The Contradictory and Complementary Relationship Between Student Constructive Engagement and Protest Strategies in South African Higher Education[1]

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

* Director, Strategy and Planning, Department of Science and Technology, South Africa (Mlungisi.Cele@dst.gov.za)

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 institutions[4] 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 move-
ment 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, re-
jected 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 paradigm[5] 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 charac-
terized by low intensity conflicts, warfare, and attempts by the old ruling bloc to
exploit differences (ethnic, religious, language, class, gender and racial contra-
dictions) 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 demo-
cratic 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 coun-
tries, and the end of the Cold of War, but which did not mean a freer and con-
flict-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 sig-
nificant 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. Bhorat 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, Bhorat 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), Bhorat 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 that 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 percent of household income from work and social security grants. The white population group accounted for 9.2 per cent of the population (12.8 percent 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 percent 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 Sehoole (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 worldwide 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 standout, 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 guilt, 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 milllion 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 psycho-
logical 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 exclu-
sions can occur on any of these grounds, most commonly students are ex-
cluded when debt and non-satisfactory academic progress coincides, and when
institutions fail to raise extra money to assist students who experience finan-
cial 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 stu-
    dents 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 an-
    nounced 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 institu-
    tions 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 lo-
    cally 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 Plan-
    ning 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); Maharasoa, 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); Maharasoa, 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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