

Chapter for the Book « STUDENT POLITICS AND PROTESTS » edited by Rachel Brooks, Surrey University.

Student power in 21st century Africa: The character and role of student organising

Thierry M. Luescher and Manja Klemenčič

Introduction: #FeesMustFall

In March 2015, a wave of student protests started at the University of Cape Town (UCT), South Africa, with the purpose to 'decolonise' the University and rid it of offensive colonial symbols such as the statue to Cecil John Rhodes. Media coverage of the protests was extensive, including front-page articles by all major local and international media houses. After nearly a month of protests, sit-ins, teach-ins, seminars and relentless meetings, the UCT Senate and Council both agreed that the statue would be removed and matters of institutional culture and the Africanisation of academic staff and curriculum receive reinvigorated attention. Following the removal of the statue on 9 April 2015, the #RhodesMustFall movement, known mainly by its Twitter handle, became an inspiration to students in other South African universities, who asked themselves if at UCT it was the Rhodes statue that had to fall, what 'must fall' in their respective contexts? On a number of campuses, discussions between student leaders and university management began on matters of institutional culture and symbols, the whiteness of South African higher education (HE) and its transformation to make it more responsive to, inclusive and representative of the black population. Acknowledging the need for a national discussion on matters of HE transformation, the Ministry of Higher Education and Training invited all stakeholders to a summit which issued the *Durban Statement on Transformation in Higher Education* on 17 October 2015. The statement shows that by October, the primary focus had shifted: while matters of institutional culture were still on the agenda, the top three resolutions for the immediate and medium term all related to questions of HE funding, student fees, and financial aid for students (DHET 2015, 2-3).

Students' response to the statement was vigorous. Student protests over proposed tuition fee increases had started at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in Johannesburg on a large scale just days before the summit. They escalated nation-wide to an extent that three days after the summit most university campuses were shut down. The immediate demand of students was to halt fee increases and take up the government on its erstwhile promise to provide free education. The national student protests became known as #FeesMustFall; like its inspiration #RhodesMustFall, it proved extraordinarily successful. In addition to campus shutdowns across the country, students mobilised huge protests at the gates of Parliament in Cape Town and the Union Buildings in Pretoria, the seat of government. Within a week of the summit and just over ten days since the beginning of protests at Wits University, the South African government agreed to the student demands and committed to a 0% fee increase for 2016 (Presidency, 2015). In addition, students on various campuses negotiated additional concessions from university managements.

We propose that #FeesMustFall had several typical characteristics of internet age social movements (Castells 2015) and student protests witnessed across the globe since the start of the global financial

crisis in 2009 (Brooks, Byford & Sela 2015). It represented a diffusion of small but effective and emotively-charged protest movement into a palette of institutional protest movements with localised student grievances, which eventually galvanised nationally around the common opposition to tuition fee increases and the unaffordability of HE to the poor. As indicated by its naming, it used social media, and particularly Twitter, not only as conveyers of information but effectively as decentralised organising platforms. Moreover, #FeesMustFall represents a new kind of activist politics in the context of post-apartheid South Africa: it was a multicultural, multiracial and multiclass movement; it was multipartisan, in that frequently the full range of party-aligned national student political organisations were acknowledged; and it was an internet age network movement, insofar as its organisational centre was a virtual one, linking highly localised and in most cases formal leadership structures, such as campus Students' Representative Councils (SRCs) and the branch leadership of national student organisations, into a multinodal virtual network which only rarely met physically beyond campus-level.

Conceptually speaking, activist student movements such as #FeesMustFall must be distinguished from formally constituted representative student organisations. While both serve as platforms from which student politics is collectively organised, a first distinction is that formal student associations are "membership organisations" while activist student movements are "broader entities, typically consisting of several organisations with no formal individual membership" (Badat 1999, 22). In Altbach's writing, a student movement is defined by students' sense of common cause in "a combination of emotional response and intellectual conviction" (1966, 180). Gill and de Fronzo (2009, 207-9) add a social change orientation as a criterion arguing that student movements represent a collective effort of "a large number of students to either bring about or prevent change".

Conversely, formally constituted student associations tend to be more enduring organisations, including a distinct membership, and they come in various types. Our focus is specifically on *representative* student organisations, which seek to play a political role. They are differentiated in a number of ways: they may be aligned to a political party or non-partisan; they may operate at supranational, national or institutional level of the HE system; they may be freely created associations or legally established with a statutory role in HE policymaking; they may have voluntary memberships or include the national or an institutional student body statutorily as members. The latter represent a peculiar type. They typically go by the name of student union, student guild or student association; they are officially recognised to represent the student body in consultative and decision-making structures of HE. At institutional level the elected members of a union or guild forming an SRC or the like, typically constitute the student government, while the executives of national student associations often form part of policy networks and formal sector bodies (Klemenčič 2012; Luescher-Mamashela & Mugume 2014). Against the headline-capturing quality and impact of activist movements, the significance of representative student associations lies in their relatively enduring nature and their ongoing political engagement in HE policy networks to defend student interests. Many African student organisations such as the *Association des Etudiants de Rumuri* in Burundi, the National Union of Ghana Students, and the South African Students Congress can trace their histories back decades to student organising in the 1960s.

In this chapter, our purpose is to provide a systematic overview of contemporary student politics and the emerging character of systems of student representation in national and HE politics in a selection of African countries. We pursue this task conceptually and empirically. We first provide an

overview of trends in contemporary African student politics, arguing that four broad structuring factors have a massive impact on student life in general and student political organising in particular. They show why contemporary African student politics appears “fragmented” (Oanda 2016) and involves new forms of activism and of formal representation. At the conceptual level we draw on the work of Klemenčič (2012; 2014) to present a classification of systems of student representation and analyse the results of a survey among HE experts regarding the characteristics of African student organising.

Glocal African student politics in the 21st century

We have referred to the #FeesMustFall movement in South Africa as an internet age social movement with certain unique characteristics; yet the movement’s medium-term advocacy for free higher education and immediate opposition to fee increases illustrates a typical characteristic of contemporary student movements globally: the defence of student interests cannot be separated from the broader movement against the neo-liberal restructuring of HE and global capitalism itself (Callinicos 2006; Klemenčič 2014). The rise of student movements struggling against all aspects of the commercialisation, commodification and privatisation of HE - whereby increases in tuition fees is among the most salient issues – has been observed worldwide (Klemenčič 2014). The antecedents to the current global student activism in the aftermath of the 2009 financial crisis can be found in student struggles against neo-liberally inspired Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) in Africa (Federici, Caffentzis & Alidou, 2000). It would appear as if the policy experiments first carried out in the developing world as laboratories of neo-liberal policymakers are producing the same student political effects at home! However, in order to understand the glocal nature of student politics in 21st century Africa, this is just part of the story; rather there at least four broad structuring factors which need to be taken into account.

First is the impact of the political liberalisation and the re-institution of multi-party politics across Africa in the 1990s on student politics. On the one hand, the democratisation of national politics has deeply eroded the legitimacy of students to act as ‘extra-parliamentary opposition’ and the activist ‘spokespersons of the masses’ (Altbach 1984; Munene 2003). This role is now legitimately claimed by opposition parties. On the other hand, there has also been an increasing formalisation of student representation in national and institutional HE decision-making structures (see below), which has often followed a politically-realist recognition that the inclusion of students in formal decision-making and responsiveness to student demands may prevent an escalation of conflicts and lead to better decisions (Luescher-Mamashela 2013; Oanda 2016).

The macro-political developments across the continent have been accompanied into the 2000s by a large-scale economic upswing in Africa, due in part to rising commodity prices, which have improved overall living conditions and enabled a general revitalisation of African HE and the building of new public universities and specialist institutions especially in countries such as Ghana, Nigeria and Uganda. This expansion is thwarted, however, by the much more incisive institutional massification that started with the SAP-induced neo-liberal reforms and privatisation of HE of the 1990s, the introduction of cost-sharing policies and admission of fee-paying ‘private’ students to public universities, and the mushrooming of (mostly low-quality, vocationally focused) private HE providers. On the one hand, this has led to a bifurcation of the student bodies in public universities into fee-paying and government-sponsored students who often have different priorities and

interests. Increased access has also produced more diverse student bodies. All these developments have increased the number of students in technical, vocational and professional programmes and altogether brought a greater diversity of students into African HE some of whom cannot afford to become involved in politics or are simply disinclined.

The broad trend has been to de-legitimise large-scale student protests unless they specifically address student issues like tuition fees and HE funding. A protest movement like #FeesMustFall could only mobilise so broadly and gain such wide legitimacy by being multipartisan and primarily focused on student issues. Moreover, reference needs to be made to the impact of the rapid spread of new ICTs across HE on the continent in the 2000s. In the African context where telephony has been largely the preserve of government departments, urban elites and multinationals, and where public media and broadcasting was tightly controlled by national governments, the development of the Internet, the spread of cellular phones first and now smart phones and tablets, has had a spectacular impact on access to information and communication. The impact on student organising has been no less dramatic as #FeesMustFall illustrates.

Furthermore, it has been argued that formal student representative organisations have gained ground in 21st century HE politics because the state serves the capitalist interest and seeks to 'co-opt' student associations into state policymaking organs to make them act 'as states surrogates' and exercise social control over their members (Higgins 1985, 352). We will further consider these points by examining systems of student interest representation in the African context using the conceptual framework for classifying national student associations developed by Klemenčič (2012).

Student organising on the national level

National student representative organisations - which usually take the form of a national association or union – are politically significant in the HE polity and in national politics because of their claim to represent all students in a country. They are the umbrella platforms for institutional representative student associations, e.g. student unions, guilds and SRCs, which give national student associations life and purpose, when they decide to cooperate and institutionalise this cooperation by means of joint governing structures. The symbolic power of national student organisations in Africa resides also in their history in the social transformation of their countries. The ties between national student associations and national political structures run deep and the entanglements between student representatives and various political actors are widespread yet not unproblematic. National student unions are a potent political force. They have strong mobilisation potential, which can play decisively in national elections or as an oppositional force to government policies. Hence governments and political parties at best try to deal with national student unions with caution and at worse try to 'capture' them into their sphere of control (Mugume 2015). Like in many other parts in the world that have undergone democratisation, African national student associations have to cope with the legacies of past government-controlled student organisations and the norms, values and conventions they left within HE systems, including systems of patronage. Associated with these legacies is the challenge for contemporary African student associations to uphold their autonomy, which is having free capacity to act and being independent from external interference, be that from public authorities or university leadership. Autonomy is crucial to preserve representational legitimacy in the eyes of the student body, public authorities, and the public at large.

There are commonalities and differences in the national systems of student representation between countries and broad regions across the continent; the latter is in parts due to the inheritance of francophone, anglophone and lusophone traditions in African HE. While path dependencies offer some explanation as to the organisational nature of contemporary national student association, they cannot paint the full picture. Following the work of Schmitter and Streek (1999), the argument here is that the emergence and structure of national student association can be much better explained if we are to consider the constellations of their members and their political interests (i.e. the logic of membership) and the conditions of the processes of political influence especially in the areas of HE and student social welfare (i.e. the logic of influence) (Klemenčič 2012, 2014; Jungblut & Weber 2012). National student associations tend to adapt their organisational structures rationally to enable them to better serve their members and to perform their representative function. Changes in the external circumstances, e.g. in the availability of funding or in the structures of public authorities of policy networks in which they operate can all bring about changes in the governance – polity, politics and policies - of national student associations (Klemenčič 2012, 2014).

In ideal terms we can speak of two types of national student associations: as interest groups and as student movement-organisations (ibid.). The former implies that there is an – explicit or implicit - exchange relationship between state and student associations, in which student association can supply important resources (e.g. expertise, legitimatisation of policy outcomes, and social control of its members) in exchange for influence. Student associations as interest groups have professionally-organised structures and use lobbying, expert services and political advocacy as their mode of political action. In contrast, the conception of student associations as social movement organisations depicts the tendency of these associations towards contentious politics and protests as a form of claim-making. Also the structures of these associations tend to be more network-like with weak organisational resources, without substantial funding and typically a transversal political agenda.

The two organisational models are related to the differences in student organising at national level which reflect the extent to which the state interferes legislatively in steering the systems of student organising; whether it has granted a monopoly of representation to one or to several associations or to none, and whether the state has created formal structures and processes for students to be represented in national policy making. The likelihood that national student organisations will be more interest group-like is somewhat higher in cases where their existence, purpose and terms are stipulated in HE legislation. Such provisions make it easier for institutional student associations to come together and form a national association. It is most likely for national associations to develop an interest group organisational model, however, in countries where the state has made formal provision for student representation in national bodies and policy processes. Where such provisions do not exist, student representatives have to negotiate mechanisms for voicing their positions with the government, and the state-student relations tend to be more volatile and prone to contentious politics. If no formal mechanisms for student representation in national policymaking exist, and if government refuses to recognise a national student association, the organisation is likely to adopt more student movement characteristics. However, the story is not so simple. If there are formal provisions for student representation, but the national student association is perceived to be controlled by the government, alternative associations will emerge with characteristics of student movement organisations.

The following section aims to investigate the differences and similarities in national systems of student representation in a sample of African countries by exploring two sets of questions: How students as collective body are organised on national level, and how students' interests are intermediated into public policymaking, whereby the notion of student interest intermediation refers to the structures and processes through which students pursue their interests in public policy processes. Structures can be official government bodies on which student representatives have a seat. Processes include both formal regular meetings between government representatives and students and informal meetings. Drawing on the results of a survey conducted among experts of African student politics in 2014, we present here an integrated and systematic analysis of the emerging character and role of national student associations in national and HE politics in a selection of ten African countries: Botswana, Burundi, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

Comment [BRP(S1)]: As this is the first time you have used this term, could you give a very brief definition/explanation, so that the readers know exactly what you mean?

Comment [TL2]: OK?

National systems of student representation

The polity of student organising on national level can comprise of one, several or no national representative student association(s). This distinction defines the various types of national systems of student representation: corporatist or neo-corporatist, pluralist and statist, respectively (Klemenčič 2012).

In the corporatist model, there is effectively one national student representative association (or a limited number of student associations), which is recognised by the state and granted privileged formal or informal access to public policy processes. In this model, national student associations effectively enter into an exchange relationship with the government: they seek to influence policy processes and may also seek financial support from the government; in return they offer expertise and information, legitimacy, and a measure of control over their members. The main difference between corporatist and neo-corporatist systems is in the autonomy of the national student association. In the neo-corporatist model, the national student association is recognised (formally or as a matter of course) as the legitimate representative of the national student body, but the government does not interfere with its functioning. Institutional autonomy of national student associations refers here to positive freedoms of the elected student representatives to take strategic and operational decisions on behalf of the association and govern the association in absence of interference by the government, political parties or others (Klemenčič 2014). The (neo-)corporatist model also applies if there are a several recognised national associations, which are either functionally differentiated (e.g., university vs. non-university sector students; public vs. private university students), or territorially differentiated (e.g., in federal systems). Such arrangement may be based on an agreement achieved between student leaders and the state; an unquestioned tradition; or formalised in legislation.

Student associations in neo-corporatist arrangements are involved in the policy process in a voluntary way to supplement rather than displace representative democratic politics. They typically have an exclusive right to nominate student representatives to permanent governmental consultative structures (such as a ministerial advisory body, a quality assurance board or loan board) and are also invited to participate in ad hoc committees and commissions. Hence, they not only possess significant legitimacy resources and formal channels of influence, but typically they also have sustained financing and well-established organisational structures. If institutional unions feel that they can make a difference in national policymaking through their national association, they are

more willing to support it and engage in it. While student organising within HE institutions tends to be stipulated in HE legislation or statutory documents of HE institutions, student organising on the national level often does feature explicitly in HE legislation (other than a general reference to student membership of a particular body). The decision to organise nationally, thus, lies solely in the hands of the constituent university organisations. They have to come together and agree on the purposes and objectives, structures and means and terms of the national association.

In view of these conceptualisations, at least formally, we do not witness corporatist systems of student representation in the democratised African countries, although these certainly existed in the past. However, the question of institutional autonomy of national student associations especially concerning informal relations between student representatives and government officials is a sensitive question that needs further exploration. Our survey shows that formally there exist several neo-corporatist national systems of student representation: Botswana, Burundi, Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, and Uganda. This means that there exist recognised national student associations that are autonomous – at least formally in terms of legal status, financing, and governing structures and processes - in their operations. The Uganda National Students Association (UNSA) is a registered “establishment of Student Councils in post-primary institutions” in accordance with the *Uganda Education Act* of 2008, Section 30. Most student guild leadership structures, which are institutional statutory bodies, affiliate with UNSA, and the association is run by a committee of students who are democratically elected. The National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), albeit registered with the government and enjoying considerable public and government support, operates mainly as a student movement organisation. The National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS), which also represents secondary school students, is formally registered with the National Youth Authority. It remains formally an autonomous structure even though it receives indirectly resources from the national government (e.g. a donation of office space). While there exist several national partisan student organisations, NUGS is recognised as the representative body of students and has seats in various HE bodies (Gyampo 2013). In Cameroon, the national-level *Association pour la défense des droits des étudiants du Cameroun* (ADDEC - Association for the defence of the rights of students in Cameroon) was started by students in 2004. It operates mainly as a student movement; albeit one that has been influential in improving the conditions of students by mobilising massive student strikes and protests and negotiating on behalf of students with public authorities. ADDEC is typically included in major negotiations between (mostly institutional) student leaders and national ministry officials in times of crisis; generally contact between the Ministry of HE and student leadership is, however, only ad hoc and informal, and typically a response to protests.

The neo-corporatist system would also apply in cases of countries where the existing national student association is dormant, or there is no national student association, and the student representatives from one university – typically the national flagship university in the capital – play the representative role for the general student body in the national policy arena. One such case is perhaps Kenya, where the Kenyan National University Students’ Union shifts between periods of activity and inactivity and the voice of Kenyan students is heard most often from students in the capital city, at the University of Nairobi and Kenyatta University. The same has been the case in Botswana, where the formation of the Student Union of Botswana (BUS) was announced in 2013, but only got off the ground in 2015 with the election of an interim board. BUS is hosted by the Flagship University of Botswana’s SRC. Similarly in Burundi, a student union has existed since 1964

which currently goes by the name of *Fraternité des Etudiants de Rumuri* (FER, Brotherhood of Students of Rumuri). It is based at the University of Bujumbura but represents all Burundi students.

The pluralist system of national student representation rests on the assumption that political power is fragmented and dispersed and therefore no association has a monopoly of representation vis-a-vis the government. There may be several associations, which are similar in their objectives and function and compete with each other for access to public policy processes and for any resources granted by the state. Thus, the government recognises that there are representative student associations and is willing to involve them in public policy processes – either formally or informally - but it does not grant a monopoly of representation to only one. Instead, it either meets with all student associations at the same time or separately, without continuously privileging one over others. In pluralist systems competition and animosity between the various national student associations is frequent (and ought to be expected); after all, if these associations would agree they would have likely built one umbrella body. Correspondingly, the principle ‘divide and rule’ often proves a beneficial strategy for the government as competition deters their collective action. In addition to access to policymaking, government funding for student associations may also be dispersed on a competitive and/or project-funding basis. A variation of the pluralist system can be seen in countries where no national student association exists, but the government interacts with university-based students’ unions. If the government regularly meets with several such institution-based associations and does not privilege one over the others, such a system would qualify as pluralist.

The two most clearly pluralist systems of national student representation in our sample are South Africa and Zimbabwe. The South African *HE Act* of 1997 prescribes the establishment of an SRC in every public HE institution, as well as SRC representation in major decision-making structures at that level. Some of the SRCs constitute themselves voluntarily into a national student organisation while others participate directly or via partisan student organisations in national policymaking. Two associations stand out: the South African Union of Students (SAUS) and South African Students’ Congress (SASCO). Both claim to represent South African students on the national level and have the longest sustained history of student representation in the country in that they trace their origins to the historic merger between the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) and the South African National Students’ Congress (SANSCO) in 1991, whose establishment respectively dates back to 1924 and 1969 (Badat 1999). The main difference between the two is that SASU is a non-partisan organisation of affiliated institutional SRCs while SASCO operates as a partisan student organisation with individual membership and campus-level branches. At the same time, there are a number of national student organisations established by political parties that compete for attention in HE politics. SAUS, SASCO and other partisan student organisations were deeply involved in the #FeesMustFall movement.

The Zimbabwean student movement has undergone many changes and its main national associations, the Zimbabwe National Students’ Union (ZINASU) and the Zimbabwe Congress of Students’ Union (ZICOSU), both operate in a partisan movement fashion. ZINASU is an umbrella body for a number of institutional SRCs. Both unions are voluntary associations without special recognition by the government; indeed, historically there has been much suspicion towards them for their ability to mobilise student protests. Zimbabwe’s national student leadership has been operating under most difficult political (and economic) circumstances for over a decade now.

Finally, there are the statist systems of national student representation where either national student associations exist but are not recognised and engaged by the government, or there is no national student association and governments do not interact collectively with institutional students' unions. In our survey, only Ethiopia fits this category. Student representation on the national level has become largely absent in Ethiopia, effectively with no national association in operation currently. While there is legislation that provides for institutional student unions and student participation in senates and boards, there are problems with implementation even at that level of student representation (Ayele 2016).

Table 1 National systems of student representation: statist, corporatist, neo-corporatist, pluralist

Statist	Corporatist	Neo-corporatist	Pluralist
Ethiopia	None	Botswana Burundi Cameroon Ghana Kenya Nigeria Uganda	Zimbabwe South Africa

It is a challenging task to classify national systems of student representation in our sample of African countries, and there are several caveats that we ought to add. First of all, the systems continue to change. For example, as mentioned with respect to several cases, new national associations emerge while others shift between periods of dormancy and activity which depends on a number of possible circumstances. The most important factor is the collective political will and shared interest to cooperate within the national association by elected student representatives in institutional-level associations. The short length of tenure of individual student leaders are a well-documented part of the “structural realities of academic life” impacting on student organising (Altbach in Luescher-Mamashela 2015, 40). Political recognition, financial support, access to policy making and/or political oppression by governments can play a role. Political party interference can also cause internal conflicts, which can damage the *esprit de corps* crucial for the continued existence of national associations. A strong political cause can work in favour of making or keeping a national student association strong and active as it proved in the case for SAUS with the #FeesMustFall movement.

Second, as mentioned above, student organising on national level is typically not stipulated in national HE legislation – nor does it need to be so; it is part of the freedom of association enshrined in most national constitutions nowadays. Yet, there may be reservations about the establishment and continued functioning of national student associations: there is always fear that the national unions will call the shots and monopolise student representation; often there are fears that a non-partisan national association will be ‘captured’ or dominated by a political party; and there are occasionally suspicions that national associations will become conduits of personal enrichment and corruption. Conversely, there are also reservations from the side of governments who fear that students, as a potential oppositional force, institutionalise their cooperation and gain political strength nationally to an extent that is regime threatening as happened in the past (Altbach 1984). All in all, most national student associations are still ‘volatile’ and susceptible to external

interference and internal conflicts. In these circumstances, it is often difficult to ascertain who it is that represents student interests on national level and who it is that governments engage in political processes.

Thirdly, there is an inherent difficulty in ascertaining the extent to which governments and legislative bodies effectively involve student representatives in national policy processes. As we will discuss in the next section, formal channels for student representation in national policymaking exist only in a few countries. But this is not to say that informally students do not have a voice. Student interest intermediation can operate by means of both formal structures and processes as well as informal meetings between student representatives and higher education authorities. What if the government only talks to students when they are protesting, but does not ban their activities? How are we to interpret this in terms of a system of student representation? The delineation between different types of systems here is indeed difficult and requires further conceptual specification and empirical research.

Comment [BRP(S3)]: Could you make your point a little clearer here, please?

Comment [TL4]: OK?

National systems of student interest intermediation

The question of how student interests are intermediated into public policymaking provides for the analytical distinction between formalized and informal system of student interest intermediation (Klemenčič, 2012). Pluralist and (neo-)corporatist systems of student representation can display both types of arrangements, depending on whether there exist legal mechanisms for student participation in policymaking, what kind of structures exist for student representation and how they are used. The most common mechanisms for student participation in national policymaking are: legal provisions for student representation in a national HE council or in other decision-making, advisory, evaluating or student funding bodies relevant to HE; and rules governing consultation procedures or meetings with the ministry responsible for HE. Informal state-student interactions are conducted predominantly through informal consultations and seminars, representation on non-permanent commissions, working groups or projects of the ministry, informal contacts with ministry officials, written or oral contact with members of parliament (Persson 2004). According to our survey, there is a wide diversity across the ten African systems of student representation that we examined.

Formal systems of student interest intermediation are most developed in Ghana, South Africa and Uganda. In Uganda, HE policymaking makes provisions for formal student representation, for instance, in the Uganda National Council for HE, which has two representatives of students from universities and other tertiary institutions on its board (*Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions Act 2001*). In South Africa, students are represented on the National Student Financial Aid Scheme Board, in the ministerial advisory body, i.e. the Council on HE, and in its HE Quality Committee. In Ghana, student representatives have a seat on the National HE Council. In addition, the NUGS has a seat on all national bodies whose activities directly affect students, including the Ghana Education Trust Fund, the Student Loan Trust Fund, and the National Council for Technical Education. In national development planning too, they are asked to submit written input.

While formal systems will typically also include informal contacts with government officials and ad hoc interactions between the student leadership and national policymakers, if only this form of interest intermediation is common, a representational system qualifies as informal. For example, in Nigeria, effectively, students have little formal voice in national policy; they may be asked to provide

written input on policy but are mostly 'used' by the federal government for political reasons and invited for dialogue when students revolt. In Botswana, students used to be represented in the Tertiary Education Council, but since this Council has been absorbed into the new Human Resources Development Council, students no longer have a seat on this national body. Furthermore, several survey respondents testified that informal contacts often depend on the political party affinities of student representatives. Not surprisingly, when new HE laws or strategies are devised, students – if not formally involved – assert more strongly the request to meet with government officials. Protest as a mode of political action remains a notable characteristic of student politics across Africa.

Even in countries, such as Ghana, Kenya, South Africa and Uganda, where there is privileged access of representative student organisations as 'insiders' into national policymaking, student protests are common and often turn violent. Among the reasons for contentious politics is a perceived lack of responsiveness of public authorities to student interests and demands. In several countries in our sample, students are depicted by public authorities and university leaders as potential 'troublemakers' (e.g. in Burundi, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Uganda, and Zimbabwe). The type of system and level of formalisation must therefore not be taken as indication of how 'peaceful' student politics is or be mistaken for the effectiveness and actual influence of student representation. A governmental advisory council with a high share of student representatives may not have any real influence in the policy process, while student representatives working primarily through a dense web of regular and frequent informal interactions might indeed be very influential.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have argued that student politics in twenty-first century Africa can be understood in terms of at least four broad structuring factors. First, the impact of the political liberalisation and the re-institution of multi-party politics in the 1990s and 2000s have left an important imprint on student politics in Africa. While having lost the status of 'spokespersons of the masses', students remain a potent political force and associate with both political parties and student representative associations and movements. Political parties try to establish or infiltrate existing student organisations to capitalise on their mobilisation potential, their influence in HE and prestige. Our survey confirms this: an aggregate estimate of the influence of different groups on student politics in the countries in our sample shows that the highest influence is attributed to political parties. The second most influential group is government, which often equates to the ruling party.

Second, the economic upswing in Africa of the 2000s has brought about a further expansion of demand for HE and consequently led to growth in privatised and technical, vocational and professional HE. With gradual massification, student bodies and the HE sector have become more diverse. The new types of institutions have a different 'public ethos' from the old public universities. They also often have a different conception of students – more as consumers. Student representative associations and their formal rights in governance of institutions are less political and more consultative in these types of HE institutions.

Third, HE expansion has often come hand in hand with neo-liberal reforms in HE which put emphasis on efficiency, competition and choice. Most governments have been unable or unwilling to increase public spending for HE to keep up with the rapidly and massively expanding sector. Public institutions have been forced to become more corporate in more market-oriented HE systems. The

marketization of African HE in the sense of the state passing on the burden for financing public institutions onto them who, in turn, pass it on to students does not go down well with the students. While anti-SAP student protests across Africa were a first continent-wide manifestation of this; with #FeesMustFall the continent joined the current global wave of student protests against tuition fees in the form of an internet age student movement, effectively using the potential of ICTs in student organising.

Fourth, conservative cultural values manifest in conceptions of students as ‘pupils’ with limited agency to constructively and critically shape their educational experience, or ‘troublemakers’ who need to be disciplined. These conceptions not only affect relations in the classroom, but also the structures and processes of student representation (cf. Klemenčič 2015; Luescher-Mamashela 2013). For students to have real influence, formal pathways of involvement need to be reinforced by a culture of partnership. Conversely, student representatives themselves have not always managed to escape the lures of patronage. To gain an effective voice in shaping HE policy, irrespective of the system of student representation, student leaders need to be critical and principled in their articulation of the student perspective. The lesson for successful student organising is to emphasise the significance of claiming and sustaining a moral high ground, like African student movements have done in the past by advocating freedom and democracy and are currently doing with social justice-related demands as illustrated by #FeesMustFall.

References

- Altbach, Philip G. (1966). Students and politics. *Comparative Education Review*, 10: 2, 175-87.
- Altbach, Philip G. (1984). Student politics in the Third World. *Higher Education*, 13:6, 635-55.
- Badat, Saleem M. (1999). *Black Student Politics, Higher Education and Apartheid: From SASO to SANSCO, 1968-1990*. Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council.
- Ayele, Bekele W. (2016). Student participation in the governance of Ethiopian higher education institutions: The case of Addis Ababa University. In: Luescher, T., Klemenčič, M., Jowi, J.O. (Eds.), *Student Politics in Africa: Activism and Representation*. Cape Town and Maputo: African Minds.
- Birantamije, Gérard (2016). The University of Burundi and Student Organisations: Governance System, Political Development and Student Representation. In: Luescher, T., Klemenčič, M., Jowi, J.O. (Eds.), *Student Politics in Africa: Activism and Representation*. Cape Town and Maputo: African Minds.
- Brooks, Rachel, Byford, Kate & Sela, Katherine (2015). Students’ unions, consumerism and the neo-liberal university. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* DOI: 10.1080/01425692.2015.1042150
- Callinicos, Alex (2006). *Universities in a Neoliberal World*. London: Bookmarks Publications
- Castells, Manuel (2015). *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age* (2nd Ed.). Cambridge: Polity Press.

- Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) (2015). *The 2015 Durban Statement on Transformation in Higher Education, 17 October 2015*. Pretoria: DHET. Retrieved on 6 November 2015 from <http://www.dhet.gov.za/summit/Docs2015.html>
- Federici, Silvia, Caffentzis, George & Alidou, Ousseina (Eds.) (2000). *A Thousand Flowers: Social Struggles against Structural Adjustment in African Universities*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.
- Gill, Jungyun & de Fronzo, James (2009). A comparative framework for the analysis of international student movements, *Social Movement Studies*, 8:3, 203-224, DOI: 10.1080/14742830903024309
- Gyampo, Ransford E.V. (2013). Student activism and democratic quality in Ghana's Fourth Republic. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 1:1&2, 49-66. DOI: 10.14426/jsaa.v1i1-2.24
- Higgins, Winton 1985. Political unionism and the corporatist thesis. *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 6: 349-381.
- Klemenčič, Manja (2012). Student representation in Western Europe: introduction to the special issue. *European Journal of Higher Education*, 2:1, 2-19, DOI: 10.1080/21568235.2012.695058
- Klemenčič, Manja (2014). Student power in a global perspective and contemporary trends in student organising, *Studies in Higher Education*, 39:3, 396-411, DOI: 10.1080/03075079.2014.896177
- Klemenčič, Manja (2015). Student involvement in quality enhancement. In: Huisman, J., de Boer, H., Dill, D. and M. Souto-Otero (Eds.). *The Handbook of Higher Education Policy and Governance*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 526-543.
- Luescher-Mamashela, Thierry M. (2013) Student representation in university decision making: good reasons, a new lens? *Studies in Higher Education*, 38:10, 1442-1456, DOI: 10.1080/03075079.2011.625496
- Luescher-Mamashela, Thierry M. (2015). Theorising student activism in and beyond the 20th century: the contribution of Philip G. Altbach. In: Klemenčič, M., Bergan, S., Primožič, R. (Eds). *Student Engagement in Europe: Society, Higher Education and Student Governance*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Higher Education Series.
- Luescher-Mamashela, Thierry M. & Mugume, Taabo (2014). Student representation and multiparty politics in African higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 39:3, 500-515, DOI: 10.1080/03075079.2014.896183
- Mugume, Taabo (2015). *Student Politics and Multiparty Politics in Uganda: A Case Study of Makerere University*. M.Admin. thesis. Department of Political Studies, University of the Western Cape.

- Munene, Irungu (2003). Student Activism in African Higher Education. In: P.G. Altbach & D. Teferra (Eds.), *African Higher Education: An International Reference Handbook*. Bloomington (USA): Indiana University Press.
- Oanda, Ibrahim O. (2016). The evolving nature of student participation in university governance in Africa: an overview of policies, trends and emerging issues. In: Luescher, T., Klemenčič, M., Jowi, J.O. (Eds.) *Student Politics in Africa: Representation and Activism*. Cape Town and Maputo: African Minds.
- Persson, Annika (2004). Student participation in the governance of higher education in Europe: Results of a survey. In Bergan, S. (Ed.), *The University as Res Publica: Higher Education Governance, Student Participation and the University as a Site of Citizenship*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing. pp. 31–82.
- Presidency (2015). *Statement by President Jacob Zuma at the Conclusion of Consultation with Representatives of the University Community*. 23 October 2015. Pretoria: Presidency.
- Schmitter, Philippe C. & Streek, Wolfgang (1999). The organization of business interests. *MPIfG Discussion Paper*, 99/1. Retrieved 6 November 2015 from http://www.mpifg.de/pu/dp_abstracts/dp99-1.asp