il n'y aura ni conférence nationale souveraine ni cadre formel de débat fructueux entre étudiants et autorités compétentes. Les réclamations des étudiants ne purent donc avoir les solutions qu'ils escomptaient. Au contraire, les bourses ont été supprimées et il revenait désormais aux étudiants de prendre en charge leur scolarité dont les frais ont été fixés à 50 000 F CFA. Dans la même lancée, la chasse aux sorcières s'est multipliée avec les assassinats, les arrestations de certains étudiants. Les trois principaux leaders recherchés par les services de maintien de l'ordre ont eu la vie sauve en se réfugiant dans les locaux de la représentation de la Communauté Économique Européenne (CEE). Celle-ci s'est chargée de leur protection et a organisé leur départ pour l'exil (Foupoussi et Ben N'diaye 1991:7).

À côté de ces mesures de répression, il a également été question pour les autorités camerounaises de réfléchir dans le sens d'éviter dans les années à venir des manifestations plus importantes dans un contexte où le nombre d'étudiants allait grandissant d'année en année. La solution fut vite trouvée : il fallait décongestionner la seule université en créant six universités sur l'ensemble du territoire national et cette stratégie de fragmentation de l'unique université n'est pas sans conséquences. Analysant la réforme, le Professeur Njoh Mouellé mentionne qu' :

en 1993, il s'est produit un débordement ayant conduit à reproduire dans les six campus les facultés traditionnelles de lettres et sciences humaines, de sciences, de droit et de sciences économiques et de gestion. Cette orientation a créé une dispersion du corps enseignant de rang magistral dans un contexte de crise financière ne permettant pas d'équiper les uns et les autres en moyens nécessaires et indispensables. Ces universités existent et il ne saurait plus être question, à mon sens, de fermer tel ou tel établissement. Mais, identiquement, je vois mal comment on pourrait envisager de créer d'autres universités comme certaines doléances et revendications le voudraient! La priorité des priorités devrait consister à présent, à consolider ce qui existe en améliorant l'organisation académique et scientifique, en recrutant, y compris des étrangers hautement qualifiés, pour étoffer des départements scientifiques qui manquent d'encadreurs pour la recherche et l'enseignement. En réalité, la véritable réforme de notre

système d'enseignement supérieur n'est pas encore faite (Fondation Paul Ango Ela 2008).

Que les raisons avancées soient politiques, économiques ou académiques pour justifier la réforme, il est à retenir que c'est dans ce contexte brumeux que le Centre universitaire de Ngaoundéré est transformé en Université de Ngaoundéré, institution académique qui du fait de sa création dans la précipitation allait faire face à des difficultés multiples.

Les difficultés infrastructurelles de l'Université de Ngaoundéré

Au-delà de cette première difficulté évoquée, l'Université de Ngaoundéré voit le jour au lendemain de la réforme de 1993 sur l'ancien site de l'École Nationale des Sciences Industrielles et Agro-industrielles du Cameroun. Cette école avait été construite à la taille de ses élèves. Dès lors, la nouvelle institution qui est créée subitement en 1993 est confrontée au manque d'infrastructures (amphis, salles des travaux dirigés, chambres d'étudiants, etc.) compte tenu du nombre d'étudiants qui devient important. En six ans de fonctionnement (de 1993 à 1999), les planificateurs de l'Université n'ont rien envisagé par rapport au nombre sans cesse croissant des étudiants nationaux et étrangers (précisément ceux de la sous-région CEMAC) qui sollicitent davantage cette université du fait de la qualité des enseignements dispensés et surtout des résultats fort appréciables dans toutes les facultés et partant dans les concours administratifs nationaux.

Il s'est donc posé – en ce qui concerne les étudiants – un véritable problème de structures d'hébergement. La cité universitaire dispose seulement de 480 chambres et l'accès est souvent conditionné par une sélection après dépôt des dossiers, mais aussi sur des recommandations de hautes personnalités du pays (source : entretien). La part réservée aux étudiants « non parrainés » est dans l'ensemble marginale. Pour preuve, sur les 480 chambres déclarées, 150 sont réservées aux recommandations et 330 sont ouvertes aux candidats ayant déposé un dossier pour sélection dans le cadre d'une commission dite paritaire. Cette situation fait en sorte que la majorité des étudiants se rabatte sur les minicités de fortune pour la plupart et qui sont construites de manière anarchique vu la demande qui est très élevée. Ce qui engendre la spéculation entretenue par les promoteurs desdites cités. L'université ne s'est pas préoccupée du sort de ces infortunés livrés à certains bailleurs qui exigent le plus souvent dix à douze mois de loyer assortis d'une caution élevée. Pourtant, il est fait mention dans le décret n°93/028 du 19 janvier 1993 portant organisation administrative et académique de l'Université de Ngaoundéré qui mention en son article 89 de l'existence d'un chef de service du logement qui est chargé de la gestion des cités universitaires et des logements conventionnés, des logements non convention-

nés (mini-cités) en relation avec les bailleurs. Or, ce dernier (chef de service de logement) n'avait pas été nommé jusqu'en 1999, année au cours de laquelle survint alors la première contestation estudiantine.

Victimes donc des abus de toutes sortes de la part des bailleurs, les étudiants se sont organisés autour de leurs délégués de niveau et de mini-cités pour entreprendre des pourparlers avec les bailleurs qui, très tôt se sont regroupés pour contrer l'élan des étudiants. Ces derniers ont mis sur pied l'« Association des Étudiants Résidants des Mini-cités » et ont été représentés par trois délégués élus pour plaider leur cause auprès des autorités administratives de la ville de Ngaoundéré. Ces délégués ont adressé plusieurs memoranda, pétitions et requêtes auprès de ces autorités afin d'interpeller les bailleurs qui déjà, sont exempts d'impôts, les services fiscaux étant très peu regardants sur ce secteur d'activité qui relève de l'investissement dans le social. Les démarches entreprises par les délégués ont abouti à l'organisation d'une rencontre tripartite : autorités administratives – bailleurs - étudiants dans l'Amphi 150 de ladite université³. Curieusement, lors de ces assises, l'attitude de certaines autorités de l'Université était froide vis-à-vis de cette situation qui devrait en principe les préoccuper à plus d'un titre⁴.

À l'issue de cette rencontre, une commission *ad hoc* est créée par le gouverneur et placée sur la responsabilité du délégué de l'Urbanisme et de l'Habitat qui devait, avec ses agents catégoriser les mini-cités et partant viabiliser le site de Bini-Dang. Les résultats de la commission a conduit à la signature d'un document connu sous le nom du « protocole d'accord » catégorisant les minis cités et fixant les prix des chambres en fonction de leur confort, des normes élémentaires d'habitabilité. Une autre commission technique dite « chargée des mini-cités » fut alors mise sur pied avec pour tâche le suivi et l'application des clauses du protocole d'accord. Mais cette commission n'a survécu que le temps de la crise volatilisant ainsi tout l'espoir que les étudiants avaient fondé sur elle. Dès lors, le *statu quo ante* a été maintenu, c'est-à-dire l'un des problèmes endémiques et majeurs des étudiants comme le relève *le Cri de l'étudiant* : « s'il est un problème qui hante le plus l'étudiant au quotidien, ce n'est pas la validation de ses unités de valeur, c'est bien plutôt le rendez-vous avec le bailleur... » (Leka Essomba 2001: 3).

Cette indifférence des autorités et des bailleurs a laissé pourrir une situation déjà assez explosive. Les étudiants Camerounais à l'image de ceux de l'Afrique au Sud du Sahara en général, « have suffered the same poverty and austerity that has hit every section of society. Some writers even argue that they come from increasingly working-class or rural households... if they are fortunate enough to live in university accommodation they must share small rooms with four or five other students » (Zeilig 2007: 5). Issus des familles très modestes dans la majo-

rité des cas, les étudiants recourent à des stratégies de survie qui consistent à « coacher », c'est-à-dire occuper une chambre à deux ou plus afin de se partager les frais du loyer. En dépit de tous ces palliatifs trouvés par certains étudiants pour faire face à cette conjoncture difficile, certains bailleurs refusaient qu'une chambre soit occupée par deux ou plusieurs étudiants, d'où la frustration de nombreux étudiants dont les moyens financiers étaient maigres. Ces difficultés innombrables vont résoudre les étudiants à se mettre ensemble dans la perspective de la recherche des solutions adéquates. La voie de la grève fut prise par ces étudiants comme unique résolution pour faire entendre leurs voix parce qu'incompris et abandonnés des autorités administratives et universitaires, dont beaucoup sont aussi propriétaires des mini-cités.

Les grèves comme ultime recours des étudiants

De sa transformation en 1993 jusqu'en 2007, l'Université de Ngaoundéré a enregistré deux grèves importantes. La première moins violente eut lieu en 1999 tandis que la deuxième plus violente s'est déroulée en 2002.

L'avertissement de septembre 1999

La léthargie dans laquelle a sombré la Commission chargée de la gestion des mini-cités, le manque de réaction des autorités administratives et universitaires et l'indifférence des promoteurs des mini-cités vont amener les étudiants à recourir à une première manifestation de rue en septembre 1999.

Celle-ci fut d'abord une initiative de la coalition des délégués des étudiants qui fut soumise et approuvée unanimement par la majorité des étudiants. Celle-ci devait initialement se dérouler au centre de la ville de Ngaoundéré situé à 15 km du campus universitaire et déboucher vers les services du gouverneur. Cependant, les agents de renseignement et autres indicateurs infiltrés sur le campus⁵ furent mis au courant du projet des étudiants ayant décidé de perturber l'ordre public. C'est ainsi que les forces de l'ordre furent dépêchées le jour prévu dans toutes les artères de la ville de Ngaoundéré dans le but d'empêcher toute manifestation. S'étant rendus aussitôt compte que les autorités étaient mises au courant de leur projet, les trois délégués changèrent de stratégie. Il fut décidé de véhiculer des rumeurs au sujet du maintien du projet de grève, de l'itinéraire et de la destination initialement choisie. L'une des plus hautes autorités de la province de l'Adamaoua convoqua ces délégués pour les dissuader par l'intimidation : « vous êtes fichés par les services de renseignement et si vous tenez à votre manifestation, eh bien l'armée s'occupera de vous et vous finirez le restant de votre vie en prison. D'ailleurs rien ne m'empêche de vous arrêter tout de suite, si je veux »⁶. La mise en garde fut sans effet dans la mesure où de retour au quartier universitaire de Dang, les délégués tinrent une réunion

de crise à l'issue de laquelle une nouvelle stratégie fut adoptée. Conscients du fait que les forces de l'ordre disperseraient toute manifestation au cœur de la ville, les étudiants décidèrent plutôt d'ériger des barricades au niveau de la guérite de leur campus.

Le lieu répond à des considérations stratégiques : la principale route qui dessert les deux provinces du Nord et de l'Extrême-Nord d'une part et, d'autre part le Tchad et la République Centrafricaine, appelée la Nationale dite n°1 passe par là. Les étudiants sont conscients de l'impact qu'une telle action aurait sur la fluidité du trafic et de l'économie sous-régionale. En clair pour eux, il n'y avait pas meilleur endroit que la voie publique pour exprimer leur mécontentement afin d'attirer l'attention de l'opinion nationale et internationale dont le but ultime serait de contraindre les dirigeants à engager des pourparlers avec eux.

Ainsi, le 10 septembre 1999 à 4 heures du matin, les étudiants passent à l'acte en érigeant des barricades à l'entrée principale de l'université. Les étudiants laissent sous-entendre par là qu'ils manifestent « à domicile ». Pour réussir leur coup, les étudiants tiennent une réunion au cours de laquelle ils se répartissent les tâches tout en prévoyant les mesures alternatives à prendre en cas de réaction brutale des forces de l'ordre susceptible de briser le moral des manifestants. Vers six heures du matin, plus de 150 camions sont stationnés de part et d'autre de la Nationale n° 1.

Tardivement alertées, les autorités administratives qui attendaient plutôt les étudiants au centre ville sont prises de court. Elles débarquent au moment où les étudiants avaient envahi la route et des centaines de véhicules stationnés le long de celle-ci. Il leur était quasiment impossible de débarquer avec tout leur arsenal sur les lieux de la manifestation, car la file des véhicules immobilisés ça et là étant un sérieux obstacle. En même temps, ces véhicules « assuraient les arrières » des étudiants dans la mesure où ils devaient être incendiés en représailles à toute réaction disproportionnée des forces de l'ordre. Les étudiants avaient ainsi réussi à tromper la vigilance de ces autorités civiles et militaires, d'où la conclusion selon laquelle ce fut un mouvement savamment conçu. Cela a contribué à donner une certaine froideur à l'intervention desdites autorités qui se passa sans démonstration de force. La voie de la négociation se présenta dès lors comme la solution adéquate par les autorités qui ne tardèrent pas à engager des pourparlers avec les étudiants.

Aussitôt, une réunion de crise, jusque-là écartée par ces autorités, mettant en présence toutes les parties et visant à se pencher plus sérieusement sur les problèmes des étudiants, a été convoquée immédiatement dans les services du gouverneur. Au cours de cette rencontre des propositions relatives à la révision des prix des loyers et l'implication des délégués des étudiants dans le comité de

suivi des mini-cités, l'extension de la distribution de l'eau de la Société nationale des eaux du Cameroun (SNEC) dans les mini-cités et l'électrification des grands carrefours ont été formulées. Dans l'ensemble, celles-ci semblèrent être prises en compte, d'où la satisfaction ponctuelle des étudiants qui rentrèrent avec l'espoir que d'un moment à l'autre bien de leurs problèmes allaient être résolus. Dans l'ensemble, les étudiants ont été ponctuellement satisfaits.

Tandis que les étudiants étaient rentrés plein d'espoir, l'administration universitaire⁷ quant à elle, outrée par la tempête de révolte qui a soufflé sur le campus, était sortie de la table des négociations avec l'idée de riposter autrement à cette humiliation des étudiants. Elle entreprit alors des représailles et une intimidation des principaux leaders du soulèvement des étudiants. On assista à une politique systématique de dénigrement des leaders étudiants, ceci à travers des rapports adressés au ministère de tutelle⁸, lesquels taxaient les leaders étudiants d'agitateurs. D'autres dirigeants ne cessaient d'interpeller lesdits leaders et rappeler aux délégués des étudiants qu'ils étaient fichés et placés sous surveillance des services de renseignement, en l'occurrence le CENER⁹. Pourtant, cela n'a guère influencé les leaders visés qui ont fait acte de candidature à des postes électifs au sein de la Mutuelle de Solidarité des Étudiants du Cameroun (MUSEC), créée quelque peu après cette grève avec l'onction du ministre de l'Enseignement supérieur.

En somme, la grève de 1999 aura révélé que l'éclatement de l'ancienne université-mère de Yaoundé n'a pas été la panacée escomptée. Au contraire, il a contribué à exporter vers les provinces dans lesquelles des universités ont été créées des contestations estudiantines dont la capitale politique était l'apanage. En même temps, elle a sonné comme un avertissement pour les autorités universitaires portées à croire à cette image institutionnelle associée à leur campus à savoir « une université périphérique où survivent de paisibles et dociles étudiants ». Mais, loin d'analyser les véritables causes et de tirer des leçons de ces « mouvements d'humeur », le traitement réservé aux leaders étudiants de 1999, c'est-à-dire les isoler voire paralyser leurs actions auprès de la masse estudiantine, était déjà un terreau fertile à la formulation d'un nouveau mot d'ordre de grève. Cela arriva quatre ans plus tard, à savoir en 2002.

Cette situation mal élucidée pourrait se traduire par un déficit de dialogue social. Or, les revendications des étudiants ne préoccupaient personne en ce moment là. Si ce dialogue avait été instauré après la grève, on ne serait pas arrivé à des contestations d'une ampleur exceptionnelle. C'est une attitude maladroite des autorités camerounaises et même africaines qui ne connaissent le dialogue que quand le pire arrive (ex. : les dernières manifestations violentes au Cameroun et au Burkina Faso sur la cherté de la vie et autres). Pourtant,

le dialogue social à l'université peut aussi être reçu dans une autre approche comme une tentative de résorber les indices d'une crise aiguë du lien social qui émanerait des disparités apparaissent dans la communauté ... cette crise sociale peut déboucher sur le développement ou la résurgence de la violation et de la criminalité qui naissent de la remise en cause de l'existence des valeurs intégratrices (Ndong 2002: 158).

Les étudiants de manière générale, ont donc l'impression de ne pas être compris de leurs dirigeants et de ne pas participer à certains débats qui les concerne pourtant. Ce dysfonctionnement social assorti de la déception des étudiants qui n'ont pas obtenu satisfaction et l'indifférence des certaines autorités administratives contribuèrent à l'escalade de la violence de janvier 2002.

La grève de 2002 : causes et manifestations

Contrairement à celle de 1999, celle-ci intervient suite à un accident de la circulation sur la principale route nationale nationale n°1 survenu le 29 janvier 2002 aux environs de 13 h causant ainsi le décès d'un étudiant de la Faculté des Sciences, Basga Laurent qui rentrait des cours. Auparavant, un autre étudiant de la même faculté percuté par un camion aux environs de 23 heures perdait la vie sur la même voie de communication.

Lors du décès du premier étudiant, une grève qui était en vue, a aussitôt été étouffée par les autorités académiques qui ont devancé les étudiants en programmant une séance de rencontre au restaurant universitaire pour essayer de trouver des solutions conjointes afin d'éviter d'éventuels accidents à l'avenir. Il a résulté de cette rencontre entre autres les doléances suivantes :

- la prise en charge par l'Université des obsèques de l'étudiant décédé au Centre Hospitalier Universitaire de Yaoundé (CHUY) et de son rapatriement dans son village d'origine ;
- la construction d'au moins cinq dos d'âne le long de la voie allant du pont situé à l'entrée du campus en provenance de la ville jusqu'au-delà du marché de Dang, soit sur une distance de cinq cents mètres ;
- l'achat d'une ambulance (jusqu'à ce jour l'Université ne dispose pas encore d'une ambulance) ;
- l'électrification des points obscurs au niveau des grands carrefours.

Il convient de préciser que l'Université s'est acquittée de la première doléance pleinement mais, les autres points sont restés morte après que la tempête des revendications se soit calmée. Il est vrai que par rapport aux revendications relatives aux dos d'âne, cela ne relève pas de la compétence de l'université mais plutôt du ministère des transports et des services des travaux publics. Les diri-

geants de l'Université se devaient d'entreprendre des démarches auprès des autorités administratives pour la construction rapide de ces dos d'âne. Ces nombreuses doléances ayant été rangées dans les tiroirs, la mort de Basga Laurent fut la dernière goutte qui déborda le vase.

Le cas de Basga Laurent a, de manière unanime suscité l'inquiétude des étudiants qui se sont sentis davantage en insécurité sur cet axe routier, d'où leur résolution à engager une seconde grève. C'est l'une des causes qui explique la radicalisation des étudiants cette fois incroyables à l'endroit des autorités qui avaient promis un an plus tôt la construction des dos d'âne.

Par rapport à la première contestation, les étudiants étaient peu organisés et la revendication a commencé par la mobilisation des frères ethniques de l'étudiant puis progressivement s'est étendue sans exclusive à tous les autres étudiants.

L'étudiant Basga Laurent a été percuté par un taxi en provenance de la ville aux environs de 13h, mais les autorités de l'université ne se sont pas préoccupées de voler au secours de cette victime. Il fut transporté d'urgence à l'hôpital sans la présence d'une seule autorité de l'Université. Cette attitude que les étudiants considèrent comme une insulte, un mépris les engagea dans la rue. Interrogé deux jours après le début de la grève le Recteur Beban Sammy Chumbow affirme: « je présidais une réunion importante de la CEMAC... dans la perspective de démarrer l'école inter États de médecine vétérinaire »¹⁰. Ces affirmations ont provoqué l'indignation et la colère des étudiants. Les propos d'un d'entre eux adressés au Recteur sont évocateurs

«...même si c'est votre chien qui a été percuté, vous devez, par compassion vous rendre sur les lieux à plus forte raison une personne et de surcroît un de vos étudiants...la réunion peut attendre mais pas une personne qui est entre la vie et la mort...mais celui-là se moque de qui au juste?... un ventripotent comme celui-là, pour qui se prend-il ?»¹¹.

L'indifférence des autorités de l'Université devant cet accident donna lieu à un rassemblement des étudiants devant la guérite, l'entrée principale de l'institution universitaire vers 16 heures. L'on ignore comment et quand l'option de la grève été décidée.

Des barricades ont été spontanément érigées sur la nationale bloquant ainsi toute circulation. La sortie du recteur vers 20 heures accompagné de ses collaborateurs ce même soir pour se rendre à l'hôpital et calmer les étudiants fut stoppée par les étudiants qui les gavèrent d'injures et c'est ainsi que le chef de l'institution fut contraint de rentrer chez lui à pieds sans son véhicule bloqué. Informé de la situation, le Gouverneur Acham Peter Show s'est rendu sur les lieux le lendemain. Sans essayer d'engager des pourparlers véritables avec les

acteurs de la contestation, il lança aux étudiants les propos suivants sous forme d'une menace: « je vous donne cinq minutes pour évacuer la route. » La riposte n'a pas tardé, dans le tas un étudiant lance des propos injurieux au gouverneur en l'interpellant par sa mère et le gouverneur outré par l'insolence de cet étudiant renvoie l'ascenseur à son interlocuteur donnant ainsi le coup d'envoi de la « guerre ». Aussitôt, le gouverneur fut accueilli par une marée d'injures propres aux étudiants et pis encore, un étudiant dans la foule a dressé le pedigree de cette autorité administrative en faisant prévaloir son indigence en matière d'administration des hommes « un administrateur de prison gouverneur! On comprend pourquoi il se comporte de la sorte. Vous allez sauter de votre poste vous allez voir! ». En effet, au Cameroun lorsqu'il y a des mouvements pareils et que l'autorité administrative compétente concernée s'est montrée faible, quelques mois après elle est soit affectée ou simplement démise de ses fonctions. C'est en connaissance de cause que l'étudiant a lancé cette menace à l'endroit du gouverneur.

Blessé dans son orgueil et incapable de convaincre les étudiants, le Gouverneur se replie en ville et requisitionne les forces publiques et quelques instants plus tard, des soldats sont venus équipés de leur arsenal anti-émeutes, lançant des bombes lacrymogènes en direction des manifestants. C'est ainsi que dans leur repli, les étudiants tels un essaim d'abeilles en furie se sont lancés dans ce qu'il convient d'appeler couramment au Cameroun le vandalisme, en brûlant sur leur passage des véhicules pris en otage quelques jours auparavant. Au total, ce sont seize véhicules qui ont été consumés. Les cargaisons d'une société brassicole ont été littéralement dépouillées¹² ainsi que celles des camions contenant du sucre et du riz¹³. D'importantes cargaisons de vivres frais (bananes, avocats, poissons frais, légumes...) en provenance du sud pour le nord sont bloquées et d'autres se sont simplement décomposées. On a évalué à plus de deux milliards¹⁴ les dégâts orchestrés par cette grève qui eut lieu entre le 29 janvier et le 04 février 2002. Le lendemain, il aura fallu le déploiement des éléments de l'armée de terre, armés de fusils d'assaut légers, des chars pour mettre en déroute les manifestants. Ce déploiement s'est soldé par l'arrestation des étudiants, des casses, des manoeuvres diverses sur les étudiants capturés, des vols d'appareils (surtout les portables et les CD rom) perpétrés par les militaires et plusieurs dégâts collatéraux dus à ce genre d'intervention.

C'est donc grâce à l'intervention musclée de l'armée que l'ordre a été restauré et les étudiants se sont réfugiés dans des sites périphériques (surtout sur une colline située à quelques kilomètres du quartier universitaire appelée par les étudiants Tora-Bora) s'avouant vaincus cette fois-ci par les militaires.

Tandis que les chaînes de radio telles que Radio France Internationale (RFI), Africa n°1, la Radio Nationale Tchadienne diffusait des informations relatives à

cette grève, la CRTV de l'Adamaoua et le poste national s'abstirent d'en dire quelque chose. Le chef de station sema d'ailleurs la confusion en commençant.

Pour ajouter à la confusion, la radio locale par le biais de son chef de station, diffusait des informations plus ou moins vraies sur l'état de santé de l'étudiant. Dans un premier temps, le journaliste avait annoncé le décès de l'étudiant alors que ce dernier recevait alors des soins intensifs à l'hôpital provincial avant d'être évacué au Centre Hospitalier Universitaire de Yaoundé (CHU) vu la gravité du traumatisme crânien et sa jambe gauche fracturée. S'étant rendu compte de la gravité de la situation, le chef de la station rectifie le tir dans une présentation ultérieure en disant que « dans la mêlée, une rumeur pernicieuse a fait croire que l'étudiant Basga Laurent ... était décédé et c'est ce qui a créé une tension au sein des étudiants qui, par solidarité ont perpétré des actes de violence et de vandalisme dont le bilan est lourd »¹⁵. Malgré la rectification de ce communicateur, l'étudiant décède cette fois-ci pour de vrai le lundi 04 février 2002 à Yaoundé. Entre temps, le Président de la République, à en croire les informations de la radio d'État, dépêche le Ministre de l'Enseignement Supérieur à Ngaoundéré résoudre cette crise d'une grande ampleur jamais vécue depuis la réforme universitaire entreprise par lui en 1993. L'État camerounais au plus haut niveau fut cette fois-ci interpellé par la descente sur le terrain du Délégué Général à la Sûreté Nationale sous les hautes instructions du Chef de l'État.

La grève de 2002 contrairement à celle de 1999, a révélé un manque d'organisation imputable principalement à l'absence d'un leader et donc d'un comité de concertation ou d'organisation. Cela est d'autant plus compréhensible que le déclenchement de la grève a été spontané et non prémédité comme la première fois. Et comme telle, elle aura contribué à discréditer les étudiants qui étaient pourtant parvenus à conduire efficacement une grève sans casse en 1999. Cette attitude pourrait aussi s'expliquer par le fait que les représentants des étudiants n'inspiraient pas confiance dans la mesure où les autorités universitaires se sont ingérées dans le choix des délégués ou ont procédé purement et simplement à des nominations afin de contrôler la masse depuis la grève de 1999.

Il faudra ici mentionner une fois de plus la léthargie des autorités universitaires et administratives à prendre au sérieux des problèmes sociaux importants (sécurité des étudiants, sourde oreille aux revendications). Cette grève fut sans doute l'occasion de régler des comptes à certaines autorités dont les véhicules furent incendiés notamment celui d'un vice-resteur. Cette fois-ci, l'usage de la force a emboîté le pas à la négociation et au dialogue (source : entretien).

Tentatives de résolution des crises et la menace que constitue le caractère réversible des étudiants

Les tentatives de résolution des crises étudiantes dans l'ensemble ont été approximatives, car le plus souvent fondées sur des promesses mirobolantes, mais au fond fallacieuses. A cela, il convient de mentionner la maladresse du gouverneur qui a été l'élément moteur de la crise de 2002.

Bien que les résolutions de la première contestation ont révélé leurs performances lacunaires, car d'un chapelet important de doléances, seulement quelques unes ont connu un dénouement heureux en l'occurrence la révision des prix des loyers pendant une année et l'extension du réseau d'eau potable.

Quant à la seconde contestation, il aura fallu l'implication du Ministre de l'Enseignement Supérieur et surtout du Délégué Général à la Sûreté Nationale, venus au nom du chef de l'État dénouer la crise et trouver des solutions adéquates et urgentes. Avant l'arrivée du Ministre de tutelle, une table ronde à la radio avait réuni le recteur et des enseignants pour débattre du sujet. Le recteur n'a pas manqué de relever lui-même que « le problème formulé par les étudiants est réel puisqu'ils se sentent en insécurité. Ils ont raison, mais ils ont manifesté leur indignation de façon spontanée...j'étais vraiment écoeuré de voir les soldats descendre pour essayer de maîtriser les étudiants »¹⁶. En effet, sur ce point il y a lieu de convenir avec le recteur que c'est l'intervention des soldats qui a compliqué le dialogue que ce dernier avait entamé avec les étudiants au risque de se faire lyncher. D'ailleurs, tandis qu'il dialoguait avec eux, certains étudiants se sont permis de soumettre le recteur à des exercices physiques intenses tels marcher au pas militaire, d'aucuns touchaient son ventre en disant qu'il se bourre la panse avec leurs droits universitaires. En dépit de ces manoeuvres et humiliations, le recteur a su résister et c'est ce qui a amené certains étudiants à interpeller violemment leurs camarades sur ces écarts de comportement. L'un des vices recteurs a reçu une gifle bien appliquée à cause de sa durété. Au cours des débats, des solutions sont proposées par exemple à court terme que des dos d'âne soient construits et à long terme, il sera question de dévier la nationale qui est une menace constante pour la communauté universitaire. A cet effet, le Dr Saïbou Issa, l'un des invités affirmait sur les antennes de la radio locale que « la revendication des étudiants par rapport aux dos d'âne est fondamentalement légitime et surtout elle nous permet de rallonger notre espérance de vie...le fait de prendre ce chemin tous les jours est préjudiciable à leur santé et surtout c'est un risque de mourir deux fois par jour...c'est la mort qui nous rate chaque jour »¹⁷.

L'arrivée du ministre a décanté la situation. La libération des étudiants interpellés fait suite à une réunion de crise tenue à la province entre les autorités administratives de la ville et celles de l'université où le Ministre de l'Enseignement Supérieur Jean Marie Atangana Mébara a proposé la libération de tous les

étudiants comme mesure de nature à apaiser la situation. Il est donc ordonné la libération de tous les étudiants interpellés et gardés en cellule. Il est organisé les obsèques de l'étudiant défunt. Le ministre, accompagné du recteur, de l'Inspecteur Général des services du Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur, du directeur de la recherche et de la coopération, du doyen de la Faculté des sciences et de trente étudiants de l'université ont conduit la dépouille mortelle à Tchatibali, son village d'origine où une enveloppe a été remise à la famille et une bourse octroyée à un étudiant de la localité pour compenser le vide laissé par le défunt qui, par ailleurs était fils unique d'une famille polygame.

De retour à Ngaoundéré, des séances de travail ont été organisées sur le campus par le ministre. De ces multiples rencontres, il ressort les résolutions suivantes :

- la construction des dos d'âne ;
- l'amélioration des repas au restaurant universitaire ;
- la révision des prix de loyer en composant avec les bailleurs ;
- la connexion de l'Université au réseau Internet ;
- l'octroi des prix et primes aux étudiants méritants ;
- la déviation de la nationale n°1.

Ces résolutions ont apaisé la colère des étudiants qui par ailleurs, ont « adressé une lettre » de remerciements au Président de la République sous le couvert du Ministre de l'Enseignement supérieur dont le contenu est le suivant :

Excellence Monsieur le Président de la République, nous étudiants de l'Université de Ngaoundéré, considérant votre magnanime décision de faire relâcher nos camarades interpellés suite aux malheureux événements survenus sur la voie publique à proximité du campus de l'Université de Ngaoundéré, remercions votre excellence de la spontanéité avec laquelle cette mesure a été exécutée, saluons votre sens d'écoute des problèmes de vos concitoyens, regrettons notre écart de comportement, nous promettons de toujours faire mieux pour mériter votre confiance¹⁸.

Il convient de jeter un regard critique sur cette lettre qui en réalité est une initiative des autorités de l'Université. C'est une pratique devenue courante au Cameroun avec des individus qui pour la moindre chose adresse au nom des masses des motions de soutien ou d'encouragement au Président de la République. La lecture de cette lettre a suscité des critiques de la part de certains étudiants qui voient là une instrumentalisation de certains de leurs camarades dociles, corrompus voire traîtres.

Cette lettre à en croire les médias a été signée par 160 délégués et présidents des associations. Puis s'en est suivi des séances d'autocritique à travers les

médias, plus précisément lors de l'émission de la radio animée par les étudiants, sous le haut patronage de la Directrice du Centre des Œuvres Universitaires, appelée « Écho du campus » qui a ouvert l'émission par ce sermon : « La rhétorique des biceps a-t-elle droit de cité et dans une cité universitaire, temple du savoir en miniature. Que non ! Casses, pillages, brigandages, coupures de la voie publique ne sauraient justifier une cause quelconque et aucune cause ne saurait les justifier... Tout débordement aurait dû finir par là où il devait commencer c'est-à-dire autour d'une table »¹⁹.

Cependant, en plus de ces problèmes figurait une autre équation à résoudre, c'est celle des étudiants tchadiens apeurés qui, selon les rumeurs répandues, seraient les instigateurs des casses et des pillages. Cela a valu le déplacement de l'ambassadeur du Tchad au Cameroun, son excellence Kalbassia Vouna Dougaï venu rassurer ses concitoyens tout en leur demandant qu'à l'avenir de rester loin de toutes contestations du genre²⁰.

Au-delà des incidents provoqués par les multiples accidents, le gouvernement ne perçoit pas encore les dangers qui se dissimulent derrière les contestations estudiantines et minimisent leurs capacités de déstabilisation sociale. Les autorités ignorent ou feignent d'ignorer que

L'université est le lieu par excellence où fleurit l'esprit critique et contestataire. Depuis toujours, c'est dans l'université que les mouvements de critique sociale se sont amorcés et c'est à partir de l'université qu'ils se sont répandus dans la société. Les gouvernements qui veulent régner en paix sur une société soumise commencent par s'assurer le contrôle des universités ... (Rocher cité par Warren et Massicotte 2006 : 6).

Ceci non pas en militarisant et dissimulant des indices dans les campus mais en assurant un cadre adéquat pour les études et en garantissant le minimum requis pour la survie des étudiants pendant leur séjour et surtout respecter les libertés académiques qui est gage d'un dialogue social franc. Il serait important pour contrer d'autes manifestations de :

- fournir les bibliothèques quantitativement et qualitativement en ouvrages afin qu'elles ne donnent pas « l'impression d'un musée construit en plein campus où l'on peut aller consulter les fresques d'une science aux théories dépassées »²¹ comme le décriait le Président des Étudiants de la Faculté des Arts, Lettres et Sciences humaines de l'Université de Yaoundé I, Armand Leka Essomba dans un discours adressé au Recteur lors de la cérémonie de présentation des vœux du 09 février 2000 ;
- ravitailler constamment les laboratoires en réactifs afin de produire des recherches fiables, optimales et compétitives sinon comment comprendre dans un contexte comme celui décrit plus haut, on puisse créer les condi-

tions d'une créativité endogène compétitive lorsque les laboratoires manquent d'équipements de pointe et/ou les distractions des budgets alloués pour les recherches sont fréquentes ? Amer constat qui se dégage encore dans l'allocution du représentant d'étudiants précité lorsqu'il affirme avec désolation que :

L'aspect de notre université aujourd'hui n'offre aucune condition d'impulsion de la créativité compétitive à l'aube où la colonisation s'opère par les signifiants culturels, intellectuels. Une anthropologie des consulats, ambassades et autres aéroports suffit à vous rendre compte que ceux qui partent, ce sont des centaines d'étudiants convaincus qu'ici la porte de leur avenir est bloquée (Leka Essomba: 2000) ;

- réintroduire les bourses et surtout financer les recherches. Comment admettre que les étudiants de maîtrise, de DEA et de thèse ne bénéficient d'aucune subvention dans la conduite de leurs travaux ? Telles sont quelques ébauches de solutions qui peuvent être formulées à l'endroit des autorités camerounaises et des éventuels mécènes qui s'intéressent aux conditions de vie des étudiants, à la recherche et au progrès scientifiques tout court. Mais davantage à l'endroit des autorités administratives, car il faut relever avec pertinence que les causes immédiates et déterminantes qui ont précipité dans la rue les étudiants (conditions de vie dans les mini-cités et accidents de circulation) les engagent bien plus que les autorités universitaires ²².

Somme toute, après ces tentatives de résolution des problèmes, les étudiants malgré la construction de trois dos d'âne se sentent toujours en insécurité sur la nationale n°1. Entre 2002 et 2006, trois étudiants sont décédés des suites d'accident et dont le dernier en date concerne une étudiante de la Faculté des sciences, épouse, mère de trois enfants, enceinte à sa mort et n'attendant qu'une programmation pour sa soutenance de maîtrise. C'est dire que le problème d'insécurité sur la nationale demeure toujours d'actualité tant pour les étudiants que pour les usagers de la route.

De même, des tracts appelant ouvertement à la grève sur le campus ont à plusieurs occasions circulé dans les mini-cités²³. Chaque fois, la réaction du rectorat a consisté à isoler les auteurs supposés en incitant un groupe de délégués des étudiants à signer un communiqué qui condamne toute manifestation fût-elle pacifique. C'est dire combien la répression et/ou l'intimidation semblent encore prisées comme mode de résolution des problèmes sur le campus.

Conclusion

L'idée d'une déviation de la nationale proposée par l'administration s'avère être une solution adéquate. Seulement cette déviation concernerait davantage les camions et autres bus de transport. Pourtant les cas d'accidents sur la nationale sont plus orchestrés par les taxis que les gros porteurs. Certains étudiants habitent en ville (15 km du campus) et sont obligés d'emprunter constamment ces taxis vu que seulement deux bus de 30 places sont mis à leur disposition. Un effort de sensibilisation des taximen s'impose d'autant plus que certains d'entre eux sont formés dans le tas et une autre catégorie fait abstraction de la limitation exigible de vitesse pour maximiser leur gain. Le comportement des étudiants serait également à l'origine de certains accidents sur ce tronçon. Aux heures de pointe, les étudiants dans la majorité des cas n'observent pas les règles élémentaires du code de la route et pis, certains sous l'emprise de la consommation excessive d'alcool déambulent sur cette voie qui se rétrécit de jour en jour. Que dire si un véhicule percute un étudiant ivre ayant provoqué lui-même cet accident ? Une réaction des étudiants dans ce cas ne serait-elle pas non fondée et dénuée de tout sens ? Pourtant, le recours à la violence peut survenir à partir d'un simple fait anodin ou d'une boutade lancée dans la foule. En pareille circonstance, l'on sait quand une contestation commence mais l'on ne sait pas quand elle finit et avec quelles conséquences sur la vie et les biens des nobles et paisibles citoyens. Sinon à qui profite finalement la tension sur la nationale n° 1 ?

Le déficit de dialogue social entre les différents membres de la communauté universitaire d'une part et les dirigeants, d'autre part, semblent être à l'origine des crises à répétition des étudiants à l'université de Ngaoundéré. Le recours à la violence intervient alors comme l'ultime recours quand la voie du dialogue est grippée voire releguée au second plan par les dirigeants. Les mouvements des étudiants à l'Université de Ngaoundéré sont de plus en plus très peu structurés mais au fond plus réactifs à cause de l'absence de syndicats et associations de défense de leurs droits. À cela, il faut également voir l'opposition des dirigeants-mêmes universitaires- vis-à-vis de telles structures sur le campus. Cette attitude maladroite des autorités qui ne connaissent le dialogue que quand le pire arrive semble être la caractéristique fondatrice des dirigeants africains qui ont du mal à se débarrasser de leur arsenal de répression hérité de la colonisation. La dépolitisation des étudiants entreprise par le pouvoir camerounais après la grève des années 1990 refait surface à travers la mobilisation des jeunes qui s'opposent à la révision de la constitution par le président Paul Biya au pouvoir depuis plus de 25 ans. Ce ne sont pas des soulèvements récents des jeunes au Cameroun, au Burkina, au Niger et au Kenya au sujet de « la vie chère » qui en démentiront. Il apparaît au regard de ce qui précède que « les problèmes des étudiants comme

ceux des autres catégories sociales mal dans leur être aujourd'hui ne trouveront finalement de réponse que dans un changement de mode de gouvernance, à défaut d'un changement radical de régime politique » (Azebaze 2005).

Notes

- 1 Le lecteur remarquera que l'auteur a peu recouru à des témoignages relatifs aux événements majeurs qu'il relate. C'est qu'il a été associé à certains de ces événements en tant que leader étudiant de premier plan, menant quelques fois les négociations avec les parties en face. Ce qui n'enlève rien à la rigueur qu'il s'est imposée.
- 2 Il s'agit d'une structure de coordination du mouvement de revendication des étudiants. La branche la plus radicale qui s'opposait au groupe dit "auto-défense", proche du pouvoir en place.
- 3 Nous avons été associé à cette rencontre en tant que délégué des étudiants.
- 4 Leur silence s'expliquerait par le fait que nombre d'entre eux auraient investi dans les mini-cités et donc seraient également bailleurs, sinon juge et partie.
- 5 Plusieurs policiers infiltrés ont été formellement identifiés par des étudiants auxquels ils étaient apparentés ou familiers de même que, parmi les étudiants eux-mêmes, il a été possible de démasquer des agents doubles à la solde de l'administration universitaire.
- 6 Propos de Patrick Simo Kamsu, Secrétaire général de la province, dans son bureau une semaine avant la manifestation des étudiants.
- 7 Il est intéressant de noter à ce propos que pour les autorités académiques, ce mouvement de grève avait également des implications politiques. Les leaders ont ainsi été taxés d'agitateurs à la solde d'opposants politiques aux ambitions inavouées.
- 8 Dans le « Procès-Verbal de la réunion du 16 décembre 1999 entre Monsieur le Recteur et les membres de la MUSEC », document adressé entre autres destinataires au ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur qui assure la tutelle, il est clairement écrit : « Monsieur le Recteur prenant la parole, dit qu'il n'a pas reçu dernièrement les membres du bureau de la MUSEC parce qu'il s'y était infiltré des agitateurs tels que : MM. Tomo Gonza, Woudamike (sic), Zangue Serges Martin », p.1. Il se trouve que le trio incriminé n'est autre que celui des trois délégués des étudiants ayant conduit le mouvement de grève de 1999.
- 9 Le Centre National des Études et des Recherches est une sorte de CIA tropicalisée. Le CENER qui était une véritable machine à traquer les « subversifs » avait à sa tête le légendaire Jean Fochivé dont l'évocation de son seul nom faisait peur même aux ministres de la République.
- 10 Intervention de Beban Sammy Chumbow au cours d'un débat relatif à la grève des étudiants organisée à la CRTV, station radio provinciale de l'Adamaoua en février 2002.

- 11 Propos d'un étudiant en furie écoutant la radio au lendemain de la répression de la contestation par l'armée.
- 12 Il est à la fois dramatique et comique de rappeler une anecdote au sujet du pillage des camions des Brasseries du Cameroun. La grève de 2002 se déroulait en pleine coupe d'Afrique 2002 au Mali. L'un des sponsors (« 33 » Export) de l'équipe nationale de football, les lions indomptables, avait pour slogan « "33" Export, sponsor officiel des lions indomptables ». Ce slogan, par dérision, est devenu « "33" Export, sponsor officiel de la grève ». Il est en effet vraisemblable que l'inflation éthylique qui s'en est suivie a contribué à radicaliser les étudiants. Mais il ne faut pas négliger d'autres facteurs.
- 13 La station provinciale de la CRTV (Cameroun Radio Television) pour l'Adamaoua a diffusé des informations selon lesquelles les pertes matérielles étaient estimées à environ deux milliards de F CFA. L'on imagine le désarroi des hommes d'affaires dont les camions et marchandises ont été incendiés.
- 14 D'après les affirmations du chef de station de la radio locale Paul Ngougou.
- 15 Paul Ngougou, journal parlé à la radio nationale février 2002.
- 16 Propos du Recteur lors d'un débat organisé par la radio locale, février 2002.
- 17 Interview réalisée par la radio locale de Ngaoundéré, février 2002.
- 18 Lettre lue à l'émission radiophonique «Écho du campus», février 2002.
- 19 Éditorial introduisant l'émission « Echo du campus » consacrée à l'Université, février 2002.
- 20 En représailles à ce qui était alors considéré comme une chasse aux sorcières dont seraient victimes les étudiants tchadiens à Ngaoundéré pendant cette grève, des ressortissants camerounais dans ce pays ont été molestés.
- 21 Discours du Président des Étudiants de la Faculté des Arts, Lettres et Sciences humaines de l'Université de Yaoundé I, Armand Leka Essomba adressé au recteur lors de la cérémonie de présentation des vœux le 09 février 2000.
- 22 Avec les récents découpages administratifs qui font de Dang où est située l'université un arrondissement doté d'une mairie, un début de solution pourrait être ébauché pour améliorer les conditions de vie des étudiants : électrification des grands carrefours, installation d'un commissariat de police et d'une brigade de gendarmerie.
- 23 Pendant les jeux universitaires d'avril 2007 organisés sur le campus de Dang, ces tracts protestant contre la mort de quelques étudiants tués pendant une manifestation par la police à Buéa. En octobre 2007, des tracts ont également appelé les étudiants à une manifestation pacifique après l'agression mortelle de l'étudiante Haoua Salim.

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Entretiens

Bobbo, ancien délégué des étudiants, entretien du 12 juillet 2007 à Ngaoundéré.

Wassouni François, doctorant, entretien 05 mars 2008 à Ngaoundéré.

Gigla Garakchème, doctorant, entretien du 02 mars 2008 à Ngaoundéré.

Abba, étudiant ayant participé à la grève de 2002, entretien du 12 février 2008 à Ngaoundéré.



Une nouvelle génération politique : les étudiants et le mouvement anti-CPE en France

Danièle Obono*

Résumé

Les mouvements étudiants ont depuis longtemps joué un certain rôle sur la scène politique en France. Au cours des dernières décennies, les réformes néolibérales du système d'enseignement supérieur menées par les gouvernements successifs ont eu un impact sur les étudiants à différents niveaux, à la fois en termes de dégradation de leurs conditions d'études, mais aussi par une politisation accrue au travers des luttes antilibérales des dernières années. Le mouvement anti-CPE (contrat première embauche) de 2006 représente un moment-clé dans cette évolution. Les étudiants ont en effet réussi à vaincre un gouvernement qui avait jusque là réussi à défaire tous les mouvements sociaux précédents. La thèse principale développée dans cet article postule l'émergence d'une nouvelle génération politique au sein de la jeunesse étudiante en France. Après avoir analysé le développement et les formes particulières du mouvement, notre étude revient sur ses racines sociologiques et politiques plus profondes qui renvoient à une dynamique globale bien plus large des processus de restructurations et de résistances à l'échelle mondiale. Cette dernière dimension est aussi ce qui, avec notamment la dégradation de leurs condition et statuts, relie le cas des étudiants anti-CPE en France avec les expériences de mobilisations de leurs homologues étudiants sur le continent africain.

Abstract

Student movements have for a long time played an important role on the political scene in France. In recent years, the higher education system has undergone profound changes provoked by neo-liberal reforms of successive governments. These reforms have impacted on students at different levels: on the one hand, they faced

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harsher conditions of studying, while at the same time being highly politicised in the waves of struggles caused by neo-liberal restructuring over the last decade. The anti-CPE (contrat première embauche) movement that took place in early 2006 constitutes in this regard a landmark in that general dynamic. The university students succeeded in defeating a government which had managed to defeat almost all of the social protests over the previous five years. The main argument in this article will deal with the anti-CPE movement as illustrating the emergence of a new political generation in France. The paper will examine the genesis and development of the movement, as well as its underlying sociological and political roots, in the context of a national and global dynamic of counter-reforms and resistances. The latter is also one of the elements that link the anti-CPE students in France with the experiences of their African counterparts.

Introduction

Il faut du temps, des années, pour accepter le monde tel qu'il est. Il en faut aussi beaucoup pour accepter de l'accepter. C'est ainsi qu'on peut expliquer le rôle prépondérant que joue la « jeunesse »¹ dans un certain nombre de mouvements sociaux. Cela vaudrait pour les Saint-Just et autres Sans-culottes de la Révolution française comme pour les Palestiniens de la première Intifada ; pour les fondateurs des grands partis communistes au début des années 20 comme pour les combattants de la liberté sud-africains des années 1970; pour les Noirs états-uniens de Watts en 1967 comme pour les « lascars » des banlieues françaises en 2005 ; pour les étudiants de mai 1968 à Paris ou à Dakar comme pour ceux des années 2000 en Grèce, au Chili ou au Zimbabwe... Pour autant, il n'y a rien d'automatique à ces dynamiques. La jeunesse n'est pas *en soi* et à aucun moment ni réactionnaire ni révolutionnaire dans son ensemble. Ce sont seulement certaines de ses composantes qui le sont à certains moments. La question étant, pour le chercheur comme pour le militant, de comprendre ce qui fait qu'une dynamique collective se développe dans un sens ou dans un autre. Car la jeunesse en mouvement possède un potentiel social et politique susceptible d'impacter sur l'ensemble de la société.

Ainsi en France, la jeunesse étudiante a souvent joué un rôle important sur la scène sociale et politique. De la guerre d'Algérie à décembre 1995 en passant par mai 1968, les mouvements étudiants ont participé à la contestation de nombreux gouvernements en place. A chaque fois, ils ont su se mobiliser aussi bien sur des revendications propres à leur secteur que sur des questions politiques plus générales. Depuis la fin des années 1980, le système d'enseignement supérieur français a connu de profonds changements. Les politiques de réformes des gouvernements successifs ont eu des répercussions sur les étudiants à différents niveaux. S'ils connaissent désormais des conditions de vie et d'étude plus difficiles, ils ont été dans le même temps régulièrement impliqués dans les

mouvements de luttes contre la restructuration néolibérale des dernières années. Le récent mouvement de lutte contre le contrat première embauche (CPE) dans les premiers mois de 2006 constitue à cet égard un moment-clé dans cette dynamique générale. Pendant plus de trois mois, la mobilisation active de centaines de milliers d'étudiants a réussi à vaincre un gouvernement qui était parvenu jusque là à défaire la quasi-totalité des mobilisations sociales des cinq années précédentes.

Cette victoire inédite, ainsi que la nature et les formes prises par le mouvement lui-même, est venu contredire le stéréotype d'une jeunesse résignée, « aussi artificiel que celui qui, il y a dix ou vingt ans, présentait la jeunesse comme la catégorie révolutionnaire par excellence » (Galland 1999 : 49)². Le mouvement étudiant de 2006 constitue un objet d'étude particulièrement riche sur la place qu'occupe désormais une certaine jeunesse et sur le rôle qu'elle peut jouer au sein de la société. Ces développements s'inscrivent d'ailleurs dans des dynamiques qui ne sont pas uniques à la France. Il s'agit bien plus d'une tendance de fond qui correspond à des transformations structurelles dans le processus de production mondial, et dont les effets se font sentir partout dans le monde. Les étudiants anti-CPE ont ainsi, toute proportion gardée, bien des points communs avec leurs homologues au Nigeria, au Cameroun ou au Zimbabwe. Comme nous le verrons dans cet article, ces jeunes se sont mobilisés contre la dégradation de leurs conditions de vie et d'étude, refusant une nouvelle dévalorisation de leur statut sur le marché du travail, des thématiques qui font écho à celles de nombreuses autres luttes étudiantes au Nord comme au Sud. Mais, au-delà de ces revendications corporatistes, le mouvement de 2006 a aussi donné à voir l'émergence d'une nouvelle génération politique, qui est le produit, en France, d'un cycle de résistances sociales et politiques, comme on en a vu là aussi ailleurs, et notamment sur le continent africain (Seddon et Zeilig 2005).

En tant que mouvement strictement étudiant, le mouvement anti-CPE illustre ainsi des modes renouvelés de mobilisation d'une certaine catégorie de la population face à des politiques gouvernementales guidées, en France comme sur le continent africain, par des impératifs similaires de dérégulation et de rentabilité maximale. Plus largement, en tant que mouvement social, il représente aussi aujourd'hui, à travers notamment ses liens plus « organiques » et sa stratégie de convergence avec les catégories sociales et salariées les plus fragilisées, un acteur politique potentiellement influent. S'appuyant sur les témoignages de militants du mouvement ainsi que sur un ensemble de sources (tracts, compte-rendu d'assemblées générales, appels, communiqués, ...) recueillis par « immersion critique »³, notre analyse abordera dans un premier temps l'origine et les développements du mouvement, puis s'attachera à mettre en lumière ses

caractéristiques les plus marquantes, pour enfin interroger ses significations politiques les plus déterminantes.

C comme chômage, P comme précaire, E comme exploité(e)

Une révolte, une loi, un mouvement

Le contrat première embauche (CPE) était à l'origine l'article 8 de la loi pour l'égalité des chances (LEC) instaurant diverses mesures relatives à l'emploi et à l'éducation. Elle fut annoncée en partie comme réponse aux révoltes sociales de l'automne 2005 dans les banlieues françaises. Ces révoltes, qui prirent essentiellement la forme de violences urbaines, ont commencé à Clichy-sous-Bois (en région parisienne) le 27 octobre 2005 puis se sont répandues dans un grand nombre de banlieues populaires à travers la France⁴. L'état d'urgence fut déclaré le 8 novembre 2005, puis prolongé pour une durée de 3 mois. Il faudra attendre le 17 novembre pour que la police estime la situation revenue à la normale. La LEC est présentée au parlement le 11 janvier 2006. Elle contient, outre l'article 8 sur le CPE, d'autres dispositions qui vont également susciter la contestation sociale, notamment : l'apprentissage en alternance à partir de l'âge de 14 ans ; la création de nouvelles zones franches urbaines⁵ ; l'instauration d'un « contrat de responsabilité parentale »⁶ ; le travail de nuit à partir de quinze ans sous certaines restrictions.

L'article 8 sur le CPE instaure un nouveau type de contrat de travail à durée indéterminée à destination des moins de 26 ans. Il ne concerne que les entreprises du secteur privé de plus de vingt salariés, à la différence du contrat nouvelle embauche (CNE)⁷ qui ne s'adresse qu'aux petites entreprises de moins de vingt salariés. De plus, comme pour tout contrat à durée indéterminée (CDI) proposé aux salariés de moins de 26 ans au chômage depuis plus de six mois, le CPE s'accompagne d'exonérations de cotisations patronales pendant une durée de trois ans. Une période de « consolidation » donne la possibilité à l'employeur et au salarié de rompre le contrat de travail (licenciement ou démission) sans avoir à en énoncer le motif, à l'instar de la période d'essai en CDI. Les stages, contrats à durée déterminée (CDD) et périodes en alternance effectués par le salarié dans la société au cours des deux années précédant la signature du CPE sont décomptés des deux années de « consolidation » du CPE, qui peut être contracté après un CDD. Enfin, le contrat doit être porté par écrit, entraînant dans le cas contraire sa requalification en CDI, seul contrat de travail français pouvant être établi oralement.

L'amendement portant le CPE est inséré dans le projet de LEC et adopté par l'Assemblée nationale dans la nuit du 8 au 9 février 2006. Mais il reste encore à examiner 27 articles et quelques 370 amendements du projet de loi dont la majorité

a été déposée par les partis d'opposition. Le premier ministre Dominique de Villepin décide alors d'engager la responsabilité du gouvernement sur l'ensemble du texte de loi, conformément à l'article 49-3 de la Constitution, ce qui est dénoncé comme un « passage en force » par l'opposition. La loi ainsi adoptée le 9 mars fait l'objet d'une saisine du Conseil constitutionnel par le Parti socialiste et le Parti radical de gauche. Le 30 mars, le Conseil constitutionnel déclare la loi conforme à la constitution, à l'exception des articles 21 et 22. Le 31 mars, lors d'une allocution télévisée suivie par 20,6 millions de personnes et effectuée en direct du Palais de l'Élysée, le président de la République Jacques Chirac déclare qu'il va promulguer la loi sur l'égalité des chances, dont les dispositions relatives au CPE. Toutefois, il annonce qu'il demandera au gouvernement qu'il soit rapidement proposé au Parlement une seconde loi modificative ramenant le délai de la période de consolidation de deux ans à un an, ainsi que le droit pour le salarié de connaître les raisons de son licenciement. Le président souhaite donc que la loi votée et promulguée ne soit pas appliquée⁸.

La loi est donc inscrite le 2 avril au *Journal officiel*, mais reste en suspens. Un nouveau projet de loi présenté par le Premier ministre le 10 avril 2006 propose de retirer l'article sur le CPE et de le remplacer par un dispositif visant à favoriser l'insertion professionnelle des jeunes en difficulté. Sous la pression de plus en plus forte de la contestation sociale, l'article 8 est finalement abrogé par la loi n° 2006-457 du 21 avril 2006 sur l'accès des jeunes à la vie active en entreprise. Le reste de la loi pour l'égalité des chances a par contre été conservé. Cette fois, c'est bien la rue qui a dicté sa loi au gouvernement⁹.

Développement du mouvement

C'est un mouvement social d'une ampleur inédite depuis plusieurs années qui a fini par obtenir le retrait du CPE, à défaut de celui de l'ensemble de la LEC.

Lors du printemps 2006 [...] les étudiant-e-s, puis les salarié-e-s, s'opposent de nouveau au démantèlement du droit du travail, à la diffusion généralisée de la précarité de l'emploi, en refusant l'instauration du contrat première embauche (CPE) et d'autres dispositions contenues dans la loi dite d'égalité des chances. [...] Au total, une soixantaine d'universités (sur 84) sont complètement paralysées pendant des périodes allant de une à neuf semaines. Plus de 600 lycées connaissent des mouvements qui vont du débrayage de cours au blocage total. [...] Entre début février et fin avril, la mobilisation qui se déploie est la plus importante depuis vingt ans, sur le plan numérique comme sur le plan des actions menées, dans le milieu étudiant. (Collectif 4 bis, 2007 : 9-13)

Principales Dates de Mobilisation

| | |
|------------|---|
| 16 janvier | Annonce de la création du CPE |
| 7 février | 200 à 400 000 personnes dans la rue |
| 18 février | Première coordination nationale étudiante à Rennes |
| 7 mars | 300 000 à 1 million de personnes dans la rue |
| 9 mars | La LEC et le CPE adoptés au Parlement par 49-3 |
| 10 mars | Évacuation de la Sorbonne |
| 18 mars | Entre 500 000 et 1,5 million de gens dans la rue |
| 28 mars | Entre 1,2 et 3 millions de personnes dans la rue |
| 2 avril | Loi promulguée au Journal Officiel, mais CPE « suspendu » |
| 4 avril | Entre 1 et plus de 3 millions de gens dans la rue |
| 10 avril | Annonce du retrait du CPE |

Sources : *Le Monde* et Agence France Presse (AFP), du 1^{er} janvier au 31 avril 2006.

Entre le 16 janvier, date à laquelle Dominique de Villepin annonce la création du CPE dans la cadre de la loi d'égalité des chances, et le 10 avril où il annonce son retrait, un mouvement de masse est né et s'est développé suivant plusieurs phases, ponctué par différents rythmes. De mi-janvier à mi-février, il y a surtout un lent travail d'information dans les universités par un noyau militant (syndicats et organisations politiques). Deux villes sont alors à la pointe de ce début de mouvement : Rennes et Toulouse. Les premières manifestations de février attestent également du potentiel national. Le 7 février 2006, des manifestations unitaires de lycéens, d'étudiants et de jeunes salariés se déroulent en France. Du 7 au 14 février, les universités de Rennes 2 (7 février), Toulouse (9 février) et Nantes (14 février) et la faculté de Brest votent la grève et le blocage, ainsi que l'occupation des sites. Le 13 février, plus de 2400 étudiants (sur 20 000 inscrits) de l'université Rennes II réunis en Assemblée générale lancent un appel à la mobilisation générale de la jeunesse en France. Le 16 février, des actions et manifestations contre la LEC ont lieu dans une trentaine de villes universitaires. Le 18 février à l'université de Rennes II, une coordination nationale d'étudiants se réunit pour lancer le mouvement.

De la fin février à mi-mars, et notamment à partir du retour des vacances scolaires d'hiver, les universités parisiennes vont prendre le relais. Le mouvement se développe et s'accélère, notamment avec l'arrivée des lycéens. Ainsi par

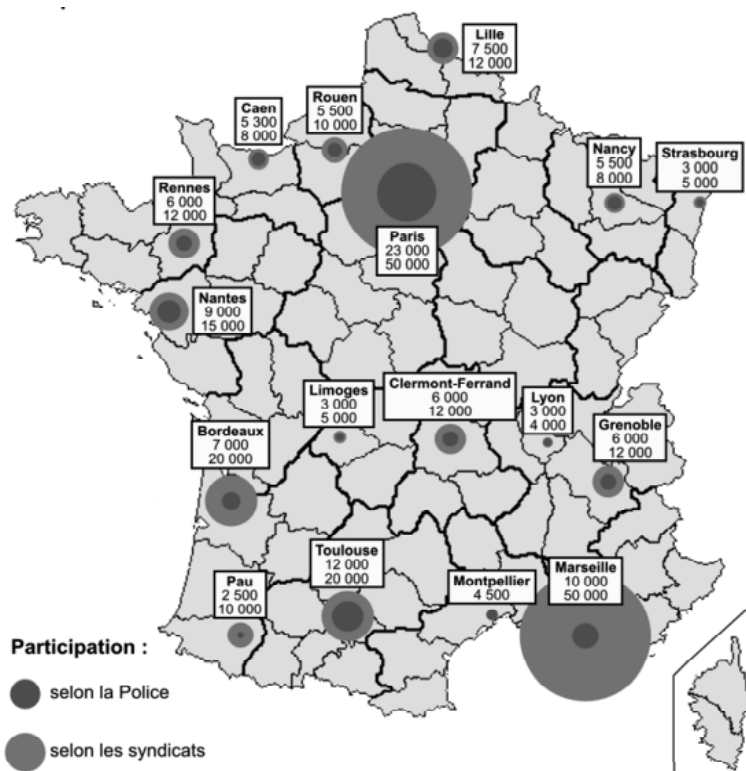
exemple, sur le site de la Sorbonne, en une semaine on passe de trois militants dans un bureau à plus de 150 personnes, puis 400 en AG qui votent la grève et l'occupation. Le 7 mars, 160 cortèges en France rassemblent entre 396 000 (selon la police) et un million de manifestants (selon les organisateurs). 38 universités sont en grève : Aix-Marseille I, Artois, Brest, Chambéry, Dijon, Grenoble I, Grenoble II, Grenoble III, La Rochelle, Le Havre, Le Mans, Lille I, Lille II, Lille III, Limoges, Lorient, Metz, Montpellier II, Montpellier III, Nancy, Nantes, Orléans, Pau, Poitiers, Rennes II, Rouen, Toulouse II, Toulouse III, Tours, Paris I, Paris III, Paris IV, Paris V, Paris VI, Paris VII, Paris VIII, Paris X, Paris XIII, Evry.

De la mi-mars à début avril, il y a ainsi à la fois élargissement et radicalisation du mouvement, avec notamment la participation massive des salariés (jours de grève et manif). Le 16 mars, entre 247 500 (police) et 500 000 (organisateur) manifestants anti-CPE sortent dans la rue. Sur les 84 universités, 21 universités (25 %) seraient bloquées et 37 seraient perturbées selon le ministère ; 66 universités seraient en grève selon l'Unef, le principal syndicat étudiant. Plusieurs soirs en mars 2006, des affrontements entre manifestants et CRS ont lieu dans le quartier Latin à Paris, où se situe le site universitaire de la Sorbonne interdit d'accès par les CRS (de même que plusieurs rues adjacentes). Le 18 mars, à l'appel d'une large intersyndicale de salariés et d'étudiants (CFDT, CGT, FO, CFTC, CGC, FSU, Unsa, Union syndicale Solidaires, Confédération étudiante, Unef, UNL, Fidl), des manifestations ont réuni entre 500 000 (RG) et 1 500 000 (organisateur) personnes à travers 160 villes en France. Le 23 mars, une nouvelle journée de mobilisation nationale a réuni 550 000 manifestants dans le pays. Fait marquant, la plupart des universités en grève envoient des délégations pour participer à la manifestation parisienne. Le 28 mars, entre 1 200 000 (RG) et 3 000 000 de personnes (organisateur) descendent dans les rues pour manifester contre le CPE. De plus en plus de lycées et d'universités sont en grève, voire quelques collèges en Île-de-France.

Le 4 avril, malgré l'allocution radiotélévisée du président Chirac promulguant la LEC, ce sont entre 2,5 et 3 millions de personnes qui manifestent partout en France. Le 5 avril, les négociations entre les parlementaires UMP et les syndicats de travailleurs, de lycéens et d'étudiants débutent pour une modification éventuelle de la loi, conformément aux souhaits du Président de la République. Les syndicats demandent que le CPE soit abrogé avant le 15 avril 2006. Les députés socialistes ont déposé une proposition de loi allant également dans ce sens. Le 6 avril, la grève continue avec une augmentation très importante des actions coups de poings, comme le blocage du pont de l'île d'Oléron par des lycéens qui bloqua le département pendant de longues heures, ou encore les arrêts de train en gare de Paris, Lille, Bordeaux, ... voir même le blocage du

convoi de l'Airbus A380. Moins d'une semaine plus tard, le 10 avril, le premier ministre annonce le retrait du CPE. A partir de là, le mouvement va alors peu à peu décliner, malgré la tentative de poursuivre la mobilisation sur les autres points de revendications, comme ce qui demeure de la LEC ou le CNE. Le retour des vacances de Pâques, à la fin du mois d'avril, confirme la fin du mouvement avec le vote de la fin de la grève et du blocage dans la grande majorité des universités.

Carte: Ampleur des manifestations anti-CPE du 23 mars 2006 en France



Source : Informations AFP via *Le Monde*. Auteur : Eric Gaba, août 2006.

Dynamiques de lutte

Un mouvement massif, unitaire et radical

Le mouvement contre le CPE a été un des mouvements de jeunesse les plus importants des deux dernières décennies en France. La particularité de ce mouvement tient au fait qu'il a su combiner au moins trois éléments fondamentaux : massivité, unité, radicalité. Mouvement massif, comme nous l'avons décrit précédemment, par le nombre d'étudiants et de non étudiants investis dans la lutte. La très grande majorité des établissements d'enseignement supérieur ont été touchés, ainsi que des centaines de lycées. Les journées de mobilisation nationale (7 février, 7 mars, 28 mars, 4 avril) ont impliqué des millions de personnes au-delà de ces secteurs, que ce soit dans les manifestations et dans les grèves de soutien. Et le mouvement a réussi à gagner un soutien majoritaire de l'opinion publique : en mars 2006, 62% des Français se déclaraient solidaires du mouvement, selon un sondage Ipsos/LCI.

Le gouvernement a perdu très vite la bataille de l'opinion. [...] Après un temps d'hésitation, l'opinion a basculé du côté des détracteurs du contrat première embauche, objet d'un rejet massif tout au long de la crise, selon les sondages. [...] Le mouvement anti-CPE a offert un exemple rare de jonction revendicative du monde étudiant et lycéen avec les salariés, avec, de fait, pour unique précédent depuis 1968, le mouvement anti CIP (contrat d'insertion professionnelle, rebaptisé « Smic-jeunes ») de 1994. On a ainsi assisté à une double confluence : générationnelle (jeunes et anciens, enfants et parents) et sociale (salariés public-privé et jeunesse scolaire et universitaire) (AFP, 10 avril 2006).

Un mouvement unitaire également, qui a su rassembler au sein du milieu étudiant les organisations politiques et syndicales. C'est un collectif d'organisations de jeunesse rassemblant des syndicats (UNEF, UNL, CGT jeunes, UNSA jeunes) et des courants politiques (jeunes Socialistes, Communistes, Verts, Révolutionnaires, etc.) qui appelle dès le 19 janvier à l'organisation d'AG d'information et de mobilisation sur toutes les universités. Mais c'est surtout la grande masse des étudiants non-organisés et sans posture idéologique définie et arrêtée qui ont constitué l'essentiel des forces. Enfin, en matière d'unité le mouvement anti-CPE a aussi réussi le tour de force de créer l'unité des forces syndicales et des partis de la gauche. Autour du mot d'ordre unique de retrait du CPE, le front syndical rassemblant l'ensemble des organisations de salariés (CGT, CFDT, FO, CFTC, CFE-CGE, FSU, Unsa, Solidaires) ne s'est jamais rompu. Au niveau politique le front de soutien au mouvement a également rassemblé l'ensemble des forces de gauche qui se sont réunies à deux reprises lors de

sommets unitaires : PS, PCF, Verts, PRG, MRC, LCR, Alternative citoyenne, MARS, etc.

Un mouvement radical enfin, notamment dans les formes de l'action (grèves, blocages, occupations étudiantes, créativité des slogans, affiches, etc.) et à travers le développement de stratégies (lien avec les salariés, appels interprofessionnels,...), inspirées de l'époque et des luttes sociales qui l'ont précédé. C'est précisément sa capacité à tirer partie du passé, en s'appuyant sur et en réinventant des orientations déjà expérimentées, qui a contribué à sa force et sa profondeur. Ainsi par exemple la nécessité d'une coordination nationale des établissements en lutte a été reprise des mobilisations de 1986. De mai 1968 et de novembre-décembre 1995 a été retenu l'appel au monde du travail pour une jonction des luttes dans un mouvement d'ensemble. L'utilisation très rapide et systématique du blocage des universités comme un moyen d'expression de la grève étudiante et d'extension de la mobilisation, renvoie à l'expérience du mouvement lycéen de 2005 qui avait vu l'usage massif de cet outil de lutte. Enfin, le développement d'actions publiques et spectaculaires (manifestations « sauvages », c'est-à-dire non déclarées en préfecture, sit-in, die-in, squats d'entreprises et organisation d'AG dans celles-ci, actions « péages libres » pour récolter de l'argent, barrages des voies ferrées et de grands axes de communication, courses-poursuite avec les forces de police, etc.) s'inspire en partie des formes de militantisme redéveloppées au sein des forums sociaux et contresommets du mouvement altermondialiste.

Auto-organisation et démocratie étudiante

Toute cette dynamique s'est appuyée sur une architecture du mouvement bien précise. En premier lieu, le cœur du mouvement était constitué par les assemblées générales (AG) réunies au sein des universités.

« Comparée à l'« agora » athénienne, les AG de l'université se sont progressivement peuplées d'étudiant-e-s porteurs de visions et d'objectifs différents [...], tou-te-s, nous avons réalisé que ce terrain était devenu le nôtre. C'est au sein de ces AG que nombreux-ses ont pris conscience de l'enjeu de cette mobilisation. L'université a donc aussi été un lieu de persuasion, d'échange et de prise de conscience. [...] Durant ces semaines de lutte, nous avons donc redonné à l'université son rôle initial, celui de nous permettre de réfléchir, de mobiliser nos outils intellectuels critiques et pratiques. » (Collectif 4 bis 2007 :184-185).

Au départ, ce sont souvent de petites réunions d'informations, initiées par des réseaux militants (politiques et syndicaux). Puis, au bout de plusieurs semaines, « la mayonnaise prend ».

« Au début, nous étions un petit groupe de militants syndicaux étudiants à avoir étudié le texte de loi et à prendre conscience de la gravité de l'attaque. [...], nous avons organisé des premières AG où il y avait à peine une centaine de personnes. C'était peu mais cela nous a quand même permis d'organiser un premier comité de mobilisation, c'est-à-dire un noyau de militants (une vingtaine) plus large que les seuls militants syndicaux. On a fait les premières manifs, et puis c'est le moment où des facs parisiennes (Nanterre, Tolbiac, je crois) ont commencé à voter le blocage. À Censier, le nombre des étudiants en AG ne décollait pas, alors qu'on entamait la troisième semaine de mobilisation sur certaines facs comme Rennes et Toulouse. On commençait à être un peu démoralisés, et puis le jeudi 23 février, jour de manif nationale, on a été plus de 200. C'est ce jour-là que la grève a été votée pour la première fois, ainsi que des barrages filtrants pour le lendemain, qui ont permis de mobiliser plus de monde pour l'AG : le vendredi ce sont plus de 400 étudiants qui reconduisirent la grève et votèrent le blocage. Nous l'avons mis en place le lendemain, lors d'un comité de mobilisation où certaines personnes essayaient de péter le blocage et donc les décisions de l'AG de la veille, sur le mode : « on y arrivera jamais, il faut faire des barrages filtrants, ce que l'AG a décidé c'est une connerie, etc. ». Heureusement, on était quelques-uns à défendre l'auto organisation et on a convaincu ceux qui étaient là du fait que l'AG doit être considérée comme l'instance souveraine de décisions. Nous avons donc mis en place le blocage le lundi 27 février. Il ne sera levé que le 24 avril... » Romain, étudiant syndiqué à l'UNEF et organisé aux JCR et à la LCR, site universitaire de Censier-Sorbonne Nouvelle (Collectif, 2007 :99-100).

S'il n'existe pas un modèle unique de fonctionnement des AG, des modalités générales, reprises de mouvements précédents, et enrichies de formes et d'instruments nouveaux, se diffusent peu à peu à l'ensemble des universités mobilisées. Ainsi à l'université de Lyon 2, sur le site de Bron :

Les assemblées générales sont organisées lors des comités de mobilisation (et convoquées par les AG précédentes). [...] La tribune est composée de plusieurs membres changeants afin d'éviter que ce soit toujours les mêmes qui y siègent. [...] La présidence de tribune : il-elle a un rôle d'arbitre et d'organisateur-trice de débat. C'est lui-elle qui lance un point de l'ordre du jour et clôt les inscriptions afin de ne pas trop dépasser le temps prévu pour chaque point. C'est également lui qui donne, à haute voix, le résultat des votes et qui donne la parole. Enfin, il-elle organise les débats et calme l'AG, lorsque cela se révèle nécessaire. [...] à la

tribune siège également une personne chargée de prendre la liste des inscrit-e-s, les tours de paroles. Cette liste est close au bout d'un certain temps, afin de ne pas trop faire trainer l'AG en longueur. Les étudiant-e-s qui souhaitent pendre la parole lèvent la main ou inscrivent leur nom sur un papier qu'ils-elles montrent à la tribune. Les temps de parole sont en général limités à une minute trente parfois une minute lorsqu'il y a beaucoup d'inscrit-e-s. [...] une troisième personne est chargée de prendre des notes pour ensuite faire un compte rendu d'AG [...]. Une quatrième personne est chargée de prendre des notes au tableau, pendant toute l'AG. Il y a également des compteur-euse-s pour le moment des votes (...) Pour que les AG ne deviennent pas un brouhaha sans nom, la règle implicite est de ne pas huer ni applaudir. Pour exprimer son point de vue, l'étudiant-e mécontent-e ou en désaccord tourne les pouces vers le bas, et l'étudiant-e qui exprime son accord agite les mains comme des marionnettes. Il faut bien dire que cette règle n'est pas toujours suivie et que souvent, nous avons du mal à nous contenir (...). Enfin, dans la plupart des AG, les votes sont relégués à la fin et l'on reprend point par point toutes les propositions. Le vote se fait à main levée (sauf lors d'expériences autres qui furent un échec) : Qui est pour ? Qui est contre ? Qui s'abstient ? (Cet ordre n'étant pas toujours respecté). Lorsqu'il y a litige, on compte et on recompte. Lorsqu'il est évident qu'une grosse majorité se dégage, le décompte n'est pas considéré comme nécessaire. Mais si quelqu'un-e souhaite néanmoins que l'on compte, on compte. (Collectif 4 bis 2007 : 63-64).

Les comités de grève issus de l'AG ont pour mission d'organiser et de faire grossir les assemblées générales et plus globalement le mouvement. Il se réunit souvent quotidiennement. Il s'agit au cours des réunions de faire un bilan de la journée, de préparer la journée suivante, de se répartir les tâches. Les différentes commissions, organisées afin d'assurer les diverses tâches de construction (écriture de tracts, décoration/animation du site, liens interprofessionnels, liens avec les médias, financements, etc.), et fonctionnant sur la base du volontariat, y sont représentées. Elles participent d'une organisation horizontale de la mobilisation: elles fonctionnent de manière autonome les unes des autres mais se coordonnent au niveau du comité et rendent compte de leur activité à chaque AG. C'est au rythme de ces AG hebdomadaires ou bihebdomadaires, dans un tourbillon d'arguments, de rires et d'émotions, que bat le cœur du mouvement.

« Et la vie est revenue à Censier, le sang coulait à nouveau dans nos veines asphyxiées. Les étudiants nous rendaient notre pouvoir d'indignation. J'assistais, émue, à leurs prises de parole, à la naissance, pour cer-

tains, d'une conscience politique. (...) Je me souviens de petits matins blêmes, autour d'un café-Libé (...), étonnés et heureux de nous retrouver. Moments de fraternité d'une rare intensité. (...) Je me souviens de poèmes, textes, motions et autres slogans recouvrant les murs de Censier, vibrants échos de cris de rage et de révolte. Je me souviens de l'université populaire, de ces moments où l'amphi chavirait d'émotion, le frisson de l'intelligence parcourant les travées. » Lee Bertad, professeur à Censier (Collectif 2007 : 47-48)

Rassemblant selon les endroits, de quelques centaines à plusieurs milliers de personnes, les AG se sont rapidement structurées en coordination nationale. La première se réunit à Rennes le 18 février, et sera reconduite tous les week-ends suivants, à dix reprises, jusqu'au 23 avril. Elle regroupera, au cours de son existence, des représentants provenant de la grande majorité des établissements d'enseignement supérieur en France (jusqu'à une soixantaine sur 84). Une coordination nationale (CN), a pour but de coordonner les idées et actions émanant des différentes villes mobilisées. La coordination nationale permet à chaque assemblée générale de site (selon le calcul de représentativité un lieu=une voix) d'être représentée au sein d'une autre assemblée générale, celle-ci nationale, par le biais d'un mandat confié à des délégués élus. Le mandat doit comporter des propositions locales quand à l'organisation de la CN, aux actions collectives et nationales à mener, aux appels lancés à la population, etc. Il doit aussi refléter la position de chaque site sur l'élargissement des revendications, sur la reconnaissance de la légitimité de la coordination ou encore sur la pertinence des appels lancés. Enfin, il garantit un minimum de cohérence de discours entre les délégués d'un même site, et évite, en théorie, la personnalisation de la représentation. Chaque AG de site est donc censée donner son avis sur tous les points débattus lors de la coordination nationale. Les mandats de chaque site sont ensuite confrontés, dans une ville qui accueille la coordination. Ce sont donc en moyenne 500 étudiant-e-s qui se retrouvent chaque week-end dans un amphi pour faire part de l'avis des AG et pour tenter de donner au mouvement une dynamique nationale pour la semaine à venir (Collectif 4 bis 2007 : 88-89).

Cette structuration a permis au mouvement d'acquérir une plus grande unité dans la lutte, de meilleures capacités de mobilisation et une visibilité publique et médiatique nationale : élaboration de plateformes de revendications communes¹⁰, appels à des journées d'actions nationales repris par les syndicats de salariés, élection de porte-paroles nationaux, etc. Des AG aux coordinations nationales en passant par les comités de grèves et les commissions de travail, les formes étudiantes d'auto-organisation et d'autogestion de la lutte ont été des outils essentiels à la mise en forme et en cohérence d'un contenu revendicatif qui est

allé parfois bien au-delà de la motivation de départ liée au CPE. Pour beaucoup de ses acteurs, le mouvement anti-CPE a en effet représenté bien plus, en termes d'enjeux, d'acquis et de perspectives, que le simple rejet d'une mesure gouvernementale parmi d'autres.

Une nouvelle génération politique

De la galère en milieu étudiant

En tant que mouvement étudiant, le mouvement anti-CPE s'inscrit dans l'histoire des mouvements de jeunesse en France depuis l'émergence de cette catégorie sociale au cours du 19^e siècle. Dans la seconde moitié du 20^e siècle on assiste à une scolarisation massive de la jeunesse. « [...] [À] partir des années cinquante, la jeunesse scolaire constitue, et ce dans un mouvement d'une grande ampleur et d'une étonnante rapidité, une nouvelle catégorie sociale qui n'était encore que marginale au début du siècle. » (Galland 1999: 34). La jeunesse étudiante en particulier va peu à peu se constituer en un groupe social et politique plus visible et actif. Les années 1960 vont voir une accélération de la diversification, notamment sociologique, du monde étudiant. Les étudiants ne sont désormais plus simplement les « héritiers » de la bourgeoisie, déterminés exclusivement par cette origine sociale et dont l'instruction centrée sur la culture générale avait un rôle plus symbolique que professionnel. Les effectifs universitaires sont passés de 150 000 en 1954-1955 à 220 000 à la rentrée 1961-1962 et à 330 000 en 1964-1965 (plus de 120% en dix ans, plus de 50% en trois ans). Parallèlement, entre 1950 et 1965, le rapport du nombre des étudiants issus des couches moyennes au nombre de ceux issus des couches élevées a été multiplié par quatre (Galland 1999:39).

On passe ainsi d'un type d'université à un autre, avec un bouleversement de l'équilibre du système. Ces nouveaux développements ne sont pas le fruit du hasard, mais bien les conséquences de transformations structurelles du système économique et de ses besoins. L'élévation générale du niveau scolaire de la période d'après guerre correspondait à des besoins spécifiques pendant la période. Durant les années 1945-75, sous la double pression d'une croissance exceptionnelle et d'innovations technologiques – électroménager, transports, nucléaire, énergie chimique – le marché du travail a connu une forte croissance en volume ainsi qu'un glissement vers des emplois nécessitant des niveaux de qualification de plus en plus élevés. À son tour cette évolution a alimenté une demande croissante en formation et en instruction. (Nico Hirtt, 2000:11) Ces mutations ont été le plus important facteur d'une crise structurelle, qui s'est vite transformée en crise politique. La contestation étudiante de mai 1968 a ainsi mis à nu les contradictions entre l'ambition et les nécessités de transformation

affichées, et le retard en termes de moyens humains et financiers. Les structures politiques et administratives ne permettant pas de satisfaire les besoins, il y a eu un décalage béant entre les aspirations et la réalité. Les étudiants ont alors un poids politique et jouent un rôle « avant-coureur », comme déjà dans la mobilisation contre la guerre d'Algérie et dans nombreuses et diverses mobilisations anticolonialistes de la fin des empires coloniaux, où se lit une qualité spécifique de ces mobilisations, à savoir la capacité à poser avant tout le monde les « problèmes de société » (Molinari 2006:249).

Pour comprendre ces phénomènes, dont Molinari refuse à juste titre d'attribuer trop exclusivement l'origine à des propriétés inhérentes à « la jeunesse », il faut prendre en compte la situation des étudiants comme celle de « jeunes intellectuels préparés à poser des distances critiques à l'égard des conditions que leur imposent, autant qu'ils les leur offrent, les autres générations et les pouvoirs socialement constitués, et interroger la position récurrente de générations successives de jeunes filles ou de garçons, qui à divers titres se trouvent, comme jeunesse, spécialement exposées à des risques ou à des aléas sociaux particuliers, en dehors des conditions permanentes de la nécessaire construction de soi. » Aujourd'hui, alors que le nombre d'étudiants atteint 2,5 millions, soit dix-fois plus qu'il y a trente ans, cette analyse vaut d'autant plus : « le monde étudiant se présente avec, ou comme, un potentiel politique nouveau dans une société française en restructuration critique. » (Molinari 2006:249)

Au 1^{er} janvier 2006, en France, selon les estimations de l'INSEE, la population de moins de 30 ans représentait 22 898 416 personnes soit environ 36% de la population totale. Cette population jeune est majoritairement scolarisée. Une nouvelle accélération du phénomène de scolarisation massive a été constatée à la fin des années 1980 : en 1997 61% des effectifs d'une classe d'âge ont eu le bac, et près d'un million d'étudiants du supérieur ont été ajoutés en plus entre 1980 et 1997. D'après les chiffres du ministère de l'éducation nationale pour 2004-2005, il y a 15 004 400 élèves, apprentis et étudiants en France. Les jeunes scolarisés représentent aujourd'hui environ 65 % des moins de 30 ans. Ces jeunes là sont très différents de leurs aînés. Ils sont le produit d'une époque qui a vu le développement du chômage de masse et de la précarité. Le tournant néolibéral amorcé par les gouvernements à partir des années 1980 a aussi eu des impacts au niveau du système d'enseignement, et par là même sur les conditions de vie et d'étude des jeunes scolarisés ¹¹. On observe en outre un allongement de la phase de transition professionnelle, au cours de laquelle se développent des situations intermédiaires, pour la plupart d'emplois précaires et temporaires. En 2006 selon l'INSEE 8,6% de l'ensemble des jeunes qui sont au chômage. 47% des étudiants étaient ainsi salariés en 2005 (Hochschul-Informationssystem 2005); tandis que plus de 100 000 étudiants vivent aujourd'hui sous le seuil de pauvreté (UNEF

2006). Pour une majorité des étudiants mobilisés contre le CPE en 2006, ce mouvement de contestation a ainsi représenté, bien plus que l'opposition à une loi, le rejet d'une mesure symbolisant plus que tout la précarité de leurs conditions de vie, d'études et d'avenir.

« Si un temps, le salariat se vivait décevant – grâce à l'encadrement des conditions de travail et la possibilité d'en faire un moyen plutôt qu'une fin – il n'en est plus ainsi depuis la fin des années 1970. C'est que depuis le tournant néolibéral des années 1980, le travail et les conditions d'y accéder ont bien changé. [...] étant né-e-s dans la décennie qui a suivi la fin des « Trente glorieuses », dans les années 1980, nous avons grandi au milieu de changements profonds. Nous nous sentons à ce titre habilités à parler des effets que cela a eu sur une génération, la nôtre qui, aujourd'hui, se rebelle contre cet état de fait. L'effervescence du printemps 2006 a bien montré que l'avenir ne nous inspirait rien de bien enthousiasmant. Galère pour se loger, galère pour trouver un emploi... » (Collectif 4 bis 2007:149).

La « génération »¹² étudiante du printemps 2006 se vit ainsi comme étant « sacrifiée », baignant depuis toujours dans la précarité et l'insécurité sociale, dans l'incertitude quant à son avenir.

« Nous sommes pour la plupart né-e-s entre 1980 et 1990, et nous avons grandi avec un maître mot dans la tête : la crise. De l'économie (krachs boursiers), du marché du travail (chômage des années 1990), de l'enseignement (échecs scolaires, suppressions des postes d'enseignants...), des idéologies (chute du mur de Berlin, effondrement de l'URSS), ou de la représentation (montée de l'abstention, 21 avril 2002...), la crise est omniprésente. Depuis l'enfance on nous ressasse que notre avenir va être difficile, qu'il va falloir « se battre » pour arriver à faire sa vie. Que ce soit au journal de 20 heures, dans les films, dans les discussions familiales, à l'école primaire ou encore au collège, note quotidien nous habitue à l'idée que « ça va être moins facile qu'il y a quelques années ». Une sortie de crise la place à une entrée dans une autre et, au final, c'est une crise générale que l'on retient, que l'on intériorise, qui devient une contrainte à laquelle il faut s'adapter. Inconsciemment, nous composons avec l'idée d'une instabilité permanente qu'il va falloir pallier avec telle ou telle « situation », si possible bonne. » (Collectif 4 bis 2007:155).

Cette précarité, qui recouvre chez les étudiants des acceptions différentes selon leurs conceptions politiques, leurs appartenances sociales et leurs expériences personnelles, n'est pas une donnée abstraite. Elle renvoie à des expériences

vécues et apparaît comme une dimension qui est fortement intériorisée tout en constituant, parfois, un support pour une remise en cause plus profonde de la société. En s'opposant au CPE les étudiants ont ainsi revendiqué le droit au travail et à la défense du Code du travail. Pour le sociologue Robi Morder (2006:267-268), c'est en fait sans trop le savoir que les centaines de milliers de jeunes anti-CPE ont donné corps à « une prophétie vieille de soixante ans ». Celle contenue dans la Charte de Grenoble, fondatrice du syndicalisme étudiant d'après guerre, et selon laquelle « l'étudiant est un jeune travailleur intellectuel » ayant, en tant que jeune, « droit à une prévoyance sociale » et le « devoir de s'intégrer dans la jeunesse nationale et mondiale ». Ils ont exprimé le refus d'isoler le monde étudiant dans un « ghetto » privilégié séparé du reste de la jeunesse. Selon la Charte de 1946, « en tant que travailleur il a droit au travail, à l'indépendance matérielle et sociale garantie par le droit syndical. ». Or désormais, avec la massification et la crise économique, les rapports entre les étudiants et la société ont changé. On note aujourd'hui que dans chaque famille, il y a souvent au moins un chômeur et un étudiant. C'est ainsi que ce qui n'était que proclamation en 1946, et même encore en 1968, est devenu une réalité sociologique. C'est cela qui explique, selon Morder, l'unité du front entre syndicalisme salarié et mouvements de jeunes sur tout ce qui touche au contrat de travail et aux qualifications. La condition de salarié/étudiant est désormais vécue comme un même combat.

Le CPE n'aura finalement été que la goutte d'eau qui a fait déborder le vase. Un étudiant de Censier confiait ainsi : « L'accident crée la nécessité disait Hegel. L'accident fut le CPE, et la mobilisation la nécessité » (Collectif 2007:54). La portée politique de la lutte a justement consisté dans sa capacité à faire de sa revendication centrale (le CPE) le point de condensation des politiques néolibérales en tant que telles. C'est l'analyse défendue notamment par Kouvelakis (2007:275) et que nous reprenons ici à notre compte. Le mouvement a révélé que ce qui se jouait avec le CPE, c'était l'obtention d'une main d'œuvre jeune, docile et entièrement « disponible », l'institutionnalisation de la segmentation de la force de travail (déjà à l'œuvre dans le CNE et les modalités d'application des 35 heures). À travers une revendication particulière (le CPE en tant qu'institutionnalisation de la précarité pour les moins de 26 ans), ce qui était en cause c'était donc la capacité du capital à renforcer son emprise dans tous les secteurs de la vie sociale, à commencer par le lieu de travail. C'est en ce sens que le mouvement de 2006 est un « mouvement de (lutte de) classe, une proposition antilibérale et anticapitaliste «à l'état pratique» ».

Nouvelle vague

Les étudiants et lycéens qui ont, grosso modo, entre 15 et 25 ans en ce printemps 2006 sont marqués par la crise économique, sociale et politique de l'époque. Et un des événements les plus marquants de la période est le « choc du 21 avril 2002 ».

« Si le «séisme politique» provoqué par l'accès du leader du Front national au second tour de l'élection présidentielle en 2002 a laissé des empreintes sur toute la société française, il a eu des effets tout particuliers chez les « jeunes » de l'époque, c'est-à-dire nous, un ensemble de jeunes citoyen-ne-s pour la première fois confronté-e-s à la politique. Le parcours de notre génération mérite d'être compris à la lumière de cette secousse politique, mais aussi des différents mouvements sociaux qui se sont déroulés entre 2002 et 2005, car ils ont conditionné bon nombre de nos prises de position. » (Collectif 4 bis 2007:167-168).

Le 21 avril 2002 a représenté pour une bonne partie de ces jeunes une entrée effective en politique. À travers les manifestations de l'entre-deux tours électoral, ils ont fait un apprentissage de l'action politique sur le tas, dans la rue. Cette mobilisation de 2002 est suivie par d'autres luttes sociales, en réaction à une série de lois et de réformes : luttes contre la décentralisation, contre la réforme du statut des enseignants, contre la privatisation des services publics, contre la réforme des retraites, de l'éducation, par la mobilisation des intermittents du spectacle, des chercheurs, des agents EDF-GDF et enfin les révoltes de novembre 2005.

« La «génération du 21 avril», à la présenter ainsi, voit sa scolarité marquée par des réformes importantes, notamment dans l'éducation, menées par les gouvernements Raffarin et de Villepin. Entre le 21 avril 2002 et le 7 février 2006 (premières manifestations contre la LEC), bon nombre de « jeunes », lycéen-ne-s ou étudiant-e-s, se forment une opinion politique ou même une pratique réelle du « terrain » politique, une pratique de la lutte et de la mobilisation collective. [...] Courant 2005, la plupart d'entre nous, encore au lycée ou en première année de fac, sont également marqués par le référendum sur le traité constitutionnel pour l'Union européenne (TCE). [...] Nous voyons se cristalliser les positions des partis, des syndicats étudiants ou lycéens, des camarades de classes ou de facultés, des enseignant-e-s, ce qui contribue à notre formation et nous aide à consolider nos jugements... Certain-e-s, sensibles à ce moment fort de politisation, rejoignent les collectifs locaux du « non » au TCE. [...] Entre 2002 et 2006, les politiques néolibérales et sécuritaires menées par

des gouvernements de droite ont largement contribué à accélérer la politisation d'une grande partie d'entre nous qui avons commencé à crier notre refus du FN. [...] Un autre fait politique majeur a marqué les étudiant-e-s mobilisé-e-s : la violence des émeutes de novembre 2005 avec l'attitude des politiques, les mesures exceptionnelles prises (couvre-feu, Etat d'urgence, etc.) et la répression dont cette révolte a fait l'objet. Quelques mois seulement après la fin de celle-ci, le mouvement étudiant contre la LEC commence. Il apparaît alors à bon nombre d'entre nous qu'il y a peut-être un lien plus important qu'on ne le dit entre ces deux événements. Les jeunes qui se sont révoltés au mois de novembre 2005 font eux aussi partie de la génération dont nous venons de parler. De plus, et nous l'avons déjà dit, le combat que nous avons mené a posé bien des questions, liées à la précarité, et plus larges que celles relatives à la jeunesse étudiante. Les débats lors des coordinations nationales l'ont d'ailleurs bien montré. C'est pour ces raisons que le mouvement anti-LEC a tenté de se rapprocher de la révolte des banlieues » (Collectif 4 bis 2007 : 169-171).

Pour un observateur non-étudiant du mouvement, il y a bien là quelque chose d'inédit à propos de ces jeunes.

« Il est clair dès ces premières journées que ces étudiants sont à la fois profondément différents les uns des autres et solidement unis. Les débats qui s'engagent dans les AG d'amphithéâtre ou les couloirs mettent en jeu la plus solide langue de bois politique comme l'ingénuité la plus stupéfiante, et c'est bien cela qui forme la cohérence du mouvement. Les organisés avec principes et mode d'emploi de militants révolutionnaires [...] prennent de la graine devant les autres, qui s'en méfient et les admirent en même temps, et se voient imposer par l'indiscipline et la spontanéité, par la connerie même associée à une inventivité débordante comme on en rencontre dans ces moments d'exception, des conditions imprévues. Dans les AG, c'est à la fois le bordel total et le formalisme démocratique le plus rigide. La société française découvre à la télé les pratiques d'une nouvelle génération, qui visiblement n'a pas totalement oublié de parler politique et de s'engueuler sur Octobre, Mexico, Barcelone ou Gay-Lussac, mais qui s'écharpe aussi sur un demi-vote de quart de motion ou un mandat semi-impératif avec salto arrière, et applaudit en agitant ses mains à la façon des sourds pour éviter le brouhaha qui couvre la parole. Quelques signes se manifestent qui permettent de penser que cette génération, que ces étudiants-là en tout cas, seront peut-être moins soumis ou moins passifs que la plupart de leurs aînés, mais à leur façon : quatre-

vingts pour cent d'une classe d'âge au bac produit aussi un certain brassage sociologique, et c'est ce qu'on ne veut plus dans la société française de l'exclusion et de la précarité. » Pierre Nicols, enseignant (Collectif 2007:19).

Il y a bien sûr eu des « loupés », des regrets et même une certaine amertume chez les étudiants anti-CPE. Rendez-vous manqué avec les banlieues et la grève générale ; regrets de ne pas avoir changé le monde, de ne pas « être allés jusqu'au bout » ; amers lendemains de lutte, quand il faut « savoir arrêter une grève ». Les débats à la fin du mouvement ont souvent été assez rudes, pour savoir s'il fallait parler de victoire ou de défaite. Pour nombre de ses acteurs, il y a eu en fait un peu des deux. Le sentiment d'avoir gagné s'explique par le recul manifeste du gouvernement sous la pression de la rue, après dix semaines de blocages des universités et de manifestations. C'est « une victoire politique, une victoire de la ténacité, de l'unité, et de la volonté collective de dire non jusqu'au bout quand le pouvoir prétend imposer ses diktats » (Collectif 2007:7). C'est également une « victoire morale » pour avoir fait triompher l'idée que « la lutte paie », « ensemble on peut gagner », que si « tout seul t'es rien, à plusieurs t'es quelque chose » (Entretien 1, 2007). Cette lutte a ainsi redonné à des millions de personnes, en premier lieu à ses principaux acteurs, les étudiants, confiance dans l'action et la lutte collective. Mais pour un certain nombre d'entre eux, si le sentiment de défaite est aussi important, c'est qu'ils attendaient aussi de ce mouvement bien plus que le seul retrait du CPE. Ils avaient voulu croire « à un autre monde, à une autre société, à un changement un peu plus radical, vraiment positif ». Le contraste entre les espoirs placés dans le mouvement et les résultats réels fut tel que le sentiment de défaite, de découragement, s'est avéré inévitable.

Avec le recul, si la lutte collective n'a pas gagné sur toutes ses revendications, elle a tout de même redonné confiance en un « nous » qui avait été presque oublié. Le mouvement a ainsi été perçu par beaucoup comme une « grande secousse sismique sociale qui intervient au moment où on pense que ça ne va plus jamais arriver ». Certains retiennent l'idée d'une lutte pour la dignité (« vivre libres et debout »), une aspiration « irrépressible, inconditionnelle à l'égalité ».

« C'est une affaire d'atmosphère : quand, sinon dans ces moments-là, nous est-il le plus palpable, le plus évident, que la vie que l'on mène quotidiennement n'est pas celle que l'on veut vivre ? Quand les choses basculent, quand la routine est interrompue, quand le cours « normal » des choses prend une autre tournure, quand on est acteurs-trices de nos vies, quand on parle naturellement à quiconque, quand des rapports chaleureux s'instaurent d'eux-mêmes, on se sent enfin vivre bordel ! » Hervé, magasinier de bibliothèque, Censier. (Collectif 2007:134).

Mais la portée plus générale du mouvement anti-CPE réside aussi dans le souffle nouveau que les jeunes mobilisés ont réussi à insuffler au sein du mouvement social, et l'onde de choc provoqué dans le milieu politique. Ainsi pour de nombreux commentateurs, l'échec du Premier ministre Dominique de Villepin dans la course à l'investiture de son parti pour l'élection présidentielle de 2007 doit beaucoup à la défaite de son gouvernement face au mouvement anti-CPE. Plus fondamentalement, ce mouvement s'inscrit aussi dans une crise généralisée de la société française et de son système de pouvoir. (Collectif 4 bis 2007:227-230 ; Kouvelakis 2007:264-265). Face à tout cela, le mouvement lui-même n'est pas parvenu à proposer des « solutions » politiques alternatives. Mais à travers l'expérience collective victorieuse de toute une génération, au tempérament trempé de luttes et de révoltes, il a indubitablement semé les graines de futurs mouvements de contestation sociale et politique de grande ampleur.

Notes

1. Le terme de « jeunesse » désigne ici une réalité sociale particulière dans une perspective historique large. « [...] la jeunesse, au sens sociologique du terme, n'[a] pas toujours existé.. [...] la jeunesse n'est pas de tous les temps, elle est une invention sociale, historiquement située, dont les conditions de définition évoluent avec la société elle-même. » (Galland 1999 : 5). Ce concept définit donc autant une classe d'âge qu'une « catégorie sociale » particulière, construite à une certaine époque et dont la signification a évolué en fonction de l'époque et du lieu. Il existe des jeunesses, qui se différencient en fonction de leurs réalités générationnelle, nationale, géoculturelle, socioprofessionnelle, politique, etc. Tous nos remerciements à Alexandre Gaudillière pour ses pertinentes remarques sur le sujet.
2. Le même auteur indique à propos des étudiants : « En tant que groupe, ils ont en effet montré en maintes occasions une forte capacité de mobilisation. Celle-ci semble toutefois avoir assez profondément changé de nature depuis les années soixante. Sur le plan idéologique, ils donnent le sentiment d' « être rentrés dans le rang », tout en conservant intacte leur faculté d'intervention mise dorénavant au service d'objectifs plus catégoriels que politiques ou moraux » (Galland et Oberti 1996:4).
3. L'auteur de cet article a participé au mouvement contre le CPE en 2006 à la Sorbonne. Le terme d' « immersion critique », emprunté aux auteurs du Collectif 4 bis, renvoie à une posture qui est celle d'acteurs d'un mouvement, qui l'observent tout en y participant, mais n'y ont pas participé dans le but unique de l'analyser.
4. L'élément déclencheur de ces événements fut le décès de deux adolescents de Clichy-sous-Bois, Zyed Benna et Bouna Traoré, morts par électrocution dans l'enceinte d'un poste source électrique alors qu'ils étaient poursuivis par la

- police. Pour une analyse détaillée voir notamment Moulier-Boutang (2005) et Chakri (2006).
5. Les entreprises qui s'y installent peuvent bénéficier de subventions de l'État, sous forme d'allègement d'impôts principalement.
 6. Le président du conseil général peut sanctionner les parents d'un enfant sujet à l'absentéisme et qui porte des troubles au fonctionnement de l'établissement dans lequel il est scolarisé, par exemple en suspendant le versement des allocations familiales.
 7. Le CNE est un type de contrat de travail sans limitation de durée pour les entreprises de vingt salariés au plus, instauré au cours de l'été 2005. Durant la période dite de « consolidation de l'emploi » de deux années la rupture sans annoncer le motif de licenciement est possible, moyennant un préavis court et une indemnité de 8% sur le total de la rémunération. Voir *Journal Officiel* (2005)
 8. Voir Présidence de la République (2006).
 9. En mai 2003, juste après la présentation du projet de loi sur les retraites, le premier ministre d'alors, Jean-Pierre Raffarin, avait déclaré à la télévision que « la rue doit s'exprimer mais ce n'est pas la rue qui gouverne ». Voir *Le Monde*, 9 mai 2003, p. 6.
 10. La principale revendication était le retrait de l'ensemble de la LEC. Lors de la coordination nationale de Toulouse le 25 février 2006, une plate-forme revendicative plus large a été élaborée, concernant plusieurs domaines : l'emploi (emploi stable pour tous et toutes, retrait des contrats précaires) ; l'enseignement (réengagement financier de l'État dans le service public universitaire, retrait de la loi Fillon ; la reconnaissance des diplômes universitaires, retrait du « pacte pour la recherche ») ; l'arrêt du traitement répressif des mouvements sociaux, l'amnistie des lycéens ayant participé au mouvement contre la loi Fillon, des personnes poursuivies suite aux émeutes urbaines en novembre 2005.
 11. Cf. Geay, Bodin et Camus (2007:2-3). Voir aussi sur le site du Ministère de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche, l'ensemble des rapports de ces dernières années (<http://www.recherche.gouv.fr/pid517/tous-les-rapports.html>). Et pour une analyse critique des politiques néolibérales dans l'enseignement, les articles d'Attac France (<http://www.france.attac.org/spip.php?rubrique45>), et les dossiers d'analyse du syndicat de l'enseignement supérieur SNES-FSU (http://www.snesup.fr/navigation/general/page.php?rubrique=dossiers_thematiques) et du collectif « Sauvons la recherche » (<http://www.sauvonslarecherche.fr/spip.php?page=sommaire>).
 12. Le concept de « génération » désigne ici une certaine classe d'âge, arrivée à « maturité » politique et sociale au début des années 2000, et qui partage un ensemble de références et de référents sociaux (pour partie) et surtout culturels importants. Ce qui n'annule bien entendu pas les nombreuses différenciations

que peuvent induire la diversité des origines sociales et « ethniques » des membres de ce groupe générationnel.

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Academic Freedom from a Human Rights’ Perspective: The Indian Case and its Relevance to Africa

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Abstract

Academic freedom is the chant of the time, particularly in the context of globalisation and the gendered and restructured academia. But many scholars have not addressed what this freedom is all about in developing countries which are still very backward in education. This paper argues that academic freedom cannot be seen as part of the larger social freedom when it is concerned only with the freedom of a fortunate few who are in institutions of higher education and related learning centres and that seen from a human rights’ perspective academic freedom entails first universal access to education at all levels viewing development as freedom and then understanding the freedom of the stake holders at different levels of the academia. The paper first looks at the education systems in developed countries to see to what extent the education system in India varies from them. It then looks at various issues concerning Indian education. Its main conclusions are that Indian education is in disarray, only a fraction of the eligible population has any access to higher education, most of those getting enrolled for primary, middle, and secondary levels drop out, and such a dismal scenario leaves hardly any scope for a meaningful debate on academic freedom. By way of conclusion the paper argues that as Indian education has been mired in problems and many of these problems have been identified, African countries can learn a lot from India’s failures in reshaping its education systems.

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Résumé

La liberté académique semble être la chanson en vogue de nos jours, particulièrement dans ce contexte de la globalisation, de la restructuration de l'éducation supérieure et de ses inégalités basées sur le genre. Cependant, bon nombre d'intellectuels n'ont pas examiné l'état de cette liberté dans les pays en développement qui sont toujours en arrière dans le domaine de l'éducation. Selon notre étude, la liberté académique ne peut pas être considérée comme une partie intégrale de la grande liberté sociale alors qu'elle ne concerne que la liberté d'une minorité des personnes qui sont dans les institutions académiques et les centres d'étude qui s'y attachent. Aussi, vu sous l'angle des droits de l'homme, la liberté académique doit d'abord engendrer l'accès universel à l'éducation à tous les niveaux, reconnaître le développement comme étant une liberté et comprendre alors la liberté de tous ce qui sont concernés à tous les niveaux de l'éducation supérieure.

Ce document fait d'abord un survol des systèmes éducatifs qui existent dans les pays en développement afin de jauger leur différence celui de l'Inde. Il explore aussi les différentes questions auxquelles est confrontée l'éducation en Inde. Les principales conclusions de ce document convergent sur le fait que l'éducation en Inde est dans le chaos : seule une fraction de la population a accès à l'éducation supérieure, la majeure partie de ceux qui sont inscrits au primaire et au lycée finit par abandonner les études. Un scénario aussi sombre permet à peine l'existence d'un débat significatif sur la liberté académique. En conclusion, ce document soutient que, dû au fait que l'éducation en Inde est entachée de problèmes et que la plupart de ces problèmes ont été identifiés, les pays africains peuvent apprendre beaucoup sur l'échec de ce pays dans ses tentatives de redresser son système éducatif.

Introduction

Academic freedom is the freedom of academics – teachers, students, and other interest groups – to pursue knowledge through teaching, learning, research, and other means. The justification for it lies not in the comfort or convenience of teachers and students but in the benefits to society, for the long-term interests of a society are expected to be best served when its educational process leads to advancement of knowledge, and knowledge is best advanced when its pursuit is free from restraints by the state, other institutions, or special interest groups.¹ The underlying assumption of such an argument is that knowledge is *summum bonum* (the greatest or supreme good) of society.

This paper deals with academic freedom in general and academic freedom in India, and its relevance to education in Africa. Its main arguments are the following:

- a) Academic freedom cannot be universal so long as education systems are not universal, inclusive, and robust.

- b) Educational systems cannot be universal so long as recalcitrant social patterns are not reshaped through a context-specific human rights approach.
- c) In discourses on academic freedom it is important to make a distinction between developed countries and developing countries.
- d) Such discourses are best done within a development framework.

General

Whether knowledge is *summum bonum* of society depends on the nature and extent of access to it, and the nature and extent of its dissemination and utilisation in society. So long as access, dissemination and utilisation are unjust and unfairly uneven, the claim that knowledge is *summum bonum* of a society remains hollow.

Academic freedom as human right

The argument that society is the principal beneficiary of knowledge without which no social advancement can take place is based on the assumption that available knowledge is widely and fairly distributed in society. But the perception of academic freedom hinging on the benefits to society should not override the related freedom of individuals and institutions. This can be calibrated only if society renders its expected role as principal provider of the comforts and conveniences of teachers and students, or of the requisite freedom to the producers, providers, and seekers of knowledge, and treat such freedom as *sine qua non* to knowledge production.

Only freedom and recognition of knowledge providers and knowledge seekers by the academia, state and society can spur them to the pursuit of knowledge, and make it pleasurable. Its absence renders the task of knowledge production tedious, effete, and even counterproductive. Ensuring its presence entails civil society bringing sufficient pressure to bear upon the state to ensure that the state as its creation and custodian overcomes the pervasive disparities and discriminations in educational processes through affirmative and anti-discriminatory measures. Understood thus, academic freedom along with its centrepiece freedom of expression has to be a fundamental and foundational human right.

Conceptual conundrums

As a package of practices academic freedom is defined in many ways, and interpreted differently in different contexts. It is loaded with numerous social, political and cultural connotations and dimensions, and saturated with meanings and counter-meanings. As a concept it is essentially contested, and continuously evolving as to make it expansive and eclectic.

What is important to note here is though academic freedom in one form or another is characteristic of all societies, especially democratic societies, as it is intertwined with, and is the working out of multiple societal processes, it appears in different forms with different intensities and degrees of salience. This raises a number of related issues. Some of these are listed below.

- a) Whether academic freedom is different from other freedoms;
- b) Whether academic freedom is contingent on, or a derivative freedom operating within, a framework of freedoms, and their socio-cultural and political contexts;
- c) How academics reconcile academic freedom with other freedoms;
- d) The dual role of academics as members of the academia and of society;
- e) Whether the former influences the latter and vice-versa;
- f) What could be considered as the threshold of academic freedom, or is there a measure of all measures in its context;
- g) When do sections of the academia feel a lack of freedom, or the freedom they have is inadequate or in jeopardy;
- h) How and why academics compromise their freedom;
- i) Conversely, how and why academics do not use their freedom as academic activists and public intellectuals;²
- j) How academics reconcile with different models and interpretations of academic freedom;
- k) What are the prerequisites for ensuring right and reasonable models and interpretations of academic freedom;
- l) When legitimate academic freedom is in jeopardy what the redress mechanisms are.

The freedom discourse

Discourses on academic freedom are generally in the context of higher education. The underlying assumption is that knowledge systems, knowledge production, knowledge development, and knowledge delivery are mainly in the domain of higher education.

If development is freedom as Amartya Sen (1999) and UNESCO reports³ have persuasively argued, academic freedom should be embedded in the processes of social development and academic development should be used for overall social development. But academic development by its very nature is not a higher echelon affair; more so, when education is seen as a gutter-to-university-ladder. Seen thus, academic freedom has greater salience as human right in its overall context in terms of access, praxis, outturn and delivery, at different levels of the education continuum.

In a speech delivered in 2003 educationist Alan Gilbert brought this out eloquently: ⁴

Because good quality education promises an escape from poverty, powerlessness, and despair, creating aspirations, opportunities, and choices otherwise unimaginable, it has emerged more clearly than ever as the last best, yet often seemingly forlorn hope that humankind may use its Promethean resources to build a safe, peaceful, prosperous world. As H.G. Wells put it in a famous aphorism exactly 100 years ago, 'Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe.'

In the same speech Gilbert pointed to the fact that for 15 per cent of the world's population educational opportunities are more widely available than ever before in human history and the other 85 per cent remain seriously disadvantaged and often dangerously frustrated by educational deprivation. Gilbert cautioned that access to higher education would be one of the most serious global challenges of the twenty-first century.

Academic freedom and disciplinary diversity

Whether academic freedom is understood from a human rights' perspective or as facilitating knowledge pursuits, it is important to understand the nexus between academic freedom and disciplinary diversity. In this connection a broad distinction may be made between social sciences and non-social sciences.

As critical sciences, social sciences are very important and are subject to much debate of the issues they cover, for at least four reasons.

- a) Social sciences often involve critical thinking about culture, economics, history, politics and society, and public debate on related issues.
- b) Dissemination of social knowledge is intrinsic to the well-being of society. This is especially so as education, as some of the UNESCO reports would have it, is the process by which people not only acquire knowledge and information skills, but also values and ability to live and interact within and with social groups, as well as participate in cultural life and productive activities which may not always be economic.
- c) Despite this great academic relevance and importance, as social sciences deal with social issues, they are often opinionated, manoeuvrable, and have direct bearing on social sensibilities. This can cause widely varying social and establishment reactions.
- d) Those who make a difference to life and social well-being are primarily from critical sciences. They have to go well beyond the class room in

expanding the civil space. In that sense also academic freedom gets transformed into human rights issues.

As non-social sciences are 'exact' sciences, but for occasional reactions⁵ often the praxis and products of them have no direct bearing on social sensibilities. In this context, it is appropriate to conclude this section with the following observations by Karl Popper:

Einstein's theory of gravitation clearly satisfied the criterion of 'falsifiability'. Even if our measuring instruments at the time did not allow us to pronounce on the results of the tests with complete assurance, there was clearly a possibility of refuting the theory.

Astrology did not pass the test. Astrologers were greatly impressed, and misled, by what they believed to be confirming evidence – so much so that they were quite unimpressed by any unfavourable evidence. Moreover, by making their interpretations and prophesies sufficiently vague they were able to explain away anything that might have been a refutation of the theory had the theory and the prophesies been more precise. In order to escape falsification they destroyed the testability of their theory. It is a typical soothsayer's trick to predict things so vaguely that the predictions can hardly fail: that they become irrefutable.

The Marxist theory of history, in spite of the serious efforts of some of its founders and followers, ultimately adopted this soothsaying practice. In some of its earlier formulations (for example in Marx's analysis of the character of the 'coming social revolution') their predictions were testable, and in fact falsified. Yet instead of accepting the refutations the followers of Marx re-interpreted both the theory and the evidence in order to make them agree. In this way they rescued the theory from refutation; but they did so at the price of adopting a device which made it irrefutable. They thus gave a 'conventionalist twist' to the theory; and by this stratagem they destroyed its much advertised claim to scientific status (Popper 1963: 33-9).

Threat perceptions

As the pursuit of knowledge is socially conditioned, irrespective of the nature of the sciences, if academic freedom is in jeopardy, it is not so much because of the processes involved. It is because of externalities of the larger contexts and premises which determine academic freedom. Of late such externalities have been on the increase for several reasons. Some of these are listed here. Of these

probably the most important is the impact of globalisation which has restructured and continues to restructure academia, pushing it between the Scylla of diminishing funding and the Charybdis of market forces (see Brooks and Mackinnon 2001; Radhakrishnan 2002).

The Indian case

It is difficult to draw parallels between academic freedom in the west and in India as their educational processes and advancements vary widely. However, to understand the nature and extent of academic freedom in India it is important to record the main features of both. Of these features three are discussed here.

West v. India

One, the West has a history of private education, impelled and conditioned by the philosophy of educational service to society, and many educational institutions are private and self-regulating. India does not have such history. Its education system is mostly a bureaucratic appendage of the state. This may have some advantages such as security of tenure, perceived (though not necessarily real) freedom of students, teachers and non-teaching staff to organise, and involvement of students and teachers in knowledge construction (such as emphasis on student participation in curriculum development). But the regulatory features of the state militate against advancement of knowledge. These include overweening presence of non-academic structures in educational matters which causes bureaucratisation of academic and intellectual pursuits; lack of concern and cavalier approach by regulatory bodies; and their abdication of regulatory responsibility, and failure to nurture the education system. A case in point is the recent controversy about quotas for backward classes in higher education in India (see Radhakrishnan 2006a, b, c).

Though India also has private institutions, only those with an educational history have imbibed some of the western educational traditions, and nurture the education systems. Private institutions established during the last two decades, mostly professional colleges, are run as corporate enterprises for profit and greed.

Two, educational advancements in India are incomparably lower than in the west. Two indicators should drive this home. The first is India's gross enrolment ratio (GER) for higher education (tertiary or degree-level) is between 9 per cent and 11 per cent of the population in the relevant age group. This is in striking contrast to the figures for developed countries. Going by UNESCO statistics, the GER in developed countries is between 44 per cent (Switzerland) and 86 per cent (Finland).

Table 1: GER in developed countries and India, 2001

| Enrolment level | Developed Countries | | | | India | | | |
|-----------------|---------------------|-------|--------|------|-------|-------|--------|------|
| | Total | Male | Female | GPI | Total | Male | Female | GPI |
| Primary | 100.6 | 100.7 | 100.6 | 1.00 | 98.1 | 106.0 | 89.7 | 0.85 |
| Secondary | 105.9 | 104.7 | 107.2 | 1.02 | 50.3 | 57.5 | 42.5 | 0.74 |
| Tertiary | 54.6 | 39.5 | 70.1 | 1.80 | 11.4 | 13.4 | 9.3 | 0.70 |

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, World Education Indicators.

The second is a lack of internal efficiency in India's education system. Those who reach higher education in India are generally from those who survive the four preceding stages of schooling, namely the four-year primary, three-year middle, three-year secondary, and two-year higher secondary. In each of these stages, particularly the first three, 26 per cent to 30 per cent of those enrolled drop out. In view of this, it is unlikely that from among the limited number who survive all the four stages of schooling and enrol for higher education many will drop out. This is also evident from the NSS data for 1995–96 according to which the overall dropout rate in higher education is 3.3 per cent.⁶ This clearly shows that the internal efficiency of India's education system from primary to tertiary levels is very weak.

Access asymmetries

India is a large country (accounting for about 16 per cent of the world population) with every conceivable form of diversity – political, religious, social, cultural, linguistic, economic, and so on. It is nearly six decades since India attained independence and became a secular democratic republic. But its traditional hierarchical and segmented economy and society and entrenched backwardness of the social groups at the bottom of the traditional caste-based social hierarchy still persist. These groups at the bottom account for at least two-thirds of India's population. The state's failure to actively address their special needs has widened the disparities in access to education in general and higher education in particular.

According to the Census of India 2001 the overall share of Graduate-plus in India's 20–24 age population is only 7.5 per cent (6.8 million). But it is even much lower among the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Muslims. These groups together comprise bulk of India's constitutional category of socially and educationally-backward classes. They account for about 36 per cent of the total

Table 2: Percentage distribution of drop-outs, all-India, 1995–1996

| Enrolment level | Rural + Urban | | | Rural | | | Urban | | |
|------------------|---------------|-------|--------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|--------|
| | Total | Male | Female | Total | Male | Female | Total | Male | Female |
| Primary | 30.4 | 28.3 | 33.1 | 33.2 | 30.4 | 36.9 | 22.2 | 22.4 | 21.9 |
| Middle | 26.2 | 26.5 | 25.9 | 26.9 | 27.4 | 26.4 | 24.2 | 23.8 | 24.6 |
| Secondary | 28.7 | 30.0 | 26.9 | 26.9 | 28.7 | 24.5 | 33.9 | 34.0 | 33.8 |
| Hr Secondary | 8.0 | 8.6 | 7.2 | 7.1 | 7.8 | 6.1 | 10.9 | 11.1 | 10.5 |
| Higher education | 3.3 | 3.7 | 2.8 | 2.2 | 2.7 | 1.4 | 6.7 | 6.5 | 7.0 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Source: Government of India, National Sample Survey Organisation.

20–24 age population. But the degree holders among them are 2 per cent to 4 per cent in their respective 20–24 age-cohort populations.

If the Other Backward Classes, particularly the lower strata among them, are excluded from Caste-Hindus, it may become apparent that the upper castes continue to dominate the higher education system.

About two-thirds of India's population are in rural areas. But the proportion of graduates in rural areas accounts for only about one-fourth of the graduates in urban areas. This urban bias of higher education is evident in all communities. The proportion of degree holders among women in the 20–24 age-cohort is only about four-fifths of the degree holders among men.

Literacy and higher education

Notwithstanding the overall low access to higher education, communities which have higher literacy have relatively more access to the higher education system.

Institutional disparities

While the causes for disparities in enrolment and outturn – social and spatial – have to be located in the social conditioning of learning, a concomitant and corollary of these disparities is evident in the spread of institutions across regions.

Institutions vary in their overall size, infrastructure, quality of students, quality of instruction imparted, nature and quality of teachers and disciplines taught, and per capita cost of and expenditure on education. So they are not really comparable. All the same, their nature and number relative to population and enrolment should give a broad idea of the regional spread of higher education vis-à-vis disparities in enrolment and outturn.

Universities v. colleges

The southern region has a significantly higher share of universities, colleges, and enrolment than their share in the population. The reverse is the case in the northern region (BIMARU).⁷ The western and north-western regions also have better distribution of institutions and better enrolment compared to their population. What is, however, important to note is the contrast between the two major regions, southern and BIMARU, in the availability of institutions and extent of enrolment.

The BIMARU region has about one-fourth of the enrolment in universities, whereas the southern region has only about 8 per cent and the remaining regions have between 6 per cent and 14 per cent. Enrolment of women is only about 33 per cent in the BIMARU region, whereas it is between 38 per cent and 46 per cent in other regions.

Table 3: Graduate-plus (percent) in 20–24 age-group population of each community, 2001

| Community | Rural + Urban | | | Rural | | | Urban | | |
|------------------|---------------|------|--------|-------|------|--------|-------|------|--------|
| | Total | Male | Female | Total | Male | Female | Total | Male | Female |
| Scheduled Castes | 3.6 | 4.7 | 2.4 | 2.4 | 3.6 | 1.2 | 7.4 | 8.2 | 6.6 |
| Scheduled Tribes | 2.3 | 3.1 | 1.5 | 1.6 | 2.4 | 0.9 | 8.5 | 9.3 | 7.7 |
| Caste Hindu | 9.8 | 10.8 | 8.7 | 5.3 | 7.0 | 3.6 | 18.5 | 17.9 | 19.2 |
| Muslim | 4.0 | 4.7 | 3.3 | 2.1 | 2.9 | 1.2 | 6.8 | 7.0 | 6.6 |
| Christian | 11.0 | 10.0 | 11.9 | 6.6 | 6.1 | 7.2 | 18.2 | 16.6 | 19.7 |
| Sikh | 7.9 | 6.5 | 9.5 | 3.5 | 3.0 | 4.1 | 19.4 | 15.6 | 23.7 |
| Buddhist | 7.4 | 8.3 | 6.4 | 4.7 | 6.3 | 3.0 | 10.9 | 10.9 | 10.8 |
| Jain | 32.3 | 30.6 | 34.2 | 15.5 | 16.6 | 14.1 | 37.3 | 34.9 | 39.8 |
| Others | 3.1 | 4.0 | 2.2 | 1.7 | 2.6 | 0.9 | 13.3 | 13.8 | 12.8 |
| All | 7.5 | 8.4 | 6.6 | 4.0 | 5.4 | 2.7 | 15.1 | 14.7 | 15.5 |

Note: Table excludes data on Age not stated.

Source: Tabulated from the Census of India, 2001, Social and Cultural Tables.

Table 4: Percentage of literates in 7-plus population by community and region, 2001

| Community | Rural + Urban | | | Rural | | | Urban | | |
|------------------|---------------|------|--------|-------|------|--------|-------|------|--------|
| | Total | Male | Female | Total | Male | Female | Total | Male | Female |
| Scheduled Castes | 54.7 | 66.6 | 41.9 | 51.2 | 63.7 | 37.8 | 68.1 | 77.9 | 57.5 |
| Scheduled Tribes | 47.1 | 59.2 | 34.8 | 45.0 | 57.4 | 32.4 | 69.1 | 77.8 | 59.9 |
| Caste Hindu | 70.5 | 81.1 | 59.1 | 64.2 | 76.9 | 50.8 | 84.2 | 90.1 | 77.6 |
| Muslim | 59.1 | 67.6 | 50.1 | 52.7 | 62.3 | 42.7 | 70.1 | 76.3 | 63.2 |
| Christian | 80.3 | 84.4 | 76.2 | 74.5 | 79.5 | 69.7 | 90.9 | 93.6 | 88.3 |
| Sikh | 69.4 | 75.2 | 63.1 | 64.2 | 70.6 | 57.2 | 83.6 | 87.5 | 79.2 |
| Buddhist | 72.7 | 83.1 | 61.7 | 66.9 | 78.8 | 54.6 | 81.6 | 89.8 | 72.9 |
| Jain | 94.1 | 97.4 | 90.6 | 87.5 | 94.2 | 80.3 | 96.1 | 98.4 | 93.8 |
| Others | 47.0 | 60.8 | 33.2 | 43.9 | 58.2 | 29.5 | 75.3 | 83.8 | 66.5 |
| All | 64.8 | 75.3 | 53.7 | 58.7 | 70.7 | 46.1 | 79.9 | 86.3 | 72.9 |

Note: Table excludes data on Age not stated.

Source: Tabulated from the Census of India, 2001, Social and Cultural Tables.

Table 5: Percentage of institutions and enrolment by region and population, 2001

| Region | Population | Institutions | | State-level enrolment ratio | | Total enrolment in percent | Women in percent |
|----------------|------------|--------------|----------|-----------------------------|----------|----------------------------|------------------|
| | | Varsities | Colleges | Varsities | Colleges | | |
| South | 21.8 | 26.6 | 31.8 | 8.0 | 92.0 | 24.8 | 43.3 |
| North (Bimaru) | 41.1 | 31.3 | 27.9 | 23.8 | 76.2 | 31.8 | 32.9 |
| West | 14.5 | 16.0 | 19.3 | 6.8 | 93.2 | 20.0 | 42.1 |
| Northwest | 7.4 | 12.5 | 7.3 | 14.0 | 86.0 | 9.1 | 46.4 |
| East | 11.4 | 9.0 | 9.3 | 7.7 | 92.3 | 10.8 | 37.6 |
| Northeast | 3.7 | 4.7 | 4.4 | 5.9 | 94.1 | 3.5 | 42.1 |
| India | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 13.2 | 86.8 | 100.0 | 39.4 |

Source: Tabulated from UGC Annual Reports; Census of India 2001, Basic population data.

Affiliation and academic freedom

At the all-India level about 90 per cent of under-graduate and 66 per cent of post-graduate students are in affiliated colleges and only the rest are in university departments and constituent colleges. Of the research students 91 per cent are in universities. As many of the colleges lack facilities, they do not have academic freedom for teaching and research. As affiliation is seen as an affliction and a systemic malaise, of late there has been increasing demand to do away with it.

As the majority of students and teachers are in affiliated colleges where the foundations of higher education are laid, in order to place higher education on a fast track, the most important need is to foster these institutions by ensuring equity and fairness in intake, by strengthening basic and infrastructure needs including, and especially of qualified teachers, and by grounding these institutions in disciplinary diversity and excellence in quality. In the absence of these measures any discussion of academic freedom in the context of most of these colleges is inane.

To provide academic freedom to potential colleges, the UGC has been granting autonomous status. Granting autonomy is an important measure of fostering quality education and academic freedom. But as of 2001 there were only 130 autonomous colleges. These are spread over 29 universities in eight states.

Stage-wise enrolment

Higher education in India stops mostly with the first degree. Going by the UGC, of the total enrolment in 2000–01 about 89 per cent was in under-graduate courses, 9 per cent in post-graduate courses and less than 1 per cent in research.

The low enrolment for research degrees has serious implications for grooming and motivating teachers and researchers at the highest level for developing a critical mass of scientific talent pool in different faculties.

Higher education growth

Going by the UGC data, the growth is mostly in the southern region (which along with the western region also has a higher enrolment in medicine), followed by the western and north-western regions.

The rapid increase in private educational institutions since the last two decades, mostly engineering colleges may be an important reason for the higher presence of professional courses.

The southern region where ICT has been having its greatest impact is spearheading India's information revolution. In it, with an exponential growth of private professional colleges, only less than 10 per cent of the engineering colleges

Table 6: Total enrolment by field of study and region, 2001

| Region | General education | | | | | Professional education | | | | |
|------------------|-------------------|---------|------|-------|---------|------------------------|--------|------|------|-------|
| | Arts | Science | COM | Total | E and T | M | AGR/VS | EDN | Law | Total |
| Scheduled Castes | 54.7 | 66.6 | 41.9 | 51.2 | 63.7 | 37.8 | 68.1 | 77.9 | 57.5 | |
| South | 23.5 | 31.6 | 19.9 | 75.0 | 13.8 | 5.9 | 0.7 | 1.8 | 2.7 | 24.9 |
| North (Bimaru) | 57.5 | 18.7 | 13.3 | 89.5 | 2.5 | 1.6 | 0.9 | 1.1 | 4.4 | 10.5 |
| West | 42.6 | 12.4 | 27.2 | 82.2 | 8.9 | 3.6 | 0.8 | 1.2 | 3.4 | 17.9 |
| Northwest | 57.3 | 15.5 | 14.3 | 87.1 | 6.1 | 3.2 | 0.7 | 1.6 | 1.2 | 12.8 |
| East | 57.4 | 17.2 | 17.5 | 92.1 | 2.8 | 1.2 | 0.3 | 1.0 | 2.5 | 7.8 |
| Northeast | 71.3 | 15.0 | 6.5 | 92.8 | 1.9 | 1.0 | 0.7 | 1.2 | 2.4 | 7.2 |
| All | 46.5 | 20.1 | 18.0 | 84.6 | 6.9 | 3.2 | 0.8 | 1.3 | 3.2 | 15.4 |

Note: Enrolment in percent; COM = Commerce; EDN = Education; E & T = Engineering and Technology; M = Medicine; AGR = Agriculture; VS = Veterinary Science. Table excludes Others or unspecified.

are state-run and the rest are under private management (Gill 2005). This has implications for academic freedom; for in the absence of regulatory measures these institutions have been a law unto themselves.

While the south has only 23 per cent enrolment in Arts subjects the enrolment in other regions including the west is between 43 per cent and 71 per cent. Though social sciences are included in Arts, the nature of enrolment and quality of education imparted calls for close scrutiny. As the basic degree in Arts is generally of three-year duration, unlike engineering, technology, and medical degrees which have a longer duration, education in social sciences picks up momentum only at the post-graduate level. But considering the low enrolment for post-graduate courses in general, the inevitable conclusion from the available data. This again has implications for academic freedom.

As of now, degrees in social sciences are poor cousins of degrees in professional and technical courses. As a result of this and the fast changing education scenario, social sciences may gradually lose whatever little sheen they have. As social sciences are also the main choice of the weaker sections and the last resort of others who cannot get admission to professional courses, the neglect of social sciences despite their continuing and increasing social relevance will further deprive the disadvantaged social groups, and result in the emergence of a newfangled education system and a social order devoid of socio-cultural moorings and sensitivity.

The enormity of the task of expanding the education system by increasing institutions and enrolment, commensurate with the needs of the relevant age-groups, the late-learners, and the national imperative of confronting the challenges of globalisation which has already driven the system haywire, is only too obvious. This task is made complex by the wide social, gender, rural-urban, regional and disciplinary disparities, which if not addressed will only vitiate further attempts to develop the education system.

The problem was placed in perspective by the UGC in its Tenth Plan Document.⁸ Its relevant observations are reproduced below:

The problems of the Indian education system relate to size, access, equity, relevance, quality, and resource constraint. Public universities are facing several crippling constraints, many of which are the result of the unwillingness on the part of all the players in higher education to change with time and adopt new ways and methods to address various issues concerning the sector. The system is inextricably entangled in its myriad problems and there is no magic solution to sort this out... Alternatives, like private institutions and foreign universities opening centres etc., are emerging in India. These alternatives, albeit expensive, are equipped to

give better and more useful education. This will, no doubt, give an advantage to a few people, who come from an enlightened family background, have a strong academic commitment and better resources for meeting the financial demands of such education. The poor and disadvantaged communities, thus, run the risk of being marginalised in this competitive regime.

When an education system is mired in myriad problems, as the UGC has admitted, sustaining academic freedom even at a minimalist level is difficult.

The failure of the higher education system to expand to take care of the increase in demand should mean many things. These include the resistance of a hierarchical society to transform into an egalitarian society; the advantages of the traditionally entrenched groups to take to education; the continuing capability deprivation of the traditionally oppressed and disadvantaged groups; and the continuing neglect of education as a fundamental human right. This makes a multi-pronged approach to the expansion of education at all levels a socio-political and national imperative.

If the data available are any indication India has about 131 million population in the 18–24 age cohort of which a major part should have ideally been in higher education. However, as mentioned earlier the enrolment is only between 9 per cent and 11 per cent. The problem of the meagre presence of youth in higher education cannot be addressed without reference to the access to, and the survival rates in, primary and secondary education.⁹

If the dropout and survival rates, and the literacy and illiteracy rates of the broad social categories are any indication, India has not done much for democratisation of access even at the primary level: going by the Census of India 2001, India's illiterates are 41 million, 16 million, 33 million, 56 million, and 157 million in the 7–13, 14–17, 18–24, and 25–34 age-cohorts, respectively, and in the 35 and above population. India has denied 56 million of its school-age children (primary and secondary)¹⁰ and 33 million of its college and university level age youth access to relevant education.

In each age-cohort women far outnumber men. The percentage of illiterates is highest among the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Muslims (26, 24 and 35; 35, 33 and 44, and 32, 27, and 33 respectively for the age groups 7–13, 14–17, and 18–24), and highest among women in each of these categories (31, 32 and 48; 42, 43, and 58, and 35, 32, and 40 respectively).¹¹ Thus, if India has a long way to go to achieve basic education for all, its distance to achieve universal higher education seems infinite.

It is only against the above background of India's complexity and diversity as a nation, its very low enrolment for higher education, the various pulls and

pressures over the education system, its internal weaknesses, and widely varying quality of universities and colleges, that any debate about academic freedom in India will be meaningful.

Lack of academic freedom

If the purpose of development is to expand freedom and that expansion drives further development because development depends on the free agency of people, then seen against the persistent lack of educational development, India has hardly any academic freedom. This is because the various choices which the stakeholders in education can normally exercise in a developed democracy are lacking in India. There are other problems as well. These include:

The ongoing privatisation and commercialisation of education, which affect the freedom and autonomy of students, teachers, and parents in relation to education. Within the state sector teachers and students are fairly well organised. This is not so in private institutions.

Recently, when the AICTE (All India Council for Technical Education) de-recognised a number of deemed universities, students, parents, and teachers were all helpless. The students, anxious about their future, went on strike. But they were roughed up by police. Police also filed false cases against some of them, apparently at the instance of the managements. The state was a passive spectator.

Many of the state universities are in disarray. Because of language and quota politics the quality of students, teachers, and teaching leaves much to be desired. There are cases of teachers migrating to other universities under duress. The faculty incentive scheme recently introduced in some state universities works against academic ethos. Those who can bring in money to the university corpus are given incentive credits in cash. The attempts to turn education into a money-spinner are apparently at the cost of academic freedom.

The political and bureaucratic interference in state-run universities is deplorable. Often Vice-Chancellors cannot inspire the faculty and students; in their eagerness to please politicians and bureaucrats they forget their academic and leadership roles in universities.¹²

Corruption is rampant in state universities. According to Transparency International, education is the most corrupt sector in India, next to health. When some of the appointments of teachers and Vice-Chancellors are by ingratiating politicians, their primary concern is profit, and not teaching. Quality of the profession is the casualty. In such situations academic freedom cannot flourish.

Between central and state universities, the former get favoured treatment. It is mainly the former which may be said to have academic freedom, though even

Table 7: Illiterates by age-cohort and community, 2001

| Caste/Community and age-group | Illiterates in million | | | Illiterates (in %) | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|--------|--------|--------------------|------|--------|
| | Total | Male | Female | Total | Male | Female |
| Scheduled Castes | | | | | | |
| 7-13 | 8.014 | 3.506 | 4.508 | 26 | 21.7 | 30.8 |
| 14-17 | 3.161 | 1.264 | 1.897 | 23.8 | 17.5 | 31.5 |
| 18-24 | 7.117 | 2.375 | 4.742 | 34.7 | 22.2 | 48.2 |
| Scheduled Tribes | | | | | | |
| 7-13 | 5.559 | 2.386 | 3.173 | 35.2 | 29.2 | 41.5 |
| 14-17 | 2.188 | 0.849 | 1.339 | 33 | 24.4 | 42.5 |
| 18-24 | 4.33 | 1.436 | 2.895 | 44 | 29.7 | 57.7 |
| Caste Hindus | | | | | | |
| 7-13 | 16.602 | 6.97 | 9.631 | 17.8 | 14.3 | 21.7 |
| 14-17 | 6.228 | 2.277 | 3.951 | 13.9 | 9.5 | 19 |
| 18-24 | 14.635 | 4.482 | 10.153 | 19.7 | 11.4 | 29 |
| Muslim | | | | | | |
| 7-13 | 8.652 | 4.092 | 4.56 | 31.5 | 28.6 | 34.6 |
| 14-17 | 3.329 | 1.513 | 1.817 | 27.4 | 23.7 | 31.6 |
| 18-24 | 5.781 | 2.367 | 3.414 | 32.5 | 25.3 | 40.4 |
| Christian | | | | | | |
| 7-13 | 0.664 | 0.322 | 0.342 | 18.5 | 17.6 | 19.5 |
| 14-17 | 0.214 | 0.096 | 0.118 | 11.2 | 10.1 | 12.4 |
| 18-24 | 0.415 | 0.163 | 0.253 | 13 | 10.4 | 15.6 |
| Sikh | | | | | | |
| 7-13 | 0.416 | 0.205 | 0.21 | 13.6 | 12.4 | 15 |
| 14-17 | 0.187 | 0.088 | 0.099 | 11.7 | 10.4 | 13.2 |
| 18-24 | 0.467 | 0.205 | 0.262 | 18 | 14.9 | 21.4 |
| Buddhist | | | | | | |
| 7-13 | 0.15 | 0.068 | 0.082 | 11.3 | 9.9 | 12.8 |
| 14-17 | 0.053 | 0.021 | 0.032 | 7.8 | 5.9 | 9.9 |
| 18-24 | 0.138 | 0.041 | 0.097 | 13 | 7.4 | 19.3 |
| Jain | | | | | | |
| 7-13 | 0.019 | 0.009 | 0.01 | 3.6 | 3.3 | 3.9 |
| 14-17 | 0.004 | 0.002 | 0.002 | 1.3 | 1.2 | 1.6 |
| 18-24 | 0.012 | 0.004 | 0.007 | 2 | 1.4 | 2.7 |
| All | | | | | | |
| 7-13 | 40.563 | 17.771 | 22.792 | 22.9 | 19.2 | 27 |
| 14-17 | 15.531 | 6.174 | 9.357 | 19 | 14.2 | 24.6 |
| 18-24 | 33.202 | 11.167 | 22.035 | 25.4 | 16.3 | 35.4 |

Note: Table excludes others and data on Age not stated.

in their case only very few academics are active as to claim their role as one of freedom.

Academic colonialism

Drawing on the debate on academic colonialism in the December 1968 issue of *Seminar*, in its November 2000 issue on 'Situating Sociology', Patricia Uberoi wrote:

Setting 'the problem' in the opening essay, Satish Saberwal described the several facets of the phenomenon of academic colonialism: (i) where foreign intellectuals contribute information for political domination and infiltration; (ii) where foreign intellectuals seek to use their status to influence local politics; and (iii) where Afro-Asian social scientists come into relations of financial, political and intellectual dependence on first world (particularly U.S.) academic institutions, moulding their research designs and priorities accordingly.

As he saw it, the basic problem for academics in the non-West was:

'How does the stimulus of communication with the international intellectual community balance against the hazards resulting from the flow of data concerning our societies into the U.S. war machine? What are our options for improving the balance sheet? How shall we relate our research to the needs of our society, and how shall we communicate its findings to our local constituents, so that we may shed our 'clientship' to patrons abroad, a relationship of subservience always and everywhere?' (Uberoi 2000)

Academic colonialism persists even four decades down the line, and if anything, persists on a higher level. Its persistence is mainly because of lack of integrity of sections of the academia, and the lure of lucre and assignments and travel abroad.

Threats to Academic Freedom

During the political emergency from 1975 to 1977, freedom in general was curbed by the state, though unlike the media whether the academia did anything to contest the curb is questionable.¹³ The Congress Party which was in power buried a 'history capsule' in front of the Red Fort.¹⁴ It was dug out by its successor the Janata Party. As the history capsule could not have been prepared without the help of historians and pseudo-historians, there is need to make a distinction between establishment and opportunistic academics and those who uphold professional integrity.

But for the short period of emergency, until recently state interference in academic freedom was not direct and frequent.¹⁵ During the 1990s, in Tamil

Nadu in the confrontation between Governor Channa Reddy and Chief Minister Jayalalitha, the latter replaced the Governor as Chancellor of all state universities with the Chief Minister. This was direct interference with the autonomy of the universities as provided in the statutes. Whether it affected academic freedom *per se* is difficult to say.

Academic freedom in India is, however, often stymied by the state's inaction, particularly failure to foster academic institutions, and lack of well-being, ethos, and integrity in many institutions.

Other ways in which academic freedom is denied are (a) restriction on the use of archival material, by treating the last 30 years records as 'current', and inaccessible to scholars; (b) some universities not allowing dissertations on living personalities without their written permission; and (c) political interference in university appointments and affairs.

During the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) rule which preceded the present Congress-led United Progress Alliance, State actions went against established academic norms. These included the introduction of astrology as an academic discipline, rewriting of textbooks by the NCERT,¹⁶ rewriting of history books, and in general, attempts to introduce into education the BJP's version of Indian society, through what was generally termed as the falsification of history.¹⁷ As the persons who carried out the state's diktats were academics, who could have resisted what are now considered political aberrations, whether it is the academia or the state which should be blamed is debatable.¹⁸

In this context, it is important to note the following observations of August 21, 2004, by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, in his address to the AICC (as reported in the media):

A major issue we are tackling is to reverse the ideological and bureaucratic onslaught on education which was one of the major damages inflicted on the Nation by the previous government. The Congress Party has always stood for liberal values and principles and believed in academic freedom, institutional autonomy, social justice and intellectual excellence as the guiding principles of educational policy.

The announcement by Arjun Singh, Minister for Human Resource Development in May 2006 of 27 per cent reservation (quota) for Other Backward Classes in all central institutions, widely seen as a political move, is interpreted by sections of the academia as interference with academic autonomy. The State's callousness towards the agitating students, and the confrontation between the Union Minister for Health, Anbumani Ramdoss, and the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) resulting in the dismissal of the eminent doctor and veteran director of AIIMS, K. Venugopal, which the Supreme Court stayed, though

in the realm of petty power play, are not without bearing on academic autonomy and freedom.

Teaching v. research

Though both teaching and research institutions and their stake-holders need academic freedom, considering that those engaged in full-time teaching may not find adequate time for research, over the last three decades India has evolved a network of social science research institutions within the framework of the Indian Council of Social Science Research. Though they are supposedly engaged in full-time research with hardly any teaching load, for the kind of autonomy, freedom, and facilities they have their research output is deplorably poor. Lack of accountability of those heading these institutions, their self-aggrandisement, nepotism, favouritism, and petty power play, and the politics of their governance structures have almost ruined many of these institutions.

Conclusion

In about half a century since independence India has developed one of the largest higher education systems in the world (265 universities, 13,150 colleges, 8.821 million students, and 0.427 million teachers during 2001–02 as against 32 universities, 695 colleges, and 0.174 million students during 1950–51), and India's enrolment for higher education is the third largest in the world next only to US and China.

However, numbers in Indian context can be deceptive. To understand academic freedom in a socially meaningful way, the first important thing is to have institutional facilities, freedom and flexibility to admit eligible and aspiring students to academic institutions. In the absence of this freedom, which is capability deprivation, freedom of those who are already in the academia cannot be construed as academic freedom. For such freedom is not functional to the entire society.

In this sense, the observation made at the beginning of this paper that academic freedom is intertwined with, and is the working out of, multiple societal processes, appears in different forms with different intensities and degrees of salience, assumes added importance in India for developing education from human rights' perspectives. Central to this is the need to understand the nature and extent of the persistence of historically accumulated social deprivations of several groups which in turn have led to their capability deprivations, especially in gaining access to education.

To conclude, if Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has to honour his recent assurance to the agitating students of a fair, just, inclusive, and robust education system, addressing the needs of the heterogeneous ensemble that makes up the

student community in the melting-pot of the education system from primary to tertiary levels by fostering existing institutions and creating new ones commensurate with the perceived and projected demand for education should be a national imperative.

For doing this, a comprehensive White Paper on India's higher education policy for a pragmatic programmatic for at least the next 20 years is urgently needed. Such a Paper should take stock of the present and required availability of access taking into consideration the size of the populations in the relevant age-groups, and cover all issues relating to higher education such as ensuring social justice through education for all, relevance of public-private partnership, admission policy, quotas, fee-structure, quality-control and other matters. Without this, higher education in India will continue to be in a mess with the state and the judiciary tossing issues around without moving towards a resolution on genuine concerns, and politicians and the fast emerging education industry continuing to fish in troubled waters. Such a scenario leaves no scope for any meaningful discourse on India's academic freedom in its overall societal context.

India v. Africa

African countries have much in common with India in terms of their colonial baggage, social disparities, discriminations, social and economic backwardness, and so on. They are also educationally very backward. In this context it is relevant to reproduce here what is mentioned in one of the end notes:

According to UNESCO's EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2002, 28 countries, accounting for over 15 per cent of the world's population, may not achieve any of the three measurable Dakar goals: universal primary education (UPE), gender equality and the halving of illiteracy rates. Two-thirds of these countries are in Sub-Saharan Africa; but they also include India and Pakistan.

Given the above context, initiatives for educational advancement and related academic freedom in Africa can learn a lot from the problems Indian education has been facing. This is particularly so in expanding the education system at all levels, in ensuring its internal efficiency, and using the concept of academic freedom from human rights perspectives as first and foremost the freedom of the illiterate and semi-literate masses to access the education system and then facilitating the articulation of freedom within the larger academia for ensuring autonomy in the pursuit and promotion of knowledge in the context of overall social development, particularly of the socially deprived, which should in turn lead to more freedom and more development.

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Notes

1. 'Academic freedom', *Britannica Online Encyclopedia*.
2. The reference is to concerned, committed and discerning intellectuals making use of their knowledge pursuits and capabilities to improve human rights particularly in the context of the less fortunate in society by contributing to increasing the dynamic interplay of democracy and civil society.
3. The UNESCO, and the U.N. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights observed the issues thus:

Academic freedom is rooted in the fundamental human right to education. A key component of this right is that governments must educate their citizens without discrimination through their acts or their omissions. The eternal triangle of access, quality and cost has been a straitjacket for education in the past; a virtuous circle of hope made up of education, freedom and development. It is a circle of hope because more education means more freedom, which means more development, which means more education – and so on.
4. *Education or Catastrophe*, General Conference of the Association of Commonwealth Universities held at Queen's University, Belfast. Media Release, September 1, 2003. Web: www.acu.ac.uk/belfast2003.
5. A case in point is the cloning of sheep in which scientists were engaged for about twenty years, and the birth of Dolly as the first genetically cloned sheep, with larger implications for cloning and geneticism. Even in this case, the reactions were mainly from the scientific community, and not from society at large.
6. Going by UNESCO data of those enrolled for primary education in 2001 the survival rate at grade 5 was only 61.4 per cent (male 59.7; female 63.4); and

the NER in secondary education during 2000 was 49.9 per cent (male 58.9; female 40.2). Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics. World Education Indicators.

7. BIMARU is an acronym for the states Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, and suggests that these states' economies are ailing.
8. Tenth Plan of University Grants Commission. Part 1: UGC's Vision and Strategy for X Plan.
9. On access to education quoting the UN, the Human Rights Watch Report for 2001 observed:

As pointed out by the U.N. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, academic freedom was rooted in the fundamental human right to education. Another key component of this right was that governments must educate their citizens without discrimination through their acts or their omissions.

Discrimination based on caste status was also a concern, as evident in the widespread cases of discrimination against members of India's Dalit community, which belong to the lowest rung of the traditional caste hierarchy.

10. In its Global Monitoring Report, UNESCO has ranked India with 34 other countries in the lowest category. The report was released in Brasilia on 8 November 2004. It means that despite *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*, UNESCO doubts that India would not be able to ensure that every child goes to school by 2015, the target date for UNESCO's 'education for all' goal. *The New Indian Express*. 9 November 2004. *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* is a premier program of the Government of India launched in 2001 to achieve the cherished goal of Universalisation of Elementary Education, a Fundamental Right (Constitutional Amendment 2002). The super goals of the programme are: All children in school by 2005; Focus on satisfactory quality with emphasis on education for life; Bridging gender and social gaps in Primary education by 2007, and Elementary by 2010; and Universal retention by 2010.
11. According to UNESCO's EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2002, 28 countries, accounting for over 15 per cent of the world's population, may not achieve any of the three measurable Dakar goals: universal primary education (UPE), gender equality and the halving of illiteracy rates. Two-thirds of these countries are in Africa; but they also include India and Pakistan.
12. In this context the following observations by Philip G. Altbach in the write-up 'Higher Education India' (*The Hindu*, April 4, 2005) are important:

India's colleges and universities, with just a few exceptions, have become large, under-funded, ungovernable institutions. At many of them, politics has intruded into campus life, influencing academic appointments and decisions across levels. Under-investment in libraries, information technology, laboratories, and classrooms makes it very difficult to provide top-quality instruction or engage in cutting-edge research.

The rise in the number of part-time teachers and the freeze on new full-time appointments in many places has affected morale in the academic profession. The lack of accountability means that teaching and research performance is seldom measured. The system provides few incentives to perform. Bureaucratic inertia hampers change. Student unrest and occasional faculty agitation disrupt operations.

13. In an obituary on historian S. Gopal, K.N. Panikkar recalled in the *Frontline* of April 27–May 12, 2002:

During the Emergency of 1975–77, despite being close to the government establishment he did not hesitate to articulate his opposition. At the Indian History Congress session at Aligarh in 1975 Gopal moved the resolution opposing the Emergency. While several senior historians were hesitant to support such a resolution, Gopal stated unambiguously that the Emergency was an assault on academic freedom.

14. Red Fort in Delhi is known by that name because of the red stone with which it was built. It is one of the magnificent palaces in the world. India's history is closely linked with this fort. It was from here that the British deposed the last Mughal ruler, Bahadur Shah Zafar, marking the end of the three century long Mughal rule. It was also from its ramparts that the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, announced to the nation that India was free from colonial rule.
15. Absence of state interference does not mean that the managements of institutions have not been targeting individual academics. There have been a number of reports on this in the media and on websites.
16. The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) is an apex resource organisation set up by the Government of India, with headquarters at New Delhi, to assist and advise the Central and State Governments on academic matters related to school education.
17. A report in the *Frontline* of March 18–31, 2000 by Parvathi Menon under the title 'Falsification of History' began thus:

The latest ICHR-sponsored assault on academic freedom is just one of several official actions under BJP rule in the realm of education and research that are aimed to disseminate the Hindutva version of history.

A related observation is in the report 'Freedom in the World – India (2005)' by the *Freedom House* in Washington, D.C.

The promotion of Hindu nationalist ideology by the BJP government also affected the educational system. According to the U.S. State Department's International Religious Freedom Report for 2004, textbooks that had been rewritten to favor a Hindu extremist version of history were introduced in late 2002, despite protests from academics, minority leaders, and advocates of secular values. However, the new Congress-headed government pledged to reverse the 'saffronisation' of education, and the content of the textbooks is currently

under revision. Academic freedom is also occasionally threatened by intimidation of and attacks on professors and institutions: in January, Hindu activists vandalized a research institute in Pune, according to the BBC.

On the curbs on academics during the BJP rule, the Human Rights Watch report for the year 2001 observed the following under the subtitle "Censorship and Ideological Controls" in the section on Academic Freedom:

India also instituted regulations governing attendance of foreigners at international academic meetings held in India. The Indian Home Ministry issued a circular ordering security clearance before holding such gatherings, singling out participants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, China, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Similarly, the ministry issued an edict requiring prior approval for all international academic meetings.

India's governing Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party continued its policy of 'Hinduising' education at all levels. India's University Grants Commission earmarked funds for university courses in astrology, a move that sparked strong opposition from India's academic community. A lawsuit brought by a group of academics contesting the new university program was before the Supreme Court of India.

18. In an open letter dated April 9, 1999 to Indian president K.R. Narayanan, the Human Rights Watch Academic Freedom Committee called on the government to launch an investigation into reports of politically motivated censorship at the Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad Institute, a government-funded Asian studies center in Calcutta. The letter urged Indian government to ensure that political tensions in the country do not spill over and restrict academic freedom.

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International Student Recruitment: South African Rationales

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Abstract

In this paper, we focus on the rationales for the recruitment of international students to universities in South Africa. Through the use of in-depth interviews with international officers at a cross-section of South African universities, we argue that there are competing and complementary rationales for the recruitment of international students. Some South African universities follow international trends in terms of international student recruitment while others adopt a different approach. The analysis locates the rationales of international student recruitment as part of an internationalisation process within the context of globalisation.

Résumé

Dans cet article, nous nous focalisons sur les raisons derrière le recrutement des étudiants internationaux dans les universités de l'Afrique du Sud. Basé sur des interviews approfondies que nous avons menées avec les agents internationaux mandatés par les universités en Afrique du Sud, nous soutenons qu'il existe des raisons d'ordre compétitif et complémentaire qui expliquent le recrutement d'étudiants internationaux. Certaines universités sud africaines suivent la tendance de tels recrutement alors que d'autres adoptent une approche différente. Cette analyse identifie les raison du recrutement des étudiants internationaux dans le cadre du processus d'internationalisation dans le contexte de la globalisation.

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Globalisation, internationalisation and higher education

A useful distinction is made between globalisation and internationalisation (Altbach and Knight 2007:290). They define globalisation as

‘the economic, political and societal forces pushing 21st century higher education toward greater international involvement. Global capital... [has] heavily invested in knowledge industries worldwide, including higher education and advanced training. This investment reflects the emergence of the ‘knowledge society’, the rise of the service sector and the dependence of many societies on knowledge products and highly educated personnel for economic growth’ (ibid).

For Altbach and Knight (2007:290) ‘internationalization includes the policies and practices undertaken by academic systems and institutions...to cope with the global academic environment’. Knight (2006:44) also suggests internationalisation is ‘...the process of integrating an international, inter-cultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education’. Moreover, Altbach and Knight (2007:291) suggest ‘globalization may be unalterable, but internationalization includes many choices’. The distinction in definitions is helpful; however, their account lacks an analysis of the ideological element of globalisation and internationalisation. Scott (2006:23) in his analysis of the dynamics of internationalisation contrasts a neoliberal market orientation optimised by the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) including higher education with the more cooperative policies of the Bologna process. It is useful to distinguish between the internationalisation rationales and practices and indeed the motivations of university representatives in South Africa towards the recruitment of international students.

Our analysis focuses on how the rationales of universities in South Africa can be located within a range of discourses. The intentions of recruiting international students whether within Africa to South Africa or from around the world to Europe, the United States or Australia amongst others can be in terms of traditional notions of the Republic of Letters and Science or enhancing the status of the university that competes on a global stage.

In assessing the rationales adopted towards international student recruitment in universities in South Africa, one feature that is significant is the reality and rhetoric of market competition for students at national, regional and global levels. This market and its competitiveness influences the practice and interacts with the motivation and indeed the recruitment of students within the global higher education system. Marginson (2006) compares the recruitment of international students in Australia and the United States and provides a useful analy-

sis of how the higher education market functions on a global scale but with the omission of discussion of student movements from and within Africa in particular. The drive to recruit international students to enhance the academic prestige of elite institutions and provide income for a range of institutions certainly in the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom and possibly in South Africa occurs (Slaughter & Leslie 1997; Stromquist 2007). This dynamic may conflict with policies of equality of opportunity to improve the opportunities of disadvantaged home students.

Brown and Lauder (2006), provide an analysis of the graduate market and the importance of the positional market in higher education. Marginson (2006) considers the elite institutions and research universities who are consistently ranked highly in world tables. They are able to maintain their positions through providing a positional good of high academic and economic importance for themselves, students and staff. As the leading institutions have a world presence, they attract bright students and high achieving academic staff from around the world as they have the best post-graduate students and academic staff and they are able to maintain their dominance of the international research culture. There is a virtuous circle for those within it but it is not easy to break into for less powerful or privileged students or universities in terms of economic or cultural capital. Some universities compete in a more limited way in the international higher education market by establishing niches of high academic status but relatively low fees as in the Australian case or as universities marketing their educational products for high fees in particular markets as in the case of the United Kingdom.

International student recruitment rationales provide not only a context but are also part of a broader process of internationalisation. There are alternative strategies of internationalisation, some of which may have less damaging effects on donor countries' economic development. These different aspects include study abroad programmes, providing access to higher education where local institutions cannot meet demand through international student mobility and the establishment of branch campuses and cooperative arrangements with local higher education institutions and distant learning provision (Altbach & Knight 2007:290).

Higher education and post-apartheid South Africa

Higher education in post-apartheid South Africa was (and still is) confronted by two broad challenges. On the one hand, years of institutional racism, under-resourced universities and the need for transformation pose significant internal challenges to the state and universities. On the other hand, in an era of globalisation, South African universities are increasingly inserted into a com-

petitive and market-driven environment that has posed broader constraints and challenges. Kishun (2007:456) poses the question whether ‘internationalisation [is] central to South African universities?’ Against the backdrop of the two challenges already identified drawing on Moja (2006), Kishun (2007:457) notes that a ‘double-edged dilemma’ faces African universities. African universities are chronically under-resourced and these institutions and nation-states are additionally burdened by globalisation. In the South African context in particular, Kishun (2007) notes that the additional urgency of redressing past inequalities and the ‘Africanization’ of higher education institutions need to occur.

Subotzky (2003:164) identifies ‘two distinct and opposing discourses’ operational in the South African context that are ‘transformative-redistributive’ and ‘global market-driven’ and delineates how the latter has become dominant within governmental discourse, tracing this back to negotiations between the African National Congress and white political and corporate interests amongst others in the early 1990s. The transformative-redistributive discourse emphasised equity and redress as well as economic and social development both within South Africa and in Africa more generally. The market-driven discourse was articulated within the more general ‘globalisation discourse’ developing in the 1990s in the wake not only of technological financial and economic imperatives but also of the demise of the USSR and socialist planned economies in Eastern Europe. The post-apartheid government in South Africa was faced with a two-fold challenge each informed by the opposing discourse: to meet the needs of the majority Black poor by providing social services, redistributing wealth and opening opportunities including access to education and higher education and at the same time ‘situate[d] the nation competitively in the knowledge-intensive network society and market-driven globalized economy’ (Subotzky 2003:165). The implications for the scope and function of higher education institutions including policy on international students remain problematic and contested.

Subotzky (2003:165) argues that even the ‘redistributive agenda [was] shaped by the transformative discourse...stands in direct ideological tension with the prevailing market-oriented framework of deregulation, fiscal constraint and minimalist government shaped by the dominant... “global” discourse’. He points out that ‘the new South African government developed a policy framework for higher education restructuring, embodied in the largely symbolic 1997 White Paper on higher education transformation’ (ibid). But in practice many ‘new developments’ including international student recruitment ‘were not necessarily transformative’ and were ‘shaped by market orientated individual interests...pursued in an increasingly competitive environment’ (Subotzky 2003:166). ‘Indeed the 2001 National Plan for Higher Education (DoE 2001)

acknowledge an “implementation vacuum” which occurred between the White Paper and the National Plan’ (ibid). Subotzky (2003:166) points out that

‘concomitant to macro economic policy trends ... [there was a] ‘discernable shift occur[ing] in higher education discourse – from an initial symbolic commitment to addressing equity and redistributive concerns to increasing emphasis on the global discourse on the market and efficiency’.

According to Subotzky (2003:166) one of the problems of substantive implementation of progressive policy is rooted in firstly ‘persistent *structural* impediments’, for example race, class and gender inequalities. Secondly, ‘the complexity of higher educational institutional change’ which does not follow rationalist assumptions. Thirdly, ‘*conjunctural* factors’, for example the particular time and the current political situation as well as the power of personalities whether Vice-Chancellors or Ministers of Education or senior civil servants and fourthly, the already mentioned ‘discursive shifts’ in the discourse framing the activities. In this case the move to a global market-driven competitive neo-liberal discourse. This market-driven discourse is further illustrated with the use of world rankings for universities.

In the *Times Higher Education Supplement World University Rankings* of 2007 and 2008, one African institution, the University of Cape Town, is found in the top 200 institutions. In 2006, *The Times Higher* noted ‘it seems harder than ever for countries such as Brazil or South Africa to assemble the resources needed to sustain a research university’ (*The Times Higher* October 6, 2006:13). Of the top 200 universities in 2008 only six are from the developing world; two are in India, one each in Argentina, Brazil, Mexico and South Africa (*The Times Higher* October 9, 2008:3). Shanghai Jian Tong University’s ‘Academic Ranking of World Universities – 2007’ lists the University of Cape Town between positions 203-304; the University of the Witwatersrand between 305 and 402; the universities of Cairo, KwaZulu-Natal and Pretoria between 403 and 510 (Academic Ranking of World Universities – 2007). (For further discussion on world rankings see Altbach, 2006 and Marginson & van der Wende 2007).

South Africa and international students

After the 1994 elections, South Africa became a destination for international students. Defining international students has been a problem in itself (see Council for Higher Education, 2004:215). In South Africa in 1995, 14,000 international students were enrolled at South African universities. In 2000 this number had increased to 31,039 and in 2005, 50,109 (Higher Education Management Information Service [HEMIS], Department of Education, 2000–2006). In 2006 international students in South Africa comprised 7 per cent of the total students

population. Of this figure, 69 per cent were from the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The remaining students originate primarily from the rest of Africa, Europe and Asia. In addition, students from North America, Australia and South America are enrolled at South African institutions. In terms of students from SADC, over 60 per cent originate from Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe. Table 1 illustrates the number of students by regions enrolled at South African institutions between 2000 and 2006. Sehoole (2006) suggest the reasons for this are as follows: close geographic borders; political instability in Zimbabwe and the lack of capacity in Botswana and Namibia amongst others. International students from SADC are primarily enrolled in undergraduate programmes. Only 19 per cent of SADC students are enrolled in post-graduate programmes, while non-SADC students at the post-graduate level is over 30 per cent (*ibid*). Table 2 illustrates the number of students by regions enrolled at a cross section of South African universities in 2006.

The SADC Protocol on Education and Training (1999) makes provision for the recognition and transfer of educational qualifications between member states (see Kamper 2002). In the context of Sub-Saharan Africa, South Africa is the leading provider of higher education (Mthembu, Coughlan and Murray, 2005). The Protocol stipulates that 10 per cent of places in higher education should be reserved for SADC students. In South Africa, SADC students pay home fees and universities earn subsidies from the government (see Table 1). Thus in financial terms SADC students are seen as the same as home students. In 2003, the then South African Minister of Education, Kadar Asmal (2003:6) maintained that subsidizing SADC students was 'a major financial contribution on the part of South Africa as a developing country but we make it gladly in the light of our unstinting commitment to internationalism'. However, African students from outside of South Africa's borders are not a homogenous group that is treated equally by South African institutions. Indeed, Sichone (2006:39) suggests 'negative consequences of internationalization...tend to lie outside the education sector [where] the policies and practices of nationalistic Home Affairs bureaucracies and security officials, coupled with xenophobia...tend to oppose the free movement and settlement of people'. In addition, Sichone suggests 'foreign students experience the same kind of hostility as refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants' (*ibid*) (see Ramphela 1999). Therefore international students and in particular those from Africa are in a contradictory position as on the one hand they are welcomed and encouraged to study in South Africa by universities and government institutions while on the other hand they face the possibility of xenophobia.

Table 1: Students by nationality enrolled at South African institutions*

| | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 |
|-------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| South Africa | 544,021 | 598,514 | 627,661 | 666,367 | 691,910 | 683,473 | 687,647 |
| SADC (excluding South Africa) | 21,272 | 25,379 | 31,699 | 36,207 | 36,302 | 35,074 | 35,917 |
| Other Africa | 4,239 | 4,836 | 6,316 | 6,664 | 6,874 | 7,196 | 8,569 |
| Asian countries | 1,492 | 1,500 | 1,585 | 2,031 | 2,496 | 2,520 | 2,371 |
| Australia and Oceania | 143 | 109 | 124 | 117 | 128 | 118 | 119 |
| European countries | 3,067 | 3,094 | 3,222 | 3,442 | 3,610 | 3,585 | 3,537 |
| North America | 675 | 765 | 1,019 | 1,340 | 1,435 | 1,462 | 1,510 |
| South America | 151 | 167 | 206 | 178 | 167 | 154 | 136 |
| No information | 13,837 | 3,464 | 2,490 | 1,447 | 1,567 | 1,491 | 1,574 |
| Total | 588,897 | 637,828 | 674,322 | 717,793 | 744,489 | 735,073 | 741,380 |

Source: (HEMIS Department of Education, 2000-2006)

Note: *These figures are for university and technikon students from 2000–2004 and for universities (traditional and comprehensive) for 2005-2006.

In the South African case it could be true that structural constraints in terms of historic and contemporary unequal social relations around race, class and gender as well as the limited resources available are important obstacles to the development of a progressive redistributive or developmental agenda. At the national level the attempts by government to implement wide ranging changes have led to a variety of directives and initiatives aimed at higher education in general and indeed at particular universities.

Methodology

When categorizing South African institutions, historical legacies are important. Historical typologies include: Historically Black Institutions (HBIs); Historically White Institutions (HWIs) and Historically English or Afrikaans language institutions (Mabizela 2005:8). In the current reformed landscape, South African higher education institutions are categorized as: traditional universities, comprehensive universities and universities of technology. We have focused on representatives from traditional and comprehensive universities (see Table 2). In addition, we refer to the university as previously HBI or HWI including whether it was or is an English or Afrikaans language institution. A range of unstructured interviews were conducted by one of the authors in July and August 2006. All interviews were recorded for transcription purposes. Our research question was to elicit the rationales for international student recruitment articulated by representatives of international student offices in a range of seven South African universities.

Analysis

Knight and De Witt (1999) suggest four rationales that drive internationalisation: socio-cultural, political, academic and economic. Knight (2006:48), maintains these 'generic categories remain a useful way to analyze rationales' whether at the level of national policy, the higher education sector or individual universities. The recruitment of international students is part of the process of internationalisation of institutions and in earlier work we identified three major strands or traditions present in the recruitment of international students (see Bolsmann and Miller 2008). The first was an enlightenment 'Republic of Letters or of Science' tradition of universities recruiting international students. This we can label 'Academic Internationalism'. The second was a discourse which involves a civilizing, controlling, and training and development discourse originating in colonial empires which we can call 'Developmental'. Thirdly, there was an economic discourse which uses the language of costs and benefits, an 'Economic Competition' discourse. The first and oldest is the idea(l) of the international 'Republic of Letters or of Science', where universities are places of learning, research and scholarship which attract

Table 2: Students by nationality enrolled at a sample of South African universities in 2006 (traditional and comprehensive)

| | Cape Town | Fort Hare | KwaZulu-Natal | South Africa | Western Cape | Witwatersrand |
|-------------------------------|------------------|------------------|----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| South Africa | 16,446 | 7,425 | 34,866 | 209,479 | 13,522 | 21,809 |
| SADC (excluding South Africa) | 2,451 | 1,012 | 1,459 | 13,384 | 593 | 1,276 |
| Other Africa | 541 | 80 | 629 | 2,556 | 218 | 549 |
| Asian countries | 282 | 2 | 146 | 449 | 114 | 172 |
| Australia and Oceania | 18 | 0 | 4 | 45 | 0 | 10 |
| European countries | 740 | 3 | 204 | 1,244 | 40 | 205 |
| North America | 648 | 3 | 259 | 254 | 10 | 143 |
| South America | 14 | 1 | 12 | 50 | 0 | 18 |
| No information | 84 | 0 | 3 | 78 | 341 | 16 |
| Total | 21,224 | 8,526 | 37,582 | 227,539 | 14,838 | 24,198 |

Source: (HEMIS Department of Education, 2000-2006)

students, scholars and teachers irrespective of their national origin. Fenwick (1987:128) refers to an 'international exchange' that 'implies reciprocity of benefit, an overall net gain to the individuals concerned and the quality of future international understanding'.

The second, 'Developmental' tradition has involved the provision of education and training for dependencies abroad. This has had elements of a religious missionary or more general civilizing mission. Historically, in the case of the United Kingdom, it was focused on the colonies and dominions. After 1945, this provision became increasingly conceptualized as help for underdeveloped countries and the Commonwealth in particular. It includes the establishment of colleges and universities under the auspices of British universities. As far as overseas students are concerned, there have been a variety of courses provided in the United Kingdom, some of them directly vocational for the ex-colonies' administrators but others more general in areas such as law, medicine, the military and, more recently, business. Fenwick (1987:128) refers to this type of relationship as 'the modernization model of Third World development'. Altbach (2004:4) refers to a 'new neocolonialism' that first originated during the Cold War. However, this has changed where

[w]e are now in a new era of power and influence. Politics and ideology have taken a subordinate role to profits and market-driven policies. Now, multinational corporations, media conglomerates, and even a few leading universities can be seen as the new neocolonists – seeking to dominate not for ideological or political reasons but rather for commercial gain (Altbach 2004:6).

Moreover, Altbach (2004:6) suggests a 'loss of intellectual and cultural autonomy by those who are less powerful' occurs. In an era of neoliberal globalization this can be seen as neo-colonial.

In the United Kingdom, the British Council maintains the post-colonial linkages with former colonies and territories (Room 2000). The global cultural hegemony of the United States functions in a similar manner in attracting overseas students. Room (2000:111) argues that a form of 'academic entrepreneurialism' has emerged where 'the market for overseas students is politically constructed and maintained'. This is 'underpinned by traditional linguistic and cultural links' (ibid). Thus we have a continuation of former imperial and political connections that have evolved into financially beneficial markets and sources of income for Western universities, particularly in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. There is a comparable argument in a key note address, the former South African Minister of Education Kadar Asmal warned:

‘...the development of a new form of colonialism with South African institutions increasingly targeting the African market. [T]he development of distance education programmes by contact institutions has been driven primarily by financial gain and issues of quality and relevance have been put on the back-burner’ (quoted in Kotecha 2006:105).

Across the world there has been a shift from a neo-colonial traditions to rationales which operate in terms of a globalised market; the dominant ideology here is neoliberalism operating at the level of both the state and the university. ‘Academic Internationalism’ becomes ‘Economic Competition’ and at the level of the university recruiting overseas students is seen as an economic resource for the university. There is increasing competition between institutions and countries in economic terms to provide the education and training which returns income. This is not only in terms of attracting foreign students to the home country, but also in terms of the provision of distance education or the establishment of programmes and indeed whole institutions, colleges or universities abroad. These are economic ventures to generate income, enhance brand awareness and provide a feeder institution which will facilitate postgraduate students continuing their education in the ‘home’ university.

The economic contribution of overseas students goes beyond the immediate fee income. In some areas of postgraduate work employing PhD students as researchers, the marginal costs may be higher than the immediate fee that the students bring in, but they nevertheless make a net economic contribution through their participation in research which itself is income generating. Excellent overseas researchers make significant contributions to university research programmes – both blue sky and applied research programmes. These feed and develop the economic capacity and competitiveness of both corporate and national economies. This, then, is one link between the economic rationale at the level of the university and policy and practice at the level of the state and corporation (Guo 2005; Miller 2006). This dynamic operates at the level of the state, economy and elite research institutions in the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom and South Africa at universities like MIT, Imperial College, London, Sydney and possibly Cape Town and the Witwatersrand.

Academic internationalism: Status, community and diversification

We can identify through our interviews a range of responses. A respondent from a traditional university, HWI and English language medium maintained ‘it is not just a regional university, not just a national university it’s an international university’. A representative of traditional university, HWI and English language medium acknowledged that ‘engaging academically, not only African institu-

tions but European and North American educational institutions in collaborative ventures' was crucial. A respondent from a traditional university, HWI and Afrikaans language medium suggested 'we wish to internationalise our student population primarily at the post-graduate level, and that is our strategy and market ourselves and advertise ourselves as a post-graduate university'. The respondent suggested 'it was getting [the institutions] name out there in the masses and masses of universities that are recruiting there [China]'. A representative from a comprehensive university, HWI and previously Afrikaans language medium articulated the goal of the institution as follows 'our current vision [is] to be an internationally recognized university...[and] the university of the 21st century cannot work in isolation whether as an institution or individually as faculty members'. We can identify universities who see themselves as international role players along with those who envisage the goal of becoming institutions with international reputations and standing.

An alternative rationale emerges for some South African institutions termed 'internationalisation at home' (see Kotecha 2006). According to a respondent from a comprehensive university, HWI previously Afrikaans language medium this is articulated as follows:

'to cater for a broad majority of our students who are not going to get the opportunity for international mobility by travelling abroad or...get what happens out there in the global world today...through your curriculum...you have to make sure that how you prepare your students will prepare them not just for the local and national citizenship and their role...but also within the global context'.

A respondent from a traditional university, HWI and Afrikaans language medium suggested 'to foster internationalisation amongst South African students'. A respondent from a traditional university, HBI and English language medium suggested 'international students bring vibrancy to the classroom simply because of coming from a different culture'. A representative of a traditional university, HWI and English medium language suggested 'we need that interaction in the classroom...the curriculum is the heart of internationalisation because the rest of it is that you can travel and get some experience'.

Development: neo-colonialism, education and training

One of the traditions we identified in England is the provision for international students for the training and education of nationals in less developed countries. In the case of some European countries including the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and France, this focussed on colonies or ex-colonies. Within South Africa we can identify a range of developmental rationales. A representative from

a comprehensive university, HWI English medium maintained 'in Africa there is a lot of focus on reconstruction and development and there is a mass of students who need higher education...in line of the vision of [the institution] to be the African university'. In addition, 'the main focus is really going into Africa to get the students [who] have no access to higher education...there is so much development that is needed in Africa...we want to make sure that, if the rest of Africa is developed' [more should be undertaken]. The developmental rationale is underpinned by the following logic

'all comes from the whole African Renaissance thing, South Africa getting closer to its brothers and sister in Africa. We are saying we are a university in Africa and...the basis of everything that we do, even internationally, we look at the principles of NEPAD, the African Union, the Millennium Development Goals, we want to contribute towards that so those form the basis to be an African university in service of humanity.'

The developmental logic is illustrated by the University of South Africa (UNISA) with the establishment of a centre in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to provide post-graduate qualifications for Ethiopian and Sudanese civil servants. According to UNISA 'the Centre will eventually be the hub for all of UNISA's programmes in the Horn of Africa and in the Eastern Africa regions. The establishment of this Learning Centre in Ethiopia is part of the University's vision of becoming Africa's premier education provider that serves the continent by responding to the needs of the communities' (UNISA 2007). In relation to the Ethiopian centre, a university representative argued that

'it is actually developmental...when you look at it long-term it is an area of growth for the university...also in terms of generating revenue later on...it will change from the growth strategy [to] income generating strategy...even though we started by looking at development and access, later, it will change as they develop and progress and move on to something else. It is a big investment because other countries that want to get involved in Africa - many people want to go to Ethiopia, it is a huge market, so they would have to go and come through us.'

At a traditional university, HWI and previously Afrikaans language medium, a large group of Gabonese students are enrolled in teacher training programmes. The university representative suggested 'it's a curious situation I think that traditionally the Francophone countries would have sent their graduates to France but it's become apparent that is very difficult to afford and they looked for African solutions to their problems'.

The South African Government promotes the country as a study destination. South African embassies and high commissions in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kenya recruit international students to South Africa. The representative of a traditional university, HWI and Afrikaans language medium argued that 'because South Africa is a good choice, a viable option for Kenyans...the fees are so much cheaper to come to South Africa'. African diplomatic missions in South Africa have encouraged their nationals to study in the country. A representative of a comprehensive university, HWI previously Afrikaans language medium suggested 'the Gabonese embassy locally encourages students from Gabon to come here because they want to prepare them for participation in the local situation in Gabon'. The Department of Finance of the Government of Botswana approached a university business school based in Johannesburg to offer courses for its officials. However, the complexity of the aid/developmental goal is apparent when a representative of a traditional university, HWU and English medium language suggested

'we don't want to undermine the University of Botswana so we would say you should do these prerequisite courses at your university and when you come you can do these courses here...we don't want to encourage their own governments not to be using their own institutions'.

Global competition: Fees and university and national economies

Within South Africa, universities charge a differential fee structure which exists across the university sector. The individual university has the authority to determine whether the fees charged for international student (non-SADC) are the same as those of local students or significantly higher (see Johnstone 2004). In addition, the university can determine whether the payment is in South African Rands or US Dollars. Those universities that charge US Dollars such as the universities of Cape Town, KwaZulu-Natal and the Witwatersrand are susceptible to fluctuating exchange rates that can be detrimental or beneficial to university coffers. Moreover, at certain universities differential registration fees exist for SADC and non-SADC students.

In the South African context, the financial contributions international students make is increasingly apparent. A representative from a traditional university, HWI and Afrikaans language medium suggested 'we market ourselves as a good quality education that is affordable in comparison with Europe and the US...as a South African experience'. However, the respondent conceded 'the finances that we receive for international students, they are a significant factor but it is not the overriding factor'. A representative from a traditional university, HWI and English language medium suggested 'the finance does help, it does

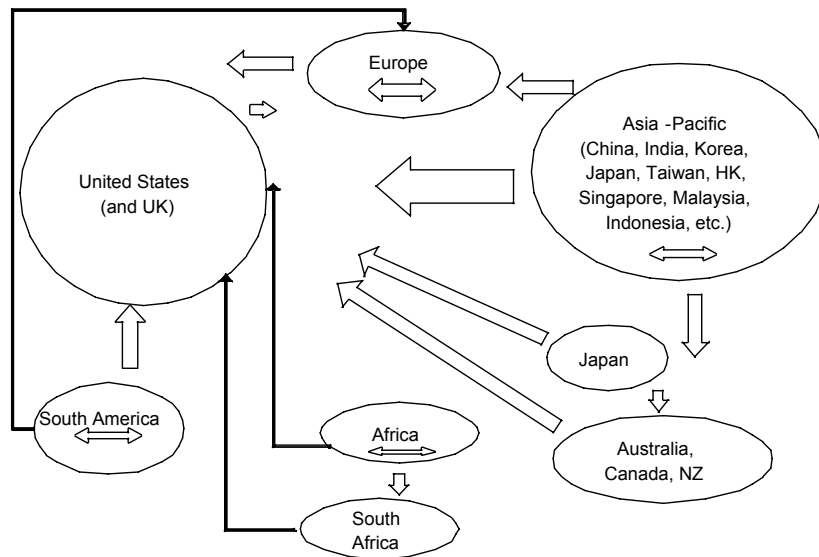
help and it would make a difference if we didn't have international fee paying students, it would make a huge financial difference'.

An increasingly popular fee-generating strategy in South Africa is to host short and semester courses, referred to as 'island programmes', on university campuses for foreign universities. International staff and students then teach on South African campuses using local university resources and facilities. A representative from a traditional university, HWI and English medium suggested 'we can make a lot of money out of semesters that have enrolled [international] students'. The downside of this fee-generating strategy is that it is also referred to as 'academic tourism' (see Scott 2006:20). The representative suggested:

'we would allow you use of classrooms, libraries whatever and you would come and do your thing and off you go so we are not involved beyond just helping you...you just come and you go you don't necessarily impact anyone. [Local] staff and students are not involved'.

An additional factor is that certain courses in the humanities in particular are 'subsidised' by international students who make up the overwhelming majority of the enrolled students with very few South Africans. The fees that are gener-

Figure 1. Global student flows



Source: Adapted from Marginson (2006:902)

ated from the international students keep certain departments operating. Despite the economic benefits and perceived problems in recruiting international students an additional benefit can be identified. South Africa has high levels of skilled emigration to Australia, the United Kingdom and US. In turn, the recruitment of international students to South Africa and in particular those from other African countries, represents an opportunity of recruiting skilled migrants to South Africa. South Africa is therefore seen as a regional 'magnet' for international students from the African continent in particular (see Crush, Pendleton and Tevera 2007). Connell's (2007:24) discussion of South African academics and globalisation is useful in this regard and it is worth considering the following:

'A free-market regime may not be able to hold its intellectual talent. Middle class incomes in South Africa do not compare with salaries available in the metropole. Consequently there is talk of a brain drain. Given the country's history, the option of emigration is particularly available to White intellectuals. White flight is thus a sharp issue for the reproduction of the intellectual workforce in South Africa. Ironically, one of the solutions available is to tap the influx of students from poorer parts of Africa, who now come in considerable numbers to South African universities, sponsored by their own governments or other scholarships. South Africa's solution may be to displace the problem further down the global scale of wealth and poverty.'

Conclusion

There is a range of reasons for recruiting international students to South Africa. Using the dominant rationales we identified in our research on international student recruitment to England we can see certain parallels and differences in our analysis of South Africa. When we consider the South African context, in 2003 Kadar Asmal argued that

'education is not merely a value-free instrument for the transfer of skills across national and regional boundaries, as some might like us believe. On the contrary, education must embrace the intellectual, cultural, political and social development of individuals, institutions and nations. The 'public good' agenda should not be held hostage to the vagaries of the market...in the context of starkly uneven development of higher education on our continent, I am also acutely aware to ensure that South African higher education institutions that wish to be active in the rest of Africa does with integrity and without harming local systems...we believe

that the internationalisation of higher education is better-addressed using conventions and agreements outside of a trade policy' (Asmal 2003:4).

In analysing the complexities present within South African universities in the recruitment of international students we engaged with rationales which connect, complement, qualify and sometimes contradict each other. Statements from our respondents include the view that international students could make a substantial contribution to academic excellence, but also that they provided revenue. The argument about the role of international students often moved from them being an indicator of international status and excellence, to them as contributors to diversity on courses and campus. This is seen as positive in its own right, but also improved the educational experience of both home and overseas students and the economic value of their qualification.

In the South African context, the overriding rationale to recruit international students is not financial. Rather a developmental agenda is adopted that benefits both South African and international students and their countries of origin. This is not without contradictions as differential fee structures exist at certain universities for international students. In addition, those institutions that charge international students US Dollar fees also see themselves as international universities that compete on the global market for international students.

This developmental agenda is however contradictory. Students are recruited from African states to enrol in South African universities with the expectation that graduates will return to their home countries. However, graduates are tempted to remain in the country and take up employment in the local labour market which invariably will have better job prospects than most other neighbouring states (Crush et al, 2006). Therefore what is seen as developmental can be considered 'sub-imperial' or neo-colonial in which donor states actually lose out on the benefits of its students who study in South Africa (see Bond, 2006). The initial beneficiaries are South African universities and once students graduate and find employment in the country, the economy. At the same time South African and Namibian graduates seek to find employment and migrate to Europe, North America and Australia.

In assessing the rationales and strategies adopted towards international student recruitment in universities in South Africa, one feature that is significant is the reality and rhetoric of market competition for students at national, regional and global levels. This market and its competitiveness influence the practice and interacts with the motivation and indeed the recruitment and movements of students within the global higher education system.

When we compare the rationales and rhetoric around international student recruitment to England and South Africa there are important parallels. In South Africa there is a smaller proportion of high fee paying students from outside

Africa as compared to England and non-EU students. In addition, a greater involvement effectively in aid, because of a high proportion of SADC and African students at undergraduate level paying low home South African fees that are subsidized by the South African Government. At the level of state and university rhetoric or discourse, a greater commitment to aid and development through the provision of university education occurs. However, despite these differences and with the addition of 'Academic Tourism' as being a greater salience and concern in South Africa, there are two major features which apply to both England and South Africa in the world context of universities, states, economies and international student mobility. The first in terms of students studying abroad in terms of their immediate and long-term employment possibilities and the second in terms of possibilities of migration.

The migration of skilled graduates and postgraduates into the more developed economies whether it be the US, the United Kingdom, Australia or South Africa is important for economies, universities and in terms of motivations of students. International graduate employment is linked to domination in the global economic market of a relatively small number of research universities who are also at the top of national hierarchies whether the Ivy League institutions in the United States, Oxbridge in the United Kingdom, Melbourne and Sydney in Australia and the Universities of Cape Town and the Witwatersrand in South Africa (see Figure 1). The operation of university markets strengthens the position of the already privileged whether universities, departments or students, and does little to advance internationalist and developmental goals.

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