

# Reflections of South African Student Leaders

1994 to 2017

**Thierry M Luescher,  
Denyse Webbstock  
& Ntokozo Bhengu**

*FEATURING*

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# abbreviations and acronyms

AGM	Annual General Meeting
ANC	African National Congress
ANCYL	ANC Youth League
ASB	Afrikaanse Studentebond
AZAPO	Azanian People's Organisation
AZASCO	Azanian Student Convention
BA	Bachelor of Arts
BAdmin	Bachelor of Administration
BCom	Bachelor of Commerce
BEC	Branch Executive Committee
BSocSci	Bachelor of Social Sciences
BTech	Bachelor of Technology
CA	chartered accountant
Cape Tech	Cape Technikon
CFO	Chief Financial Officer
CHC	Central House Committee
CHE	Council on Higher Education
COSAS	Congress of South African Students
CPUT	Cape Peninsula University of Technology
DA	Democratic Alliance
DASO	Democratic Alliance Students Organisation
DG	director-general
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DP	duly performed (certificate)
DUT	Durban University of Technology
DVC	deputy vice-chancellor
EFF	Economic Freedom Fighters
EFFSC	EFF Student Command

eNCA	eNews Channel Africa
FFACT	Forum for Further Accelerated and Comprehensive Transformation
GC	General Council
GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution
HE	Higher education
HESA	Higher Education South Africa (now: USAf)
HR	Human resources
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
IEC	Independent Electoral Commission
IF	Institutional Forum
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
ILSA	International Law Student Association
ISM	International Socialist Movement
LLB	Bachelor of Laws
MA	Master of Arts
ManCord	Management Coordination Committee
MEC	Member of the Executive Council
MEDUNSA	Medical University of South Africa
MISTRA	Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection
MP	Member of Parliament
MUT	Mangosuthu University of Technology
MK	Umkhonto we Sizwe
NCHE	National Commission on Higher Education
NEC	National Executive Committee
NECC	National Education Crisis Committee
NEHAWU	National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union
NEUSA	National Education Union of South Africa
NMU	Nelson Mandela University
NRF	National Research Foundation
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
NUSAS	National Union of South African Students
PABASA	Pan African Bar Association of South Africa
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress of Azania
PASMA	Pan Africanist Students' Movement of Azania
PASO	Pan Africanist Student Organisation
PenTech	Peninsula Technikon
PLT	Practical Legal Training
PQM	Programme and qualifications mix
PYA	Progressive Youth Alliance
RAG	Remember and Give
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme

Res	student residence
RCL	Representative Council of Learners
SA	South Africa
SAB	South African Breweries
SACP	South African Communist Party
SADESMO	South African Democratic Student Movement
SALSA	South African Liberal Students Association
SANSCO	South African National Students' Congress
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SASCO	South African Students' Congress
SASO	South African Students Organisation
SATSU	South African Technikon Students' Union
SAUS	South African Union of Students
SAU-SRC	South African Universities Students' Representative Councils
SC	senior counsel
SG	secretary-general
SHAWCO	Students' Health and Welfare Centres Organisation
SMS	short message service
SPU	Sol Plaatje University
SRC	Students' Representative Council
SSAC	Student Socialist Action Committee
SSSC	Student Support Services Council
SU	Stellenbosch University
TB	tuberculosis
TEFSA	Tertiary Education Fund for South Africa
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UCSA	United Christian Students of South Africa
UCT	University of Cape Town
UDF	United Democratic Front
UDW	University of Durban-Westville
UFS	University of the Free State
UJ	University of Johannesburg
UNISA	University of South Africa
UP	University of Pretoria
USA	United States of America
USAf	Universities South Africa
USF	United Student Front
UWC	University of the Western Cape
UZ	University of Zululand
VC	vice-chancellor
Wits	University of the Witwatersrand
YCL	Young Communist League





# acknowledgements

*Reflections of South African Student Leaders, 1994 to 2017* is a collection of the reflections of 12 former student leaders who were in positions of leadership in South African public universities – typically as presidents of Students’ Representative Councils (SRC) or as executive members of institutional SRCs between 1994 and 2017.

For the Council on Higher Education (CHE), the book is a continuation of its Reflections Project. In 2016, the CHE published the reflections of eight former vice-chancellors and deputy vice-chancellors in the book *Reflections of South African University Leaders, 1981 to 2014*. For the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), its participation in the project is part of researching the historical dimension of the post-apartheid student movement to enrich its project ‘The New South African Student Movement: From #RhodesMustFall to #FeesMustFall’.

All the research material generated from this project will be made available for secondary analysis to other researchers who are interested in student leadership in South Africa. The repositories chosen for the data are South African History Online (for open data) and the HSRC Data Curation Unit (for data that require ethics clearance prior to access).

A project of this magnitude relies on the goodwill, support and expertise of many. As the editors-cum-authors of the book, we would first of all like to thank all the former student leaders who contributed to this book and who are acknowledged here as the co-authors of their respective chapters.

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- Mr Nkululeko Makhubu, research intern in the HSRC and master's student at the University of Cape Town, who has greatly assisted us in setting up interviews, co-conducting some interviews, checking transcripts and communicating with student leaders.
- Ms Genevieve Simpson, former senior manager in the Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate of the CHE, for managing the project from the CHE's side until the end of 2018, including liaising with the student leaders and setting up interviews, transcribing and checking transcripts and generally keeping the project on track.

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Finally, the HSRC is grateful for funding received from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, grant number G-1802-05403, which contributed to the realisation of this project.

# preface

*Professor Narend Baijnath  
Chief Executive Officer  
Council on Higher Education*

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In 2016, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) published the reflections of eight former vice-chancellors and deputy vice-chancellors in a book titled *Reflections of South African University Leaders, 1981 to 2014*. Reviews of the book suggested that it contributed significantly to a better understanding of the stringent demands of visionary and transformative leadership required by university leaders in the fast-changing and increasingly complex public higher education sector.

As a sequel to *Reflections of South African University Leaders, 1981 to 2014*, the CHE, in collaboration with the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), is pleased to publish *Reflections of South African Student Leaders, 1994 to 2017*, as a collection of the reflections of 12 former student leaders who served in positions of leadership in South African public universities – typically as presidents or executive members of respective Students' Representative Councils (SRCs) – between 1994 and 2017. The Higher Education Act (No. 101 of 1997, as amended) recognises SRCs as legitimate structures within the broader governance matrix of public higher education institutions. In order to present a balanced perspective on how transformation of higher education has unfolded since the dawn of democracy, it is in the view of the CHE quite critical that the voices of students are also recorded in accounts of the seminal changes experienced over this period.

Twenty-five years since the dawn of democracy, higher education institutions still face many challenges of not being able to effectively address the concerns of students on key issues of access, success, transformation and funding. The frustrations of students in this regard have sometimes triggered student protests, some of which have been accompanied by violence, resulting in the suspension of academic activities and closure of university campuses. Readers will recall the highly publicised student protests such as #RhodesMustFall at the University of Cape Town, which gathered momentum as it spread to several other campuses and itself transformed into the 'decolonisation movement' before transitioning into #FeesMustFall and related campaigns such as #EndOutsourcing. One of

the many lessons learnt from these protests is that there is a dire need for the decision-makers in higher education institutions to recognise the student voice. As key stakeholders, students should be engaged meaningfully and constructively, especially when they represent the vanguard struggles which address legacy and contemporary struggles in our society.

An intriguing aspect of the 2015/16 protest movement was that it was portrayed as 'leaderless'. This has raised questions about the role of leadership in student governance. Do student leaders represent the masses of students? Do they have real authority and influence on the student body politic? Whose interests do they serve? How do they determine if they are successful or not? How are they perceived by those they purportedly lead and represent? The search for answers to these and other questions was the main motivation, on the part of the CHE, to contemplate the research project that has culminated in this publication. At the time that the CHE was still conceptualising the research project, the HSRC received funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for a nationwide research and archiving project on the 2015/16 student movement, including a focus on the developmental trajectory of the student movement from the early post-apartheid movement to #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall. The clear convergence of the research project that the CHE was planning to embark on, and that which the HSRC had just started to work on, led the two organisations to agree to work together on the reflections of former student leaders.

*Reflections of South African Student Leaders, 1994 to 2017* is based on comprehensive interviews with former student leaders, each of whom provided a personal account in their own words of their experience in the position of student leadership. The interviews were transcribed and written as chapters focusing on the backgrounds of the interviewees, their respective journeys to become student leaders, and their roles and responsibilities while in student leadership positions. The chapters also cover the former student leaders' views on the threats to, and opportunities for, the development of the higher education system broadly, and student governance in particular. The former student leaders concerned were provided an opportunity to review the earlier drafts of their respective chapters, and they approved the final chapters published in the book.

The interviewees are from different backgrounds and of diverse political persuasions. Some were student leaders in universities located outside the urban areas while others were student leaders in township and urban universities. The representation also covers historically white universities and historically black ones. Furthermore, among them are those who were student leaders at merged institutions and those who were leaders at institutions that were not merged. They also represent a mix from traditional universities, universities of technology and comprehensive universities. With respect to political persuasions and affiliations, the interviewees are affiliated to different political parties and/or student political formations.

The book is a 'must read' for current and future student leaders. The experiences shared by the former student leaders, including the lessons they learnt in hindsight, are invaluable to the current and future crops of student leaders. They are likely to glean much from the book about student leadership visions, strategies and tactics which could contribute to making them better leaders.

The book is important for current and future leaders of higher education institutions as it provides insights into the thinking, aspirations, desires, fears and modus operandi of student leaders. Such insight can contribute to developing and implementing appropriate strategies for achieving meaningful and constructive engagement with current and future student leaders.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the former student leaders for their voluntary participation in this project, and for willingly sharing their experiences and the lessons learnt from their experiences.

I would also like to acknowledge the contribution of Dr Denyse Webbstock, who led the book project on the CHE side until she resigned in December 2018, and Prof. Thierry Luescher, who was the project co-leader on the HSRC side, for a job well done. This book would not have progressed to completion without their steady resolve in the face of many obstacles.

I thank Mr Ntokozo Bhengu of the CHE, Mr Nkululeko Makhubu of the HSRC, Dr Denyse Webbstock and Prof. Thierry Luescher for conducting the interviews with the former student leaders, transcribing them and converting the transcriptions into book chapters. I also thank the publisher, African Minds, for seeing the value of a book of this nature and agreeing to publish it.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge with appreciation the role played by Dr Amani Saidi in taking up the leadership of the book project in January 2019, on the side of the CHE, following the resignation of Dr Denyse Webbstock, and steering the project through to completion.



# chapter 1

## A quarter-century of student leadership

*Thierry M. Luescher, Denyse Webbstock & Ntokozo Bhengu*

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As part of South Africa's transition to democracy and the creation of a single higher education system from a medley of technikons, black township and bantustan universities, Afrikaner *volksuniversiteite*, and English universities with a distinct white colonial imprint,<sup>1</sup> the nature and extent of student representation in higher education governance was re-imagined for a post-apartheid era, reinforced through legislation. The impetus for change was expressed early on in the report of Mandela's National Commission on Higher Education of 1996. Student representation within formal governance structures was expected to provide students with avenues to express and negotiate their concerns and demands, and to contribute to shaping the fabric of university life. The principles of 'democratisation' and 'academic freedom' were to underpin a new philosophy of 'co-operative governance' in which students' voices were to be included in major decision-making processes.<sup>2</sup> This impetus was articulated in Education White Paper 3 of 1997 and formalised in the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 (HE Act), which mandated formal student representation in governance throughout the

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- 1 Bunting, I. (2002). The Higher Education Landscape under Apartheid. In N. Cloete, R. Fehnel, P. Maassen, T. Moja, H. Perold & T. Gibbon (Eds), *Transformation in Higher Education: Global Pressures and Local Realities in South Africa*. Cape Town: Juta.
  - 2 Hall, M., Symes, A. & Luescher, T.M. (2002). *Governance in South African Higher Education*. Research Report. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education.



system and institutions of public higher education.<sup>3</sup> The Students' Representative Council (SRC) became a legislated governance structure in all South African universities (while previously it had only been formally recognised in certain university private acts and statutes, and in the Technikons Act 125 of 1993). Henceforth, student representation was mandatory in the two highest decision-making bodies of universities, the University Council and the Senate, as well as in the Institutional Forum and the Student Services Council, and by extension on many of their committees.

The HE Act further provided for the representation of students in the Council on Higher Education (CHE), the statutory advisory council providing advice to the minister responsible for higher education. In addition, by means of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) Act No. 56 of 1999, the NSFAS board was composed in such a way that students' voices would also be represented in matters of student financial aid. Student representation thus became statutory in national higher education governance, planning, funding and quality assurance, as well as at institutional level in all matters concerning students and the institution at large.

And yet, throughout the past 25 years, and quite contrary to the expectation of the policy-makers of those years, student protests have continued across much of the sector in relation to recurring grievances. The key issues have persistently been academic and financial exclusions, student funding, accommodation, institutional transformation and institutional culture, as well as matters of governance. Despite the formal means provided by the HE Act and NSFAS Act for students to represent their interests in the 'boardrooms' of formal decision-making bodies, student protests 'in the street' remain a recurrent, if not normalised, and frequently violent part of university life on many campuses. Why? Examining this phenomenon has become ever more pressing in the wake of the intense student protest wave of 2015/16, starting with the #RhodesMustFall campaign at the University of Cape Town, and its reverberations across many campuses of historically white universities, the original #FeesMustFall campaign of late 2015 with its long history reaching into the early days of black student politics after 1994, and eventually the culmination of the protests, in late 2016, in the #FeesMustFallReloaded campaign, which shut down academic work on many campuses for weeks and required a collective effort by university leaders, academics and student leaders for the 2016 academic year to be rescued.

The successes of #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall campaigns aptly demonstrate the lack of efficacy and responsiveness of higher education authorities – at institutional and system level respectively – to pressing student concerns,

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3 Department of Education (1997). Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education. *Government Gazette*, Notice 1196 of 1997. Pretoria: Government Printers; Republic of South Africa (1997). Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997. *Government Gazette*, 18515 (Notice 1655) 19 December. Pretoria: Government Printers.

unless a serious crisis is created. And the culprits claimed victory. The former vice-chancellor of the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, Prof. Adam Habib, famously claimed that with the #FeesMustFall campaign students achieved in 10 days the policy change that vice-chancellors had requested for 10 years!<sup>4</sup> Similarly, for over two decades, students at historically white universities in South Africa – underpinned by surveys and in-depth studies – called for a ‘deep transformation’ of their institutional cultures and curricula. What does it all mean? Staying focused, we must ask: Has the post-apartheid regulatory framework for higher education governance failed? Have the provisions for student representation failed? Is there a need for a new reimagining of higher education governance and student leadership therein?

A growing body of research from across the African continent shows that the relationship between student representation and student activism is not contradictory; rather, protesting is often an extension of politics in the formal governance structures, sometimes complementary to, sometimes in place of, what student leaders fail to achieve by working through formal structures.<sup>5</sup> This body of research on the dynamics of student politics tells us many kinds of stories; they are, however, typically told from a removed, academic perspective and confined within specific case studies and timeframes.

An alternative approach to understanding the merits and pitfalls of the current model of higher education governance, the dynamics of student representation and activism, and the roles of SRCs therein, is to seek the reflections of those who have been intimately involved. In providing a platform for former student leaders to relate their recollections in their own voices and from their standpoints, this book seeks to provide material for a critical consideration of the questions above.

## Aim and approaches

The primary aim of the book is to give a platform to South African student leaders of the period from 1994 to 2017 to reflect on their experiences of involvement in student leadership at SRC level. At the outset, we developed a semi-structured

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4 Desai, R. (2018). *#EverythingMustFall: The High Cost of Education* [Documentary]. Braamfontein, Johannesburg: Uhuru Productions.

5 Byaruhanga, F.K. (2006). *Student Power in Africa's Higher Education: A Case of Makerere University*. New York: Routledge; Cele, M.B.G. (2015). Student Politics and the Funding of Higher Education in South Africa: The Case of the University of the Western Cape, 1995–2005. Doctoral dissertation, University of the Western Cape, South Africa; Jansen, J. (2004). Changes and continuities in South Africa's higher education system, 1994 to 2004. In L. Chisholm (Ed.), *Changing Class: Education and Social Change in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. Cape Town: HSRC Press; Luescher, T.M., M. Klemenčič & O.J. Jowi (Eds) (2016). *Student Politics in Africa: Representation and Activism*. Cape Town: African Minds; Munene, I. (2003). Student activism in African higher education. In D. Teferra & P. G. Altbach (Eds), *African Higher Education: An International Reference Handbook* (117–27). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

interview schedule to cover six topics: (1) the personal background and context of student leadership involvement; (2) reflections on the role of the SRC and student leadership, the internal organisation of SRC politics, SRC electoral systems, and training and support to student leadership; (3) reflections on the challenges of student representation in co-operative governance and the strategies and tactics used to represent the student voice and influence change; (4) the use of different forms of interest intermediation, including protesting, and the former student leaders' understandings of the emergence of a nationwide student movement in 2015/16 centred around #FeesMustFall and other campaigns like #EndOutsourcing; (5) reflections on the lessons learnt from their experience for successful student representation; and (6) reflections on the impact of the student leadership experience on their life, including its impact on their political attitudes and ideology, continued participation in politics after university, impact on the choice of subsequent studies, career opportunities and professional life, and impact on personal life.

In the development of topics and questions for our inquiry we were guided by existing theory and empirical research on student politics and representation in Africa, drawing particularly on Badat's early work on the history of organised black student politics in South Africa under apartheid, and key concepts and approaches for understanding the same; Nkomo's study of the student culture of resistance in historically black universities; the seminal work on emerging trends in post-apartheid student politics by Cele, Koen and Mabizela; and on SRC electoral politics by Koen, Cele and Libhaber.<sup>6</sup> We also considered different conceptions and purposes of student representation in higher education internationally and in South Africa in the work of Klemenčič, Luescher and Jowi; the relationship between representation and activism in African student politics, including the dynamic relationship between different types of student actions by Cele; and classic work on the biographical impact of social activism on activists by

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6 Nkomo, M. (1984). *Student Culture and Activism in Black South African Universities: The Roots of Resistance*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press; Badat, M.S. (1999). *Black Student Politics, Higher Education and Apartheid: From SASO to SANSCO, 1968–1990*. Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council; Cele, G., Koen, C. & Mabizela, M. (2001). Student politics and higher education in South Africa: Emerging trends since the early 1990s. Paper presented at the Education Policy Unit, UWC, and at the Society for Research on Higher Education Conference on Globalisation and Higher Education: Views from the South, 27–29 March, Cape Town; Koen, C., Cele, M. & Libhaber, A. (2006). *Audit of SRC Elections at 21 Universities and Technikons in South Africa from 2002–2004*. Johannesburg: Centre for Education Policy Development.

McAdam.<sup>7</sup> The growing body of literature on the Fallist student movement also informed the work of this book.<sup>8</sup>

## Conceptualising student leadership, representation and governance

The concepts of student leadership, representation and governance on which the approach to the interviews in this book is predicated, draw on previous work on student representation published in the *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*.<sup>9</sup> According to that work, the collective student voice can become 'present' through formal structures and processes of elected or appointed student representatives in decision-making processes within higher education institutions.

Student representation is premised on three conditions: (1) democratic procedures which confer collective student powers on student representatives to represent the interests of the collective student body and through which those powers can also be revoked; (2) regular communication procedures with the student body to collect student views and inform about their activities; and (3) the representation of these student leaders on governance structures and other decision-making and consultative bodies at all levels and stages of the decision-making processes in higher education. In this manner, student representation forms part of the formal governance and administration of higher education institutions and systems which steer and influence organisational behaviour and

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- 7 Klemenčič, M., Luescher, T.M. & Jowi, O.J. (2015). Student power in Africa. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 3(1): vii-xiv. DOI: 10.14426/jsaa.v3i1.99; Cele, M.B.G. (2015). Student Politics and the Funding of Higher Education in South Africa: The Case of the University of the Western Cape, 1995–2005. Doctoral dissertation, University of the Western Cape, South Africa; Cele, M.B.G., Luescher, T.M. & Barnes, T. (2016). Student actions against paradoxical post-apartheid higher education policy in South Africa: The case of the University of the Western Cape. In T.M. Luescher, M. Klemenčič & O.J. Jowi (Eds), *Student Politics in Africa: Representation and Activism*. Cape Town: African Minds; McAdam, D. (1999). The biographical impact of activism. In M. Giugni, D. McAdam & C. Tilly (Eds), *How Social Movements Matter*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- 8 See, for example, Booysen, S. (Ed.) (2016). *Fees Must Fall: Student Revolt, Decolonisation and Governance in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press; Habib, A. (2018). *Rebels and Rage: Reflecting on #FeesMustFall*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball; Jansen, J. (2017). *As by Fire: The End of the South African University*. Cape Town: Tafelberg; Langa, M. (Ed.) (2017). #Hashtag: Analysis of the #FeesMustFall movement at South African universities. Johannesburg and Cape Town: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation; Luescher-Mamashela, T.M. & Mugume, T. (2014). Student representation and multi-party politics in African higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*. 39(3): 500–515; Naidoo, L.-A. (2015). Needing to learn: #RhodesMustFall and the decolonisation of the university. *Independent Thinking*, 2: 7; Ngcaweni, W. & Ngcaweni, B. (Eds) (2018). *We Are No Longer at Ease: The Struggle for #FeesMustFall*. Johannesburg: Jacana; Nyamnjoh, F.B. (2016). *#RhodesMustFall: Nibbling at Resilient Colonialism in South Africa*. Bamenda: Langaa RPCIG.
- 9 Klemenčič, M., Luescher, T.M. & Jowi, O.J. (2015). Student power in Africa. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 3(1), vii-xiv. DOI: 10.14426/jsaa.v3i1.99.

policy. In this notion of student representation, students as a group are a highly invested actor in the decision-making processes.<sup>10</sup>

On the one hand, student governance includes in its scope the structures, processes and relationships of student government, how it is organised, governs and is governed, and how student representatives relate to the collective student body and to the authorities which they try to influence. On the other hand, it also refers to the system of formal and informal operative rules that govern all domains of student life and thus to the codified student–university relationship.<sup>11</sup> Focusing specifically on the agentic capabilities of students is a way to understand ‘the constellations of authority and accountability’ that manifest in the ‘cultures of governance’<sup>12</sup> and the manner they operate and are experienced in student life ultimately. If governance is about rule-making (which provides the criteria for resource allocation), then ‘the governed’ should have a determining voice in a system underpinned by democratic ideals.

Where student representation is absent or ineffectual (which is largely the same), students have historically resorted to protest action to voice their grievances and express their preferences. The latter is what Altbach defined as student activism: the various, typically oppositional, forms of *public* expressions of student power.<sup>13</sup> Student representation and student activism are both run by the currency of student power. Pabian and Minksová suggest that there are two categories of student politics: ‘student activism in “extraordinary” governance processes like student protests and rallies’ and ‘the “ordinary” processes of elections and board negotiations’.<sup>14</sup>

What is ordinary and what is extraordinary in a particular context may be open to debate – where protesting has become normalised, it would not seem that extraordinary. Whatever the case, the *interrelation* between student representation and activism is not only conceptual (or normative) – it is empirical and historical. The formal representation of students in higher education governance has its roots

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10 Klemenčič, M. (2012). Student representation in Western Europe. *European Journal of Higher Education*, 2(1): 2–19. DOI: 10.1080/21568235.2012.695058; Klemenčič, M. (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.

11 Luescher, T.M. (in press). Student governance. In M.J. Amey & M.E. David (Eds), *Sage Encyclopedia of Higher Education*, 5v. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

12 Hall, M., Symes, A. & Luescher, T.M. (2004). The culture of governance in South African higher education. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 26(1): 91–107.

13 Altbach, P.G. (2006). Student politics: Activism and culture. In J.J.F. Forest & P.G. Altbach (Eds), *International Handbook of Higher Education*. Dordrecht: Springer.

14 Pabian, P. & Minksová, L. (2011). Students in higher education governance in Europe: Contrasts, commonalities and controversies. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 17(3): 262.

precisely in student agitation to this end, and it can vacillate back and forth at any critical point.<sup>15</sup>

Student representation, if diligently following the principles of democratic governance and embedded within a democratic university, would be a powerful example of democracy-at-work, and the efficacy of student representatives in university governance an important lesson that democracy (not technocracy, aristocracy or meritocracy) works. Can there be a university in a democracy without democratising the university?<sup>16</sup> Can there be a university in Africa without Africanising the university?<sup>17</sup> Both a university's academic project and its human project have to respond to these questions.<sup>18</sup> As much as the academic project should be humanising (rather than dehumanising), so should the human project be knowledge-based in ways that bond the university community and enhance student engagement and success.<sup>19</sup> Universities cannot simply be diploma mills; they must be life laboratories for active and collaborative learning, for the development of competences and critical understanding, and for living democratic citizenship.<sup>20</sup> All of the accounts in this book attest to the importance of the learning associated with personal growth and development, both within their institutions and in their further careers, political awakening and the development of critical, democratic citizenship.

This potential, of course, also presents challenges. Student representatives who do not know or adhere to the principles of democratic governance, who misuse the powers vested in them for personal gain or party-political interests, or who fail to meet student expectations due to inactivity, immaturity or incompetence, feed cynicism over the state of democracy and the university within their student

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- 15 Luescher-Mamashela, T.M. (2013). Student representation in university decision-making: Good reasons, a new lens? *Studies in Higher Education*. 38(10): 1442–1456; Cele, M.B.G. (2015) Student politics and the funding of higher education in South Africa: The case of the University of the Western Cape, 1995–2005. Doctoral dissertation, University of the Western Cape, South Africa
  - 16 Habermas, J. (1971) [1967]. The University in a democracy: Democratisation of the university. In *Toward a Rational Society: Student Protest, Science, and Politics*. London: Heinemann.
  - 17 Yesufu, T.M. (Ed.) (1973). *Creating the African University: Emerging Issues of the 1970s*. Ibadan: Oxford University Press.
  - 18 The notion of a university pursuing at the same time 'an academic project' and 'a human project' is taken from the University of the Free State's transformation plans during Prof. Jonathan Jansen's term as vice-chancellor.
  - 19 Tinto, V. (2014). Tinto's South Africa lectures. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 2(2): 5–28. DOI: 10.14426/jsaa.v2i2.66; also see: Kuh, G.D. (2009). The national survey of student engagement: Conceptual and empirical foundations. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 141, 5–20; Astin, A. (1997). Student involvement: A development theory for higher education. In E.J. Whitt (Ed.), *College Student Affairs Administration* (ASHE Reader Series). USA: Simon & Schuster.
  - 20 Luescher-Mamashela, T.M., Ssembatya, V., Brooks, E., Lange, R.S., Mugume, T. & Richmond, S. (2015). Student engagement and citizenship competences in African universities. In N. Cloete, P. Maassen, & T. Bailey (Eds), *Knowledge Production and Contradictory Functions in African Higher Education*. Cape Town: African Minds; McAdam, D. (1999). The biographical impact of activism. In M. Giugni, D. McAdam & C. Tilly (Eds), *How Social Movements Matter*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

association, university and country. Hindsight is instructive. In some of the accounts in this book, former student leaders acknowledge failings in some areas, and poignantly discuss regrets over missed opportunities. Conversely, some of the institutional contexts they describe fail to provide an adequate context in which to build the student body and student leadership and to nurture students' investment in the development of the institution. They fail to supportively and constructively integrate the student voice into the curriculum as much as they fail to do so in the functions and operations of university life. In this respect they fail to give effect to academic freedom, co-responsibility for learning and co-construction of knowledge; they miss the opportunities of student engagement and the intentional and systematic cultivation of democratic norms, values and practices on campus and beyond.<sup>21</sup>

## Context and agency

In his seminal analysis of black student politics under apartheid, Badat argued that an analysis of student politics, the student movement and student political organisations 'could not be abstracted from the institutional conditions in the education and political arena and the particular historical conditions under which they operated'.<sup>22</sup> Correspondingly, understanding *post-apartheid* student leadership spanning almost a quarter of a century equally requires an understanding of the changing context of student agency, including the relevant structural and specific conjunctural conditions in society at large, the higher education sector, the specific institution from where student leadership is exerted and the student body or section thereof from which it arises.<sup>23</sup> Yet, what approach to establishing the relevant context should a new study take? Should it be a top-down one whereby the analysts offer their own 'objective' reading of 'the context'? Or should it take a bottom-up approach, whereby the individual student leaders as the agents of student political activity contextualise their reflections on leadership in ways they consider relevant?

This book gives way to the latter approach. The methodology makes explicit provision for the former student leaders to recall the context of their involvement and to contextualise their reflections in terms of the larger societal developments,

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21 Klemenčič, M., Bergan, S. & Primožič, R. (Eds) (2015). *Student Engagement in Europe: Society, Higher Education and Student Governance*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing; Luescher-Mamashela, T.M., Ssembatya, V., Brooks, E., Lange, R.S., Mugume, T. & Richmond, S. (2015). Student engagement and citizenship competences in African universities. In N. Cloete, P. Maassen, & T. Bailey (Eds), *Knowledge Production and Contradictory Functions in African Higher Education*. Cape Town: African Minds.

22 Badat, S.M. (1999). *Black Student Politics*. p. 351.

23 Badat, S.M. (2017). Theorising and researching university student politics in South Africa. Paper presented on 6 April 2017 at the Ali Mazrui Centre for Higher Education Studies, Faculty of Education, with the Postgraduate School, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg.

higher education and university-specific conditions prevalent at their time as they recall it. Thus, each individual chapter foregrounds what is considered by the respective student leader as the relevant context for understanding their background, standpoint, and reading of the times. In addition, we do a cross-analysis of all chapters to return to the key question around higher education governance and student representation. The concluding chapter engages with the former student leaders' views as a collective and in relation to other analyses of the changing context, as a way to consider continuities and discontinuities in student leadership and higher education governance.<sup>24</sup>

## Design and method

Each of the 12 reflections' chapters can be seen as a focused biography of a very special and specific time in a young person's political life. In this regard, our design of the research draws on life history methodology to give effect to our commitment to foregrounding the subjective reality of the former student leaders and their understanding of context, process and change from a biographical perspective.<sup>25</sup> Correspondingly, this also means that the trustworthiness of their accounts is not judged by the accuracy of recall of specific events, processes and persons involved (even if we cross-checked a number of dates, places, names, and so forth with them and other available records); rather, it is in the authenticity of their personal reflections and the relevance of the sum of learnings they offer.<sup>26</sup>

Originally, we envisaged two methods of generating material: prospective participants could choose to either submit their own reflections in writing (with or without guidance from our interview schedule) or to be interviewed. It turned out that all participants opted for the latter and all the chapters here are therefore based on verbatim transcripts of audio-recorded interviews conducted mostly face-to-face in a space of the interviewee's choice. Only in two cases was the interview conducted telephonically. While the interview schedule was semi-structured and included a detailed set of questions grouped into six topics, the questions were presented in a conversational and flexible manner, depending on the direction an interviewee took. The interview sessions thus did not follow a rigid format as the interviewers were cautious not to 'over-steer' and rather allowed the interviewees

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24 Jansen, J. (2004). Changes and continuities in South Africa's higher education system, 1994 to 2004. In L. Chisholm (Ed.), *Changing Class: Education and Social Change in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. Cape Town: HSRC Press; Council on Higher Education (CHE) (2004). *South African Higher Education in the First Decade of Democracy*. Pretoria: CHE; Council on Higher Education (CHE) (2016). *South African Higher Education Reviewed: Two Decades of Democracy*. Pretoria: CHE.

25 Babbie, E. & Mouton, J. (2001). *The Practice of Social Research*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press Southern Africa.

26 We are grateful for the comments of the three peer reviewers of the manuscript who pointed out minor inconsistencies and inaccuracies that we cross-checked with the participants and with other records and subsequently corrected.



space to express their experiences and views in their own order, at their own pace, and using their own frames. As can be expected in an oral recall of personal history, participants from the earlier periods of 1994 to 2000 and beyond tend to conflate some events and have different and often more critical estimations of their role than those of the more recent periods, but this does not detract from the authenticity of their experience and their accounts.

### Selection of student leaders

The initial selection of student leaders was such that it sought to cover a representative set of institutions and a demographically representative set of ex-student leaders with a diversity of student political affiliations. In the process of selection, two experts of student politics in South Africa were consulted. The final group of published chapters reflects two limitations. First, a number of former student leaders that had been selected and were approached did not find the time or had little interest in participating. Second, there were pragmatic limitations, like budget and capacity to make visits and conduct research outside of the metropolitan centres where the CHE and the HSRC are located, and the size of the final book, which had an influence on the final selection. The original list included 25 former student leaders that represented the selection criteria indicated in Table 1.

However, it must also be said that the intention was never to interview all 25 selected leaders and include them in the book. Because of our interest in a longitudinal perspective, one that covers almost a quarter-century of student leadership, the primary classification of participants was in terms of three governance periods derived from earlier work of the CHE – i.e. the periods of 1994–2000, 2000–2010, 2010–2017 – and the primary aim was that there would be about four accounts per period.<sup>27</sup> In the earlier CHE volume on reflections of former vice-chancellors and deputy vice-chancellors, only eight reflections were published.<sup>28</sup> The target for the present book was to have more former leaders represented, understanding that student leaders' governance terms are normally much shorter than those of a vice-chancellor, and to allow for a more representative selection of institutions and student leaders. Eventually, from 14 interviews that were conducted for this project, 12 were developed into chapters and are published here. One interview remained incomplete and one chapter was not approved for publication by the former student leader for professional reasons. The final sample analysed against the selection criteria is indicated in Table 1.

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27 Lange, M.L. & Luescher-Mamashela, T.M. (2016). Governance. In Council on Higher Education (CHE), *South African Higher Education Reviewed: Two Decades of Democracy*. Pretoria: CHE.

28 Council on Higher Education (CHE) (2016). *Reflections of South African University Leaders, 1981–2014*. Cape Town: African Minds and Pretoria: CHE.

*Table 1 Selection criteria and participants*

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Participants' leadership background</b>	<b>No.</b>
Institutional type	University	9
	Comprehensive	2
	University of technology/Technikon	1
Historical classification of institution	Historically black	4
	Historically white	8
Geographical location of institution	Metropolitan	10
	Rural	2
Participants' gender	Female	4
	Male	7
	GNC*	1
Participants' race	African	9
	Coloured	1
	Indian	1
	White	1
Participants' political affiliation	Progressive Youth Alliance (PYA)**	8
	Democratic Alliance Students Organisation [DASO]	2
	Pan Africanist Student Movement of Azania [PASMA]	1
	Independent/other	1
Period of SRC-level leadership	1994–2000	3
	2000–2010	5
	2010–2017	4
Total participants		12

\* GNC = *gender non-conforming*

\*\* Consisting of the South African Students Congress (SASCO), African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) and the Young Communist League (YCL)

## Participants' backgrounds

In the broader perspective, the chapters in this book include the experiences of a truly diverse range of former student leaders. In terms of political affiliation, the participants were allied to a range of partisan political formations during their student leadership years, including the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL), the South African Students Congress (SASCO) and the Young Communist League (YCL), which eventually became known collectively as the Progressive Youth Alliance (PYA); the Pan Africanist Student Movement of Azania (PASMA); the Democratic Alliance Students Organisation (DASO); and others who were independent. Despite their inclusion on the initial list of 25, none of the former student leaders from the Economic Freedom Fighters Student Command (EFFSC) or from the South African Democratic Students Movement (SADESMO) availed themselves for participation.

In terms of socioeconomic backgrounds, a range is represented, including former leaders hailing from wealthy suburban communities and metropolitan townships to others from rural farming backgrounds or rural locations. The diverse backgrounds and early political socialisation in the home environment

of the ex-student leaders may account for some of the changes over time and variation between institutions in student political behaviour.<sup>29</sup>

While disciplinary background was not a criterion for selection, it seems that there is some level of commonality in their academic backgrounds, with most having studied broadly in the social sciences. Five studied political science or public administration, four studied law, two studied in commerce, and one had a background in sociology. Moreover, most of the participants were undergraduate students during their SRC years. This also means that postgraduate related issues do not feature sufficiently in their reflections. Whether and how SRCs are addressing the challenges faced by postgraduates in general, and black postgraduate students in particular, and the obstacles they face peculiar to different institutional contexts, such as postgraduates at historically black institutions, rural institutions and universities of technology, are therefore aspects of student governance that will require additional work.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, as intended, the final selection covers a good spread of reflective accounts over time. Due to the limitations noted above, there are unfortunately not as many rural universities and universities of technology represented in the final sample as we would have liked. However, we are confident that the present book covers a sufficiently broad spectrum for debate and opens up new areas for further interrogation. An overview of the final selection of ex-student leaders, their institutional affiliation and their involvement in university-level student politics and SRC is given in Table 2.

### **Approval process and ethics**

In order to realise the approach chosen for the project, research ethics had to be considered more deeply; after all, we asked the research participants to waive any expectation of anonymity and to give permission to be personally identified in the chapters and in subsequent research outputs based on the transcripts. In return, therefore, they retained a higher level of control over their accounts and the research outputs than is typical in social research. Thus, over and above informed consent to participate at the outset and be interviewed (with the proviso of being able to withdraw at any time), after the interview transcripts had been transcribed, the participants were asked to identify parts that may lead to stigmatisation, for example, or any other matters that they would like to have removed, made confidential or corrected in some way. Then, once the transcripts had been corrected, approved and were rewritten into chapters, the participants were again invited to comment, make changes and eventually give approval. This was readily taken up. In this latter process, more potentially controversial passages

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29 Although this is implied in several chapters and explicitly pointed out by some student leaders, to make this argument will require further research.

30 We are grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers of the book for pointing out this limitation.

Table 2 Participants' involvement in student politics at South African public universities

	pre-1994	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	
Muzi Sikhakhane	WITS																									
Prishani Naidoo		WITS																								
Jerome September			UCT																							
Kenny Mlungisi Bafo					UCT																					
David Maimela											UP															
Xolani Zuma													UZ													
Zuki Mqolomba														UCT												
Kwenzma Madlala																	MUT									
Lorne Hallendorff																			UCT							
Hlomela Bucwa																					NMU					
Vuyani Sokhaba																						UWC				
Mpho Khathi																										UFS

**Key**

-  Involvement in student politics at university level
-  Involvement in SRC
- WITS Institutional SRC, see list of abbreviations and acronyms on page v for the full names of universities

and passages that could possibly be incriminating or lead to stigmatisation were moderated or removed from the draft chapters, typically upon the advice of the editors. Overall, the iterative process involved a varied level of involvement of the former student leaders in the co-production of their chapter. In several cases it involved face-to-face meetings over and above the initial interview meeting, and in all cases it included numerous emails and calls until a final chapter was acceptable and approved. Every reflection chapter published in this book has therefore been approved by the respective former student leader, who is acknowledged as co-author thereof.

Given the risks involved in a research project of this nature, we submitted the project conceptualisation, design, methodology and instruments to a ethics review process and were granted ethics clearance by the HSRC Research Ethics Committee in June 2018.

## **How to read this book**

For those who jumped right here, this is a good place to start. But our recommendation would be to restart at the beginning of this chapter for those who are interested in knowing the main issues and questions, and the problems on the ground, politically and conceptually, that gave rise to this book.

### **Overview of the reflections' chapters**

The accounts of Muzi Sikhakhane, Prishani Naidoo and Jerome September start the chronologically arranged reflections' chapters. Having been involved in student leadership from the early to the late 1990s means that they tend to reflect more deeply on their apartheid-era upbringing and the way this shaped their views on and experience of higher education, governance and student representation. Advocate Muzi Sikhakhane SC begins his reflections by recalling his upbringing in rural KwaZulu-Natal, his involvement in struggle politics in the mid to late 1980s, his memories of the violence between the ANC and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), and eventually, how he got to Wits and was roped into student politics and became president of the Wits SRC.

The reflections in chapter 3 also come from Wits, which is where Dr Prishani Naidoo ended up becoming SRC vice-president in 1995, and eventually president of the South African Universities SRC in 1996, after she had a first experience of university life and student politics at the University of Durban-Westville (now the University of KwaZulu-Natal) in the early 1990s. Naidoo's chapter is a reminder of how deeply involved student leaders were in transformation initiatives in their institutions and at national level in the mid-1990s. Fast-forwarding 20 years to a time when Naidoo is back at Wits as an academic, her insights into the start of the #EndOutsourcing, #October6 and #FeesMustFall campaigns at Wits in 2015 are equally invaluable.

Jerome September recalls the alienation he experienced when arriving at UCT and settling into his residence in the mid-1990s. During his two SRC terms, student representatives returned to the University Council and Senate in 1998 after the proclamation of the HE Act (after years of having boycotted them as ‘illegitimate structures’). He remembers the hopes that student leaders had for co-operative governance to work and the consternation he felt when his SRC lost the battle about outsourcing with the university management under Vice-Chancellor Dr Mamphela Ramphele. This battle, which would be taken up again and again over the next 20 years by students, eventually led to the #EndOutsourcing campaign of 2015/16. Since his years in student leadership, September has made a career in Student Affairs at UCT, Sol Plaatje University and Wits University. His professional experience adds greatly to the richness of insights he gives into the relationship between student representation and protests.

Kenny Bafo’s chapter provides the bridge between the late 1990s and early 2000s. Bafo had a first stint at UWC from 1997 until he was excluded at the end of 1998. He returned to UWC in 2000 and his chapter provides a lesson on how to build a student political organisation from the ground up in less than three years. With the SRC election victory of Bafo as presidential candidate in 2002, PASMA came to run the SRC of UWC for the first time – taking it from SASCO. Bafo tells in his inimitable way how his SRC struggled to catch up with the load of expectation and responsibilities placed upon them, while they had very little support and almost no institutional memory to draw on at all. Bafo remained at UWC as an associate lecturer until his election to the Council of the City of Cape Town in 2016 and thus was able to observe (and comment on) the emergence of #FeesWillFall at UWC.

In chapter 6, David Maimela tells his story of arriving at UP in 2001 and encountering a strange and oppressive residence culture on campus. Having been involved in the Congress of South African Students at high-school level already, he became a leader of SASCO at UP and was eventually deployed into the SRC where he soon realised that black students’ concerns could not be addressed by an SRC that had a majority of Freedom Front members. Reminiscent of student politics at historically English-tuition white universities in the 1980s, Maimela ended up having to represent black student interests outside the SRC, thus illustrating that the SRC model of student representation might fail to represent the broad range of student experiences and interests in large and diverse institutions like UP. Maimela’s reflections also draw on his experience as SASCO president nationally, and his involvement in ANC political structures during those years.

Xolani Zuma spent his first year in the SRC in 2005/06 and became SRC president for 2006/07 at UZ. In his chapter, he reflects on partisanship in student politics and particularly the rivalry between ANC- and IFP-aligned student organisations. His chapter further stands out by his reflections on the many lessons he learnt: on personal and political ethics, managing resources and corruption, and on the importance of understanding the distinction between politics and real life.

Zukiswa Mqolomba reflects in chapter 8 on her SRC presidency at UCT in 2006/07, drawing frequent comparison between the issues her SRC dealt with and what was taken up almost a decade later by #RhodesMustFall. In the final part of her chapter, Mqolomba reflects on the huge impact the experience of student leadership at UCT has had on her professional career and others who served with her in the SRC.

Having been SRC secretary-general in 2009/10, speaker of student parliament in 2012 and SRC president in 2012/13, and being the current chair of Convocation, Kwenza Madlala has vast amounts of insight into the governance of MUT. He starts his account by recalling how he was roped into the SRC in the midst of rivalry between SADESMO and SASCO at MUT. Madlala then shares his reflections on his SRC's approach to student representation in committees. His chapter stands out for his condemnation of managements that first impede institutional progress when students raise an idea and then appropriate the same idea to take credit for it. Madlala is also among those student leaders who comment in detail on the differences of student politics at historically white and black universities in South Africa, and on the continuities and discontinuities in student politics leading up to the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall protests.

Lorne Hallendorff became SRC president of UCT for 2012/13, running as an independent candidate after he had spent a first term in the SRC in 2011/12. During his SRC presidency, he made a concerted effort to work through the university's system of governance structures and committees – similar to Mqolomba – to address matters as diverse as financial exclusions, the academic timetable, and the divisive debate on UCT's race-based admission policy. The latter is often cited as part of the 'origin story' of #RhodesMustFall. Thus, Hallendorff's chapter is highly instructive for a better understanding of the emergence of #RhodesMustFall in terms of a longitudinal perspective of student politics at UCT. Like the other former student leaders in this book, he argues that 2015 did not take him by surprise at all: for too long had student leaders been frustrated on the same issues.

Chapter 11 tells the story of Hlomela Bucwa when she was first an SRC member and eventually became the SRC president (affiliated to DASO) at NMU. Bucwa recalls how she sought to pursue her organisation's principles by putting students first and running a corruption-free SRC at NMU. She counts among her achievements that her SRC fundraised R9 million for students in the face of the inability of NSFAS to respond to students' dire needs. In her reflections on #FeesMustFall, NSFAS features as one of the main sources of students' frustration with an uncaring and unresponsive system.

An important story running through the first part of chapter 12 is the so-called battle of the two Brians at UWC. Vuyani Sokhaba was deputy secretary-general of the UWC SRC then. Sokhaba's second term as SRC president extended into 2015 and the time when #RhodesMustFall and #OpenStellenbosch activists

sought to inspire a similar decolonisation movement at UWC. Sokhaba critiques #RhodesMustFall from the UWC point of view, explaining why no decolonisation movement ever took off on a campus where students had fought apartheid and colonisation almost since it was founded as part of the extension of apartheid to the higher education sector in 1959.

Mpho Khati was also active for two terms in the SRC, in her case on the Bloemfontein campus of the UFS from 2014 to 2016. While her first term focused on improving the plight of black first-generation and first-year students, her second term was distinctly defined by the #FeesMustFall campaign at the UFS which, in the aftermath of the #ShimlaPark violence of February 2016, became increasingly consuming and eventually traumatic. Khati's chapter also gives various examples of the way university governance processes fail students and how university leaders fail to understand student issues and student political culture.

Different readers will find the reflections of the former student leaders important for different reasons. In a book where every chapter can stand alone as an important insider reflection on leadership and governance in a specific institution and the sector at large, and where each chapter also represents an autobiographical excerpt from a young student leader's life, it is impossible to do justice to each chapter in a few lines' overview.

The final chapter of this book draws out a first set of findings from a cross-chapter analysis, pointing out continuities and discontinuities over a quarter-century of student leadership, and concluding with a call to take student leaders more seriously and to collectively reimagine a new, democratic and responsive system of higher education governance in academic and support departments, faculties, institutions and at national level.



# chapter 2

## Muzi Sikhakhane

University of the Witwatersrand, SRC president 1994/95

*Denyse Webbstock, Muzi Sikhakhane & Ntokozo Bhengu*

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### Brief biography

Advocate Muzi Sikhakhane SC is a practising advocate and senior counsel in Johannesburg. He was the first elected group leader of Victoria Mxenge Group of Advocates, which is a group within the Johannesburg Bar, from 2011 to 2012. He is currently the national chairperson of the recently formed Pan African Bar Association of South Africa (PABASA). He was admitted as an advocate in 2000, joined the Johannesburg Bar in 2002 and took silk in 2015. Sikhakhane has served as an acting judge of the High Court on several occasions.

This chapter is based on an interview conducted by Denyse Webbstock and Ntokozo Bhengu on 31 July 2018.

### Early influences

#### Childhood

Advocate Muzi Sikhakhane's involvement in student politics began when as a young man fresh out of school he entered Indumiso Teacher Training College. It was to continue for many years, most notably as the president of the SRC at Wits in the immediate post-apartheid years. Asked about the factors that influenced him to become a student leader, he traces his motivation to the experiences of extreme inequality of his early childhood that engendered an abiding need to fight the injustices he felt and saw around him.

They are very unusual influences, in the sense that I come from a rural place that was completely apolitical when I grew up. It's a far-flung rural area in Bulwer [in KwaZulu-Natal, or KZN] with no anti-apartheid struggle history. I come from what I would call one of the poorest families in that village. It was, and still is, a staunch Catholic family, surrounded by farms and mountains. We lived in a rural area with no services, and many that were lucky to work did so as labourers on the white-owned farms. I saw my mother work on a farm for about 60 cents a day and my father doing odd jobs. It was also what we as children did during school holidays. The flat, leafy vast land belonged to two or three white farmers, while the small rocky area was for hundreds of indigenous rural villagers, all of whom were poor. That contradiction, that stark reality always surprised me – that I lived in a village that was terribly poor, but three farms surrounded this village with just three white men owning probably 20 times the village where we lived. And our parents worked for them, and I think that was the influence.

I was, and still am, a Catholic. There was a Catholic mission in the area. The priests were white German priests mostly, and every time we went to this church, it always surprised me that the farmers, who were rude and harsh to our parents, had a special place in the church. When I was an altar boy, the priests allowed white farmers and their children to have a separate queue for the holy sacrament. Black people were to wear jackets when they went to church, but white kids and their parents from the surrounding farms always came in their sleeveless shirts and vests. Observing those things in a poor area made me question the way things were, and why it was that Africans – who as far as I knew were the original people – always lived a hard life. This reality was striking to me and seemed unjust and odd. My father and many of his peers lived a hard life. He died when I was 11. I saw my father work for SAPPI Forests, chopping trees for a wage that never seemed to make us live better lives. He was chopping wood from 6am to 6pm, with a teenage white supervisor calling him names. So I think that lived reality, that rural poverty, that blatant injustice, shaped how I saw the world and inspired me to rebel against it. Unlike many in the area, I was lucky that I was able to go to school. I think that is how we survived what I think was the dehumanising poverty of our family. We went to school in order to change that sad reality that humiliated us. A lot of my peers that I grew up with didn't go to school because, I think, they were not as poor as we were, and I think, they had some false sense of security as their parents had some cattle or worked in the cities. I was personally able to survive that mindset and environment through my mother's desire to get me to school. And I think when I went to school, I met other influences. My mother's sense of justice and absolute honesty were the main influence. I can't talk about my father that much. I saw him suffering and then he died when I was 11. My mother's sense of justice, and the fact that

my mother – as poor as she was – made it a point that whatever we had, we shared it with villagers who were poor, is what taught me to think I must fight for others. I still have an obsession with justice and fairness to date.

## Family

Sikhakhane's mother's placing importance on the value of education was central to his development, and allowed him to escape the narrow confines of his surroundings, both physically and mentally. As he explains:

I am lucky, because a lot of people that I grew up with – through no fault of theirs – couldn't escape. There is a book about Oliver Tambo, *Beyond the Engeli Mountains*,<sup>31</sup> that I associate with, because I was really surrounded by mountains. Those mountains are physical – something you can see – but a rural area is both physical and psychological, because it hides you from the world. There was no TV, we had no radio at home until I finished standard 10... you actually had no direct contact with any other world, and so your ambitions are also limited – I think I once entertained the idea of working in the mines after standard 8 because those who were richer, were guys who had gone to join the mines in Joburg and would come back looking a little sophisticated. Having lived in Johannesburg all my adult life I came to know that the view I had of the mines was a little distorted.

That was as far as it went with the good life. I had never seen anyone who was a nurse or anything else. A teacher, or someone who worked in the mines, were my sort of reference point. I think you are lucky if you can get out psychologically, you can escape the psychological prison of rural poverty. And, if your parents like school, they are not seduced by short-term desires to have their kid work. My mother didn't want me to work for any white farmers. Against my will sometimes, I thought. Self-reliance was very important to her.

Sikhakhane attributes many of the values he holds dear to his mother's strong guidance and discipline in moral matters.

My mother was firm, had a good sense of justice. I think the idea that you must never steal somebody's money comes from my mum. We would walk down the street, and I would find a R10 note and be very happy because that meant that day we would eat, and I would give it to my mum proudly. Up to today, I could never steal public money, or any money, because my mother would walk back with you for two kilometres and ask you, 'Where did you

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31 Luli, C. (2004). *Oliver Tambo: Beyond the Engeli Mountains*. Cape Town: New Africa Books.

pick up the money?’ and you would say, ‘Here,’ and she would say, ‘Put it back there.’ And you stay hungry, but with your dignity. You don’t take somebody else’s money.

## High school

There were other influences too, particularly at the boarding school he attended, Polela High in Bulwer. There he met a boy who later became a bishop of the Lutheran Church, Bishop Emmanuel Nzuza, who had a profound influence on Sikhakhane’s intellectual development as a political activist.

When I met him in standard 9, he was this young fellow – we were both like 16 years old or he was slightly older than me – we were sort of ‘black consciousness’ at the time, and we discussed politics almost every day in the dormitory. This fellow, in solidarity with me, would even wear school uniform with me at social functions, just to ensure that my poverty did not stick out. I didn’t teach him much, but he taught me a lot, and we became close. We went our separate ways at the end of ’83. By that time, both of us had been wrongly accused of organising some food boycott or something related to food, and the boarding master thought it was me and him behind it, because we always discussed politics ...

But this was unrelated to me – in fact I wasn’t even there when it happened. I had gone out. I had been asked (by the same boarding master who accused us) to leave as I was owing boarding fees. I think that shaped my political views, and just generally, if you go to Pietermaritzburg and you see the poverty in the surrounding rural areas ... So, in ’84 when I got to Indumiso [Teacher Training] College, I joined AZASO [Azanian Students’ Organisation]<sup>32</sup> almost in the first week of getting there. That was the beginning of my formal involvement in political activism.

As he explains:

It [AZASO] was at first a Black Consciousness student movement which was one of the first to jump ship and join the UDF [United Democratic Front]. The name has always been misleading to other people because they think it is part of AZAPO [Azanian People’s Organisation]. It wasn’t, they were called charterists. I joined a boycott that was happening in the first two months at college, and I think it’s my activities around that time that made me a student leader even in my first year at College and I led that throughout until I left in 1986. I had been part of that, I had been detained I don’t know how

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32 Formed in 1979.

many times – I lost count – and that is how I knew Peter Kerchhoff.<sup>33</sup> Peter Kerchhoff and I were dragged from a meeting in his offices and detained for no reason in Pietermaritzburg and released on a Sunday. I still don't know what we had done; they didn't tell me what we had done.

## Context of getting involved in student politics

Sikhakhane's experiences as a political activist – he had joined the ANC when he was about 19, and later the UDF – and an AZASO student leader at Indumiso College in the mid-1980s in KwaZulu-Natal, were to prove even more traumatic and led to him, as he puts it, being 'kicked out of' the province. The context of the time was the violence between the ANC and the IFP. At the time, Sikhakhane was working together with Cassius Lubisi and Reggie Hadebe,<sup>34</sup> an ANC leader in the Midlands. His time in KZN ended brutally, with him being attacked and shot by members of the IFP.

The story unfolds as follows:

When I finished [college], I realised I couldn't teach in KZN because I couldn't teach in a KwaZulu government school. All of us at AZASO had been detained at some point or another. We didn't know why they said they couldn't employ us. I went to a high school near KwaMashu, and after two hours the principal came back from the regional head office and said he had been instructed not to employ me. And then I ended up in Bulwer, in a KwaZulu government secondary school, where I taught from February to October 1987, until I was told that the KwaZulu government wanted me to leave. I was expelled. I was suspended for no reason. I was just teaching. I loved the rural community and worshipped with them every Sunday. Of course, I had been in the UDF in those years. But there was no politics in the school.

I was just teaching and hoped to make a difference in the upliftment of that community. One day the principal told me he had been instructed to let me go. I left only briefly, as there was a boycott and students demanded that I stay because there were exams coming, and I taught more classes than were allocated to me. I was teaching English, Zulu, and history because there was a shortage of teachers. It was a rural area. I was also the choir master and music teacher. I was then attacked on 12 November 1987 by a group that purported

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33 Organiser of the anti-apartheid organisation Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness (PACSA).

34 Cassius Lubisi was a student at the time and is now director-general in the Presidency. Reggie Hadebe was an ANC Midlands executive committee member who was shot dead when the car in which he was travelling was ambushed by named members of the IFP between Richmond and Ixopo, Natal, on 27 October 1992.

to be Inkatha members, accompanied by police, and that's how I left KZN. I survived the battle with them.

How had Sikhakhane understood the motivation for the attack?

You know, it was just Inkatha. I had refused to join the Inkatha Party – most teachers in rural areas there joined – and I had made it clear that I was not going to do that. I had clashed with Inkatha people who frequently came to take kids from the school every day, as I thought it was anti-education to take kids to rallies or meetings during school hours. It was not because I wanted them to go to an ANC rally or UDF – there was no political activity in KZN, except Inkatha activity.

I had raised it with the principal that this idea that someone from Inkatha walks in, kids must leave classes and assemble, it's a bit anti-freedom struggle. So, there was the clash, and that is how I left and how I ended up in Joburg. I can tell you about sleeping in the streets of Joburg and all of that. But, ja, I was injured – I was stabbed and shot by those people.

Sikhakhane had to leave KZN in a hurry, and was helped to make his escape by train within two days by Reverend Lund,<sup>35</sup> who had sheltered him after the incident.

So that's how I got here. Anyway, when I was here, I was already a member of the NEUSA. That was a union of teachers called the National Education Union of South Africa led by Reggie Hadebe with Thami Mseleku. I could only teach in a Catholic school because had I gone to a government school I would have been followed and I would have been arrested or killed.

That his home province had become dangerous for Sikhakhane is illustrated in the story he relates about having to bury his mother twice. She died in 1998, and even after the end of apartheid, he was not able to bury her near her birthplace but only in KwaMashu, to where they had escaped. It was only in 2007 that her body was exhumed for a proper burial in the Midlands.

### Becoming involved in the SRC at Wits

That Sikhakhane went to study at Wits was not part of his original plan. Fleeing KZN, he had decided on 14 November 1987 to leave the country altogether. He was to meet fellow comrades in order to facilitate his leaving, but they had

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35 For details, see: P. Denis (2013). The churches' response to political violence in the last years of apartheid: the case of Mpophomeni in the Natal Midlands. *Studia Historiae Ecclesasticae*, 39(1).

suggested that he work in the Transvaal UDF. With the help of his long-time friend, Aubrey Matshiqi, and Reggie Hadebe, he managed to get a position as a teacher at a Catholic school, St Mathew's High School in Soweto, and there he started a period of intense political activism.

My political life as an activist was bigger in Soweto in the UDF Area Committee, but remember at the time, I was also an MK [Umkhonto we Sizwe] operative, and I joined the Transvaal-based units of MK at the time. And so I remained in Soweto as a teacher and a member of the UDF Area Committee and became more known as an activist in Soweto than in KZN. Because in KZN, I had left in 1987 when no one was watching – and that's why most people think I am a Sowetan. I also regard myself as partly a Sowetan because the place allowed me to be an activist without harassing me. I am still indebted to Rockville Township, my second home.

In Soweto, together with many comrades, I formed branches of the ANC when it was unbanned, but it's because fate brought me to Soweto. But as I said, that is not where I was born. It's still an important part of my life because I think it was the first time I got to be active politically without being harassed. I am not saying it was easy, we were running away from the police, but KZN was a painful place for me. I was trying to help poor people, but the same poor people were calling people to kill us because we were regarded as terrorists for demanding that chiefs treat them with dignity. The same poor people we were trying to help. It was a contradiction in a way, because as I told you, the farmers – I resented the wealth they had at the expense and toil of our parents – but actually, it's our neighbours who called us out, because they were convinced we were terrorists and all of these things. Soweto was a very different place for me. For the first time, I joined forces with other activists and we were all running away from the police, not our own neighbours.

Sikhakhane and Matshiqi were arrested in 1990 for MK activities. Sikhakhane's MK unit was directly linked to Chris Hani, who arranged bail for them. Sikhakhane remembers that Hani had said to him that he must go back to school (study) because, having seen what had happened in liberation movements all over the world, it would be important to be independent when liberation came and not rely on government or liberation movements for a job. Sikhakhane declares he is still indebted to him for that advice.

That's when I went to Wits. I had already been studying through UNISA [University of South Africa]. While I was teaching, I was studying at UNISA. So, I went back to Wits after I went on trial and Chris died in 1993, in April, and I think it was after that I put in my resignation letter without knowing where I was going. But I knew I was going to school and I went to Wits in

'94, and I didn't want to be active at all. I went there to study and not do anything and I still attribute my involvement to Kenneth Creamer and the guy who is now the CEO of the IEC [Independent Electoral Commission], Sy Mamabolo.

I was sitting quietly as a student, and no one knew where I was from, but these comrades seemed to know who I was because I had been active in the area, and they asked me to be part of the student activism at Wits. I was tired, I had been an activist all my life, I had come from a trial and this time I wanted to go back to school to prepare for my future. Well, fate had other plans. And that is how, accidentally, I got involved in SASCO at Wits and then I was elected SRC president, together with a varied group of activists.

### *From activism to student politics*

Sikhakhane was to spend five years at Wits, doing first a BA in English and history, but he studied political science and philosophy as well, before doing his LLB. For the term he was SRC president, Sikhakhane remembers that he did not take the usual sabbatical that SRC presidents took. Nor did he, on principle, accept any allowance that was available to SRC presidents who so chose. Sikhakhane's life experience was very different to those of his peers in student leadership. Having had a decade's worth of intense activism behind him, he had a different frame of reference from students who were new to activism. He relates how he had to balance his own activist experience with students who were now as radical as he had been in the 80s. This was his second round in student politics.

To balance that is very difficult, because sometimes experience teaches you to be wiser and cautious and it moderates you in a way, and I was trying to manage a student movement in a changing South Africa. And SA [at the time] was not only changing physically, it was changing psychologically. There is a Mandela, there is the ANC, but the lived reality of students in these historically racist, white institutions had not changed. Nothing much had changed – except hope. Yet, there was an expectation to tone down our historical anti-establishment posture and rhetoric.

And hope is a funny commodity, because it's elusive. You are being told to tone things down but these institutions are still racist, they are still doing what they used to do, and I think the white liberal institutions are more difficult because people there almost don't think of themselves as prejudiced. When you are at loggerheads with them, you have a tougher battle than someone fighting an Afrikaner in Ventersdorp because you may be fighting someone who has a reputation as a liberal, yet in your lived encounters with them, you face their prejudices head-on.

And at the same time, the historical conditions of white racism in institutions persisted. The country was expecting it was the end of protests,



because there is a new government. Conditions outside are not conducive to protests, but your lived realities in these institutions are such that very little has changed. Black students are still sleeping in the libraries, they have no accommodation and they are excluded every year, so the conditions that faced the students in 1990 are still facing them in 1994, but we have a government that has credibility, and when you protest you face a barrage of criticism from people who believe you should not protest because we now have an ANC government. Mandela had been unleashed – he is still being unleashed now. You can't complain about something without people unleashing Mandela on you. Be like Mandela, and all of that. So sometimes we were faced with difficult conditions.

I don't think it is criticism that is unjustified, but it came from ANC people who are now in government – and they don't understand why you are protesting because they are trying to fix things, but you are also faced with situations that are difficult for you and whenever you protest it's regarded as embarrassing the ANC. But you are protesting against administration at these universities, and so it was a very difficult time to manage because the contradictions, I think, were sharper in 1994. There was hope, and hope lived side by side with the hard conditions that black people had always experienced and found difficult to manage.

## **The SRC and internal organisation**

### **The role of the SRC**

The role of the SRC at Wits in the immediate post-apartheid years, was, according to Sikhakhane, circumscribed by the external political conditions.

We learned to engage the African National Congress [ANC] as students in order for them to understand that the only way you could bridge that gap [between the hope and the lived realities] was by interacting with our government, and the ANC in particular, to say, 'Yes, you do expect us to tone it down because you are now in power. Yes, we can do so, but we need your help with these institutions that continue to brandish your name in our faces when they continue with things which we feel we should challenge.'

And I think the ANC in 1994/95 was quite involved. As students we were invited to Shell House to meet with the ANC, and we continued to protest, but we did make the ANC understand what our issues were at the time, and that it was not about them, but we needed them to help us by engaging with the institutions of higher learning so that we could not just use the new political dispensation to blunt student struggles, but use it to tell universities it's time to think differently. It's time to confront their own prejudices.

## Main issues

Among the main issues of the time, Sikhakhane lists student exclusions, student fees, and what he calls ‘soft issues’, such as the need for management and academic staff to reflect the demographic of society.

The biggest issue had always been student exclusions, particularly at white universities because what happened is that poor students found themselves in tough conditions because they didn’t have accommodation, some of them just made it by the skin of their teeth to be there, and could not afford what a student needs in order to get on with their work. So when January came, a lot of them had failed and we used to intervene on their behalf just to see whether the university could be more compassionate about it. We were not encouraging that people should fail forever, but we felt that conditions of students had to be understood.

Secondly, I think students all the years had problems with fees. It’s an old battle, so we always wanted the university to accommodate those who had travelled far to seek education and to find them accommodation. And there are soft issues, but they are big ones. That when people go to university or a school – it happens today when my children go to school – I worry that the only black person they see is the one who is cutting the grass and the teachers are white, and in their heads psychologically they draw a distinction that knowledge is white, and hard labour is black, and we engaged the university that as students we would also like to be in a university where management reflects our society, the demographic of our society. We engaged management about how we wanted to see more black lecturers. We wanted to see more black people in management structures. We confronted it, and formed a structure which included academics, administration and students – it was a transformation committee at Wits. While things were changing, our universities were not, but I think changes started to happen. Makgoba became the deputy vice-chancellor, and we saw more of that.<sup>36</sup>

There were things we didn’t confront, and I wish we had. I am happy that students after us did. The students who led #RhodesMustFall are my role models sometimes. Because they challenged things we didn’t have time to challenge, what are called institutions of whiteness in society. We had other, bigger problems, but I think we confronted the issues of the time which were management issues, and issues of black poor students. But we hardly had time to engage with the curriculum. We tried, but I wish we had done more

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36 Prof. Malegapuru William Makgoba was the first black deputy vice-chancellor at Wits, appointed in 1995.

because the curriculum was important, but I suppose the issues we were facing were more bread and butter issues for us.

### *Communication*

Communication with students mostly followed a direct strategy, and as SRC President, Sikhakhane made it a point to go to faculty council or house committee meetings, and would try to engage directly on matters of concern. One example he cites is when he had been called an anti-Semite as he had allowed Muslim students to march, and he went to the South African Jewish Student Body to explain that they would have been allowed to march against a position as well. In general, the methods of communication involved noticeboards, mass meetings and general lectures with invited speakers on specific topics.

As the SRC, we engaged more with students face to face. We went to their meetings, we called mass meetings a lot, and spoke to students and whenever there were others who differed with us, we would call meetings and go there. So I think that was the method we used at the time.

Choosing the issues on which to focus attention was also part of a strategy.

We tried to focus on issues that the students could relate to. You can call a march on Palestine all you like, or what's happening in Syria, and students will hardly understand that. I don't think we ever had a protest that did not include issues that students felt strongly about. Even there, you would smuggle in something about what is happening in the country – about NEHAWU, the workers – but basically, the march would be about students. It's about exclusions, it's about accommodation. Of course, it could be broader, you could have demands that talk about the curriculum, talk about management of faculties as well, but we dealt with those issues that students are faced with on a daily basis – as long as we won the issues that were immediate and close to the hearts of students.

We wanted a black vice-chancellor – you can't get that over the seven days of a march, we knew we were not going to get that, but we made the point that the management should change. And it's a very hard thing to do because you are faced with people who all their lives have been socialised to see you differently.

And so we were dealing with that at universities, you are dealing with people who don't believe that if you had black managers at the top, the university would not collapse. It was hard but I think students still face those things and new challenges. I am happy that students are not trying to be us. They are trying to confront the unique issues that they face now. I don't know

how they are going to deal with that fact that politics attracts people who are in it for themselves.

### *SRC processes*

Sikhakhane explains how the SRC at Wits was run at the time. There was a university administrator, and logistics, structures and offices were provided by the university.

When I was SRC president – I don't know since then – but I really think it was a clean group of people when it comes to corruption. I don't think we spent anything that we shouldn't have. And I don't think it was just me. I think I was lucky at the time. I had people like Ebrahim Hassen, Alex Khumalo and others. From the DA side now, Manie, Malcolm. We could differ with them on anything. But we all agreed that we had to run a clean SRC.

There was another important factor in ensuring what Sikhakhane considered to be clean governance at the time – the assistance he had from a group of people who guided him in management matters.

I had a couple of very conscientious people on the SASCO side who had been at university longer than I had been and who helped me a lot because they managed that aspect better. So, the office logistics – just the management of student affairs – was run by more people than just me. I think most of them were better than me at that level. I think I was a political activist – inclusive in my approach – but I think there were more talented people with experience who would be in faculty councils. It lifted my leadership. I was new, they had been there three or four years some of them. So, it worked well, I think they managed that office very well.

Sikhakhane was shocked in later years to learn that in higher education, some student leaders were engaging in corrupt practices and taking university monies, as in his day there had been systems, processes and people holding them to account. How does he account for this?

The struggle has been taking a hammering for some time. The type of activist you get when the benefit is death and detention, is different to the type you get later when being involved comes with certain benefits which are material. And I think what united the group of us in the 80s and earlier, in the 60s and 70s and possibly earlier, I suppose, was an idea and a passion for particular values. I tell people that I never thought of politics when I was elected, or thought what would I become. I didn't want to be a politician. I was just an activist and I am sure what has happened is that – just as in all struggles – the

type of leaders we used to have is diminishing, because the values that inform what we do used to be about freedom and justice, social economic justice, and as you go on and get involved in becoming a leader with benefits, you attract a particular type of person.

I think in student politics too – like our leaders – celebrity became part of it. I have seen a lot of student leaders who became SRC presidents, and you could see just by what they say that they had become celebrities rather than activists. That came with a love for benefits, for money, for fun, and once people use positions they have for fun and for benefits, I think the temptation to use funds to fulfil those urges becomes greater. And I think that it continues.

The era in which Sikhakhane was involved in student politics was quite different, both from the current times, and from other countries, and in his view, it spawned a very specific kind of student leader.

The question comes of why you get involved in the first place, and I don't think we ever check. When I went to South Korea once for a symposium for young leaders, I met students from Cambridge and I realised we were different. This was in '94. I was amazed – I met people from Cambridge and Harvard – these are student leaders. But these were politicians, these were Democrats in the making, these were Republicans in the making, and we were activists. I was not an MP in the making, and I think in South Africa people don't believe this when I tell them that in the 70s, 80s and 90s students and activists did not even think about what they would become. I say to my kids, my biggest ambition when I was an activist in the 80s is what I thought would happen to me ... maybe a very big funeral where the ANC would speak, that was great to me ... I didn't see anything beyond being an activist. I think as people saw possible posts in government, it started attracting a different type of person. People get into politics to be wealthy. It's a problem of postcolonial countries that are poor. There's a psychological barrier. There is a lot of mind-shift that must happen.

Sikhakhane reflects further on what he means by that mind-shift. Speaking about the ambitions of many young people today to become employed in government, he has the following to say:

We need a different imagination. Memory is passed down from generation to generation, and so if I have always known that my father worked in Durban or Pietermaritzburg for a firm or whatever, I am going to school so that I can get employed. Being secure with a job is a very important thing in the minds of a lot of people because of that. I think it is the psyche that came with the lack of freedom, being seen as providers of labour in their own country rather than being part of the mainstream economy, that has created a particular mindset.

I see it here [at the firm where he currently works]. A lot of youngsters come here. [Being an advocate] is a hard job. It's a very, very hard job to do. You don't choose your clients. When I represent Ramaphosa or Zuma or Malema, I don't choose them, they are clients. I do my job without any regard to their political orientation. It's like being a doctor – it's a hard job – and you get judged, and you must work hard. No one goes to an advocate's chambers unless they think he or she is good for their case. A lot of people come here, and they are looking for the security they would get if they were employed by someone. They can't have it. We must teach people to get out of that mindset and start thinking of themselves as part of the mainstream economy. Free people that must think independently of being charity cases. It's a hard thing. Self-determination is the ultimate mindset of freedom. Just like love, compassion and courage are the only real pillars of being a revolutionary.

## **Governance and the SRC**

### *Representation*

The internal functioning of the SRC in Sikhakhane's time was complicated by the fact that there was a division in SASCO, chiefly around the issue of whether SRC elections should be boycotted or not. One group, led by Mamabolo, to which Sikhakhane was allied, felt that they would have let students down had they boycotted elections, so they decided to stand. SASCO's reputation on campus had apparently suffered as a result of continuing to use tactics that had made them popular in the 1980s, such as tipping over dustbins, which, in the changed dispensation, had increasingly alienated them from the student body. As Sikhakhane remarks, a lot of them felt they needed to do a lot of soul-searching. Different tactics were needed.

Among these was the introduction of a student assembly, which included leaders from all the different student organisations, from political formations to sports and social clubs, to try to find some common issues and promote harmony, even though their ideological positions were very diverse. House committees were also important in understanding the problems students faced. Sikhakhane and his vice-president, Ebrahim Hassen, represented the SRC on Senate and Council. There were also faculty committees, which had not stood on political tickets but were included in the student assembly. How had this worked?

During my time it worked very well because I am an inclusive person by nature. I hold radical views, yes, but I do believe that when people can sit and persuade each other it works better. No matter how radical your view is, the more people you have around you the better. So, I think it worked quite harmoniously. We were able to reach students we had not been able to reach politically through those structures, just by making sure that in a structure of student leaders they can speak their minds. We would differ with them, but

they could speak their minds and people would come and speak. I have always believed in what Rosa Luxemburg once said, that freedom of expression should be the exclusive privilege of those who differ with you.

### *Relationship with management*

The SRC's relationship with management at the time was also generally open, although there were exceptions.

We were able to engage management meaningfully, and the entire student leadership. There would always be people who didn't see eye to eye with the management, and there were those who didn't agree with us, but they treated us with respect. I still remember Judge Carol Lewis, who is now a judge in the Supreme Court, and I had to appear before her all the time. We differed sharply, but one thing we did was engage with each other, and that was important. She was very good at that level, and when she differed with us, she would call us to a debate. There were others we never had a relationship with, those who humiliated students in those engagements. There were a couple of them, and students didn't have a good relationship with some people ... But the vice-chancellor, Bob Charlton, I found that engaging with him as a human being was more meaningful than my engagement with some of the people who boasted they have been liberals before. I found that as a human being, he was much more sincere to deal with than some professors who I found to be more prejudiced than they imagined. There is always a contradiction between what students want and what management wants – it is never going to be smooth – but I think we were able to manage that relationship.

We were also able to bridge the gaps which existed amongst ourselves because of the climate in the country and I think that the SRC at the time – without being pompous about it – was able to unite students across ideological lines. I think we were able to do that. And also, we engaged with workers a lot – more than they had been engaged with before. I think NEHAWU, the union, was our closest ally at the university and there was a structure of academics that was close to us as well.

### *Strategies*

Sikhakhane believes that the trust between SRC leaders of different political persuasions was important in dealing with issues honestly and openly.

I think you can transcend a lot of ideological differences with people if they know that face to face with you they can trust you, right. So that trust was there. I could call Malcolm Lennox – still a DA councillor today – close the door, and sit with him and say, 'Malcolm, you tell me now why are you

differing with us on this issue. Let's leave politics now. Why? This is about black students,' and when we had finished with that meeting, Malcolm would go to his meeting and persuade those people that it is the right thing to do.

So it was that engagement. It was not easy, but I think that engagement about real issues rather than just ideological waffling works better. Because all human beings, if you sit with them closely, they do want justice, they do want freedom. What curtails them is their own prejudices and their past that they bring to a discussion about the present.

We could go to have a bosberaad and we would spend the first day discussing politics and our understanding of society and what's needed in society, and there are things you can remind people about. It doesn't matter who they think they represent. If you ask anyone – go to Ventersdorp now and ask an Afrikaner racist you will find there what do they think is better between freedom and lack of it. They will tell you that freedom is better. They can then debate their notion of freedom.

We engaged a lot about those things and I think it was sometimes hard when we were taking radical stands, we were marching, and students who believe they are from a tradition that doesn't do that found it hard, but I don't think we had difficult moments. There were few moments of difficulty.

Sikhakhane's pragmatism is evident in his view of leadership, which is about moderating between extremes.

I suppose leadership is never a position of extremes. Leadership by its nature is a centrist position, and it's about managing contradictions better to achieve whatever it is you set yourself to achieve. Even if you are leading a group of soldiers in the bush, in the context of that group of rebels, the leader of that rebel group must be centrist in their approach in order to manage the contradictions. It doesn't matter where you are. In that way, you accommodate people better, you manage their contradictions. Your ideal may be radical, but the way you deal with people must accommodate them.

## **SRC and external structures**

Sikhakhane returns to the theme of the relationship of the SRC with external political formations. He explains that while some of his SRC were aligned to the ANC, others on the SRC from the South African Liberal Students Association (SALSA), whom he still sees occasionally, were aligned to the Democratic Alliance (DA). At the time, as student leaders, they did not feel that they had been deployed by their party, but operated independently, and sometimes challenged the party's understanding of student issues.



I think [that relationship] has changed now, but it also depends on individual leaders. I didn't see that we should take instructions, because the conditions we were dealing with were quite different. But let me put it this way – honestly, they [the party leaders] were influential. They had been our heroes for a long time, so I can't say that when we went to meet Mandela that students were not awed and overwhelmed – they were. When we had criticised the ANC one day, and had said nasty things about the ANC, he said to us, 'Do you think we must smell what you are doing at universities? You have not told us the issues. So how must I know? Must I smell that you have issues at Wits?' Of course, we didn't know what to say. He was right. We just thought they must support us in whatever we did. The more we engaged with them, the more enlightened they became about what we were facing and their own shortcomings in how they were dealing with universities. Through their engagement with students, they also learnt to understand it was not hunky-dory at universities just because they had arrived. So, I think they learnt something from us. We were at loggerheads with the ANC sometimes because comrades at the ANC felt they were trying to normalise the country, and we were making it look like the country was in turmoil. So, there was tension and co-operation, but I don't think we ever took instructions.

## Lessons learnt

In his reflections about the policy context of the early 90s with respect to funding higher education, Sikhakhane outlines a perceived disconnect between the policy intentions and the funding realities.

I think we were all caught up in this euphoria in South Africa, and I think we have that problem until today, I am afraid to say. Political leadership is the ability to balance all things that need to be changed. You change them – yes, it may not be at the same time – but you group things that you need to change and change them – and I think what happened in those days was that policy development was ad hoc and unstructured. So, you increase access, which is a good thing, but you are a bit scared of touching your budget to accompany what you say, right? At the same time that you are increasing access in education, in hospitals and everywhere, you adopt a macro-economic policy where you know you are discouraging social spending ... [in the shift from RDP to GEAR].<sup>37</sup> We are flooded with students who have better access, but there is very little progress, policy-wise from the state, to make sure they have free or affordable education and that access happens without compromising any quality in education.

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37 Reconstruction and Development Programme; Growth, Employment and Redistribution Programme.

I think that disjuncture in the mid-90s was because it was a period of lack of clarity policy-wise, and, I think it's a problem in the postcolonial world, that people take over a government and still go out there to western countries to beg them for policy direction. I don't know what it was, but I think our leaders were a bit seduced by western types of economies. I don't think they studied the conditions when they did away with training colleges for teachers – only to say there is a shortage of teachers a couple of years later. It tells you there was a lack of strategic thinking about it.

We were at the heart of things – 1994 and 1995 were difficult because you were dealing with a new government and a lot of things must happen, but a lot of things are not happening ...

When you have had a history of colonialism and apartheid and racism, you must check which structures you can transform – white and colonial structures. But basically, my point is that I believe you must form new structures, fund them and create new values, rather than being trapped in old structures that were not designed for your new values. I think the new government was scared of doing these things, which has a lot to do with the nature of our political settlement. I am not saying the nature of our settlement was wrong. I am not sure there was an alternative. I am saying it's a very, very difficult political settlement ...

We always see a struggle as a struggle to undo physical things – poverty and access to education, housing. Those things are important, but I think one of the biggest postcolonial things to deal with is the mind. A lot of white South Africans tell you we were not there, and we didn't oppress anyone. All black people pretended they were in the struggle. But basically, psychologically, our politicians still lead a free country trying to seek white and western validation for what they are doing, because they feel whatever they suggest is not good enough until western countries and white South Africans like it. It is for that reason, actually. I can give you an example. Our black people struggle every day. They have marches every day. It will take a march in Sandhurst for our politicians to do something. If people in the suburbs of South Africa did something like that ...

We just have to deal with the vestiges of colonialism in our own minds – both black and white – and I think the problem is we are all very comfortable not confronting our own prejudices and how those things tend to affect what we do. I see it now, when people fight in the ANC about which leader is good and which leader is bad, we are all hung up with personalities and loyalties. Every conference of the ANC is a vicious cycle. We replace one group of people we dislike with the new group we like, but that group is not necessarily caring. All the divisions in the ANC have nothing to do with policy.

## Reflecting on #FeesMustFall

Reflecting on the 2015/16 student protests, Sikhakhane speaks of being inspired by them.

### #RhodesMustFall as an eye-opener

I can't say I agree with all their tactics, but I was quite inspired by students' #FeesMustFall yes, but that #RhodesMustFall thing for me was such an eye-opener – that students saw things we didn't see. I think those students – particularly at UCT – are the only group who tried not to imitate us, and I think it's because they were not necessarily aligned to existing political tensions and parties and they had space to think independently – as students must do. And I think they carved a niche for themselves. As an activist, I walked and sat next to Rhodes' statue without thinking. I was quite impressed that students started engaging with a notion of white power and whiteness in the context of South Africa and what it means. Something we talked about, but we didn't mind that we were sitting in this boardroom with old colonialist pictures. You know, we had other issues, so I was happy that they started thinking about issues that are different from those.

### Disillusion with post-1994 and the fate of liberation movements

What does Sikhakhane view as accounting for that becoming an issue in 2015, and not, for example, in 1998?

I think it's because '94 overpromised and we are still going to see it. I predict a civil war in South Africa. I hope I am wrong. In South Africa, we like suppressing dissent. Mandela was a revolutionary of course, but there are people who are telling us a particular side of Mandela and it's a side of understanding and reconciliation. Things that are nice, and it forces us not to engage head-on with things that are hard questions in South Africa.

And I think what happened was '94 was papering over the cracks in certain instances. Our leaders were working hard on a solution; the world was changing. The Soviet bloc had collapsed and frontline states could no longer afford to keep us in exile. So there were lots of pressures, and our leaders were coming out of jail, and I think there was a rush to create an ambience of harmony, of peace and order to fit in with the modern, democratic world. But I think in doing so, we suppressed a lot of frustrations by black Africans in South Africa, and I think it came out 20 years later. I think if you study all of these liberation parties, they start facing that rebellion in 20 years or so.

### The need for true freedom

I think it was that, and a generation of people who – it's not that they didn't

respect former leaders – but they started thinking differently. But also what I was telling you about what we faced in '94, that sometimes at universities you are at the coalface of prejudice. I once engaged with a member of top management at Wits who was spewing racist things to us as student leaders and she stood up, went to her corner and said she is phoning the office of the then deputy president. I thought, 'This is interesting – this person who is fighting us as black students and we regard her as a highly prejudiced individual – has this relationship with our leaders and wants to use that relationship to force us to retreat.'

Of course, she phoned the office. You feel small and perplexed when that sort of thing happens. We were forced to retreat, and I think South Africa is like that. It's like creating a false sense of progress and all of these things we cover up, keep coming out. It's going to happen with the land question. It's going to happen with all sorts of things, and I think it's because we choose not to confront challenges head-on. Like the nature of our political settlement, we seek painless change, a contradiction in terms. We fail to be bold and radical about true freedom. I think the day we do, we will truly be able to get onto the freeway to true non-racism and progress. At the moment, I think we do that by asking formerly oppressed people to bend over backwards, to forgive people who have not asked for forgiveness and who, on a daily basis, insult us. South Africa is going to be in that vicious cycle all the time and we can confront it with better leadership. We can confront it with leadership that doesn't side-track us from those painful issues. And I think that is why that thing happened and it's going to happen again with the land question and other debates because I don't think people truly understand what it's like to be born of a race, a group of people who have been underdogs in society for centuries.

I don't think people fully understand your emotions and what it means to sit with your white colleagues in Yeoville and eat olives, and then go back and see black people who are hopeless and have no future who are your relatives. It brings mixed emotions inside you. That is one of the things we are sitting on in South Africa.

I hope I am wrong about a civil war. I hope I am wrong, but I do think our political transition taught us to paper over our cracks and suppress things that we should deal with and confront head-on and move on.

## **Impact of the student leadership experience**

What had Sikhakhane learnt as a student leader that he carried through into his later life?

I am a leader in my profession and that experience comes in handy as a member of the Bar Council, and I led this group [of advocates] when it started – the

Victoria Mxenge Group – and I think that experience, you can't buy it. Just at the level of understanding contradictions that emerge when people are in groups and how to manage them. I have learnt better skills. My involvement has made me able to persuade a person from a different background about a radical view that one would have thought only black people would take, because those roles taught me to be receptive to other views. I think that is the thing you learn. You can't lead if you can't follow. That's just me. I think you can't lead people if you can't follow. You must learn to follow them, and hear their views.

Student activism by its very nature is a temporary thing. It's an episode in one's life, and one can't be a student activist forever. By its very nature, it doesn't outlast graduation. But of course, there are things to be done in society and when you graduate, you must find your rulebook to pursue the values you thought you were pursuing. And they don't have to be in political parties.

I find that I am much better now in going to a school in KZN and donating money and excluding politicians. I make more of a difference than I would if I were in a branch of the ANC. There they are fighting about whether they like Zuma or whether they like Cyril. It doesn't make sense to me, because I don't see how ideologically it advances freedom. So in a way I think we need to encourage people to find wherever they are going to make a difference. Become an advocate to make a difference. You must be able to say, okay, what he does [as an advocate] is consistent with what he was as a student leader. I don't have to be in any other political structure. There was a move two years ago for all [former] student leaders to go back to Wits. I was quite critical, and I didn't get involved. A lot of former student leaders were getting involved, and I was suspicious of it because it seemed to be aligned to what was happening in the country and the sides that people were taking. People had been quiet for 30 years, and suddenly there is a fight in the ANC and government about getting rid of some leaders, and people are going back to university under the guise that they are assisting in that debate. I could see that people were using student tensions to position themselves and people they support outside the university.

## Regrets

Did Sikhakhane have any regrets about his student leadership, or is there anything he would have done differently?

I don't regret my involvement at all. When I was SRC president at Wits, and I was managing all of these contradictions, I did regret that, why, after 10 years of being an activist when I had come here to hide and be a student – why did I get involved in this? I did regret it a bit. There I was, sometimes at loggerheads with younger comrades, whose radicalism was where mine had

been at a particular point of my political development. They were entitled to be what they were. Sometimes I did not handle it well but we were able to work together because we were united about our commitment to freedom.

I finished. I did my BA, I did my LLB. When I was SRC president, I was doing about 18 law courses at some point and I went out and I finished. But to come to your question: No, I actually don't regret anything. I don't regret being involved. It shaped who I am today. I was true to my commitment to justice and freedom. You asked me – you know hindsight is always better – would I have been a better leader if ... well, it's because I am using my experience now. I think I could do things differently. I don't think it's something to dwell on, because it was my time and I was in my mid-20s and I thought like a student who is that age. So I think I did everything right that a person of my age faced with the tasks then could do.

## **Advice to others**

Asked about what he would like to convey to current student leaders, Sikhakhane is thoughtful, and then says:

I think the essence of student activism – what makes it – is its honesty and independence. If you sacrifice honesty and independence of thought, you are likely to lose the battle and align yourself with battles that are outside, and which are replete with contradictions and self-interest.

And I think students [should] truly, every day, as they did with the #FeesMustFall, #RhodesMustFall, continue to help us, because that is their road. To intellectually lead us into areas we fear thinking about. I think that is what students must keep doing for us. To identify those areas that we oldies fear, or are tired of thinking about, and with a new energy. To ignite us to think courageously about things we have become lethargic about, and things we have learnt to accept – even if they are wrong. They have been at the forefront of the much-needed project of decoloniality.

And I think that's what student leaders must do – or students in general – is to keep honestly probing those areas that are wrong in society that we have learnt to accept. I think, if they do that, they will chart new ways of thinking for us. All of us tend to be aligned with certain things that are set. Only students can do that for us, because they have the courage to defy the accepted narratives in society. Only students tend to force society to think critically, even about those idols we have created. That is what I would ask them to continue to do.

# chapter 3

## Prishani Naidoo

University of the Witwatersrand,  
1995/96 SRC vice-president (Internal) & 1996/97 SAU-SRC president

*Ntokozo Bhengu, Prishani Naidoo, Thierry M. Luescher & Nkululeko Makhubu*

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### Brief biography

Dr Prishani Naidoo is director of the Society, Work and Politics Institute (SWOP), a research institute of the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). She has held this position since January 2019. In 2008, she joined the sociology department at Wits in a lecturing position. Her contribution to knowledge production includes research, writing and teaching across a number of academic fields and disciplines and across the academic–activist divide, addressing primarily questions related to poverty, protest and social movements, political subjectivity, in South Africa and the global South. Prior to rejoining Wits, Naidoo worked in and with social movements and organisations, including Indymedia and the Anti-Privatisation Forum in Johannesburg. Naidoo holds a BA in English and sociology and a BA(Hons) in comparative literature from Wits, and a PhD in development studies from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN).

This chapter is based on an interview conducted by Ntokozo Bhengu, Thierry Luescher and Nkululeko Makhubu on 19 February 2019.

### Early childhood influences and upbringing

Naidoo grew up in a politically involved family where both her mother and father were medical doctors, and her father was involved in the Congress movement

in Natal. This inevitably had a major impact on her political consciousness as a young person.

I grew up in a political family. I grew up in a Natal Indian Congress [NIC] family. My dad was the first secretary-general of the NIC when it was revived in the 1970s, Dr Dillie Naidoo. Both my parents are doctors: my mom worked in the public sector mainly, and my dad experimented with community projects. He had also grown up close to Steve Biko and Black Consciousness people. So, I grew up with my parents' friends being BC and ANC-aligned, and so I grew up always having a political sensibility and always seeing myself as contributing to effecting change in society. There was never a question about that, but I was confused as to how I wanted to act.

I went to a state-aided Indian school until I was 11 in Port Shepstone, in a small farming community. Then my parents decided to send me to a private all-girls' Catholic school in Durban, which I hated, but I did not question my parents at the time. I was one of three black girls in my class. I refused to make friends with the white girls; I refused to get involved in anything beyond my academic involvement. So, I was considered a very shy, quiet girl, who did well at her studies. My dad had also withdrawn from the NIC in the seventies when he was threatened with banning. So, he withdrew and went back to his hometown in Port Shepstone and did his medicine and in very underground ways supported stuff but although we had a political home, there was no real direct involvement until the 90s when things changed. Then our house in Durban became a base for meetings and I was in matric at that time and being told by my parents, 'Stay away, stay away,' but I was aware of what was going on. But, I only really got actively involved in the 90s and, in 1991, I started taking up organisational positions.

## **Political involvement at the University of Durban-Westville and beyond**

Against the background of her family's political involvement and the political environment of the early 1990s, Naidoo's own political journey and finding herself continued when she entered higher education in 1991, joining the University of Durban-Westville (UDW, now University of KwaZulu-Natal).

I started university in 1991 at the University of Durban-Westville. I was unsure of what I wanted to do. I think I was a very confused person and I think my dad was thinking this was a kind of gap year because I had a scholarship there. He said, 'Do whatever you want and take the year to decide,' which is what I did. I did five Bachelor of Arts subjects and by the end of the year I



decided that I wanted to do medicine, because it's the only way that I could imagine myself contributing to change.

So, I went to UDW and there I threw myself into student politics. It was the time when the ANC branches were being established, ANC Youth League branches were being established, after the unbanning of political organisations, the freeing of political prisoners, 1990 ... so that was the context which influenced me. For a young girl in that kind of atmosphere ... For example, I can remember Operation Vula. I was sitting in the backseat of the car when Mac Maharaj was fetched from prison by my father. So, it was that kind of introduction to politics.

### **Carving her own path in student politics**

Growing up in this environment, I took on certain traditions, certain approaches without questioning them. I eventually started to see myself as independent in a political formation when I joined the student movement. So, 1991, I joined the South African National Students' Congress [SANSCO] at the time; I also knew certain older students from being involved through my parents. I was always the kind of 'laaitie' tagging along.

I actually did SRC work in that first year. It was a different time as well because it was the time of mass movements and organisations. There were real functioning sub-committees; there were functioning spaces through which you could produce media. For example, I got involved in what was called the Free Press Collective, which at the time produced a newspaper called *Free Press* at the University of Durban-Westville. Many of us living in the community were also mobilising and attending meetings to establish ANC and ANC Youth League branches.

### **Expanding political relationships and experiences of factionalism**

Naidoo's political involvement extended beyond campus politics and some of her political connections were established off campus as an active member of an ANC branch. This broadened her understanding of party politics and internal party contestations.

Malusi Gigaba was someone I met hitchhiking for example. That's the kind of time we were in; he was hitchhiking. One day, my mum stopped and gave him a lift and we realised that we were neighbours, and then we found each other in the ANC branch. Then, there was a very contested ANC branch – western areas – in Durban, which I was part of; I realised later that there were people with big names in that branch: Alec Erwin, Pravin Gordhan, Fatima Meer. It was a really vibrant branch and a contested one. I learnt in that time that there was contestation within the movement; not everybody believed in the same

thing. There was a huge divide between the unionists and those belonging to the party [the South African Communist Party/SACP].

The ANC and this idea of a broad church – you started seeing those kinds of differences ... and then we established the first ANC Youth League [ANCYL] branch in that area. Malusi was chair and I was secretary-general. So, I also started to get to know the bigger ANC because he was also involved in the provincial ANCYL executive committee at that time. I started attending some of those meetings and that's where I learnt about the bigger organisation and then in 1992, that's when I decided to do medicine and I got into Wits.

## **From UDW to Wits**

Naidoo's journey took a turn when she moved from Durban to Johannesburg, now having set her mind on what to study, while Congress politics and student politics continued to be an integral part of her life. Coming to Wits opened a new chapter in her life that brought about new challenges.

I came here to do medicine and the first year was fine because it was the general kind of subjects and I threw myself again into student politics. It was the time when SANSCO and NUSAS [National Union of South African Students] were merging to form SASCO.

I got involved in all of those debates and discussions and once again it was a really vibrant branch. You could speak of it as mass politics. There were functioning sub-committees and you would come in and join either a res [student residence] committee or another sub-committee.

I was taken under the wing of some senior male comrades and then very quickly I was put on the branch executive committee. I had no organisational skills, no sense of what was really happening at the time and got thrown into the position of res coordinator.

## **Gender discrimination in residence life and becoming a house committee member**

The residence life at the university was characterised by the separation of genders. There were separate male and female residences, which had discriminatory norms that did not settle well with Naidoo and which she confronted.

I lived at res, Jubilee Hall, which was an all-girls' res. At the time we were a minority of black students. In my first week here during orientation week, I got confronted by a white house committee member (who acted like a prefect) and a kind of house committee initiation. I think in that moment I started to realise the 'problem' of being a woman or the problems related to gender.

Just to give you a sense: orientation week consisted of all of these separate activities that would bring us together as the girls' res with what was called our brother res: Ernest Oppenheimer Hall. So, the very first night of orientation week, we were summoned by the house committee to the dining room and the house committee from the male res arrived in white coats and introduced themselves and asked us to separate ourselves into virgins and non-virgins ... That's just to give you an example and that kind of thing continued for the week.

You can imagine, I had already had my experience at UDW and I wasn't going to shut up. So, I started organising black students in the res and then eventually contested house committee elections. A few of us black students got on to the house committee ... it was a split house committee – racially.

### **Experiences with the SASCO branch at Wits, key issues and demands**

Naidoo recalls a number of matters in her reflections on the SASCO branch at Wits, starting with the strategies that some comrades used to recruit women into the branch, the way the branch established a reputation for challenging the ANC leadership, and SASCO's call for broad transformation at Wits.

#### *Recruitment strategies*

Naidoo's reflections of her SASCO experience at Wits start with the different ways in which women were being recruited into SASCO in the early years.

At that time, recruitment strategies in SASCO were non-existent. There were too few women in the branches. So, my comrades told me much later on that they would come to the residences at the time of TV news and see how many women were watching the news. That was a recruitment strategy.

Here we were trying to transform society, but amongst ourselves, our own practices, our own forms of relating to each other ... speaking about recruitment, many comrades used to be proud of the fact that they recruited female comrades through starting up relationships with them. It was seen as a recruitment strategy and as nothing wrong. We laugh about it now, but those kinds of things happened.

#### *A radical branch, challenging ANC leadership*

The Wits SASCO branch was seen as radical to the extent that it challenged some of the ANC leaders at that time; it was also a branch with close ties to local community organisations. Naidoo recalls:

Wits SASCO branch became notorious over that period from the early 90s to about 1997/98 for questioning the ANC leadership from within. I was in the middle of that and cut my political teeth during that time. The divisions that I had started to see back home started to manifest on a much bigger scale

in my university life and the contestation that we now see today, I started to experience then.

But there was also commitment from within SASCO to the idea of student politics that weren't always driven by the Alliance, particularly here. For example, we fought every year about whether there should be the establishment of ANC Youth League branches on campus and in my time that didn't happen. It happened only recently. How we fought about that, whether we were autonomous or not. That is how we were trying to make sense of the matters at that time.

#### *Participation in the National Education Crisis Committee campaign*

From 1993, the SASCO Wits branch was also part of community formations. We always saw ourselves as embedded in broader structures and we used to talk about the MDM, the mass democratic movement. So, the National Education Crisis Committee [NECC] at the time made a call for the occupation of white schools and the SASCO branch at that time undertook a campaign to call for the resignation of all Council members.

We linked our campaign to the NECC campaign and started to talk about what kind of forms this campaign should take in the university context. The vice-chancellor was away and the deputy vice-chancellor, June Sinclair, was put in charge. They started anticipating violent forms of action, but nothing had happened yet. They started mobilising their forces against anticipated action. But to cut a very long story short, after the first mass protest which was just a march on campus, Sinclair called the police on campus for the first time in many years.

#### *Protest action, ANCYL intervention and SASCO's call for a transformation forum*

After challenging the university management and Council on various transformation issues, including the call to dismantle existing governance structures seen as illegitimate, SASCO eventually demanded the establishment of a broad transformation forum at Wits.

Our demands were whittled down to making this demand for broad transformation. In that time, our demonstrations were starting to get uglier and that started to split the movement. I mean its laughable now – after what we've witnessed since 2015 – but at that time what was seen as the most problematic form of action on the part of students was littering campus.

So, Wits started the first 'Operation Litter' and that's when the ANCYL Provincial Committee and National Executive Committee were here in our branch office, scolding us students like high school scholars. And the branch was also split. Our demonstrations started to be related to the broader approaches of the alliance and what was acceptable in the alliance – acceptable

forms of action. The branch also started to experience problems, started to fragment, and attendance of meetings started to dwindle.

#### *Demand for broad transformation and the establishment of FFACT*

Then the broad transformation demand became central. Over time, Wits established what we can debate was a broad transformation forum or not. And over that time student leaders started to get caught up in, and most of their time started being taken up by, negotiations around the actual character of the forum and there were really some ridiculous discussions.

So, for example, the name of the forum eventually was, because that was fought over, the Forum for Further Accelerated and Comprehensive Transformation [FFACT] because Wits administration wouldn't concede that they had not been committed to transformation in the past. After all, they had fought the apartheid state ...

So then, in that time it also became more important within the branch to contest representative structures on campus.

## **Becoming involved in the SRC**

After serving in SASCO and various other student political structures, Naidoo was now set to step up to serve in the SRC. As part of the context of such involvement at the time, it is important to recall that the question of the role of the SRC was one that continued to be debated.

### **Deliberations on the role of the SRC and the campus as site of struggle**

Naidoo recounts the contestation over whether the SRC is part of the governance structures of the university or more of a student union.

So that also changed over time at Wits: moving from the black students' society to the Students' Representative Council in that moment of the merger between SANSKO and NUSAS. I am speaking about those two because they were dominant at that time. They really pushed and participated. There were always divisions, always debate, always contestation about what the SRC meant or what it would become. I think to the detriment of SASCO, the SRC was seen as another representative space that SASCO could gain another voice through.

#### *Advancing the national democratic revolution*

If you also think of my generation coming onto campuses, imagining ourselves as contributing to this mass struggle and seeing campuses as what we used to call 'sites of struggle', we were thinking about how our agenda would enable

the university to contribute to the broader transformation of society. If you came from the Congress tradition, it was building non-racialism, non-sexism, democracy, and in this branch, in a few SASCO branches, we used to have the principles of African leadership and working-class leadership and that also related to the theory of the national democratic revolution and so on. So, supposedly representative structures were to further that big agenda.

You also imagined yourself as having the correct line, as having these solutions, having these answers. You were going into the SRC to take forward a predetermined agenda. It was to convince everybody else. At that time, it was a majority of white students. How the hell were you going to win? There was a sense that the SRC was also not taken seriously by white students outside of NUSAS.

So, people used to talk about apathy: people are apathetic, that's why they don't vote. I think that's another discussion to be had in this current day. But, at the time that was it, so you played with the SRC; you played with the processes of the SRC; you didn't necessarily take it very seriously in following the rules and so on. It was your agenda to get your people into that structure so that you can get access to resources and so that you could do the work that's determined in the branch.

#### *Debating university governance: toward a non-hierarchical system of governance*

As time goes by, you get your people on Council and Senate, and involved in what was unfolding in terms of this broader policy agenda and policy transformation agenda. So, that's why it was debated every year. There was also a group within SASCO that thought this policy transformation process was not the way to go: we should be opposing it and we should be insisting on broad transformation forums as they were initially imagined, or we should be contesting structures of governance as they exist completely, down with councils, down with Senate, down with the professors towards a more horizontal, non-hierarchical kind of approach to changing the system.

And you'll recall, the first non-racial SRCs came at the beginning of the 1990s. Prior to that there were black students' societies. So, SASCO came from the merger, and with the principle of non-racialism came the prioritisation of SRCs. At its Wits branch that was the debate every single year. There were some who were committed to the idea of SRC as a student representative structure. It made a difference whether you came from NUSAS and that tradition, that you fought in different ways from the majority of black student leaders and activists who saw the SRC as a means through which we could get another voice on the campus.

SASCO was still recognised and we fought very hard for SASCO to be considered as a separate entity in FFACT. So, there was always a debate on how we contest SRC elections ... the imagination of this 'new student' and

so on. It was funny, because there was some kind of imagination that you must choose those who are popular, those who hung out at parties, those who would be able to speak to a broader mass to contest elections.

I had been on a house committee and all of that, so I knew a lot of people on campus and so on. So, I got forwarded by SASCO to contest SRC elections, but there was at this time this contested sense of the SRC.

## **Election into the SRC**

In 1995, Naidoo was elected onto the Wits SRC for 1996. Elections happened at the end of 1995, and leaders' terms of office ran from the end of 1995 to the end of 1996.

I got elected as vice-president internal, which meant I had to take responsibility for FFACT. Here it became the matter of debating Council and who would sit on Council. So, for years it was how many representatives from each stakeholder should there be on Council, and so you'd get bogged down in those kinds of discussions – ridiculous debates – because sitting on those forums were also people like Charles van Onselen, who at the time formed part of a group of 13 academics who were challenging change, the need for change on campus. So, for example, he would bring in the race–class debate and then keep us occupied with that for sessions and sessions.

## **Support and training for SRC members**

Naidoo reflects on her preparedness and training and the level of support they had during their term of office in the SRC.

There was no support – like I said. I was shivering when I had to go and speak on the report of the National Commission on Higher Education with Jairam Reddy [who had been the vice-chancellor of UDW from 1990 to 1994 and was the chairperson of the National Commission on Higher Education]. I think I didn't sleep that night before, reading the entire document. You got to think on your feet, and we relied on certain comrades. Like I said you get taken under the wing of some senior person and you are young and fearless, and you have these big ideas which make you act in certain ways but then you can't deal with the consequences and what comes after.

So, no, there was no real support but there were some attempts from Wits. For example, at Wits the dean of students at that time was Ron Carter, who had come from Boston University in the US, got together resources and made connections with the United States Information Service and USAID. And Elaine Sacco and them were the student drivers of this.

When I came into SAU-SRC [South African Universities Students' Representative Council] there was something called the National Centre

for Student Leadership and Development that was housed here in Ron Carter's office and operated from here. He got all of us student leaders onto a committee that used to meet quite regularly with people from USAID. It was SAU-SRC, PASMA, Ignatius Molapo at that time, AZASCO, SASCO, all student leaders. And they used to give us resources and organise for us to run these training sessions across Johannesburg for SRC leaders. But, we did not have much training ourselves, and then it collapsed in that time.

Ron Carter was problematised here at Wits. To cut a long story short, they organised a trip, the first real training trip for all of us to the US. It must have been 1995 or 1996. And we were taken to mainly private colleges, African-American, along the East Coast of the States, so Morehouse College, Spellman College and then eventually we got to Howard. So, it was a slightly different experience for us.

The training started with us being asked to role-play engaging with our vice-chancellors. You can imagine, we are coming from these crisis-ridden institutions and we are told 'to make ourselves available' and 'hold our vice-chancellors' hands'. So it was that kind of thing. By the middle of it we were just completely disappointed and alienated and I decided to leave the group. I was the only woman in the group and it was made out that, 'She is leaving because she is a woman and she is not dealing with stuff.' But I left; I refused to continue. I asked an activist in New York to hook me up with people and I ended up staying in Harlem and I got much nicer training from an older woman activist and academic, living with her and meeting other people. But, yes, that was the only real kind of training.

## **Student representation in university governance**

Naidoo's time in the SRC was the period when black student activists not only debated new ways students should be involved in governance but also eventually entered various committees within the university for the first time.

It was in my SRC's time that the discussions and debates started happening about whether we sit on Council or not. And there was actually a debate about it because some people felt that we were becoming part of the university management and we will be making decisions about other students, not just representing students.

But, I think there was also a debate that got lost in the time of transformation because there was this idea that the Broad Transformation Forum would replace the Council. Instead, these forums became the spaces in which we discussed transformation of existing structures of governance. So, the whole critique that was there from the early 90s about existing structures of governance got lost.



I didn't follow this process, but I think there is still a university transformation forum but it's toothless.<sup>38</sup> No one hears about it. I don't know what they discuss.

*'The student voice has been heard' – not*

The experience of student representation in the committees turned out to be frustrating.

From about '95, '96, you got, I think, two representatives to Council, two representatives to Senate. I think I actually sat on it but I hated those discussions and I dropped out of them. I remember we receive these thick documents with pink, green and yellow pages [the agendas].

Look, we tried, we would put things on the agenda, and I can remember one of the senior professors saying that, it was in a debate on fees, he said, 'your voices have been heard and you have been consulted'. And I said to him, but consultations don't just legitimise a process.

It means if you were heard you must have some impact on the process. I think we got disillusioned in that time because we were being frustrated by buying into a process and then not having our grievances addressed in ways that we thought were acceptable. So, there was this thing at the time: you will never win anything at the table that you can't win on the streets.

## **Internal organisation, communication and changing ways of mobilising**

As a student representative structure there is an indispensable obligation for student leaders to be well informed of the needs, demands and issues experienced by the student body. During their time, Naidoo and other student leaders employed various means to communicate with the student body and student structures. At the same time, there was also the rise of a new character of student leaders.

### **SRC, residence councils and faculty councils**

There were debates and engagement with the general student body using various platforms of engagement.

The mass meetings and so on seldom happened unless there was a crisis. The All Residence Council and the SRC had a much closer relationship at

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38 With the HE Act of 1997, the university transformation forums that had been established on some campuses became formalised in the Institutional Forum as a statutory advisory body to Council.

the time. You can imagine, the All Residence Council and the Students' Representative Council had that close relationship because of the growing accommodation crisis. Also, members of the All Residence Council tended to be far more active and politically engaged. They would also see themselves as holding the SRC to account.

Then the faculty councils, there were very few engagements between SRC and faculty councils. I think that faculty councils have only very recently started being taken seriously by students.

## Communication spaces of engagement then and again during #FeesMustFall

There was a SASCO newspaper that used to be produced in the 1990s called *Mamela*. There were many spaces for debate, spaces for students to actually critically engage each other about issues.

I think social media has given the current political space a different character and we have seen its successes in terms of hashtags and so on. But I think there's also more space for engagement with that form of interaction. Face-to-face engagement isn't that necessary and that has many effects.

There's on the one hand the rise of a kind of celebrity student leader. Then on the other, you have this faceless engagement when bigger numbers of people access information not necessarily because they are members of a group, party or whatever, but because they are connected to a particular issue.

We saw #FeesMustFall here at Wits brought together a range of students, many who had never been involved politically before and came together around #FeesMustFall. They didn't gather because SASCO had put out pamphlets or made a call. Some of them didn't even know about SASCO and for many weeks there was some kind of general assembly in Solomon House where any student could speak.

For a time we saw some of those old traditions, old ways of speaking. I think that also then allowed for women to come together and say, 'You know what, we have been silent, we don't represent ourselves in these platforms and we don't speak in this kind of language, your forms of organising are masculinist.'

Not to romanticise that, but I think there was a time that started to happen but then that space itself started to close because the older traditions started to become more dominant. We don't also have an imagination beyond party politics. So, people withdrew into the party-political formations. Those students who didn't want to get involved in parties kind of withdrew into their own little spaces; they formed for the first time ever at Wits a branch of the Pan Africanist Student Movement of Azania [PASMA]. It's never been there before. There was AZASCO at Wits but not a PASMA branch and AZASCO was a very small number of people.

## From mass mobilisation to factionalism

At the time in which I was also involved, mass mobilisation started to fade. When I came to campus, like I said, it felt like an active branch. How organising happened then was through regular meetings of SASCO members at residences. At medical school there was a local meeting and regular branch meetings in addition to the branch executive committee meetings, and those mass meetings were really vibrant because they didn't just deal with the day-to-day organisational stuff but real questions.

I remember debating the sunset clauses for example. That document was very real for us, and we were imagining ourselves as actually contributing to the debates. Then our leadership would go participate in the provincial, national debates and discussions, and of course, because it was such a contested space and it came with access to resources, it was significant if you were to get on the SRC and so on.

The branch became notorious for cabals and cliques. So, people were aligned to different traditions within the Alliance, setting up little groups and so on. I think that killed the movement over time.

Then, communicating with the general body of students used to happen through what was called the General Student Council, and that used to happen regularly and so I can't remember how often but it was the SRC's duty to call that General Student Council.

In crisis, if there were crises – and we had many crises in the 90s – generally that's when the general student body would come and debate things, and it was the same at the University of Durban-Westville. I can remember the main hall being packed around 1991 ... even Chris Hani's death ... it was, like, how we were mobilising. Those kinds of events, major issues and so on.

That started to change over time, I would argue, partly because of factionalism and also because of the change in political space and the introduction of 'broad transformation', the move away from protest to policy formulation ... because, what started to happen here was that the branch became divided between leaders and the rest. Your leaders would be occupied by these protracted negotiations, which hardly any of them were interested in and mass participation dwindled.

## The Boom Shaka generation and the SRC

I spoke about my generation on the SRC and there was contestation and so on, and I have also spoken about how over that period during which policy formulation started to be prioritised, there was a decline in mass protests. But I think at that time, SASCO leadership also started to see the importance of the SRC no matter how contested it was because it was being given more priority by university management than the individual political organisations.

I think there was a paper written about ‘the new student’ in SASCO and how this Model C – I hate to use this term but – the ‘coconut’, needed to be approached and how that group needed to be brought into politics.

So you needed music and sport and parties. SRC needed to play that role in bringing these ‘new students’ into the political space. So, the SRC started to be characterised as partying ... But, at the same time you did have this idea at SASCO that you needed activists to be sent to the SRC who understood that the university still needed to be transformed, that you still needed to factor in things like fees, exclusions and so on.

## **Graduating into national student leadership structures**

After Naidoo got onto the SRC of Wits, she was elected onto the SAU-SRC NEC which then exposed her to a host of national student issues and gave her access to various platforms. The South African Universities Students’ Representative Council (SAU-SRC) was the national body which brought all SRCs together.

I got forwarded by SASCO to the Wits SRC and things were also happening nationally. Elaine Sacco [from UCT] was the first president of the South African Universities Students’ Representative Council, now South African Union of Students [SAUS]. I got elected after her.

Naidoo served two terms as SAU-SRC president in 1996 and 1997.

## **The National Commission on Higher Education [NCHE] and free education**

During that time, SAU-SRC often made what were considered to be more radical demands than SASCO, and tensions were high both at campus level and at national level as students voiced their demands.

At the same time as we were contributing to debates related to the NCHE, a new macro-economic policy was being introduced, GEAR [the Growth, Employment and Redistribution strategy, critiqued by many for being neoliberal in its approach and introduced by the ANC government in 1996]. So, we started from within the Alliance formations arguing against GEAR and against its impact on the transformation process in higher education.

But, in that time, interestingly enough, SAU-SRC became more radical than the SASCO NEC. It was partly because a few of us were from Wits and those from Gauteng were challenging it from within. I started getting disciplined by the SASCO NEC as someone seconded to SAU-SRC for participating in this national debate. You must remember, things really got hectic at national level in 1996, 1997, around GEAR, around the Commission

on Higher Education, and around what was happening on individual campuses, particularly around fees.

I remember the first march for free education started at Wits and was going to Stanley Avenue where the National Development Agency offices were to demand bursaries, and following that came TEFSA [Tertiary Education Fund for South Africa] and following that came NSFAS [National Student Financial Aid Scheme] and student leaders were also drawn into that process; first starting to insist on bursaries and then slowly moving into the loan scheme.

### **Reprimanded by Mandela**

The radical approach towards addressing student issues adopted by SAU-SRC did not go unnoticed and didn't settle well with the higher structures of the ANC and the ANC government.

The last part of this picture was the kind of discipline that I spoke about coming from higher structures in the ANC. I think it was in 1995 that Nelson Mandela summoned all student leaders to the Union Buildings and he met the SASCO leadership, SAU-SRC and SATSU [South African Technikon Students' Union] at that time and I remember sitting around this long table and he sat at the head.

He just lectured us for like 45 minutes about the need for us to be more disciplined on campuses in that kind of fatherly reprimanding voice: 'I will bring my army and police onto your campuses if you do not stop with this nonsense. Just tell me what you want, I will go to Anglo American, I will go and get the money for you. It's too premature to be talking about deracialising campuses like the University of the Western Cape. Your demands are too early, just be patient and go get your degrees,' that kind of thing. 'Get your honours, get your masters, get your PhDs.' That was his line. 'Leave it to us to do the other work.'

I can remember getting five minutes at the end to respond. How do you respond in five minutes to someone that you have held in awe all your life and who was just now giving you the line? ... I was very apologetic but saying we still must fight on ... And at the end of it, all of us lined up for his signature.

### **Another Mandela story**

I will give you another story, '93 or '94. So, at the time I think we were young, and seen to be young, and Wits was at the heart of capital. Mandela was addressing businesspeople in Johannesburg and we were protesting at the time, and he said, 'No, he will deal with the students, and students must just behave.' And we came out as a branch with a pamphlet with the title 'Mandela Messianism and the Media' and you can imagine what happened.

So, you get ANC province, ANC national, at the height of the protests here, when ‘Operation Litter’ started, I think, Cheryl Carolus and Walter Sisulu were deployed here to calm things down. So, you would be summoned by people within the ANC at various times, but I think when Mandela intervened it was also then at a national level that the policy agenda of the ANC in government was starting to be challenged. So, it wasn’t just about institutional protests.

## Reflecting on #FeesMustFall

For Naidoo, #FeesMustFall opened a new chapter in student activism and a new hope in the struggle to confront neoliberalism and its impact in society. Being a Wits insider, Naidoo recalls the October 6 anti-outsourcing protest as part of the lead-up to 2015 #FeesMustFall and the first occupation of Solomon House. She reflects on her experience, partisanship, and the new forms of protest that surfaced during the momentous #FeesMustFall protests at Wits.

### From #October6 to #FeesMustFall

One of the ongoing debates which re-emerged prior to and during #FeesMustFall was the issue of outsourced university workers. Meetings amongst workers, students and academics in small groupings were taking place at Wits, which led to what became known as the ‘#October6 protest’ that took place a week before #FeesMustFall.

Prior to #FeesMustFall, a few of us started meeting, initially to see how we could link worker, academic and student struggles, and link up to what was happening at the time around the idea of a United Front. We had our own differences but we agreed, let’s prioritise one issue. So we started organising for a demonstration on campus against outsourcing on the 6<sup>th</sup> of October 2015 and then we became known as #October6. So ... exactly a week before #FeesMustFall broke out, was the October 6 demonstration against outsourcing.

That saw a few of the students getting involved in a shutdown, shutting down The Matrix on October 6, which is where all the shops are at Wits, to enable outsourced workers to join the protest. That was a non-partisan protest. It brought together SASCO, EFF, independent students who didn’t want to join a party, and that’s also increasingly becoming and became quite evident in #FeesMustFall. We were questioning party politics, questioning the party model; we wanted something different.

From the #October6 group came the slogan ‘Towards a public African decolonised university’ and the discussions around decolonisation included

structures of governance and the need to imagine a very different system of working together that doesn't reproduce hierarchies.

I am still on the WhatsApp group and demonstrations are still possible. They keep on saying, 'Let's revive #October6' but we thought about hosting a long series of discussions and debates and seminars that would confront these questions, because we were also saying, we don't have models any more. We are not coming with predetermined solutions any more. Many of us had been defeated around those.

Those issues are still there, and in the 2015 moment in a very new way, through the discourse of decolonisation, black students and African students in particular, bringing together all those demands around curriculum transformation, language, outsourcing and bringing together fees and free education, and bringing together worker and student issues, and then also seeing themselves once again as part of a community being in the university. That moment was really interesting, exciting, but also sometimes a bit scary, because no one knew what was happening.

I was on sabbatical and my partner teaches in politics and I just came to fetch him, and we ended up camping here for the next three days. Also, student leaders were not expecting this, you speak to Shaera and others who led, they will tell you that they would have been happy to have had 200 students on the day. They were not anticipating this.

## **Experience on the ground during #FeesMustFall and the prevailing campus issues**

No one had anticipated that the #FeesMustFall campaign at Wits would become a movement and attract so much attention. Many issues that came with such a massive protest wave had to be addressed on the go. They ranged from daily logistics and catering for students in Solomon House to the political differences that surfaced again and again, and the common ground found in a new discourse centring the notion of decolonisation and new ways of seeing each other. Naidoo recalls the first days of occupation:

Food, toilets, basic things – you started being called by students who had a relationship with a few of us.

Also, in that time, I spoke about this open space that had been created. But even on the first night, EFF and SASCO protested in circles next to each other, singing the same songs but refusing to engage with each other.

And you were also dealing with that kind of thing on the night that Adam Habib [the vice-chancellor of Wits] was held here in Solomon House.

It was actually crazy to witness what was going on between different student factions because there was no sense of how we were going to get out of this. Yes, we have our demands, but how do we move beyond this particular

moment. So, that entire night there were people going around different groups of students trying to bring them together to some kind of consensus that eventually ended up being the statement that was signed.

The issues are still there. They have taken centre stage in a very different way and there is a new discourse that has emerged that has allowed for that newness: decolonisation.

If you sit in meetings you will hear students referring to workers as their mothers and fathers, as their daughters and sons, you know. It's not comrade any more. It's about how we are seen in this space, how we feel in this space, how are we able to be, and how are we able to become, and that comes from many different individual experiences and groups, and encounters with knowledge itself. Biko became prominent on campus, graffiti and slogans; Robert Sobukwe; the renaming of these buildings.

### **The birth of the new movement and the aesthetic of protests during #FeesMustFall**

Naidoo reflects on the intellectual work, the political imagination and creativity that went with the protest movement. There was a revival of former struggle icons and graffiti and artistic performances became an impactful form of protest.

It started on October 6 first and then it just grew and grew. In the months before there was also a group called Black Thought. When you walk around you will sometimes see the Black Thought graffiti, things like that.

Solomon Mahlangu is a very interesting example. You can't explain how a Congress icon suddenly becomes a figure for an entire movement of a generation that didn't grow up under apartheid, that has no real concrete relationship to this history, for many of the students who were not involved in a Congress formation or any political formations.

The majority of them who came together in Solomon House would not have been part of any political formation. If you walk around campus, you will see the Solomon Mahlangu signs. On the day we came back from the mass protest by the Union Buildings, Solomon Mahlangu's image was there and you just saw the 'Project Hoopoe' logo below it – I don't know who they are, where they come from, but they also made a significant impact – they linked Marikana to the Wits struggle in some of their stickers. There is now only a trace of the image that remains after the university management tried to have it erased.

In addition to the graffiti, there were lots of kinds of artistic performance. For example, when the private security was brought on campus the entire Great Hall was fenced off. Arts students brought together other students and put on a performance where there were banners linking up all the different struggles, from Andries Tatane to Marikana, and then a group of them



painted themselves with fake blood. They just stood in front of the Great Hall and then workers and other students joined in and there was toyi-toyiing. The fence was demolished and that made an open space to get people to pass through security ... and then giving private security flowers.

In her reflections on #October6 and #FeesMustFall, Naidoo could not hide her pride in the new crop of student leaders that it brought to the fore and her cautious hope that 20 years after her own experience in student leadership, the stalled transformation project may regain some momentum.

## **Changing the world as a scholar activist**

Naidoo came into student politics from a family background of anti-apartheid and liberation politics, steeped in the Congress tradition. After completing her studies at Wits, she continued her activism including by helping found and organise the Anti-Privatisation Forum in Johannesburg. She explains how she sees herself today, having returned to Wits in 2008 as an academic in the Department of Sociology.

### **From student leader to full-time community activism**

I graduated here with my undergrad. I had the possibility to stay on but decided not to and went to work in movements. I worked at Khanya College and did contract research and so on, and started connecting up with the unions and community organisations. Then, in 2000 Wits introduced its first plans for neoliberal policies and some of us started to protest against those and then Wits SASCO branch got divided over that. Academics, workers and students came together at Wits, at the same time the city was introducing 'iGoli 2002' which was its first set of neoliberal policies and so we got together with other activists in the city and started demonstrating against conference here called 'Urban Futures' which was showcasing these policies and in those struggles the Anti-Privatisation Forum [APF] was born.

So, I threw myself into the Anti-Privatisation Forum between 2000 and 2006. If you look at the initial makeup of the APF, one of the first chairpersons of the APF was from SASCO, but over time certain activists withdrew. COSATU and so on withdrew. I remained active there and kept the link with outsourced workers and activists on the campus. I was also relating to other activists in SASCO at Wits who started to go through some of the experiences I had had in relation to taking on some policies of the alliance and being constrained by the transformation process.

And then in 2008 I took a contract job here as an associate lecturer in sociology and I really felt at that moment completely defeated, I mean like I am not giving you the whole story ... the APF does not exist any more. For a

whole lot of reasons it declined, and I withdrew feeling completely defeated and said okay I am heading back to my studies and went into a master's programme at UKZN, but my research was here in Orange Farm. So, I was struggling for library access in the first year and application for the job was one way to get library access and I got back into the space.

### **Returning to Wits and continuing to work with student activists**

On describing herself based on the roles and various hats she has worn in her journey, Naidoo states that she would like to be called a 'scholar activist', as she continues with her recount of her life back at Wits, connecting the impact of her student leadership, her community activism, her scholarly work and the #FeesMustFall movement.

The value of being back here, and over time was just to have student activists coming over and knocking at my door because of what I was teaching in the classroom, this seemed huge. After a little while, well, this is a little space: you get to know who's here and who's there. So, people like Mbuyiseni Ndlozi, the EFF spokesperson, came to me as a struggling activist from SASCO, you know; he's been threatened with expulsion and so on. How does he deal with this, so those kinds of engagement ... Vuyani Pambo, so those kinds of people ... some ended up leading #FeesMustFall. So, I started having those kinds of engagement, started reconnecting with people, with the solidarity committee that was taking up the questions of outsourcing. All those issues that I felt defeated around, people were still taking up in very small groups and they were often not having a lot of success.

### **Confronting oneself as academic and activist in #FeesMustFall**

It is definitely a significant moment that shaped my life overall, because it's in that moment where I had really to confront who I was, who I wanted to be, who I could be, and how I could answer that question that I came to university with, which was, 'How do I contribute to effecting change in the world?'

Knowledge itself and knowledge production I started to see as very important and central in that idea of changing the world. I never imagined myself as an academic because 'academic' was a swear word in my house and in the movement.

The first time I was ever made to confront that I am an academic was in the #FeesMustFall protest because students identified me as an academic. There were few who knew me and knew where I came from. In such a mass of students you are an academic, the enemy. So, yes, it became very real in a different sense which made me confront who I am. I have been really lucky, I think, to have had the experience of 10 years teaching in the social sciences and humanities. I didn't ever imagine myself as applying for this kind of job

and to be in this space. The Society, Work and Politics Institute is one of the Wits research institutes that has been able to sustain itself in the space of the university whilst continuing to do more activist work. So, yes, I still struggle with that title of academic.

### **Scholarly activism and the classroom**

How one imagines oneself in the world also changes in different forms of interactions and engagements. I gain the most from being challenged in the classroom about what I am presenting. I am lucky to teach the sociology of work and theory around that and then social movements and collective action, and sociological theory.

The race–class debate, gender, feminist thought, student movements, the new social movements, these have been the kind of issues I have interacted around – with this generation that has not grown up under apartheid. Many of them not coming with the kind of baggage that most of us carry having grown up in that period and many of them not coming with the knowledge that is produced within political parties and political formations, means that they have a much broader set of understandings of the world that they then want to bring into the classroom and then speak to the theory or make the theory speak to their experience. That opens up a very different set of conversations.

### **The future of representative politics: what is the alternative?**

I think the moment is now (it might even be too late) to be confronting the challenge of representative politics because I think a lot of our students are struggling with what might come after or what's the alternative. Voting or not voting today, as it applies to SRC elections as well as national elections, is not necessarily apathy. It's about questioning the very political system itself ... and then there is withdrawal because there is no alternative space to actually confront the questions.

# chapter 4

## Jerome September

University of Cape Town, SRC media officer 1997/98,  
SRC Chair: Student Life 1998/99, SRC president 1999

*Thierry M. Luescher & Jerome September*

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### Brief biography

Jerome September is the dean of Student Affairs at the University of the Witwatersrand. He was previously head of Student Affairs at Sol Plaatje University (SPU), Kimberley. Before that he served for more than a decade in different positions at the University of Cape Town (UCT), including as manager for Student Governance and Leadership from 2005 to 2012. In 2012, September became the youth development connector at Citizens Movement in Cape Town. He returned to UCT in 2014 and worked as special projects advisor to the director of the International Academic Programmes Office until 2015. September holds a BA in political studies and a MPhil in human rights from UCT. He is currently pursuing a DBA at the University of Bath in the UK.

This chapter is based on an interview conducted by Thierry Luescher on 15 August 2018.

### Early influences

Jerome September traces the early influences on his motivation to become involved in the SRC of UCT to his upbringing during apartheid South Africa in the 1980s, the transition to democracy in the early 1990s, and his awareness of the injustices in the country, which he gained from teachers during his schooling years who covered an informal curriculum on South Africa's struggle history.

My political socialisation was influenced by the fact that I grew up under apartheid South Africa on a farm in the Western Cape. At my school there was quite a bit of awareness about what was happening in the country, both in primary and high school, and also the student movement at the time. I wasn't one of the leaders; I was more a participant, mainly in informally organised marches.

There was a big sense around the injustices in the country. The teachers would cover an informal curriculum. So in history you would do the formal curriculum, which you were required to do, but at the same time teachers would also, quite in-depth on the side, speak about apartheid, the history, the struggle, and so on, so to get students involved.

When Mandela was released, I was in standard 8, about 16. And so it was really that transitional period. By the time I matriculated in 1992, the changes had already begun to take place.

After matric, I didn't go straight to university; I went to work. By the time I arrived at university, I was one of the older students. I guess your school results and academic performance alone isn't enough for you to access opportunities. In my case a lack of information, a lack of proper guidance, meant that I had the matric results but I had not applied extensively for funding and those sorts of sources of support. So I worked for two years and then went to university.

## **Context of getting involved at UCT**

### **Disorientation and alienation**

Coming from rural Western Cape and being slightly older than the average first-year student, September found the UCT student culture of the mid-1990s both disorienting and alienating.

Arriving at UCT in 1995, it was a very white university. I stayed in College House, which was a very typical boys' res, with kids who typically came from boarding schools, who had particular ways of being and there were sets of tradition. I was taken to varsity by a family friend. When the car stopped, there were drunk white boys opening the car doors and just diving in and you're like: what the hell! That was my introduction to residence life at UCT ...

And, there was a streaking tradition at College House. At some point you get naked in front of the Mowbray police station. You shout at the police until they chase you and yah, the aim is not to get caught. It didn't make sense to me and I didn't participate.

There was also like the drinking thing during orientation, where you have to go into the pub and just drink yourself motherless. And it just didn't make sense to me and I didn't drink; I was quite a strong Christian. But, if you don't do this you will not be one of the boys ... for me it was always like: well

whatever, I'm turning 21, I am not going to participate in this; it just didn't make sense to me.

It was a very foreign world, a very alien world.

It was that stuff, but it was also more subtle things: behaviours in the dining halls; what is appropriate and what is expected of you; a certain way in which UCT students behave; certain things that UCT students embrace.

For example, I was lucky I guess not to have to do the English for academic purposes course. There was a case at some point where you had to write to show that your English was up to standard and I wrote it and passed. So, I didn't have to do the course. But there was quite a stigma around that, it was seen as 'English for African people' and that's how people used to joke around those things.

### **Confronting your prejudices**

Not all culture shock experiences of coming to university were necessarily bad, however. September recalls how his prejudices were challenged by the diverse student community he encountered at UCT.

The other shocker of course was also coming from the particular background that I was coming from and an education system that almost demonised the rest of the continent; it was such a culture shock to arrive at university and in College House that my room-mate is a white guy, and in the corridor, there are loads of Zimbabweans and Kenyans; people from all over the world but also other black people from South Africa. And suddenly you are confronted with your own prejudices against other people: the idea that beyond the Limpopo everything was 'just dark' and there was nothing there to aspire to or to look forward to' was really being challenged.

And suddenly here are black African, Zimbabweans, that firstly, speak much better English than you, and secondly are top performers throughout that year across the university. And just the way that played with your mind because suddenly everything that you believed up to that point is being challenged.

At the same time being confronted for the first time in your life with white people that are actually pretty mediocre ... There is actually nothing special about them. When having grown up on a farm where whiteness was so revered ... the white farmer ... his kids ... the way it was indoctrinated to you. And here you arrive at UCT and in some instances you get better marks than they do: they're actually just human; there's actually nothing that's special about them. That stuff start that you suddenly confront in your first year. And here, I'm already 20 turning 21 and it's at this point only where I'm confronted with that stuff ...

Although during the orientation social diversity programme I didn't have a clue as to what prejudice meant. I went through a whole diversity workshop with no clue as to what they were talking about. It was only after the first or second workshop during orientation on the social diversity thing that I went to the bookstore to go and buy an English–Afrikaans dictionary and looked up the word 'prejudice'. And it was only then that I discovered: oh, it's *vooroordeel*, right, so that's what they were talking about.

So, it was also layers of assumptions being made that the language that was being used in the space, that it was accessible and that we all understood, so of course later on that you also want to address.

### The importance of role models and friendships

Seeing positive role models in the context of feeling disoriented and alienated, three issues stand out in September's reflections on how he became involved:

Firstly, the orientation leaders: the way they carried themselves, the way they were presented, that was something to aspire to. They were the cool kids, who were confident, who spoke well, who didn't seem to have all these barriers, the racial stuff, the gender stuff. These were the in-kids ...

And then sitting in Jameson Hall, which is now Sarah Baartman Hall, and being welcomed by the vice-chancellor, Dr Stuart Saunders,<sup>39</sup> and SRC president Maxwell Fuzane. I can't remember what Maxwell said but I can remember just being so inspired, being so in awe of this student who is the president, who is now speaking and who seems to have it all together: I was thinking maybe one day I could be doing this.

And the third big influence for me was UCT Radio. UCT Radio was part of the orientation on the Plaza, and I was being inspired by this confident young woman, Natalie, who seems to just own and hold this space.

So those were matters that just ended up staying with me: the orientation leaders being very confident and very articulate and young leaders who made me feel so welcome and inspired.

Upon reflection, I am glad that I wasn't the impressionable 18 year old straight from school in my first year, going to the university. I think I may have been open to a lot of stuff that I maybe would not have been ready for. So, I was very appreciative of the fact that I had worked before coming to university and that I had some experience. And because of that I then also challenged myself to try and make my friendship groupings as diverse as possible, and those were often difficult, and they were often different pockets

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39 On Dr Stuart Saunders' reflections on university leadership, see his chapter in: Council on Higher Education (CHE) (2016). *Reflections of South African University Leaders, 1981 to 2014*. Cape Town: African Minds and Pretoria: CHE.

of friends. So, at res, I had a lot of white friends; on campus itself I would often sit or be with a lot of coloured friends and that was often mixed with African friends, and they became more and more all the time.

## **Becoming involved in the SRC**

Having arrived at UCT in 1995 for his first year, and becoming an orientation leader in his second year at varsity, September decided to run for the SRC and did his first term as SRC media officer in 1997/98.

So, two years after arriving at UCT I ended up running for the SRC. My university involvement had not strictly been in student party politics. I was involved through the orientation route: I was an orientation leader and was trained to welcome new students. I also got involved in some religious societies and I had some involvement in student political organisations, but not so much on campus. What happened was in fact that I had run for the College residence house committee, but I wasn't elected. I then still wanted to make a contribution and decided to run for the SRC.

A big influence on this was also my interpretation of the context. A great influence was Dr Mamphela Ramphele who was vice-chancellor.<sup>40</sup> It wasn't because I necessarily agreed with her politically, but it was this confident black woman who is seen to be in charge, which was also inspiring.

In 1997 I was elected as the SRC media officer. It was great; a fantastic experience. And in 1998 I ran again and in my second term I was originally elected as SRC president, but in the process of SRC portfolio allocations one group objected and walked out of the portfolio allocation. Student Affairs then investigated and said the process had to be redone. So, we then redid the process and another student won the presidency. So, I then became Chair: Transformation. When the SRC president was academically excluded at the beginning of the following year, at the beginning of 1999, I ended up being elected by the SRC as the new SRC president for the remainder of that year.

### **SRC elections**

When September ran for the SRC, it was only the third time that he was involved in an election process: he had voted for the first time in 1994 in the first democratic national election, and then in 1996 in the UCT SRC election. He recounts the different experiences as follows:

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40 Dr Mamphela Ramphele became the vice-chancellor of UCT in 1996. She was the first black female university vice-chancellor in South Africa.



The SRC election process of 1997 was important for me in several ways. Just two years before, in 1995, UCT didn't get the minimum poll for the SRC election and a transitional student council was put in place by the student parliament. I was one of those students who didn't vote in 1995. The following year I participated when Mzukisi Qobo became the SRC president. Mzukisi came from College House which was where I was staying. But I never went to the SRC question and answer sessions.

The following year in 1997, I'm now a candidate. So, of course now I am required to be campaigning and participating in SRC Q&A sessions, but I didn't know really what to expect because I hadn't gone before! So, I think the way it was done was important. It was quite an eye-opening experience in that for the first time I was really exposed to some of the issues that students were going through and that were being raised.

I also liked the fact that there was strong control around the campaigning and electoral process. You have your manifesto; you could do a party; candidates were formally presented to the electorate by the elections committee; and to an extent there was a layer of equalising the playing fields.

Previously, my most incisive experience had been the 1994 national election. But remember, then I was on a farm and on the farm, there were no real party-political activities. You relied on what you got from the TV or the radio and what you got from newspapers. No parties came to campaign – except there was one night when we were taken to go and listen to the National Party because the farmer decided that we must go and listen to ... But that was it ... and often on the farm you couldn't talk about being pro-ANC or being pro-anyone but the National Party. And so you spoke about that stuff still in almost hushed tones.

Even going to vote, you're put on the back of a truck to a voting station on another farm where a farmer's daughter or wife or whoever actually were the electoral staff. So even as you stand in the queue you just keep your mouth shut, you do your thing, you protect your vote that no one sees who you voted for and you drop it in, because you fear some sort of reprisal if you didn't vote the way they wanted you to vote. So, for me to this day the idea of my vote being a secret is an important part of who I am. It's a secret and I'm not gonna tell.

So even the UCT SRC election it was a proper election; it was serious. I never doubted the integrity of the electoral system, I never doubted the integrity of the process. I never felt that the election was being rigged; that a party was being favoured or anything. Even though I immediately realised that if you ran under a party banner, you had more chances.

My doubts came when I was now a candidate for the presidency and one group walks out after a voting took place. There was now an investigation but I can't recall whether we were actually ever presented with an actual report that said what went wrong.

The SRC election campaigns were also important in a different way for September. They contributed to his awareness of the issues affecting a diverse range of students on campus.

I think it was actually the electoral process that opened my eyes to a lot of the stuff that was actually happening on campus. So, I think to an extent I was a typical, almost apathetic, student up until that point. Certainly, I was involved, but wasn't involved in the campus politics, to put it like that, or student politics.

### **SRC internal organisation**

An important difference between the way SRCs were constituted in the 1990s and early 2000s and now was the provision for sabbatical officers. September also recalls the importance of student parliament during his two terms and particularly when at the end of 1998 the SRC president was academically excluded. Finally, it is the relationship he built over the two years with the Student Affairs department that eventually impacted greatly on his future professional biography.

#### *Sabbatical officers*

September recounts how four SRC members who were full-time student leaders and as such on a 'sabbatical' did not have to do any academic work for the duration of their SRC term.

In my second term as SRC member 1998/99 I had been elected as a sabbatical officer. That is a student leader who suspends their studies for the period of their student leadership at the SRC level. Your registration as a student is a technical registration: you are a student, but you don't take any courses; you are essentially a full-time student leader. This was reserved for the SRC president, Chair: Academics, Chair: Transformation, and Chair: Student Life. Those were the four portfolios that were full-time.

So, if you ran for those portfolios and you had to indicate that during the election. If you ran for those portfolios then you had to take a sabbatical. And for the year, you got a stipend. I can't remember how much it was, but it was enough to take care of your basic expenses for that year, and you paid your residence from that.

#### *Student parliament and the relationship with the student body*

The relationship between an SRC and the student body is typically maintained throughout the year in various ways. Prior to 1995, the SRC at UCT would hold regular referenda and mass meetings to consult the general student body on various matters. With the 1995 SRC constitution, a student parliament came to serve the function of advising the SRC and holding it accountable.

By the time I came into the SRC, there was already a student parliament, which in fact was the highest decision-making structure. So, the parliament had to endorse the portfolios allocated by the SRC. So when there was the fight over the presidency in 1999, with the SRC president having been academically excluded at the end of 1998, it was because I had quite strong support in the student parliament that at the end of the day I ended up winning the SRC presidency.

And so one tried to maintain that relationship, firstly with the student parliament, but then secondly also with key constituencies in the student body: it was important to have residences on our side, RAG, and others, because they were quite influential.

To gauge the student interest, we often relied on what came either from a direct structure or what came through the student parliament – and you kind of relied on your own sense of things.

#### *Student Affairs and SRC: building trust*

The relationship between an SRC and Student Affairs is often not an easy one. September describes how after an initial sense of distrust, he came to appreciate Student Affairs' role in induction, training and support for the SRC. It is important to note here that at the time of the interview, September had just become the Dean of Student Affairs of the University of the Witwatersrand, after a two-decade career in Student Affairs at UCT and at SPU in Kimberley.

I didn't trust Student Affairs. In my first term in 1997/98, there wasn't much training; you kind of learnt for yourself on the job. Student Affairs didn't even do our induction, our strategic planning. That was outsourced to a private company. And there wasn't a formal training programme and a formal requirement for any of us to go through a compulsory training programme. And my sense is, the reason I didn't trust Student Affairs was because I felt they were very partisan and pro a particular group.

The following year, when for the couple of days I was now SRC president-elect, I talked to Student Affairs and this is when Edwina Brooks, the current director of Student Development at UCT, really entered the system. That year we said we want Student Affairs to do a proper induction and to help us with our strategic planning because I felt that the previous year had just been a waste of money.

There was now a more formal relationship between us and Student Affairs. And through academic leadership we also ended up doing quite a few programmes together and so you also ended up learning in that way, because the process was very participatory and you take the lead, so we had joint projects. Not only with Student Affairs but also with other areas of work.

And that's really how it happened in terms of my journey. In my later career in student affairs, wanting to make sure that there is training in place became quite a strong feature because of that personal experience. Not just you-learn-the-hard-way.

## **Towards co-operative governance**

After the landmark report of the National Commission on Higher Education of 1996, the White Paper on Higher Education and the Higher Education Act were promulgated in 1997. Forthwith, co-operative governance would be the principle to guide higher education governance at national and institutional levels. Part of that was a legislated provision for student representation in the University Council and Senate (and their committees), and in a new body: the Institutional Forum.

### *The 1997 Higher Education Act*

September recalls that during his two terms, there was a serious attempt by the SRC to practise co-operative governance; that is to participate in the formal committee structure of the university.

In 1997 the Higher Education Act was promulgated. With that came changes in the actual structure of student governance. Whereas before you would have participated in the Broad Transformation Forum, we were now moving towards the Institutional Forum; we were moving towards the co-operative governance thing. So, we had to make sense of what we were now dealing with and what it would mean for us to sit on these committees and be so-called co-governors.

I was the first co-chair of the Institutional Forum: so what is this animal that we are now dealing with? Thandi Lewin was the transformation officer of UCT at the time and I was sitting with her and having to talk through the structure. At times I was feeling that this is a way we are actually being managed, because suddenly all the energy must go to this structure as opposed to previously where you could just march or write a petition or do whatever. And suddenly you have to rethink some of those things.

## **Key challenges, issues and protests**

Academic and financial exclusions, institutional culture and inclusiveness on campus, the initiative by the university leadership to outsource support staff, and changes to the academic timetable were some of the key challenges that September's SRCs were dealing with.

### *Exclusions and student funding*

There were always the issues around fees. There was always some form of protest at the beginning of the year because of students being excluded on

financial grounds. We tried to take this through the formal structures of the university and tried to advocate through the formal structures, but there were also times when you needed to protest. In my first year there was a march to Bremner [Building] and in the second year as well, there was advocating for students around financial and academic exclusions. If there were exclusions it was often a matter of writing appeal letters; you help students write appeals and you try and put the best case possible forward.

You would try to get more money so that people could register, or when it's graduation time again, when there are people who have met the degree requirements, but they don't necessarily have the funding to now graduate.

### *Reconciliation and institutional culture*

Building some sort of inclusive university community was another issue: How do we make the space better for black students? For example, the RAG parties: they were often seen as these white parties; black students go to the beach braai. And so also, how do we then create spaces where we are able to coexist? And because of the euphoria of 1994, there was a strong reconciliatory kind of tone to it all. How do we work together? How do we build UCT together; how do we open these spaces up for black people and for women? You know like those sort of things.

As SRC president, for example, I went to a Muslim Students' Association dinner, a fundraising dinner, which got me in trouble with my church: 'What are you doing there?!' But for me it was the thing: 'Well, we are creating a different society and as SRC president it's important that I show that, in where I go, and what I do.'

In one of our meetings there was even a discussion around the Rhodes statue. It was very brief and it had more that conciliatory tone. One of the members suggested that maybe a statue of Mandela should be put up somewhere close to it; maybe it should be contextualised; maybe something else should be done there. But it wasn't a major discussion point and debate issue.

### *Outsourcing*

September recalls the way the SRC and student-worker alliance lost the outsourcing decision in 1999. This issue comes up again when he reflects on the traumatic experiences that SRC members have to cope with.

Remember '99 was also when Ramphela hit us with outsourcing. So that was a major issue. Again, it was about mobilising students, getting the student voice together and putting some sort of submission from the student body together.

We were trying to now use the university structures, because it was about buying into the idea that we are co-operative, that we are in a co-operative

governance arrangement and we have structures. So, let's take our issues to the structures.

But when it mattered, the university leadership did not care about co-operative structures. I think at some levels it was a boxing-ticking exercise. The students are here, we have given them an opportunity to express their views and they've done so.

With outsourcing I got the sense that the decision was made. We're outsourcing; we're only going through the motions by consulting. So, our submission to the University Council – students said no, we're against this – we made a submission to argue our points. I do not think that made much of a difference. The decision had been made, it was just going through the motions.

### *Academic timetable*

Unlike in the case of the outsourcing of workers, when it came to the academic timetable the SRC recorded some success in using co-operative governance structures. At the same time, September notes the challenge of developing an institutional memory in student governance.

There was a decision to change the timetable. At the time, there was a formal lunch hour, but the proposal was to do away with the lunch hour and have period 1 to period 10 running through the whole day.

We introduced this thing called 'meridian'. That idea of meridian and the way it was set up was actually the result of a negotiation.

Originally there wasn't meant to be anything, it was meant to run from period 1 to period 10 with no sort of midpoint break in between any more. It was with the result of a negotiation with Prof. Martin Hall which then resulted in this idea of let's call it meridian. There were meant to be a number of conditions put on when that period could be used, but of course this is where student leadership falls flat because in handing over to the following year the conditions that were put go down the drain. Because we didn't sufficiently hand that over.

### *Mergers and restructuring*

And then *Size and Shape*, oh Lord, yes of course. So, *Size and Shape* was a controversial report by Mamphela and we participated in it. To a large extent, it was from a protectionist position almost that UCT can't be merged with other institutions. Originally that was the discussion at UCT.

Internally to UCT, the other big changes that took place at UCT was the faculty restructuring, when we moved from 10 or so faculties to the current six. And also what came with the devolution of power to the faculties. So, lots of change was taking place, which was tough sometimes to keep track of.

## Strategies and tactics

September reflects on the academic exclusion and financial exclusion protests as against the challenges of moving into committees and co-chairing the Institutional Forum – different ways in which the SRC tried to make the student voice heard: one in the boardroom and one in the street. Which of those was more impactful? More successful? And why?

Look, I think it was often the combination of advocating in structures and protests that was more impactful. For example, with regard to getting funding for poor students, a lot of that was, on the one hand, about making the boardroom case, but you had to almost support the boardroom case with a protest. Often it was at the point of either threatening to protest or actually protesting that it would create movement. And often it depended on the issue. On the timetable issue, students were unlikely to protest; but on financial exclusions you knew there's enough political will or frustration on the ground for people to actually protest. So, you had to be quite savvy about which form you use.

Now this was before social media. So, there wasn't the instant thing of getting the message out right away. You had to rely on posters, you had to rely to an extent on email, which was being introduced. I think by '99 most people had an email address. But there was no Facebook, there was no Twitter. So, a lot of it meant it was posters; meeting with people in various ways; getting the buy-in from student parliament; and, of course, relying on the student political structures.

The nature of the issue would therefore determine the use of different forms of representing the student voice.

Our input into the *Size and Shape* debate was a Saturday morning colloquium and you collate the views and you submit that.

On the outsourcing it was a similar strategy, but also on the day that the actual Council decision was made, there was a picketing outside the venue to put pressure on management. So, while those of us who were on the Council were inside, from inside you could hear the workers singing outside as part of that. But Council made the decision and then the matter went to court, if I'm not mistaken. NEHAWU or someone took the matter to court, and you had to wait for that outcome. But then the case was lost in court as far as I know, and we lost this one. But in other senses, that was one of the struggles the students never gave up on.

With regard to the fees, one had periods: there were periods when maybe the fees issue was higher on the table than in other periods. But there was a formation of students, a student-worker alliance or some grouping, where the

outsourcing debates is one of those that remained on the agenda all the way through and took great prominence again during #FeesMustFall.

## Reasons for protests

In the context of a co-operative governance framework with formal student representation, the question is: What is not working for students and contributes to them resorting to protest action? This is September's take on the matter:

### *Slow and stalled decision-making processes*

Decision-making at universities takes time. A decision on a particular issue may drag over a year or it might take two years for a decision to be made. And because the rollover from one SRC to the next, the continuity, the institutional memory is often not there.

Or the political will is not there; it often means that students lose momentum on a particular issue.

Or the debate evolves in a particular way and students were not necessarily part of the evolution of that thing which means that there could be level of frustration kicking in among the students because students would say: we have been arguing about the shuttle service for two years now and still no decision is made.

But because your term of office is so short-term and you need to show delivery, I think then taking it to the street becomes an effective means to get a decision which you would not otherwise get.

### *Management doesn't understand the urgency*

But I do not necessarily think that protest in itself is a bad thing; often that's what it takes for the wheel to turn, because often I think as managers we don't always have a sense of the real frustration on the ground or the urgency of an issue for a particular generation.

And, of course, there is often comfort and certainty in processes, because you take often long-term decisions and often we have to think about long-term implication. So, I think there's a reliance, therefore, on the university processes that have been set up, to help us get certainty along the way about the best interest for the institution for the long run. There's comfort in the faculty board discussing this new programme or this new rule, and then it going to Senate, and then it going to Council. There's comfort that a number of people had looked at it in a consultative process to know this is in our collective interest.

And that makes it difficult for a student leader, who is here for a couple of months, who's got classes to attend. Student leaders don't necessarily have that layer of patience and longevity in their role.



### *Student leaders need a 'quick win' – or else*

And I think often as management we maybe do not consider those sorts of things; the quick-wins stuff, the stuff which is also important: the sense of success. Every now and again we must say: ok here we're gonna agree because it's important to affirm and to give students a sense of victory. Because that builds confidence, that helps them move forward and often if you don't have that sort of framing and you only think in a one-dimensional kind of way, then that can get lost and breed frustration.

I think it is about appreciating that. And of course, this is maybe a controversial thing to say, but I think often there is actually no need for this 'strong man' kind of approach. Often students will come and say: this thing must happen tomorrow or else. But why are we 'or-elseing' already? This is the first time we're having this conversation; what kind of conversation are we having? And then egos get into play and it's like well ... the institution will not allow itself to be bullied. Suddenly you're having a different conversation. So I think it is also important that in the process, all the different approaches are potentially appreciated and given space.

## **Reflecting on #FeesMustFall**

In the course of his reflections on his student leadership experience, challenges and protesting, and given his various roles in recent years in Student Affairs at different institutions, September reflects on the 2015/16 student movement, its origins and manifestation at UCT, SPU and at Wits.

### **The origins of #FeesMustFall**

Part of the story on the origins of #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall is the state of our democracy. Here is a generation of students who grew up under the false banner of being 'Mandela kids', who have been made a series of promises all the way through their lives and who arrive at university, and who are frustrated by the fact that these promises are not reality. You've been through a schooling system that says to you: If you work hard, the sky's the limit! You are a rainbow kid! And in some respects it is saying: These kids are diversity savvy; they don't have the race issues that the older generation has; they are just the future! Meanwhile their lived reality in many respects is something completely different.

It's of course also a generation that had layers of education around their rights and the Constitution and have a sense of what their rights are and that the right to education is in fact a constitutionally enshrined one. It is a generation who got tired of being lied to or of being let down.

So, you arrive at university with the promise of a brighter future, but then something stands between me and you and that goal and then you connect

with just what the broader struggle is about. So, I think what this group was successful in doing was to link that struggle. And to make it a very personal struggle; there were clear faces; it wasn't simply, we are now marching! And there was quite a strong intellectual project that supported it. And so even those who said, but we can't afford it, at some point had to admit that this is a noble cause.

And I think that was partly what this generation was meant to do. They were able to frame it like in 1976 in a social justice way: this is about what is just, this is about what is right, this is about the future and the possibilities that the future might hold. I think it spoke to something bigger than just my individual need.

#RhodesMustFall probably helped in that narrative, because #RhodesMustFall happened shortly before #FeesMustFall and it was that sign that we're *gatvol*.<sup>41</sup> I've arrived here expecting something else, and again I am being lied to. Let's say I was in a private school or in a former Model C school, where I had to be quiet and just take the stuff in. You know, the stuff about the kid at the school with the hair. So many kids have had that experience and you just keep quiet. And then you arrive at university where you think that finally I'm free, finally I can just be, and it's the same stuff that you're confronted with. I think #RhodesMustFall was a precursor to that; it paved the way, because #RhodesMustFall said we are tired of just accepting things as it is, the time is now for the change.

And unlike generations before, they had the language; there was an academic framing; there was the connecting to something bigger than the self; and they used the power of social media, more so than before. They realised it lay in a simple hashtag – that was our Arab Spring moment! – the power of social media. And so, they were able to craft that into a simple catchy slogan: #FeesMustFall says it all. It was all encapsulated into that. If you read, people said vile things to the students, but even in those things, often people said, but can't they just protest peacefully? And it was almost like the issue wasn't the fees, the issue at some point became the means.

### #FeesMustFall at Sol Plaatje University

There was also a #FeesMustFall process at SPU. There were protests; there was police on campus. And seven students are still facing charges. I'm not sure whether those charges have been withdrawn but when I left Sol Plaatje at the end of January 2018, those students were still facing public violence and whatever else charges.

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41 *Gatvol* is South African slang meaning 'being upset' or 'fed up' (from Afrikaans).

However, the issue with #FeesMustFall was that by and large media focused on Wits and UCT in terms of coverage. But the issues around #FeesMustFall had been the issue at many black institutions for years. It may not have been framed in this particular way, and it may not have taken on the life of a movement, but those issues have been there.

At Sol Plaatje, of course it was an issue. The majority of Sol Plaatje students are NSFAS-funded students, so they – and this is before the current dispensation, so this was when it was still R122 000 cut off, right – so that a poor student, although they were funded they could relate to the struggle, they could relate to what #FeesMustFall was all about.

And I think for many of us, who now find ourselves in leadership positions, that was part of the dilemma: you could relate to the struggle, you could relate to the issues. As someone who came from the farm who in fact was funded by TEFSA, the predecessor to NSFAS, I could absolutely relate to the struggle. I could relate to what students were saying, even during the #RhodesMustFall process.

Therefore, it was easy for me to sign a letter of support that former SRC presidents signed. But at the same time, and this is the dilemma, there's the thing called 'institutional interest'. I am seeing protesting students in front of me and, on the one hand, I must give space for that to take place; but at the same time, I also have a responsibility to ensure that the institution is protected. And being in Student Affairs it's that tough role of relating to students, guiding students, advising students, supporting students, but at the same time also being bound by this thing called institutional interest.

## Lessons

Among the key lessons that September offers for future student leaders are: pick your battles, collaborate, push as hard as you can by using the structures, processes, strategies and tactics available, and do not get side-tracked by playing party politics.

Apart from being more committed to my studies [laughs], I think what I would do differently if I were a student leader now is immerse myself more into the diversity of campus experiences. Although I tried to do that in the social sense, I didn't push myself enough to maybe attend meetings of student political organisations and gatherings, or a programme that might have been happening.

I would also do that institutional memory handover stuff more, because by the time you reach the end of your term, you just want to move on. Often you don't take a longer-term view on some of the issues. That's the other thing I would do different, is to take a longer-term view on some of the issues.

The third thing, given my position I should probably not say that, but knowing what I know now, we should have pushed a lot harder. I think often students don't realise how much power they actually have until they're gone. You sit on these committees and you have a space to say things, or to put things on the agenda, that often staff feel they are not able to.

Of course, you can't do everything because there are real limitations: you are a student and you have academic commitments. But I think, student leaders often didn't work together enough. So often students get so bogged down in the party politics and my organisation looking good, and my organisational interests. The #FeesMustFall kind of sits outside of that. But now on some of the other important issues, often an SRC will say: we are this SRC and we're talking, this is our constituency, and so forth; and often they don't cut through the barriers. You can't be a jack of all trades, so you have to prioritise the fights and pick your battles carefully.

And enjoy the experience. Make the best of that moment that you have.

## **The impact of the student leadership experience**

Looking back 20 years on, since having been in the SRC, September describes his student leadership experience as having been transformative and life-changing.

That was the transformative moment for me ... What I was when I arrived to what I was when I left student life; it's two different people. It took my life on a journey that I don't think it would have gone on, had I not had that experience. Absolutely fantastic. To this day, it's the lessons I learnt then that I can apply to my role and to my job.

When we are speaking about student leadership, my focus has been SRC, but I think student leadership is more than that. In its various forms it is a fantastic platform for young people to become the best that they can be. It's part of that journey, it's part of preparing them for whatever life beyond the university will be. And that's been my experience; although I arrived older, student leadership challenged me in ways that I think I would not otherwise have been challenged. And I'm the better for it.

Often we place so much emphasis on governance; we put so much emphasis on party-political activity; but there is a host of other activities that are actually out there. Students are not only involved in the party politics, but students are doing amazing things through other student structures: Amnesty International, women's movements, Black Management Forum, SHAWCO at UCT ... and a host of opportunities, where students are making a real impact. I see that as active citizenship too and that's also student leadership. There are young people who are doing amazing things and who are making a major difference. When I look at the *Mail & Guardian* 200 Young South

Africans, that's what inspires me, because they deliver across the board. Sport also; students going into communities and coaching or just tutoring every Saturday morning. There's the sanitary pad drive: it's making a difference. So, we must not forget the other components of student activism which sit outside of party politics.

### **Impact on career trajectory**

For September, his experience in student leadership in the mid to late 1990s set the course to where his professional career brought him, being currently the dean of Student Affairs at Wits University.

My interest, even before I came to university, has always been people development. So, before university it was the church. Before university I was involved in an adult literacy programme where we were teaching illiterate farmworkers who couldn't read and write. So, I have always been involved. My journey into student leadership took that further and it was just a different platform to do that. But my interest has always been people development, youth development. And so all my career choices and decisions had been around the extent to which I can make a difference and an impact in the lives of individuals or groups.

When the barriers were broken between me and Student Affairs officials and then the kind of support that I got from those people, it made me realise that this is the kind of professional that I want to be and this is the kind of difference I want to make.

I shouldn't say this about the VC, Dr Mamphela Ramphele, again, but as much as we fought, and as much as we didn't agree, there was always this encouraging, there was an undercurrent of encouraging you, to come out: we want to hear your voice, even if you thought this was just playing the game.

### **Impact on political attitudes and active citizenship**

My experience in student leadership also opened my mind to new possibilities and definitely to the injustices that are there. So politically it made me want to be with the political group or party that speaks to addressing the injustices of this world. So that's where it tended to push me towards. But it also pushed me towards having an open mind, to reason, to debate and sometimes to compromise better.

While I'm not actively involved in party politics, I vote, I definitely vote. I have political views and I try to, well, I follow as much as I possibly can political debates and what's happening generally in the country and beyond.

I went to a men's march, for example, the other day. So, when there are issues I will go to the meeting, I will go to a demonstration. For example, at Sol Plaatje University, the institution organised a demonstration against

violence against women that I participated in and helped organise. I sign petitions. In the spaces that I find myself I do my best to make a difference. I consider myself an active citizen, but I'm not involved in any party-political activities.

### **Impact on personal and family life**

In my personal life, I think there has been an impact on how I relate to the kids in my family and how I relate to other people in the family. So, with the children it is very much a focus on their education, pushing them to want to be the best that they can be; pushing to be as involved as they can be.

This experience has taken me on a journey to be in this position where I am also able to plough back. If I know about a child in the community, what I try and do is to link them to opportunities. Because I see myself now in this role and in my previous roles, as being that social capital. I'm the social capital. For the child wherever on the flats, I'm the social capital, and many times even on my Facebook, I have young people just randomly adding me and asking me questions about stuff. And so a lot of it is an extension of this role.

### **Potential negative consequences: layers of trauma**

While September outlines the amazingly positive impact of the student leadership experience on his biography, he also reflects on potentially negative impacts that the experience of being in leadership at a young age can have on a student leader's biography: traumatic experiences, a heavy burden of responsibility, experiences of violence during protests, and even the possibility of incriminating yourself while advocating for student issues.

Being in student leadership can be very traumatic. Personally, I didn't live through, as a student leader, the kind of #FeesMustFall dynamics. But even then, student leaders were exposed to quite traumatic things. Because of things that students share with you, because of the hope that even workers place in you. Which was the case with the outsourcing debate: the sorts of letters that I received from workers who tell you their life story and who then put faith in you to go and fight their case. And then you lose. And then you have to grapple with thinking about aunty this or uncle that who wrote you this note and what does this now mean for their kids. The weight of responsibility that you carry 24/7. It's extremely traumatic and I don't think we do enough. While most institutions now have quite sophisticated electoral processes and induction programmes and ongoing training programmes, I'm not sure if any of us, in any of our systems, have place for an 'outduction'.

But with #FeesMustFall, it is also about how institutions, or how the state, responded: extremely traumatising to students. If you were a first-year student in 2015 and you graduated end of 2017, your entire student experience would

have been protests. And that's your framing of university life. And so where are those students, students who were at the forefront? We know that in some instances intelligences services were using surveillance, students were being followed, there were instances on campus where rubber bullets were shot and people ended up in hospital. People are still going to court cases. We have not fully dealt with the trauma of that experience. We now talk about depression, we talk about anxiety, we talk about all these things that young people in our universities are going through and we have not yet provided all the layers of support for students to deal with that experience. And then there is the potential of ending up with a criminal record. We are going to have to deal with it otherwise we're going to send a generation of very wounded young people into the world beyond university.

# chapter 5

## Kenny Mlungisi Bafo

University of the Western Cape, SRC president 2002/03

*Thierry M Luescher, Kenny Mlungisi Bafo & Nkululeko Makhubu*

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### Brief biography

Kenny Bafo has since 2016 held the position of councillor in the Cape Town Metro Council representing the Pan African Congress (PAC). Previously he lectured political science and academic development at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and political reporting at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT). Bafo holds a BAdmin(Hons) in public administration from UWC and he is currently completing a MAdmin in political science. He was the leader of the Pan Africanist Student Movement of Azania (PASMA) at UWC from 2000 to 2002 and national secretary-general of PASMA in 2005/06. In 2002 he was elected president of the SRC of UWC.

This chapter is based on an interview conducted by Thierry Luescher and Nkululeko Makhubu on 17 August 2018.

### Early influences

Kenny Bafo traces what influenced his involvement in student leadership by recollecting his experiences as a schoolboy. By the time Bafo joined UWC in 1995, he had had a different schooling experience to most of his peers who grew up with him in Gugulethu and who had lived as school kids through the momentous transition years of the late 1980s and early 1990s.



I went to a primary school in Gugulethu in the early 80s. Standard 3 to standard 5 I was at Intshinga Higher Primary School, the school just behind Mzoli's. I went into 4a which means that I was classified as a good student for that cohort and it had added responsibilities. You know, in standard 3 I was in the top five, in standard 4 I was in the top 10, also in standard 5 as well.

I did my standard 5 in 1989. That was at the time when the first cohort of Robben Islanders were being released. It was a big hullabaloo that was taking place. There was a shift, but we were still kids. Time and again we would see people doing the toyi-toyi in the street and we would just join them not knowing what was happening or who was being released; who was Mandela? That was also the time when there was the state of emergency; the townships were having a lot of upheavals. The Witdoek, the IFP-Inkatha, they were also deploying to assist SAPS at the time. We also had the Third Force, those who were staying in a place called Crossroads. At the time they were referred to as the 'witdoek mense'. So, there was a lot of turmoil at the time, but as kids we did not understand what was happening.

Intshinga Primary would pride itself on learning excellence; so, what some of the teachers decided to do was, they called in our parents. They said: 'Look, these kids are now going for high school in 1990 and the situation in the township is untrainable.' The teachers thought that there would be no schooling for that year, 1990. So, the advice they gave to our parents was: 'Let's take some of our best kids into coloured schools.' There was a sense of normality, a sense of stability in some of the coloured schools. So, I was one of those who were then taken from Gugulethu township school into a coloured school.

By moving from Intshinga Higher Primary School in Gugulethu to a coloured school in Athlone, Bafo realised that schools were differently resourced and he now had to learn in English.

It was going to be a whole transition for me from just being in Gugulethu using my mother tongue as my first language and everything, now going into an environment whereby English will be the medium of instruction. So, it was a major paradigm shift for me.

I went to Athlone North just for one year, as part of adjustment. I did extremely well there as well, despite the language barrier. It was the teachers of Athlone North who suggested that I must go to Athlone High. So, they applied on my behalf. I went to Athlone High so that's how I managed to get my high school, grade 12 now, it was standard 10 then.

And the first thing there for me was a wow-moment. In Gugulethu, the only person who had a car was the principal. When I went to Athlone North and Athlone High, almost all the teachers had cars. So, this for me was a wow:

this was a good school. The parking lot was full of cars. But in Gugulethu there was only one car and that was the principal's car. So that culture, that transition, that paradigm shift for me it's what instilled a sense of, look I need to be serious now.

The novelty of the new school environment soon faded; after doing initially very well in the new school, Bafo got a wake-up call in 1994. Having always been a top-achieving learner, not getting a university exemption in his matric in 1994 meant he had to find a way to be able to repeat standard 10. He recalls:

That seriousness went up to standard 8; because now I was already in the system, I could bunk classes, and I was able to stand my ground. English was no longer the barrier and I was doing well in sports as well. I was going up to what was called 'champ of champs', almost representing the Western Cape Province for 100 and 200 metres. So, my high school days were quite normal; they were not necessarily disturbed because of politics. Only when I went to University, then I was exposed to other material.

In '94 I was doing my matric. It was the time of the elections. I was the only one in my neighbourhood who was attending a school in a 'foreign', they used to call it 'a foreign land'. I was the only one attending a school outside of Gugulethu.

1994 was just one of those year where you were just going to school for the sake of going to school. All my friends, in as much as they were also doing matric, there was that *laissez-faire*, that chill, don't worry about anything, we're gonna pass. And matric was a totally different story. In as much as that was supposed to be the year where I was just going to concentrate on my studies, the opposite happened. In 1994 I was less serious on my studies; it was a year where one was just with friends. But one thing I told myself was that I will not fail matric. So, when it came to exams, I wrote my exams and all of that.

And my father then came to me and as is the normal state of affairs that when you are in matric at a certain age, 18, then you must go for the right of passage, you know. So, I said to my dad: 'Look, let me just wait for my exams, my results, and then I will make my decision.'

After I had written my exams, I realised I had wasted a year. The exams came and I looked at my results: I passed but it was not my full potential. I then called my dad and my mom and I said: 'Look, this is not Kenny Bafo, I just request an extra year.' But now the difficulty was, in coloured schools they don't accept repeaters, right. So that meant that I had to go and find another school. Despite the fact that I know I passed, but I only got a school -eavers certificate and not a university exemption.

I sat down and some of my friends, in fact all of them had failed. For them it was like, what's up? There wasn't even a single person who passed matric

who was our role model at the time. So, we really had no role models, almost everyone failed matric before us, so it was not like a huge thing. But for me who was someone who was always goal-oriented and someone who had potential; for me it was a very down moment. I felt that I had disappointed my parents.

So, in 1995 when some of my former colleagues from Athlone High went to do their first year at CPU, then PenTech, at UWC, and all of that, I put my uniform on, Athlone High, and went straight to the principal's office. I sat down with him and I pleaded for him to take me back. He said: 'Kenny you passed. You gave us a lot of trouble in your years. Now you had passed, so that's it.' But he took me back under very strict conditions, and I had to make some commitments. I guess in my case, they were more concerned because they knew my potential. So, I did my matric again; it was the most difficult year for me. I had to stay in line. I had to stay on top of things. Every time I want to go otherwise, teachers would remind me: 'You made a promise to us.'

I did well. I wrote my exam and I felt good. Then, while I was waiting for my exams I had to go for my rite of passage in 1995. So, the results came out while I was still in the bush. My little brother brought it to me, and it was a matric exemption. I had applied to UWC and everything went well. So, in 1996 I went to UWC.

## **Context of getting involved at UWC**

When Bafo arrived at UWC in 1996, the idea of student representation was something new to him and there was no 'student political career' that he had in mind to pursue at university. As a first-generation student, he recalls how many misconceptions he had about studying and how little orientation he was given to understand what was expected of him.

### **Academic life as a first-generation student**

I went to UWC to do my BA in law but then, one was not taken through the process. I thought with going for law, it is six months of theory and I'll just go straight to court [Kenny laughs]. That was the misunderstanding. And you didn't have anyone in your family who would explain to you: 'Ok this is gonna take so many years,' that kind of thing. I was the first one to go to university. My sister went to a teaching college. I was the very first one. Everything was new.

I did not stay on campus. I was referred to as 'opidam student', travelling back and forth, and it also had a huge financial impact on my mom who was a single parent with three kids. You know the normal township story. The abnormal made normal. And also just coming out of the bush, you want to contribute at home; the rite of passage on its own it gives a financial strain; and still you have to pay upfront payment at varsity. So, I started working at KFC.

I went to do my first year. Now BA law meant that it had a bit of BA in it. I took history and something else, I can't recall. But I enjoyed history more than anything; the legal subjects were just boring to me. So, we took a decision that is not for us. Let's go and see if we can't change this into a BA. And we were told that: 'Look you should feel lucky that you were accepted for a BA law. Many were rejected. You were accepted based on your results, you were accepted from a number of pupils.' We were like: still we don't like it. We were not taken through the process of what this entails. Law sounded very nice. 'What are you doing?' – 'I'm doing law.' It sounded very professional, than someone saying they are doing BA. But now you had to go to the library, you had to look at the legal proceedings and all that nonsense. That frustration coupled with the fact that no one was taking us seriously.

So for us it was like fine; we have a choice of just going to class or not and no one was going to ask why you were not in class. And there was also 'The Barn'. We were more there than being in a lecture hall, you know. But that caught up with us, come exam time and DP and classwork marks. We were coming from the schooling, whereby you could go into an exam room, write an exam and pass. The idea of a DP for us was like, what is that? Continuous assessment ...

So BA my first year it was terrible. The only thing I passed, I think it was history with an A [laughs]. The rest was like bad. But then 1997, now that I knew the system, it was a much better year for me.

## **Getting interested in politics: the International Socialist Movement and PASO**

After recounting his frustration with his first year of university studies, Bafo recounted how he became aware of the changes in higher education that were taking place nationwide, and how 1997 became a year that profoundly influenced his political ideology.

There were so many student activities taking place at the time in 1996. The institutional right-sizing was taking place in 1997, the higher education landscape was being debated and all that nonsense. So it was quite an exciting period for SRCs, you know.

Then came the student uprising of 1997. It started in 1997. At that time I was already attending seminars that were organised by the International Socialist Movement [ISM] and we were introduced to Karl Marx' material, Leon Trotsky, Steve Biko ... you know all the Marxist socialist theory was introduced. And there were these guys from exile coming to introduce workshops and for us it was incredible ... us being members of ISM, those of us who made a conscious decision to attend the workshops.

I made a couple of friends on campus and I was spending less time at home, despite the fact that I was a day student. Some of them were staying in res. Because UWC had this 60 km radius, so for me to get accommodation in res it meant that I had to come up with an address from Eastern Cape, because I'm outside the 60 km radius. But if you stay in Gugulethu you will not get into res.

So, I made friends on campus and we would have these discussions. What made them interesting is the little stories that we were getting from exiles. The one person that was telling these stories was a guy by the name of Terry Bell. He now writes for *Cape Times*. Terry Bell is a former principal of Solomon Mahlangu High School in Tanzania. He was also the head of curriculum at that school. He was also in the top structure of the SACP. So, he was one of those gurus of the SACP up until he had a Damascus moment where he started to question the two-stage theory of the ANC and Stalin's work and all of that and the route that the SACP was taking. Not post-1994, still in exile. And that's when he started to read a lot of Trotsky. Issues of the revolution and all of that. So, he was part of that group that was expelled by the SACP referred to as Trotskyites.

So post-1990 when they came back, he was part of the International Socialist Movement, and part of their task was to set up student chapters at university. One part was the Student Socialist Action Committee [SSAC]. So, I was part of the Student Socialist Action Committee. That was my first political home. But it so happened that 80 per cent of their members were members of PASO, the Pan Africanist Student Organisation, you know, the predecessor or the precursor or the mother of PASMA, being the Pan Africanist Student Movement of Azania.

PASO at the time, which was a body of the PAC, had serious ideological challenges. Some members of PASO believed in the socialist, Marxist theory; others believed in the Africanist nationalist approach. And these were guys like Terry Bell who managed to find and utilise the gap and draw in those who were more aligned towards the Marxist way of thinking and they became one of the student socialist movement centres. But now the offices, PASO. PASO and SSAC were all occupying ground floor offices, in the student centre, so you would have members of PASO who would go to PASO for a meeting and they would attend our meeting also ...

So, in 1997 when the student protests started, we wanted to analyse them using the Marxist lens. There were many debates that were organised at varsity and AZASCO at the time was very powerful in terms of how they were presenting their case. And these were the guys who were well read and who knew their stuff and were ideologically grounded. The Black Consciousness people are always like that. So, we were engaging with Black Consciousness movement student leaders and all of that.

## Building a socialist state, the 1997/98 protests, and getting academically excluded

Bafo describes how easy it is to become so committed to the ‘extra-curricular’ student work that it can have bad repercussions for academic progress.

1997 I spent most of my time attending those workshops rather than being in lecture halls. I then realised that there was no way that I would succeed with my studies. You know, 80 per cent of my time was spent attending ISM or going to other institutions representing ISM. When you are a student activist, 80 per cent of your time is less on what you came to varsity for, than what you met at varsity, in terms of your activity. I ended up going to various institutions pushing the ISM chapters, and that of course coincided with the student uprising of 1998.

Because I did not write my exams – I was in and out of Cape Town – automatically one would be excluded academically at the end of ’97. And that was a shock for me, because the rules were not that well explained because first year I was not excluded academically. I just failed some of the modules; I passed others. So, in 1997 because I was just not there and did not write exams, I was excluded. I was prevented from even entering the exam room. But that did not bother me at all, because I had a mission to fulfil, and that was the attainment of a socialist state. You get into that zone as a student leader you know [laughs].

Basically in 1997 when the student uprising was really starting to kick in and we had lecturers who were committing suicide, that was the time when most of the faculties were starting to close down under Vice-Chancellor Cecil Abrahams. The Department of Religious Studies was going to Stellenbosch. Music, all those were being closed down. So, I was very much into those discussions in terms of understanding the developments theory-wise and all that. They knew my potential, they knew my commitment, and when we decided to make the institution ungovernable, I was part and parcel of that process.

So, 1997 I was excluded. I remember when we made the institution ungovernable, that was in September.<sup>42</sup> My photos were up and down at varsity, and I think this is now where I am going to incriminate myself, but it is fine. What happened is that this one moment we decided: let’s make the institution ungovernable.

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42 For a closer analysis of student politics at UWC during this period, see: Cele, Mlungisi B.G. (2014). *Student Politics and the Funding of Higher Education in South Africa: The Case of the University of the Western Cape, 1995–2005*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, Faculty of Education, University of the Western Cape.

So, we had a plan. All of us we met at AZASCO's office, there were many representatives: Goodenough Zizi Kodwa, the former ANC spokesperson, he was the president of AZASCO and the president of the SRC. So, we came up with this plan of just going into male toilets and just open up the taps. Let them run, you know, and just make everything ungovernable. You know, and you go and litter the entire institution. You go to res, you do the same thing. That's what we did. So, whilst people were having lectures you just see water flowing in.

There were cameras of course; they picked up my face and all that. The campus protection identified us; there were three of us. So, they chased us and we went into the student centre and I gave my girlfriend my bag because I had a very unique bag. And we went and locked ourselves into AZASCO's office. They could not get hold of me, but they knew I was in the student centre. And they were able to identify the bag as mine. So, they asked this lady to give my whereabouts, but she refused. So, she ended up being arrested as well. There were about 15 of us and she was number eight, because she had my bag. So that case went on for about three months at the Bellville Magistrate Court, but of course they were all found not guilty. And it was only 1998 that I made a decision not to go back to varsity, because the first two years were just terrible. I called my family and I told them ...

And, of course, as much as I was not studying or passing, I was accumulating debt all the way.

## **UWC and student politics: round 2**

Bafo recalls how after the experience of the 1997 student protests and its aftermath, he went to work at the Cape Town Waterfront and eventually prepared for rejoining the university.

### **Getting back to UWC**

So, I said to my mother: 'I just need a space, I just need to find myself. Yes, I've been to varsity, I know what varsity is like now. But I went for a law degree which I was not properly orientated around, what it entails; the system and the culture around what it means to be at university. But I just need a six-month break to really do the introspection.' And her response was: 'This is the second time you're asking for introspection. You did that in matric and you were successful. And this time, I hope you will also be successful.'

It so happened that my sister spoke to a friend of a friend and she gave my CV to Truworthis. I went to Truworthis on Saturday and I was told the same day to start the next day. When I got my first pay, I gave it to my mother and she opened it, she looked at it, and I said: 'Thank you, now that I have done the cultural thing of giving you my pay, can I have it back.' [Bafo laughs] So

from R1 500 she just took the R500 and gave me back the R1 000. So now I was working at Truworths from 1998 at the Waterfront. I was no longer at varsity. And in 1998, Waterfront was booming. Then I left Truworths for Stuttafords; that was now in 1999. It was also the year that I made a decision to go back to varsity. I went back to varsity the following year, in 2000.

I kept some money while I was still working. So, I was able to say this is what I have, you know. So, I negotiated when I presented and also I shifted from BA law into something new. I was exposed to the retail market sector; I had the experience of being a student before; I was much more equipped, you know, and I was aware of what I wanted. So, I went to varsity and of course I kept it secret at home, at first. I was accepted for first-year BAdmin.

Every single decision I was making I was getting the desired outcome. When I started out with discussions with some of the university officials to have me back, they looked at my academic performance, they asked me to write a letter of readmission. It was a whole long procedure. I had to go to Student Credit Management and I had to negotiate my settlement for the debt that I had; I had to make a commitment in terms of paying the monthly instalment. Once that was all done and dusted, I then called my mom and I said: 'Look, I'm back into the system.' So, I had to sit with her and explain the process, you know: I'm no longer doing law, it's not that I'm defeated it's just not in me. You know, our parents, they come from that mould of saying, if you cannot finish something, *ikuhlulile*. For me I was never defeated by law, even if I were to complete it, I would still be frustrated. So, I explained it to her. Workwise, even the management staff agreed; if this is what you want, we'll support you. You work 5 to 9. So, everything was working out greatly.

So, I did my first year. I would go to class and 2 o'clock I would catch a train. That was my routine – class-work-class-work. For six months everything was fine until some of the PASO guys were told I was back in the system. PASO in 1999 did not contest SRC elections. So, they hunted me, big time. And they got hold of me when I was in second semester and that's when my political activity was activated – again.

Bafo recalls how he sought advice from his lecturer in political science, Prof. Siphon Maseko, who advised him to reconcile his different interests.

I had passed my first semester in BAdmin extremely well. So, when I was confronted with this challenge the first thing I did was, I said guys, I have to consult someone. So, I went to Prof. Siphon Maseko and I told him exactly my stories as I'm telling you now. And his response was: 'It will not assist to run away from something that you know you are, it will always find you. The best way is to accept it and manage it.' That was the advice. He said: 'Don't let it overwhelm you, try to find a way to live with it. Because in politics you



are doing extremely well, theory-wise. You just need to have that discipline.’ So, I was then able to marry the two. It was through Siphos’s advice that I was able to activate my student political activism and still at the same time do my academic work and also at the same time work.

## Rebuilding PASMA at UWC

In the period between 1998 and 2000, PASO saw a decline in members, in terms of brave soldiers, in terms of activism, in terms of SRC, and also in terms of SRC contestation. That was why in 1999 they did not contest because they had no members.

So, there I was as someone who came from ISM, having had a very close relationship with former PASO members; someone also who has been interacting with them. So, they came to me and said: ‘Comrade, during those days, you were active in PASO more than with any other structure.’ They won me over in terms of their ideological inclination. I said: ‘Look here guys, whatever you have put on the table, I’m ok. I’ll do it but here are my conditions: it has to be five committed comrades; I don’t want more than five. And we meet on a daily basis, we give each other tasks and we give feedback the next day.’ I was working, going to class, you know, balancing everything.

We were five when we started, all excelling academically, and we were also tutoring at the same time. So, I shifted my tutoring hours and venue. I started to use the PASO office for student consultation, and I told them as well to do that. So that is how the office now was more active and people were coming in; not to join PASO but for academic reasons because the tutors was there. That office was kept open for tutoring. You know, and also for lunch and everything ... So we had students, some of them were leaders, and they were coming to the PASO office for tutoring. Whenever I look at the EFF I always think of how we activated PASO.

In 1997 PASO had a congress at UWC and I attended that congress as an invited delegate of ISM during their open session. It was in 1997 that PASO was demarcated into PASO and PASMA. PASMA was now the name for the university-sector students and PASO for high school. And also there was the South African Schools Act and also the 1997 Higher Education Act. Comrades had to accommodate that the Schools Act dealt with COSAS and PASO, and the Higher Education Act was SASCO and PASMA.

When I got back in 2000, I became the chairperson of the PASMA branch at UWC. And we first needed to win the confidence of students. Because in 1999 we did not contest SRC elections, so in 2000 we had to make a mark. Unfortunately, the comrades approached me in 2000 during the second semester and we couldn’t do anything. I told them: ‘Look comrades, let us agree that we are not going to win the elections. And let us agree that we are not going to contest the elections. But what will be key even during election

time: we are visible; and we must have a story telling people why we are not contesting. We must spin in such a way that students will understand.’

So we started to have sessions, political sessions and classes on Fridays and also to attend and respond to invitations from other structures as well.

### **Towards the 2001 SRC election**

After having shown his strategy of rebuilding PASMA internally and its membership in 2000, the challenge now was to build the organisation towards being able to contest the SRC election. Bafo tells the story of how he and the PASMA comrades pursued the goal to contest and win the SRC election in 2002.

The story now is rebuilding PASMA from the ground up in 2000 to contest elections in 2002. I made it a point that those comrades who were tutoring passed, because that was our goal: Let us set up the academic standards that will make it attractive for people to follow us.

End of 2000 we had a get-together with the students that we were tutoring to make commitments in terms of how we want to shape 2001. Came orientation week 2001, we had materials. We approached the SRC because we were a structure of the SRC, and they gave us a lousy R2 000. We said it’s fine. We understood we were building a structure that will be seen as equal to other structures of PASMA outside of the university, because when PASMA at UWC was deflated, PASMA at Cape Tech and Pen Tech was making strides; they were winning SRC elections.

So, in 2001, we went on this growth path of the branch. Then came elections ... uhm ... we made a study of the elections and we said look we will not win the elections. But we will get three or four seats at most out of the 12 seats. We contested the elections in 2001 as a force and everyone was excited. Remember this was after two years of non-contestation, now everyone was angry and hungry. And the results came, we lost everything. We didn’t get a seat. Aye! People were so demotivated, that is those that voted for us. So, we had to wait for another SRC election in 2002.

### *Participating in student structures*

But Kenny and these five guys, we were now a force to be reckoned with, because we would attend the General Council meetings and ask difficult questions. General Council [GC] at UWC is when all the structures of the SRC meet. Each affiliate would have two representatives and the SRC would chair it. And what made it extremely good for us, or what was working for us was the fact that some of the affiliates of the SRC would even come to us before the GC and ask about certain positions around the agenda. So, we were able to win over some of the affiliates of the SRC. Affiliates being the student organisations that were formally registered with the SRC and getting funding

from the SRC, like the religious structures, sports, creative arts, which was UWC choir and all of that. So, we were able to win some of the affiliates.

## Towards the 2002 SRC election

### *Building an election coalition: the United Student Front*

Then 2002 I was doing my third year and we told ourselves that come rain or shine we were going to take over the SRC. This was also the first year that we realised that AZASCO [the Azanian Student Convention] was now resuscitating themselves. We approached AZASCO and we said: 'Look guys, if we are serious about elections, we can only have two blocks. That is SASCO and us. Let's give the voters two choices. Either they vote for SASCO or they vote for us. Right, so let's engage.' As early as March 2002 we started to engage around the issue of forming a coalition.

Now people felt that I was so close to AZAPO [Azanian People's Organisation] and some of the GC and PASMA guys outside of UWC were against the coalition; they even wrote a letter saying that if you guys meet with AZASCO you will be given a summary dismissal from the organisation. But we said: 'Comrades, look. When we were all down and under, these guys were nowhere to be found. We started this branch, it's time that we also became arrogant. We had to protect what we started ... we're very much on the right path.'

And then in the GC we pushed for whoever was running the elections to come for a presentation, because we didn't want to have what we had last year. We discovered that the same guy who running last year was also applying for elections this year. That's when we took the matter up with management. It went to a point whereby a neutral person had to be called. And now we were so highly motivated because we were winning on this on the table. Management would call us at four in the morning. Management would call us late in the afternoon. We were just having discussions.

Normally the elections were run during the third term, but now we were going into the fourth term and there was a deadlock in terms of elections. And for us the more there were deadlocks, the more we were getting inspired, because our confidence was booming. This was a SASCO-led election but they could not make a decision. And every decision that they wanted to take they had to consult with us. We were more like same scale as the SRC going into the elections.

We also realised that we had to bring in a third party into the coalition. So PASMA ended up as partners with AZASCO and UCSA, that is the United Christian Students of South Africa. It had to have that 'coloured' flavour as well. And we had to come up with a name. We reactivated an old name, because there was a coalition of that nature before, in 1998, which gave PASMA one seat: the United Student Front [USF]. So, we reactivated

that name and called our coalition the United Student Front. Our theme was 'unity in action'. So, every time we saw each other we said: 'Unity, comrade, unity.' That was our slogan basically. And the question of the presidential candidate was non-negotiable, everyone had agreed that Kenny would be the presidential candidate; the rest we will discuss after the elections.

So, came the voting day. Students voted. And the next day I left for Pen Tech for a PASMA AGM and because I was just not in a good space to hear the results. Whilst I was there, I got a call from the DVC: Student Affairs, Prof. Ikey van Rheede. 'Is this Kenny Bafo?' 'Yes it's Kenny Bafo.' 'I just want to say congratulations.' I say: 'Who's this?' – 'Prof. Ikey van Rheede, Student Affairs.' I was like, 'Eish, how did you get my number?' That was my immediate response.

And SASCO protested the elections; called for a recount. Because out of the 12 seats, we had won the entire 12 seats. The recount was conducted, and we had won 11 and SASCO gained one seat. And our mandate was that 'comrades, can you frustrate the hell out of that comrade'.

## **SRC induction and internal organisation**

### **SRC handover, induction and institutional memory**

After years of a SASCO-led SRC at UWC, PASMA in the coalition of the USF won the 2002 SRC election. In Bafo's recollection, the handover process was far from 'clean'; it was mainly a process of trying to frustrate the incoming SRC.

The next day [after the election results had been announced] we went to management for a meeting as SRC. There is a 14-day handover and then we will be inaugurated. So even before we were inaugurated, we had a meeting with management. And in our discussion with management they told us that whatever demands we have we need to submit them.

And there was a lady there by the name Nondumiso. She worked for Student Affairs but has since left UWC and went to work for HESA. At the time she was also a SASCO member but employed by the institution as the head of SRC admin. So, management knew that we thought that she was suspect and of course wanted to have our own admin.

That's when comrades who had left UWC to PenTech were coming to advise us. The same comrades who did not support our coalition with AZASCO and who had left the UWC PASMA office unattended for two years. They were now coming to say, as senior members, in terms of portfolio allocation, so and so must occupy this one, so and so must do this. And we were like, 'Comrades, what rights do you think you have to come and tell us who must occupy what and where and how?' So, we stood our ground against them, senior as they were. We even reminded them of their threats to expel us

and they did not even donate a cent to our campaign. We ran it from our own pockets. We had comrades from the ANC Youth League supporting us in our cause and not our own comrades. So, we told them where to get off. And so some of them never forgave me for that. And those differences then are still current even in the PAC now with some of their comrades.

Two things I refused to do: First, I refused to fire Nondumiso. She was working as an admin person and she had all the institutional knowledge. Apart from that, here was someone that was renting a flat with a two year old and for me to say she must be fired, or removed somewhere else, what would I be gaining from doing that? So, I was accused of protecting the terrorists. Secondly, I was not going to frustrate the SASCO guy who won that seat. In fact, I took him into Council position. It was myself and him. Because he also had his institutional knowledge as well. I was aware that we were just winning elections, but in terms of governance we were babies. I think his term was much better compared to some of the Pasma members who were also SRC. Little did I know that many years to come this very same comrade that I protected would be employed as the director-general in the Department of Mineral Resources, Thabo Mokoena.

### **Lack of handover**

After we were elected into the SRC, we did not have the official handover from SASCO members because they were bitter about the elections; it's normal. So, there was no institutional handover, like, 'Comrades, this is where we are, these are the programmes we are busy with.' We inherited a structure where there were no inventories, nothing. The computers were wiped; everything was cleaned, nothing. And the only person who was there to guide us, was the very same person Pasma members were saying I must fire: Nomdumiso from Student Affairs. And the argument was that we had nothing except this person to guide us through the process. So we went into an office which was empty; we had to go through some serious files; we had to find our way.

### **SRC portfolio allocation**

Having won the election in a coalition as the USF, the SRC constituted itself internally by distributing SRC portfolios between the coalition organisations.

So, we went into office in late 2002, when we were inaugurated. The process of appointing people into the SRC portfolios was very much ok. This is how we composed the SRC: It had to reflect the face of USF. So, the president was from Pasma, myself; the first deputy president was from UCSA; and the second deputy president was from AZASCO. Because the idea of a coalition came from us, we also had to be smart about portfolio allocation. We had to show the face of a united SRC, but we also had to come strong in terms of

portfolio allocation, right. For instance, UCSA came later into the coalition and it was up to us to bring UCSA on board; it was also us who suggested a coalition to AZASCO. AZASCO had no numbers, but we needed AZASCO for psychological reasons, to say that students are united. And one of our comrades registered as an UCSA member, so that when we discussed the portfolio allocations, we took from UCSA a comrade of ours. And this was an agreement that we had with UCSA: 'Look comrades, you don't know how SRCs work. You've never been into the SRC. You don't even have a muscle on res, but we want you to be part and parcel of this arrangement.'

UCSA also did not have experienced cadres, or people that were courageous enough to say I'm willing to stand in front of the masses and present a manifesto. So, we had to train them as well. We took the president of the International Student Organisation, who was from Burundi, and we asked UCSA to register him as one of their members and they must bring him into the coalition. So, in reality UCSA had three members not four.

In the SRC there were 12 seats and we all had to fill it four-four-four members. But in essence PASMA had five members. But when it came to the financial collective, which is the president, the secretary and the finance: the president is PASMA, the secretary is PASMA/UCSA and finance we gave to AZASCO.

## **SRC and co-operative governance**

Bafo recalls the challenge of running an SRC where for many years a different student political organisation had been governing. There was a lot of learning and little institutional memory. This included participating in the university's governance structures and institutional committees, managing the SRC budget, and maintaining the relationship with student organisations and the student body.

### **Allocating committee membership**

Once you are in the SRC, you now need to attend institutional committees. Issues that we were not privy to as affiliates of the SRC. Once we had completed the portfolio allocation, we then had to allocate ourselves to institutional committees. So, we looked at the list of these institutional committees and we had the SRC constitution which guided us. If you were the president you sit in Council. Something along those lines.

If there was one committee that we were all aware of and we all agreed I would not be part and parcel of – but we would need to monitor that committee – it was the tender committee. We reached a consensus that the second deputy president dealing with the issues of legalities would go and sit on that tender committee and then he would come and present issues to us collectively there. And the second deputy president sat there, and things went astray. He was no

longer reporting to his organisation, he was no longer reporting to the SRC. We had to deal with that.

I also went into Senate meetings and we were articulating positions. Some of these committees had agendas like big books. And there I was required to read these books, and yet I was struggling to read my own course reader which was this small!

## **SRC budget**

Our SRC had a budget of R1.2 if not R1.3 million and we had to divide that money to SRC affiliates and also ensure that we had operational funds as well. Now these PASMA comrades, myself included, who now find themselves in charge of a budget of R1.3 million, we were so used to getting R2 000 for a year from SASCO as our budget. And now we were in a space where it was us allocating budgets to structures.

## **Relationship between SRC and PASMA BEC**

After being elected into office we had to ask ourselves, can you serve as an SRC member and BEC member at the same time? We had to quickly call a branch executive AGM. Now this is a branch that we had strongly guarded as the top five, that inner core, but we had to leave the branch, because our focus was more onto SRC. And that's where we made our greatest mistake, because we opened the branch to anyone and everyone; to cadres who needed insight on how to build a branch, how to build your membership. We also were no longer there for them because we were all-consumed by our SRC activities. And they would come and say: 'Hey comrades, we want to do this activity.' And our response would be: 'How much do you need?' And then we give it to the branch without monitoring the performance of the branch.

## **Main challenges and issues**

### **Fee increment and debt agreement with management**

Bafo shares how the university management and the SRC would annually agree on the fee increase for the following year by means of a 'fee increment agreement' with the outgoing SRC and a 'debt agreement' with the incoming SRC. The new SRC from PASMA was now faced with having to defend a fee increase that the SASCO SRC had agreed to and to which they had not been party and which they did not understand. The agreement on fee increments had, however, implications for the debt agreement that the new SRC was meant to sign, which stipulated the required upfront payment that students would need to make for registering in the new year.

After our inauguration, we had a meeting with management and we agreed on the date when we were going to have the student summit. We agreed on the

agenda and all the institutional managers and directors must come and present. The director of finance would come and do the projections for 2003 and in terms of the fee increment as well. And we as the SRC will draw up a proposal to the institutional leaders and to the student leaders as well, and at the student summit we must come to a consensus. Now you can imagine, there we were, being told that there was something like fee increment. Now the technicality is that, it is the outgoing SRC that signs the fee increment, you understand.

We were expected to call what is called a student summit where you invite management to present their plans for the following year and to allow student leaders to engage with that.

So ... and we as the SRC were supposed to sign the agreement for 2003 that was our major challenge. We were good at identifying the loop-holes and also at magnifying the incompetency of the SRC, but in terms of their weaknesses when engaging with management. But now we were in the SRC and we were tasked with signing a financial agreement for the following year. A financial agreement which will have an impact on student enrolment.

We, the SRC, we had a huge mountain to climb.

Now it's November and the institution closes on 23 December and we need to sign the financial agreement with the institution, latest by 15 December, and we need to have the mandate from the student summit which must sit in November. All that after the elections which were dragged because of the deadlocks until we managed to find a consensus. So, we were behind by almost a month and we had to rush things.

By the time the new SRC comes into office, the fee increment has been signed by the outgoing SRC. All you have to do as the new SRC is to sign what they call a debt collection agreement, because fees have been increased. But if fees increase by a certain percentage, it will have a direct impact on what I will pay in the year towards my debt. So, if Kenny owes the institution R10 000, this SRC must then agree in terms of the upfront payment. Kenny will pay 25 per cent towards his debt and also an upfront payment of at least R1 000. Now this is the debt agreement that the incoming SRC signs and it is influenced by the fee increase agreement that the outgoing SRC must sign.

So, we were not privy to this information but we were forced to sign something here. And these guys knew we were not privy to this information and they were waiting for us to make the announcement at the student summit and to deal with us there on the spot.

So, we went into the student summit. Even before the student summit, we met the comrades from AZASCO and UCSA and we brought this challenge to their attention. Of course, UCSA was very quiet, because they are religious students who were only brought in to bring numbers. So as usual it was between us and AZASCO. And the guys from AZASCO were like: 'Let's



sign.' My argument was that I am not putting my signature to something that I do not know and will not be in a position to defend.

So, we went to the student summit, we listened to management. They all presented and then we asked them to leave. And then the SASCO guys, some of them had been in the outgone SRC, wanted to hear our proposal and we refused to give the proposal. We said: 'No, this was more of an information-gathering session.' We then were telling structures that these guys were refusing to give us an official handover ... we did not know how many computers we were inheriting and all of that. Then the student summit collapsed. We then went to management and we told them the date that you set for us will be impossible. We need more time to study the fee agreement and to consult before we could sign.

Finally, we signed the debt collection agreement on the last day of the institution, the 22nd of December, not on the 15th. Some of the university managers who had plans to leave the institution had to remain for an extra week, because the SRC was still busy studying the fee increment and all of that. For us it was victory in a sense, since we were able to alter the process in our favour.

When asked if the debt agreement actually changed in their favour, Bafo intimated:

It slightly changed and it was more explained to us. What they had in mind was you go in, sit down for 30 minutes and then we sign the agreement. We actually wanted the presentation from the day they signed the fee increment with management with SRC. Because remember, it's the University Council that agrees on fee increment, and there was no way that we could change that. The best we could do was to change the debt collection into our favour.

## **Student registration and finances**

At the beginning of the year, in terms of salaries and operational expenses, the institution depends on registration fees mostly. If you owed them R10 000 and only had R1 000 just go and pay them that money. And the students felt if I paid that money there would be no guarantee that I would be allowed to register. It was not enough for us to say we'll cross that bridge when we get there. Students wanted some guarantees. But we had to lie and tell the students that you will be guaranteed registration. We had students owing a maximum R10 000 and we said if your debt was R10 000 and you had passed, then you only owe R2 000, just go and keep the receipt.

But now the process was abused by students who had failed and who were owing R40 000, just paying R1 000, showing that slip to res coordinators to get their rooms and all that nonsense. So, it had become a very complicated

process – we had to manage somehow. It was January/February and there was a string of students who were coming back.

So, we assigned some of our comrades to be part of the finance collecting and we had a target as well. We said we are going to monitor on a daily basis how much the institution was receiving in terms of registrations. And we had a target. We said if the institution was getting x-amount at the end of the month, it means that they must open up the gates.

### **Frustrating SASCO's launch of the Right-to-Learn Campaign**

The partisan competition between the USF coalition SRC led by PASMA and SASCO which had lost the election continued to define much of Bafo's term. In his interview, Bafo gave a number of examples of the way former SASCO-aligned students who were now institutional officers frustrated the work of his SRC. Conversely, now being in the SRC also gave PASMA a certain muscle to frustrate SASCO's efforts. Bafo is aware that this was not necessarily in the interests of students; it was rather 'politicking' between the two organisations, as the example of the Right-to-Learn Campaign shows.

We went into 2003 fully armed because SASCO was bad-mouthing the SRC. Mid-February SASCO was putting up posters to say they were launching their Right-to-Learn Campaign. The campaign was going to be launched the Monday, and a certain minister was part and parcel of their campaign. And that minister will have discussions with management in terms of assisting this SRC that is failing.

So, we allowed those posters to be up. And I said to some of my guys: 'Look, we just have to go back to our BEC days.' So, the Friday we called an urgent meeting and that meeting we planned how we were going to counter the Monday event. On Monday morning at six o'clock, we were all up and letters were delivered to various offices. Six o'clock in the morning we were already standing in front of the rector's office with a letter saying that SASCO is suspended by the SRC.

So, when they went to fetch audio sound for their event, they were shown the suspension letter. When the rector was called to address, the rector could not, he said: 'The SRC suspended you.' So, we had suspended SASCO and we did not give them any letter. It was a strategy just to frustrate the Monday event.

There were no grounds; we just had to suspend them. It was just politicking, and we knew that they were going to come running angry to our office, and that they did. They came bashing doors and all that nonsense. On that grounds we suspended them: just to prevent them from getting the necessary resources to arrange that the campaign kick-starts. But they also fell into a trap, because they came and they became chaotic and distracted the registration process. So, they fell into that trap and now we had good reason for suspending them.

We suspended them until the registration process was finished. It was only then that the registration process started to run smoothly. When we knew that at least 80-90 per cent of the students were in the system everything was fine.

### **SRC budget and spending on bashes**

Being in charge of a huge budget can be an overwhelming responsibility if there are not enough checks and balances in place. Bafo's SRC had to learn the hard way and eventually 'spoil' it for future SRCs.

We had a cheque book that was with the SRC secretary of finance all the time. The institution was putting R50 000 a month into that cheque book so that any structure of the SRC, when they come they need this. We just said: 'Look I have given you R20 000, here's R5 000 you are going to minus it.' So, we kept all the records. The signatories were myself and the secretary for finance, Sandile Dolweni [who is an advocate now and currently the proctor of UWC]. And we also had a political responsibility to uphold and also fund the programmes of other bodies.

When asked what the institutional procedures and control mechanisms were to make sure the SRC budget was spent responsibly, Bafo argued:

We should have been workshopped around it. Mind you we had that cheque book, we had the petrol card, we had the Toyota Venture, we had everything, we had everything as SRC, 12 of us. And suddenly you wake up and you find you have this power. Petrol card, you have a driver, you have everything.

And what did the students say to that?

Students? All that they want is for you to throw a bash for them and that's it. That's where it ends. And that's how you keep them happy. Bring Mandoza, bring Mdu, that's service delivery for them and then you engage with SAB. The students were happy and everything was fine.

What, other than bashes, did the SRC organise for students? Any debates or academic programmes?

There were no real academic programmes because we did not understand what it meant to be in the SRC and run an academic programme as an SRC. We were not informed. The only thing that made us go into the SRC, we were just opposing SASCO and it happened that we won. We were just good in opposition.

## The Mr and Miss UWC spending crisis, forensic audit and removal of the SRC cheque book

And also financial controls should have been in place. Because we were almost arrested for fraud in the SRC. And that would have dealt with my life completely.

The matter of financial controls was eventually resolved with the forensic audit and the institution of a new process by which the SRC budget is disbursed at UWC.

What happened was that before we had Miss UWC, we realised that we had run out of finances. We had zero from our budget and we could not understand it. Because we were told when we went into office that we had R1.3 million. Nobody told us from that money they paid the photocopier machine, they pay electricity, the petrol card, the staff, the admin is paid from that money. We were not informed of how that money is utilised. Right, a certain portion goes to the payment, a certain portion is operational and all of that. We were not informed. We were just signing. And also the photocopier machine, we thought it was institutional property. So, comrades come and print and make photocopies as much as you want to. If it runs out of ink it's fine, we just have it refilled and all that nonsense.

By the time we hit June we were flat broke, flat broke. But there was money that was kept for AGM and elections and we had to make a very strong case for that money to be released for Mr and Miss UWC. And the very same thing that I told them is what I am going to tell you now. That had you put these measures in place we would have been more resilient, we would have been more careful how we spent money. But if you want chaos – because management was also aware about the chaos that we had – if you want chaos, we will unleash it as SRC. So uh, what management said to us as part of the conditions for releasing the money was that they were going to call in Price Waterhouse Coopers to do a forensic on the SRC. So, we had to submit the cheque book, we had to submit everything to them. The auditors came, and they came rushing, they came like wolves on us. You know this thing of you write something and then you tear it and then you leave it. I had that experience of auditors coming into the SRC offices and checking everything, the bin and all of that nonsense. And I was making notes of all of these things as I was planning. And we were grilled individually.

There were two commissions in my term. One commission was headed by Advocate Norman Arendse SC and that one was on the suspension of SASCO. It was through the commission's recommendations that the suspension was lifted. If you can go to UWC and ask for the Norman Arendse's commission of 2003 which sat at the Senate Building you will find my submissions there.

And then the other commission was the one of the forensic auditors. So, they came and I was called into an office for an hour session. And then I told

them literally that: 'Look, there were no financial controls and we gave money to PAC just like the SASCO-led SRCs funded ANC programmes at UWC. We gave money to so-and-so, so-and-so ...' We just told them what we were doing, we were not hiding anything. We said, we thought that these things were normal when we were in the SRC; we would even go to Prof. Ikey van Rheede and we would tell him that we need this and this and this. We had to attend conferences, because we are political deployees, so when our mother bodies had conferences we had to go. Because being in the SRC is a political job. So, we were exonerated from that but the one thing they did was to take the cheque book from us.

And since then, no SRC ever had a cheque book. That was our legacy. [Bafo laughs] It was taken permanently from the SRC. I think the process has fundamentally changed now.

We came into office at a time, it was Brian O'Connell's second year in office. But by the time he left there were so many controls. Even to buy a cool drink as an SRC you had to go through certain processes. So, the SRC in my time, I think it was the very last of the SRCs to have free rein.

It had to happen the way that it did, so that the rest can learn, right. And also for the institution to actually see the weaknesses and what can happen if we have an SRC that's not properly inducted into office.

## Reflecting on #FeesMustFall

Bafo's reflections on the #FeesMustFall protests are mixed. On the upside, he was surprised by the strong pan-Africanist leanings of the movement and wishes that the Pasma leaders of the 2015/16 student campaigns were better accommodated within the PAC and given guidance by former Pasma leaders and PAC leaders.

### #FeesMustFall and the PAC

The Fallism – #OpenStellenbosch, #RhodesMustFall – decolonisation project; all those took the PAC by surprise. #FeesMustFall has taken the PAC ideals to another level. And even when they have graduated they maintain this, but not at an organisation level; the sad part about the Fallists is that we really don't have space within the PAC, currently. Hence, the EFF is the nearest space for them because the leadership of the EFF is very young, they're attractive. They fit in into the vocab and the dialectic of these youngsters ... But very few of the PAC members assume the platform and make these quotations of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, WEB du Bois ... in the manner that is attractive, you know. We are not moving with the times. The best we do is say 'Sobukwe said' ... and we don't have any other person outside of Sobukwe.

So, this is the difficulty with #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall. The most reasonable thing that the PAC should have done, was to call in all of us

who have led an SRC into a summit and ask to give our experiences. Because we have led SRCs at CPUT, at Cape Tech, Pen Tech, Fort Hare, you know. That is what one would have expected from a thinking, leading organisation like PAC.

### **A new culture of engagement, reading and new concepts**

Bafo also feels that the #FeesMustFall and related activism brought back fundamental debates to university campuses, a new culture of engagement, and of learning.

Thanks to #FeesMustFall, debate was able to resurrect. Thanks to the Fallists and the decolonisation project, quality was brought back into the discussion. The beauty of #FeesMustFall is that it brought back engagement with management in a way that we never thought it would happen ... And now we have students who are able to – and eloquently so – present their cases and also bring new terminology into the discussion. The culture of reading is starting to take shape, to find its way. And these learners themselves are also reading; it's not about attending political workshops in your own mother body, they are now workshoping themselves.

#FeesMustFall has brought back the dignity of the student body. It has also made reading fashionable. The concepts that they are using, are concepts that we never really used back in the days. Concepts foreign to the vocab of our mother structures. Intersectionality, feminism and all of that, they are not there in the PAC. As I have said, the conservatives within the party, they have a problem in accommodating or providing a space for Fallists. They are saying these arguments are not PAC.

### **The individualistic mentality of #FeesMustFall leaders**

Bafo deplores what he sees as the self-aggrandisement of some leaders that he spoke to from the movement.

I've had a discussion with some of the leaders of #FeesMustFall and the most troubling thing is constantly hearing the word I-I-I-I ... I did this ... I did that ... I was arrested ... I spoke to this comrade: the I-mentality kind of leadership with your #FeesMustFall. It sounds more like a cult mentality. I think some of the comrades, some of the leaders of #FeesMustFall were starting to have an 'if-it-was-not-for-me' kind of mentality.

### **Own involvement during #FeesMustFall**

During the 2015/16 student activism, until he was elected the sole PAC councillor in the City of Cape Town municipal council, Bafo was an academic staff member in the Department of Political Science at UWC. His history of having been in the SRC before, his leadership role in the Western Cape provincial executive of

the PAC, and his role as political analyst predisposed him to get involved in some form in the movement.

As a former PASMA member I was called by the university management to speak to the PASMA-led SRC when there was a crisis, you know. So, at times I was this person who was putting out fires on behalf of management because now I was a university employee. But for me the passion that I have is for students and politics.

I can remember with Pastor Xola Skhosana. We were there, me and Pastor Skhosana. And where it became very personal for me was when I witnessed the brutality of the police towards students.

And I was called in to give my input on TV, as a political analyst on ANN7 about #FeesMustFall. I ended up siding with the students, being the 'spokesperson of #FeesMustFall' – against the other invited guest who was the chairperson of the UWC Council, Mthunzi Mdwaba. We were debating this issue and I had to remind him: 'Let us listen to the students.' So I came from the Department of Political Science, but I ended up taking him on; and the next day I came to campus and some of my colleagues in the faculty questioned my approach, asking whether I was a staff member or an SRC member, and all that nonsense.

Being at UWC 13 years after my term in the SRC, I have seen the rise and the fall and the rise again of the SRC.

## **The impact of the student leadership experience**

As much as Bafo sees his experience as student leader as a huge learning curve, he also sees how former leaders from other student organisations like SASCO have reaped a huge benefit from having been in the SRC in terms of their careers, while as a PAC man, he does not see such benefits.

### **Impact on career trajectory**

Having been in the SRC has taught me a lot of things. Like the ability to stand in front of a crowd. I think my lecturing experience was greatly influenced by my student activism. I was able to stand in front of 400 students and teach them politics; not teach but to facilitate a discussion around politics and current events.

I think it made it easier for me to understand the transition from being an ordinary student; the ability to make mistakes and also to rectify those mistakes.

Looking back, I would say it has been a good investment for me personally to have been a student leader for PAC. But there is a very painful observation ... if you look at growth projections of some SASCO comrades, the ones

who I was leading with, where they are now and where I am at, it's a painful observation. And where they are at, some of them, it's through organisational support, because the organisation invested in them. I was the first SRC president who stayed on past my term at UWC. Because the trend was SRC president, parliament; SRC president, government. Because those were the SASCO progression positions. They became spokespersons for the so and so. Because being in the SRC also gives you the ability to stand in front and spin things. I went into Senate meetings and we were articulating positions. I was only in those positions because I was in the SRC. I sat on those committees with big books like this. And here I am as a PAC councillor. Unlike those from the ruling party, I don't have researchers, I don't have organisational support. All I have is people who are in and out of office because I belong to a certain faction. All that assists me is that I have an academic background. And yet I am here pushing the party line, right. You understand the frustration.

I'm just saying as a former SRC president, your role is to serve. That for me is an esteemed position. That for me is reputable. It's highly respected. Now I knew the guys that I was going against. I knew the guys who were there before me. I left UWC after 13 years, and I was there for two years before that. In 1997, right, under Zizi Kodwa and then I left, came back under Xolile Majola; they are big guns now.

### **Impact on political attitudes and active citizenship**

My year in the SRC was messy because it is only through that process that you actually learn. And it had to be messy because I was the very first in the history of UWC to lead an SRC under the banner of PAC. I came to the conclusion that you can unseat even the ANC. But you have to deal with officials, because those officials are there, employed by the ANC, and they had a lot of experience.

These are the things that you reflect and you say it's wise to win elections, but it's wiser to tell people to learn and apply for positions. So that when you take over you have a human resource that you can rely on.

### **Impact on personal and family life**

I have grown as a person. I think it has taught me to be bold enough and take steps; not to be afraid to venture into the unknown. What it has also taught me is that it takes a lot of effort, but what keeps you there is character; it has built my character. And it's had a huge dent on my family. I think I've sacrificed a lot in terms of my time.



# chapter 6

## David Maimela

University of Pretoria, SRC member 2003,  
SASCO national president 2006–2008

*Denyse Webbstock, David Maimela & Ntokozo Bhengu*

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### Brief biography

David Maimela works at the Gauteng Department of Health as chief of staff in the Office of the MEC. He is trained in public policy with a keen research and specialisation interest in international relations, foreign policy and political economy. He holds a Master of Arts degree from the University of Johannesburg, and a BA(Hons) in political sciences from the University of Pretoria (UP). He was the president of SASCO from December 2006 to June 2008. He was awarded the Mandela Rhodes Scholarship in 2007 and, in 2010, he was chosen as one of the *Mail & Guardian* 200 Emerging Young Leaders in South Africa. David has previously also worked for the Gauteng Youth Commission and the Gauteng Office of the Premier in the Policy and Governance branch, and as a political economy researcher for the Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflections (MISTRA).

This chapter is based on an interview conducted by Denyse Webbstock and Ntokozo Bhengu on 31 July 2018.

### Early influences

David Maimela's abiding interest in politics is reflected both in his early life choices and his academic interests, which include political systems, public policy, political economy and foreign policy.

Maimela's story indicates that it was a natural progression for him to enter student politics after his early involvement as a student leader at school. He notes:

My involvement in the SRC was natural because of two things. I was involved with the Congress of South African Students [COSAS] at high school level. In my high school, I was also the chairman of the Representative Council of Learners [RCL] in terms of the South African Schools Act of 1996. You could have a sense that I was already actively involved in youth and student politics, and I was actively involved in community development projects and community politics. So, it became natural for me to enter the university and one of the first things I did when I entered the campus was to find out where is the office of SASCO. I wanted to join SASCO, and be active as a member there. So initially I served SASCO as an activist, and then immediately after that, as an executive member on campus.

Maimela's political awakening was informed by early memories of two major events – in 1990, the release of Nelson Mandela, and in 1993, the assassination of Chris Hani. He remembers listening to the narration of Hani's funeral by Noxolo Grootboom in isiXhosa, a language he really liked, and for him it was the start of the opening up of a new world, of thinking beyond his neighbourhood and province.

For Maimela, entry into student politics was experienced as a smooth transition from having been the provincial secretary of COSAS in Mpumalanga where he had been to school. But what had inspired Maimela at such an early age to become involved in representing others? In thinking about his response, Maimela highlights his passion for public speaking and a love of language as the first intrinsic factor.

He explains that he used to achieve good grades in languages – English, Afrikaans, isiSwati – so when occasions arose in which a student was needed to speak, such as at a funeral, he would be called upon by teachers and students to speak even though he was not formally a class representative at that stage.

So, all of that encouraged me to see that perhaps people appreciate the contribution I make in terms of making them imagine their realities differently.

### **Politics and school**

The second factor he attributes to political decisions that affected him and his family directly. The first was a situation involving matric results that affected his brother, while the other involved a government decision to redeploy teachers. Elaborating on these two incidents, Maimela recounts the following:

There was a crisis of matric results that were adjusted unfairly, or rather dubiously, by the Provincial Department of Education in Mpumalanga at the

time. And my brother was affected by that because he was doing matric in 1998, and I was in grade 10. And coupled with that was the redeployment of teachers, which became an issue quite early on in the year, and then the adjustment of the matric marks wherein people were passed who were not supposed to pass, just because I guess the political leadership of the time felt embarrassed by the low performance. When that crisis arose, it affected our school so some of the students – including my brother – were affected by those results. We felt aggrieved.

They had to make sure that more students passed. So, they adjusted those marks [until they were] ridiculously high and in a manner that was inappropriate, as the investigation showed, and as a result most of the students were then affected in terms of their admission into university. Because some of the universities were like, ‘We can’t accept the matriculants of this year’s class of Mpumalanga matriculants. It’s quite shady for us to admit them.’ So, the problem was at multiple levels. Admission to university became a problem because those students were not regarded as legitimately progressed students.

And then also, just the sheer weight of the scandal itself – it was just not good for our school, for our province. And then, of course, individually students were affected in many ways – you know students who felt they did well, and then they feel that perhaps their marks were manipulated as well and so on. So, it just became a very bad situation. So that made the students restless.

In the event, Maimela’s brother did not get admitted to university. He points out the implications of the second incident for his own education and outlines the role it played in his leadership journey.

The redeployment of teachers was also an issue. We felt that they are taking the best of our teachers to be redeployed to schools that had a shortage of teachers. There was a programme that the [provincial] department instituted – I think it was a national programme actually – where certain schools were declared to have excess teachers and certain schools were declared to be having a shortage. I think we had to lose close to 10 teachers to be redeployed to less resourced schools. And some of them did leave, but some of them did not, because we insisted that these teachers can’t leave because they make the school.

Maimela felt very strongly that it did not make sense to weaken his school, which he describes as a normal high school in the township, and he took a leading role in finding ways to deal with the crisis it presented for the school.

That is where then I became to be known in the whole school. Because I took to the assembly, and I addressed students. It was just an impromptu act. I mean, the assembly was restless, for some reason we felt that we should take

the initiative and calm down the students in the first place. The teachers who were targeted to leave could not – the students didn't want to accept their explanation. The principal wasn't leaving, but was explaining – and the students just did not want to hear what the principal was saying. They started being restless. And one of the highly respected and admired teachers there, our history and English teacher, came forward and tried to calm the situation down. The students still did not want to listen to them.

And so we – I think at the time I must have been a class rep – we jumped to the podium and we calmed this situation down. We said, 'Okay this affects us, guys. Can we first have a conversation amongst ourselves and agree on what should be the way forward?' And the teachers took a step back and they watched. So, we, you know, it was a few of us – it was myself and my other comrades at the time – and that is how we then got recruited into [student politics].

This was because our school was just a fence away from the Ngwenya Teacher Training College, and the guys who were there got worried about our attitude. They heard about the fact that the learners at Thembeke High School were protesting against the redeployment of teachers. Those guys themselves were already in SASCO, and they were former graduates of COSAS, and so they came to the school and they had a conversation with us and then they said, 'Guys, you have to understand one thing. That we are one country and we have particular priorities and particular challenges. You guys have got excess teachers, meaning that you have got more teachers than you need, and there are less fortunate schools that need teachers. You have got to understand and pledge solidarity with those schools that are less fortunate.'

And then it dawned on us, oh ja, this makes sense. In any case, these are brothers and sisters, they also need teachers. And then we said, 'Okay fine, but we have got to negotiate which teachers go and which teachers stay.'

And then we entered into that conversation and then finally it was resolved and over a period of weeks it was agreed. And some of the teachers that we insisted shouldn't go, stayed, and others left. We lost one good economics teacher in the process, but it was fair. It was quite okay, we understood that we were a township school – fairly resourced comparatively. The other schools were in the peri-urban and rural land and therefore needed more teachers. And we understood that, and they made us understand that.

It is from there that they insisted that we should actually revive the defunct branch of COSAS that was in the school. Then they said to us, 'But you guys are already active and are dealing with the issues that a typical branch of COSAS should be dealing with, so we are willing to help you to re-establish the structures of COSAS.'

So that is how we were recruited and brought into COSAS and we joined and we participated and we started leading.

## Mentors

Maimela's early mentors, the SASCO members at the local teacher training college, took the young school representatives under their wing and trained them in many ways. One particular mentor, Joe Mnisi, who later died in 2004, stands out in his memory as someone who taught him about student politics and introduced him to his first copies of 'dialectical materialism' and Karl Marx's writings. Another mentor whom he found really shaped his brand of politics – politics of principle and discipline – was the late Mthandazo 'Gogo' Ngobeni, who was a significant thinker and leader, and to whom Maimela believes many activists of his generation remain indebted for his generosity and intellect. Maimela recalls him as being very intelligent, well known and respected in the province of Mpumalanga and yet very humble and disciplined. These mentors took the young COSAS leaders along to the national congress of SASCO in Ongoye Zululand in 1999, and led them to see a world of political activity they otherwise would not have known.

In the year following (1999) when he was in grade 11, the stance Maimela had taken in the matric marks crisis and the redeployment of teachers led to him being voted into the position of chairperson of the RCL, even though he was not yet in matric. He remained active until the end of his school career, becoming also the secretary of the local branch of COSAS which serviced five schools, ensuring that members were inducted and trained, new branches were launched and that the organisation continued to run. His father was concerned about the effect the time devoted to his activism might have on his academic studies, but after much discussion, they agreed that Maimela could continue with his political work as long as he achieved academically as well. This he managed, achieving the promised matric exemption, and thanks to a particularly inspirational English teacher, a distinction in English as well. This particular teacher Maimela counts as one of his early role models.

He was one of the best teachers I ever had. In fact, he is my friend even today. The good thing about him was that he studied all over the place and he was very bright and committed to teaching for the longest time. He used different and unconventional methods of teaching. And he was a teacher that students respected and loved, but the line was never crossed in terms of respect and professionalism. So, the students liked that, that they could see in a teacher a friend who was approachable and yet firm and still could deliver quality results ...

He is now in the Department of Higher Education. He is involved with the TVET colleges. The other good thing that he did which was quite unconventional, and I think he was doing it for the first time in the school, was that he progressed with his learners. The same teacher taught us English for five years. So, we knew his style. You know, he didn't have to tell us to get into class – you know how classes are at school, if the teacher is late or ...

with him, you would always find us in class. And he didn't have to shout at us, or call us names. He had the power of discipline without having to enforce discipline. Just his presence alone was quite enough for us to abide by the rules.

From this teacher, Maimela learnt about leadership that

You don't always have to throw the rule book in order to get as much as you can in terms of compliance from pupils. An example of leadership can be more of a force to show people the way, or for people to regard you as a leader and follow what you set yourselves as a group. So the rule book is one thing, and must always be there, because I mean you need rules. But leadership by example is a more powerful tool that is intangible but yet can produce results.

## Family

The injustice around the matric marks scandal was a powerful early influence on Maimela's growing political consciousness in a family that was avowedly apolitical. There was, however, another factor in his close family that influenced his later choices.

None of my family members were political. I am the only guy who was political in the family. I think I understand why, because my parents were neither conformist nor co-operating with the system, and they were also not actively involved. I have never seen my father wearing an ANC T-shirt or a PAC T-shirt or an AZAPO T-shirt or whatever the case may be. And all that my father and my mother used to insist on, is the importance of going to school. You must go to school, education is important. If you don't go to school, you will basically not make it in life.

And so that kind of message, and that kind of discipline, was instilled in all of us from the beginning. But you know at home, all three boys were quite excellent at school. But one of them, my eldest brother, dropped out of school partly because of, I think two things, or maybe three things. One, peer pressure. Two, I think he started smoking weed – this is part of peer pressure, social norms and trying to fit in and that kind of thing.

The third factor takes a while to relate. It's the story of his eldest brother, a very talented footballer, scouted by well-known coaches, and loved by the crowd. Maimela continues:

He was the famous guy. He was successful in football and all of that, but then he lacked discipline, and it's one of the things that I kept on telling him even on his hospital bed. I told him this sometimes, that the only reason why you didn't play in Europe or in one of the top leagues in the world, is not because

you are not talented, it's because you lack discipline. That is what I told [his sons]. This thing is not magic. It's not rocket science. You get disciplined, you master your craft and win. If you focus on both football and school you succeed in both. If you don't succeed in football then you've got school. But if you are going to depend on football only, it doesn't matter if you are a tennis player or any sport. But if you are going to depend on sport only, it's normally a short career, and it lasts for as long as you are still young and strong. But if you don't have a fall-back position then you will have a problem, to survive in life generally.

So, I say to them, 'You've got to do what your father did not do. You have got to do two things. You have got to master both school and football, but at the same time you have got to master discipline in both so that you succeed.' I can tell you now, there was nothing that stopped him.

They had a big fight, my brother and my father, about football. Because he would run away for the whole weekend, and go and play football. And my father would be upset. My father wanted all of us to be under his discipline throughout as children. It was expected, but the guys wanted him to play.

So, he would score in every second game, if not every game. But then discipline dealt with him, saw him lose a lot of things, including having to lose his life as well.

Maimela's brother passed away in 2009. He says:

Out of that experience, I was even more resolved that I would rather be the opposite of what he was, so rather he didn't influence me. His lifestyle and his achievements were quite amazing. We looked up to him. He was an inspiration in many ways, his achievements at school in the earlier grades, whether in athletics, in football, or in class he had honours. I mean he would be in the top five, the top three. We looked up to him in that regard, but he then began to drop the ball as he grew older and failed to be disciplined and all that. Some of us who were also now dabbling in politics at that early stage were now beginning to see the positives and the negatives of his lifestyle and achievements, and then began to say, 'How do you take both and synthesise them and then produce a lesson out of it?'

So, the lesson out of it for me was, that here is a brilliant guy – academically and in terms of sport, in terms of his talents – but because he couldn't master discipline, he could not be the mainstay. So, for me that was a lesson and I said, no I am just going to be sticking with this discipline thing, because that is what I want. Because if you don't stick with the discipline, then you lose all of what this guy has lost. So that was my take-out of his life, so if you are saying the influence, that was the influence.

The lesson of discipline was something Maimela also learnt from his father and his particular upbringing. His father's advice to focus on education, and to prioritise school uniforms over new sneakers or Christmas gifts, and not to succumb to peer pressure, was something he took to heart, and that has guided his life since.

## **Context of getting involved at UP**

### **Disorientation and alienation**

After matriculating well, Maimela enrolled at UP. This was a new world for him, coming from Mpumalanga to Pretoria, and facing a very different environment from the one he was used to. In his own words:

The first thing you get when you get to varsity – I was fortunate enough, quite privileged to go to a big university – so the first thing that intimidates you is the size of the place. This is bigger than my high school – this is big. I am immediately frustrated by the fact that I cannot walk through the entire university at once and know all of it. It is overwhelming to be in that space. So that is the first thing, the size is just too much to bear.

The second thing is that you are confronted by the question of sheer diversity, and this diversity ranges from geography – and this would be both foreign and domestic geography. Students would be coming from SADC, coming from Germany and elsewhere. And some students would be coming from the Eastern Cape, Cape Town and all of that. And you are confronted now by having this extremely urban, cosmopolitan environment that is a university, where everybody is there. People from the Middle East are there. I remember we studied with, and he was active in our SASCO ranks, the son of the ambassador of Palestine.

The demographics and the diversity ranges from geography, to the colour of your skin, to language, as well as to wealth. So, you find all these things together – race, class, sex. So, you are faced with all of that geography, language and all of that. So, all of that is combined in one space. And then there is the issue about the diversity being on the one hand a good to have and a nice to have – what a different world! What a nice thing to have! On the other hand, the difficulty about having to contend with the diversity, and how people have to coexist now. Here you are, at a formerly white Afrikaner institution having its own traditions, history and culture, and you have to adjust to that. Language becomes an issue, whether from a social or an academic point of view. There is a sense among students that Afrikaans is more privileged in the institution, more than English, or any other language for that matter. And this takes different forms and acute forms. There are all sorts of allegations – some proven and others not proven. I remember there were huge allegations



from the medical faculty that the Afrikaans students in the medical faculty get more from their lecturers than when the same lecturers have to switch into the English class, or when they have to explain things in English. So that was a huge thing from a diversity point of view, from a race relations point of view, from a mere language policy point of view.

Also, I mean, the costs that attach to having a dual-medium university, you know, who pays for that? Those became the difficult and deeper conversations that we would have at SASCO with management and with the SRC and within the SRC and with other student formations. It would even be the right-wing formations, the Freedom Front student formation. At the time, we didn't have DASO, we just had DA. So, we had that kind of thing. And when I came in, we also had young Afrikaners from far-right Afrikaans student organisations under the Afrikaanse Studentebond. It was called ASB. It has a long history in the university sector.

### **University culture: opposing oppressive residence culture**

Maimela stood for the SRC under the banner of SASCO, and began to confront some of these issues through his student political activism. Two years before he entered hostel as a first-year student, there had been an investigation by the Human Rights Commission into alleged human rights violations at the UP university hostels at the insistence of the SASCO branch.

So I come in two years later, in 2001, and go into a hostel called Morula. It's a men's hostel. I go into Morula ... and it's a totally different world. I mean, the place has got its own anthem, it's got its own uniform, and it's got its own practices, meetings, mass meetings, rules, culture, events – and the whole thing. I'm like no, this is too much. I go to this guy – I still remember it – he was the chairperson of the 'tehuis kommittee', you know? I mean the guy is tall, and I think in my first year I was smaller than I am now. The guy is tall. He is Victor Matfield tall. He is a big-build kind of a young man. He was the chairperson of the house committee and he was standing up there. And I look at him ... And he says, 'Yes, this is what you have to do now. You have got to get the uniform.' And I say to him, 'Where must I get it?' And he says, 'You have got to go and buy it.' I say, 'I don't have the money.' It's as simple as that. The first thing is that I don't have the money. No, I mean it was R350, at the time it wasn't cheap. 'You know, I came with the train here. It cost less than what you are saying.' He says, 'Ja, but if you want to stay here and belong here, you have got to do what we do.' And this guy, you know, he is going to create problems for me, and I am going to create problems for him.

And then my first rebellion was against the university hostel cultures and initiation traditions. That was my first issue. I campaigned for that until I

left the university. I was completely opposed to it. We succeeded in large measure because we were also backed up by the Human Rights Commission report, but over time they actually phased them out. Some of the practices they made more voluntary and all of that. Still unacceptable. They had to have a transition for some reason. This comes back to one of the big issues in higher education, which is transformation versus institutional autonomy.

Maimela describes what he considered to be abusive, backward and violent cultures at the university, which he found to be damaging to the psyche, the confidence and the self-esteem of the students, which the university seemed reluctant to abandon.

[Such practices included] that you have got to observe your senior and there is a way of doing it. So, when you go past a senior, you can't just go past quietly or silently. You have to greet the senior and you stand up, '*Goeie môre meneer*' and you hit your chest like this. It's kind of militarised place. And when we were in the dining hall, you can't sit on the chairs that are designated for seniors. I used to sit in them and the guys would say, 'Hey, they are going to bully you and all of that,' and I would say, 'Let them come and bully me, I am sitting here. The amount that they paid is what I paid to be here.' Then on an annual basis they would have – in September – they would have the annual alumni of the hostel event. So, they come together, they would have a braaivleis. So, they come – these would be guys who were in the hostel in the 80s and the 70s, and you can see now these are the 'verkrampptes'. They are wearing khaki shorts. They are in the agri-business or the agricultural sector. These are the farmers. They come with their 4x4 vans. They come in their shorts. And all of that.

It's called the Morula annual alumni get-together, something like that. I was the rebel and it was uncomfortable to pass through a passage where the seniors and some of the house committee members were sitting. When I pass by, they would go dead silent and you can imagine how nerve-wracking that could be. Guys are old, have been at the university for so long – they are so big. I said, 'Guys, I am not doing it [wearing uniforms, etc.]. This is not for us. I don't belong here. I just belong here by coming to take a shower, eat and sleep and study. That's all. Everything else – I don't belong here. This culture is alienating me.' They said, 'Well, we don't think we have an option.' I said, 'You guys do have an option, but you don't want to exercise it.'

You are asking me what they do. I don't know what else happened, but what I saw happening with my other hostel mates, was that you are requested to serve as waiters for these guys who were there in the 80s and so on. You don't know them, they are not your friends, they are not your uncles, they don't speak your language, you don't understand what they say when they talk. So, they run out of rolls and water or whatever. So, you must take your meal

card, swipe it at the thing, and give them the rolls that they have run out of, because the boerewors is there but they need the rolls. I am like, guys, I mean this is wrong. So, all of these kinds of things did not make sense to me.

With my background, my political training and my experience, I simply said no. After a while the house father realised I am active in SASCO, so he just told the guys to stop harassing me. He said, 'Guys, I don't want trouble. If you touch this man, you are going to put me and the whole house committee into trouble and we will all be hauled before the management of the university.' And then they just stopped talking to me at all. Everything just stopped and I mean, that lasted up to March maybe. That was it.

### Becoming involved in the SRC

Maimela took over a SASCO seat on the SRC from someone who had resigned in early 2003, somewhat reluctantly, as he perceived the SRC at the time to be restrictive and narrow, exclusionary and right-wing.

The SRC was led by the Freedom Front for a good half of the time I was at the university. And the DA started leading just towards the end of my time there. The Freedom Front wasn't taking up the issues that were affecting black students, so I felt it was a waste of time because these guys have got the majority numbers in the SRC. No matter how hard we can push for certain issues that affect poor black students, or foreign students, or whatever, these guys are not going to understand these issues. Like the safety of women and this kind of thing. So I then said, no, I am very reluctant to go to the SRC. That is why I served half a term, and another term, and that was it for me. We then developed [our own group], because we then had to be tactical at the University of Pretoria. We understood that we as SASCO, and black students, were a minority and it would take long before [we could get our issues on the agenda].

Race mattered when the SRC elections came at the university. It mattered – I mean we got more votes (certainly I think so, though it was a secret vote), but we got more votes from black students, because in the mass meetings and the rallies that we had, we would get more black students coming to our rallies than white students. We would get one or two white students who were just there to listen to find out what are these guys talking about. They would ask a question sometimes, but that was it. So, our sense was that, because black students were receptive to our message, we must build an alternative SRC outside the SRC. So the branch executive committee of SASCO had to carry all the activities, the issues, the burdens and the problems that are faced by mostly black and poor students from working-class backgrounds that needed a lot of student support for them to navigate through academic life.

So, these are students who would need NSFAS; they would need financial aid. These are students who would need accommodation. These are students

who need money to buy books, and so on. So, we then had to say, the SRC is not concerned about these things. The SRC is concerned about other things ... We also got to appreciate that, as the years went by. But initially we couldn't understand why the SRC would fight so hard for parking spaces for students. We were like, but guys, there are students dropping out of university because they don't have money and you are complaining about parking! So, there was a rift and a division. And as I was saying, the diversity is now turned upside down. It becomes a source of frustration and a source of conflict. Your aspirations and interests and needs are not the same as ours.

You want to see where you must park your bicycle or your motorbike or your car. We don't have that. That is not what is key in our agenda. Most of our students don't have cars – except if these are kids from rich families, son of ministers, some of the diplomats or ministers coming from African countries or wherever the case might be. Those guys might also have cars, but the majority of our guys don't have cars. They just need a place to sleep, to study, eat and go to class. That is all they want. And so those were the key issues – what we call bread and butter issues. But we succeeded, on a number of things – campaigning outside the SRC and running programmes there like I am mentioning now – the initiation things had to be revised and toned down. I think it's just basically about 10 per cent remaining now.

## **Representing black students' issues outside the SRC**

Being in a minority group on a diverse SRC meant that SASCO had to use alternative strategies to highlight the issues of predominantly black and poor students. Maimela's experience at UP is, in this respect, reminiscent of the kind of 'racial parallelism in student governance' that was prevalent in historically English-tuition universities from the mid 1980s to the early 1990s.<sup>43</sup>

Look, what we did – what was quite fascinating about us was that we did not just use our legitimacy, or the legitimacy of our cause, and the numbers because we could mobilise students. We could get students to gather in numbers, and listen to what we had to say. Explain to them that these are the key issues. In any case, the students come to us at the beginning of the year, in what we would call the Right-to-Learn Campaign, which we run every year on every campus. Which was what the fight was about between the #FeesMustFall guys and the SASCO comrades. That they will say but we have a Right to Learn Campaign every year. And you guys are saying

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43 Luescher, T.M. (2009). Racial desegregation and the institutionalisation of 'race' in university governance: The case of UCT. *Perspectives in Education*. 27(4): 415–425.

#FeesMustFall. We have been doing this for years! To come back to the point ... we succeeded because we understood that we didn't need only numbers, mobilisation and the legitimacy of our cause. We also delved deep into the policy questions of the universities. So, we wrote papers and submissions to the university on initiation, on institutional culture, on university residence policy, how exclusionary and racist it was.

Maimela and his comrades submitted the documents they had prepared directly to management and executive committees, despite not having a formal SRC position on issues. As Maimela explains:

The universities do allow direct interaction with student organisations generally. It's not the exclusive preserve of the SRC to interact with university leadership. We can audience directly with the VC. When I arrived, Van Zyl [the then VC] was about to leave, a brilliant chap, still brilliant even now. He was the guy who would say, 'Welcome gentlemen. This is your meeting, so what is the issue?' And then we would present our issues and then when he responds he gives you the sense that you know, if you are not prepared to engage with this guy, you are not going to get anything out of him. So, we had to dig deep down to actually have a conversation with him and the university management. And over a period of time, they developed a respect for us, because we could present a well-argued case of why particular things are wrong and what has got to be done. So, we presented our case, and we had to do so convincingly – even through submissions, not only through verbal representations – because the university always asked questions to us. The university is now asking that, in the place of this practice or this policy, what do you suggest should be the alternative? That is where the love for interrogating, for university, student affairs and higher education policy came from for me.

Maimela's love of policy analysis permeated his life at that point, and continued into his future career. Later, as deputy president of SASCO at a national level, he became the head of the policy division. His student leadership experience convinced him of the power of argument and persuasion to reach certain goals.

I used to say, 'Let's sit down with the policy as it stands. Let's interrogate it. Let's see where the weaknesses of this policy are, so that we don't just only present political arguments, but we also present well-reasoned and worked-out alternatives to the status quo. And in that sense, we will be able to give the management no room to manoeuvre because they will see that substantively we have got a political case to make.' So that's how it went. So that's how we won our issues. By directly speaking to management, but also making sure we are ready in terms of the substance of these issues.

While SASCO was not in the majority in the SRC, Maimela notes that university management was concerned that only white representatives would be sent to the formal university structures, so they insisted on demographic representivity in the structures. In his view, university management seemed to be more 'liberal' than the university student body at the time. What it did imply, however, was that, as Maimela recalls, unlike on other campuses, there could not be a united front of students in the structures, particularly where there were two representatives, for example one from SASCO and one from the Freedom Front, representing different worlds. Despite being difficult to claim a common mandate, Maimela found the situation to be an incisive learning experience, where arguments had to be presented clearly, where new strategies and tactics had to be devised to cope in an unusual, narrow and conservative territory, which was quite unlike the situation on a campus such as Turfloop,<sup>44</sup> for example. In retrospect, for Maimela this was a blessing in disguise in helping to harness his creativity and to develop his political skills.

## Strategies and tactics

In reflecting on the events of 2015/16, Maimela notes the importance not only of winning arguments in the boardroom, so to speak, but in building groundswell support to lend legitimacy to one's cause. In that sense, the protest strategy was something that was common both then and now. He recounts how he led a march to the minister's office on the Reitz matter,<sup>45</sup> and organised a sit-in on the fourth floor of the administrative building of UP. He relates the incident as follows:

We caught them off-guard. Once we gathered close to 50 to 80 students, in the foyer there of the university management quarters. We then said to one of the PAs, 'We are here for a meeting with the vice-chancellor.' They said, 'No, but not all of you!' I said, 'No, all of us!' You should have seen the ladies there. Most of the PAs are white female employees, and they were so shocked to see so many students in the foyer and they got so scared. They thought something was going to happen to them, and we said, 'No, we are not here to fight. We are here to have a conversation, we don't have weapons, we are just here.' And if I'm not mistaken, on that day, we had comrades Abner Mosaase, Obed Mathivha and Mlimandlela Ndamase who are today senior in the movement'.

And the head of security came running, I have never seen him sweat like that. He was wet, completely wet. So, we would organise those kinds of things, many of those. The biggest protest marches that we had, one of the biggest,

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44 The main campus of the present-day University of Limpopo.

45 See fn 49.

I think it was 2004, was against the downgrade of the Mamelodi campus of the university. That was after the incorporation, because we protested and fought around the mergers for quite a while. I mean it started off with the *Size and Shape* report,<sup>46</sup> but our position was that there shouldn't be any teaching and learning sites that should close down because our interpretation was that it means that you are closing down on access. If you have 2 000 students in Soweto or in Mamelodi on campuses you are shutting down, it means that 2 000 students won't have access. So, we made a massive march to the university. We got to a point where it got so massive that those of us who were in front leading the march couldn't hear the song that was at the back and vice versa. It was confusing because it was so big.

Before Maimela was even in top leadership in SASCO at a national level, he was involved in their debates on the macro issue of reshaping the higher education landscape as a whole through mergers and incorporations. SASCO had argued that some of the proposed mergers, such as the merger of MEDUNSA<sup>47</sup> and Turfloop to become the University of Limpopo, didn't make sense. They were also opposed to a few others, as well as the potential shutting down of the Vista campuses,<sup>48</sup> and they considered it a victory when, in the event, the University of the Free State and the University of Johannesburg incorporated and developed the Vista sites. With hindsight, given that the University of Limpopo has since been unbundled to form both Limpopo and Sefako Makgatho universities, and that the Soweto campus of the University of Johannesburg appears to be thriving, Maimela feels that their arguments, ignored by some at the time, have since been vindicated.

## Key challenges and achievements

### Registration fees

Maimela describes some of the highlights of his time as a student leader. One of the main issues at the time was whether the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) would cover students' upfront registration payment as poor students were finding it difficult to find the initial registration fee that was required before financial aid from NSFAS was received. That it did eventually do so, after

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46 The CHE report, *Towards a New Higher Education Landscape*, 2000, that contributed to discussions on university mergers.

47 The Medical University of South Africa was a historically black health sciences university established in Ga-Rankuwa in Gauteng province. After an unsuccessful merger with the University of the North (or Turfloop) to become the University of Limpopo in 2005, it was unmerged and became an independent university again in 2014 under the name Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University.

48 Vista University was a historically black university with campuses in most of the large urban black townships across South Africa. In 2003, the university was closed, its campuses were incorporated into universities and its distance education arm merged with the University of South Africa.

interactions with the minister of education at the time, Dr Naledi Pandor, and the board of NSFAS, he counts as one of the main victories achieved in his time, which he experienced as very exciting. He recollects how NSFAS grew massively from its predecessor, the Tertiary Education Fund for South Africa (TEFSA), especially in terms of the amount of money that it disperses, and laments that it is often forgotten what strides the scheme has actually made since those times.

## Racism

A second incident that looms large in his memory was the 2008 racism incident at the University of the Free State, which became known as the Reitz incident.<sup>49</sup> He was president of SASCO national at the time. As he recalls:

That incident became the highest representation of the frustrations about institutional culture and racism in particular. Historically white institutions continued to be racist in their culture, exclusionary at various levels, full of patriarchy, [conservative with respect to] progression of academics, progression of blacks, this that and the other. All sorts of things. And for us then, we could make a stronger case with that. We were saying, but the Reitz incident is just a representation of one of the many incidents going on that are humiliating to us. So, we said, 'Guys, this is not an isolated thing, it is just the tip of the iceberg.' And students at UFS and elsewhere come out saying, 'Indeed, this is what is going on.'

Maimela narrates how SASCO pushed for something to be done about this, which contributed to the establishment in March 2008 by the then minister of education of the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions (known as the Soudien Commission). He tells the story of how in 2005 when he was deputy president of SASCO, they had introduced awards for the 'most untransformed universities in the country', indicating a long-standing concern with some universities' lack of transformation.

He argues that:

Some universities use institutional autonomy to defend the position [their lack of transformation]. So, they were saying, 'But we have got institutional

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49 The Reitz incident refers to a racist video that was produced by four white students for a 'cultural evening' in the Reitz student residence of the University of the Free State in 2008. For details see: J.C. van der Merwe & D. van Reenen (2016). *Transformation and Legitimation in Post-Apartheid Universities: Reading Discourses from 'Reitz'*. Bloemfontein: Sun Press. The Reitz incident was taken as symptomatic of ongoing racial (and other) discrimination in (mainly historically white) universities and led to the establishment of the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions in 2008.



autonomy. We determine our policies, practices, norms, values and all of that.' That is well and fine. Universities must have a certain level of autonomy, but what about the White Paper 3's articulation of the proper understanding and genesis of autonomy in a democratic South Africa?<sup>50</sup> What should be the model university for a democratic South Africa? When you say autonomy, we have always married it with public accountability. That you can't then say that you have autonomy to go against what is national consensus on how we should transform our society to make it more inclusive, make it more inclusive in terms of race, gender, class and so on. You can't then use institutional autonomy to shield yourself from the necessary changes that must happen institutionally. It is wrong, it's absolutely wrong, because then it means that you are undermining progressive national policy, but you are also undermining the very same policy that gives you institutional autonomy. Public accountability means that you have got to account for the support, the resources, the whatever, the regulation, whatever the government offers – the incentives, and all of that. So, we can't give you R3 billion and you tell us that you still can't produce black professors, black PhD students and still have white hostels ...

### Free higher education

For Maimela, in that context, the Soudien Commission was a major victory for the sector. Another major victory he counts as the inclusion of the paragraph on progressively free higher education that was adopted in the resolution of the ANC at the Polokwane Conference of 2007.

The free education paragraph, rather the higher education resolution in that conference – now I can say it 10 years later – was literally crafted by me. Literally. I can still remember how that particular line went – there were other lines that were there under the resolutions, it was a small paragraph – but it said that the ANC-led government shall progressively introduce free education up to the first degree at university level. That's what it says. And the reason why it was couched like that was because we understood that, in order to do this successfully and without disruption and without the pitfalls of failure, you have got to progressively introduce this thing over a period of time.

NSFAS also increased over time the bursary component, so that is part of the progression. Now it covers registration fees. That is part of the progression, right. Now it says we can exempt students [from households with a higher threshold income] – that is part of the progression. Then almost 10 years later

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50 White Paper 3 refers to the Department of Education (1997). *Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education*, which is also referred to as the White Paper on Higher Education.

the minister has not so much acted on it except with that committee that was led by Habib and others and so on. But, that for us was a big thing, it was a major victory. So, we have managed to convince the ANC to adopt this resolution and this is quite great, its huge, and then they don't implement, and then the #FeesMustFall comes and hits them like they don't know. And then [they] say, 'But this is our resolution anyway ...'

## **Reflecting on #FeesMustFall and recent student movements**

### **Decoloniality**

In reflecting on the differences between student politics of his time and the 2015/16 student protest movement, Maimela points to the following:

What for me is a pitfall of the decolonial movement is that their narrative seems to be saying that decolonisation must necessarily fix each and every issue in the sector. We will always believe in an education system that is pan-African in outlook, that responds to the concrete conditions of Africa, making sure that our knowledge production, our research and development, the skills that we produce for the private sector and the public sector, should be able to extricate the continent from all sorts of backwardness, be it in the knowledge gap, be it in the technology gap, the infrastructure gap, be it in the health and welfare gap and so on. So, our view has always been that we should do that. But from what I have been hearing – I have attended a few of the seminars and the debates – the guys seem to think that decolonial thought and a decolonial set of ideas should be the one major concept that you throw around and then all the problems are solved. And my view is that if you do that, then you are trying to rewrite history and you are doing it because every kind of body of thought or knowledge comes in to patch a particular gap, or fill a particular weakness. And the decolonial movement and decolonial thought has its place and its role to the extent that it helps us to progress. But in other elements of the debate about changing the higher education sector, you need other perspectives that are equally legitimate, equally strong and equally useful to the debate about how to take education from this point.

I mean, for instance, I think that you need to appreciate the class perspective on the lack of transformation in the sector. That at an institutional level, why do you continue to have the historically black universities as cousins and brothers or younger brothers and sisters to the historically white universities? Because let's be honest, universities are institutions of elite production and elite values production, creating that hierarchy in society. I mean they are instruments of hierarchy to a large extent inasmuch as they are also instruments of levelling the playing field.

So, to the extent that they are institutions of levelling the playing field, they have got to take into account the class basis of our conflict in South Africa. If the government or the state continues to see nothing wrong with the funding model, then the University of Venda and University of Zululand will continue to be non-research institutions and will not go up to the level of being a so-called world-class university – they will not go to the extent of being a reputable university, a university to go to. It's just going to remain the same, so it's going to be sub-standard in terms of perception and in reality. Sub-standard education, sub-standard teaching, sub-standard research, sub-standard facilities and all of that. And welcoming and creating entry and access only for students who are from a sub-standard schooling system, in the rural areas, in the villages and so on.

Because the barriers to entry are lower there, and the barriers to entry are higher on the other side. So, if you have to equalise the system – transform the system to make all the universities competitive on quality – they must all compete on quality. The University of Zululand must not get the poorest of the poor students on the basis that the barriers of entry are low. They must compete on the basis of their quality offering. All these universities. And it should be possible that a student feels that, in order for me to do an agricultural degree or an agricultural programme, the university that is strong on agriculture is the University of Venda. I go there – no matter where I come from, and no matter who I am. So, I am saying that the class/economic kind of consideration in the debate is just as important as the decolonial one. So, it creates a situation where even universities like the University of Pretoria, when they market themselves, they would largely only go to the Girls High, the Boys High and the so-called best performing schools and the top quintile schools. Why? Because for them, the more students progress, because of the funding model, the better for their income, the better for their subsidy and all that. I don't know what's the latest now. You have got to have good participation rates, and you have got to have good success rates, in order to attract more funding, as much as you would have A-rated scientists and researchers in order to get the research funding component, right? So those kinds of things. So, it perpetuates class divide, closes out students who are from poor backgrounds, don't have access to cutting-edge, top of the range kind of facilities, and that kind of thing.

From where I stand, those for me remain the key issues. I remember now there was a debate at the second higher education transformation conference, where there was appreciation from some of the professors there – some of them from white universities – who were so *gatvol* [fed up] and so tired of the slow-paced nature of the change at university level or in the higher education sector as a whole, that they were saying, 'Look guys, we tried the three-year rolling plans, which the higher education department can use as a so-called

steering mechanism to steer the universities to change.' I remember Prof. Chris de Beer for instance, who was one of the key proponents, who said, 'I have been in the higher education sector for long. We have tried to say these universities will change by themselves. Give them the autonomy and all that.' And there was an idea, I don't know if it passed through, that we are now beginning to give more powers to the minister to intervene in the instances where universities really fail to change. And the minister can use some mechanism to force the university to change and adopt certain things. And we said that this can be a bit dangerous because you really don't want to encroach a lot on autonomy, but where the frustration has now built up so much that people say, look this thing is not moving ... We have tried this and the other. This thing is not moving. You have used this incentive, that incentive, three-year rolling plans, you use reporting mechanisms, whatever the case may be, but universities are just refusing to change. So, what do you do then? Then the politicians are saying, then we must revert back to our legislative power and say, what can we do about it. But then you are reverting back to the apartheid model of how universities were governed and so on.

### The 2015/16 protests

Maimela reflects on the emergence of the 2015/16 student protests, regarding them as an almost inevitable moment in a long cycle of student movements that manifest in different ways. While social media, or new media as he prefers to name it, to avoid it sounding frivolous, played a large role in assisting with the swift organisation of protest action, he muses as follows:

If you look at the history of higher education instability, or rather contestation, at the ups and downs of the higher education sector in terms of stability, every few years it shows some form or another of upheaval or instability that reaches a boiling point. So, the emergence of the #FeesMustFall movement is not an outlier and it is not a new phenomenon but rather a continuation of that kind of a thing. As an example, it must have been '95 when there was a total national shutdown of universities. Madiba called in the National Executive Committee of SASCO, and Madiba said – among other things – that your demands are basically legitimate, and we hear them, and we are going to deal with them. Agreed. And then the SASCO leadership said, 'Agreed.' And then the second thing that he said was that you will also call off the protest. You know students have to go back to class. There was no agreement there, because Madiba walked out of the meeting, faced the journalists, and announced that SASCO has agreed with me, and the national shutdown is called off and students are going back to class. And then the SASCO leadership was shocked, but Madiba was Madiba, so you cannot say no now ... [laughs].

He relates a story about another crisis period in higher education around NSFAS funding issues in the merger period, and tells of a time when he spent the night in a cell for running the SASCO Right-to-Learn Campaign, and in that light he sees the #FeesMustFall movement as being part of a continuing pattern, albeit with its own issues and tempo.

On the #FeesMustFall movement, Maimela's opinion is that:

It adds value. It takes the momentum forward. It has achieved great strides on the trail of issues that were always on the pipeline and were sort of not taken too seriously – and that people probably didn't believe until there was a national shutdown. The people didn't believe that the sector is in such a crisis. And I think it succeeded to really drive that point home to a point where for weeks and weeks Cabinet was preoccupied with this, and me and [the interviewer] were in a task team and we tried to work out something.

The sector is in crisis – not only crisis, crises. The problem of the ageing professoriate is one of them, access as you know has always been an issue, and now also the issue of institutional culture has come to a peak – suicides and rapes and all those kinds of things. Sometimes universities become a microcosm of society. What society is troubled with, is also what universities are troubled with – not to say that I associate with or condone the violence and the abuses that happen there, but I am saying if generally our society is quite an exclusive, abusive, violent society, then the likelihood is that our schools and our universities will take that shape as well.

## **Impact of the student leadership experience**

### **On personal life**

Asked what he takes from his activism and his student leadership roles into his present life, Maimela's response is considered and comprehensive.

I think a combination of concrete experiences of being the outsider would always have propelled me in one way or another into some form of struggle. Because the nature of the underdog, if I can put it that way, when you feel that you are living under certain conditions or you are faced with certain conditions, and you can live better, you tend to fight back. It's a natural instinct. You fight back.

But I always had the determination, the consciousness that was built. So, it is a combination of both: your material, lived conditions and the consciousness that was built. So, it's not mind over matter, or vice versa. It is both. For me it is both the values of striving for a fair and just and inclusive society, free from all sorts of oppression and exploitation. Those values and that consciousness

you carry forever with you. Wherever you see injustices happening, you must always fight them. You are just the activists for life, therefore I am just committed to it.

And I take away from my experience in the student movement firstly the love for ideas – I think that's the first thing. The love for ideas. I think if you want to be a person of substance and want to contribute, you have got to associate yourself with a search for ideas, debating ideas, reading ideas, comparing ideas and so on. I take that out of it, and that for me is very key. Because you shall be known by your character, and the character you build out of what you stand for, and if you don't stand for anything then you are dangerous, not only to society but you are dangerous to yourself as well. Because you stand for nothing. So, the issue of ideas becomes very key.

Then the second thing is excellence. In whatever you do, you want to succeed, and the more you go through experiences of being given tasks – some of which I often think I don't deserve, but you get given those tasks, and some I actually see as a burden – you end up finding yourself there and you swim and you go along and all of that, and you learn and then you realise that actually I am not only paddling, I am swimming very well here. To your own surprise.

## On career

To the question of whether his student leadership experience influenced his career choices, his answer is in the affirmative.

If it's not academia, its policy-making for me, because I also love the freedom associated with academics and research. I stayed in a research organisation, MISTRA, for seven years. I helped as a founding member of that and the other founding member was Tshilidzi Ratshitanga, who was also the former secretary-general of COSAS and SASCO. So, it has always been for me the passion for ideas, for debate, for policy-making, for intellectual work generally.

Some of this interest manifests itself in involvement in a project aimed at documenting the history of the student movement, but it is the values he learnt that are most abiding.

## Overall impact

The other thing that it has taught me, the student movement, is that you have to take responsibility for the task given and accept it with all that it comes with. So, there will be the painful moments and there will be the joyful moments, and you have to take it all, so in that way you don't become a quitter. That it is tough is a simple thing which now became like a staple food for me, a kind of lifestyle. Whenever you are requested for an interview at five o'clock

in the morning, you must just wake up – you give up certain comforts. There are privileges and niceties and pleasantries and comforts that you enjoy by being a leader. Some of which you don't ask for, but which you just get given because people recognise and respect you, but at the same time there is a hard side. Where because you are successful at what you do, you can just be accused of anything, and it is your duty then, using your character and your values system, to clarify to whoever that needs to be clarified. To say, no, on a factual basis, this is what is happening.

So that is helping me now at management level in decision-making. I mean, I work for a regulator now, a huge, huge regulator. We are regulating markets. And you are taught that discipline of appreciating the pressures that come with higher responsibility and bigger responsibility. To be able to manage about, at the time it was 26 universities and – I don't know how many campuses – and be the spokesperson in the country and outside the country for the thousands of students that were card-carrying members, supporters, voters of SASCO, was quite a privilege and an honour. It's an experience that you never want to forget.

# chapter 7

## Xolani Zuma

University of Zululand,  
SRC member 2005/06, SRC president 2006/07

*Denyse Webbstock, Xolani Zuma & Ntokozo Bhengu*

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### Brief biography

Xolani Zuma studied at the University of Zululand [UZ] from 2002 to 2007. He obtained his LLB degree in 2006, and was admitted as an attorney in 2010. He currently runs his own law practice, Zuma and Partners, in Durban.

This chapter is based on an interview conducted by Denyse Webbstock and Ntokozo Bhengu on 6 September 2018.

### Coming to university

Xolani Zuma grew up in different parts of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) – his mother was from the north of the province and his father from Newcastle. He matriculated in 2000 from Thanduyise High School in Ngwelezane, which is just outside Richards Bay, and after a gap year (basically as a result of financial constraints), he began his studies at UZ. As part of his background, Zuma describes the lack of opportunities in a rural community, both in Swaziland and later in northern KZN where he grew up.

In general, there was poverty there. I think that what you could experience on a daily basis was to wake up, go to school, and then you go and herd cattle, and then you go and play soccer. But you are not exposed to, you know, the things



that you would find in an urban area. So, like your IT, technology and all of those things were not there.

In 1997, Zuma went to live with his mother in eSikhawini outside Richards Bay. In his view, the 'township background was even worse than the rural one'. As he says:

There you are exposed to violence, you know. You are exposed to serious crimes. And almost everyone within your generation is either committing crimes or they are in prison. And very few people succeed. If you go there now, the people that we grew up with are either sitting at home doing drugs or drinking. Some, obviously, are successful, but you know, most of them don't make it because of the material conditions. That also motivated me to say, I think we can change things around here.

Getting to university at all was to prove a trial of finding the requisite funding through part-time work. Zuma relates the story of gaining access to university as follows:

So, what happened was that, I had about R1 000. And registration at the time for off-campus students was R2 700, and for students who are residing on-campus it was about R3 800 or so. And then there was a friend of mine who was actually already at the university. And he said, 'Look, maybe you can come and negotiate. There is an SRC there, so you can come to varsity with R1 000 and see if you can convince them that you have to be registered.'

So, I spoke to the SRC at the time, which was led by a lady who is now an advocate. She was the president of the SRC, and the SRC at the time was led by independents who had broken away from SASCO. I said, I have R1 000 and I want to register. And they said, 'Unfortunately, you can't register. We don't negotiate for first-year students. You must have the full registration. We only negotiate concessions that apply to second year upwards.'

The SRC then referred him to the financial aid office in the administration building, but Zuma found his way to the office of the acting vice-chancellor (VC), whom he thinks was Professor Hugh Afrika at the time. Zuma explained that he wanted to register, but did not have the registration fee, and when he was referred once again to the financial aid office, he proceeded to outline three options to the acting VC.

The first option is for you to register me, because I want to be a lawyer, and then I become a student, and then I contribute to society. The second option I have, which I do not want to do, is to go back to my township, and join the many other young people like me, who I actually grew up with, who are

now criminals. Some of them are in prison. And then you might even be so unfortunate that when I commit these crimes, you might even be a victim. You know, when I start hijacking and doing all these funny things. And then, I remember, he called his secretary, and said, 'Look, tell Finance to sort out this guy.' And I went to Finance, and then they actually registered me. And that is how I became a student.

Once registered, Zuma was able to cover his tuition fees through NSFAS and through the SRC, which took care of his debt in his second year.

## **Context of getting involved in the SRC**

Zuma served two terms in the SRC of UZ: first as an ordinary member in 2005/06, and then in 2006/07 as president. Zuma's decision to become involved in student politics and to become a student leader was informed largely by his circumstances, and a particular incident which fortified his resolve to participate in bringing about better conditions for students.

Most of the decisions that I took, as a student, now and as an activist, were informed by the material conditions which I found on the ground. My first experience was not the nicest one when I arrived, to literally be told by a person who should actually be negotiating on my behalf, to say, look, we don't deal with first-year students. And then, the question that I asked myself was, 'Are these first-year students not going to become senior students and vote for the very same student activist?' And for me, it didn't make sense. Then I looked at a number of people who may have been coming from the same background that I had. And I said to myself, maybe justice could be served if I also join, and then try the obvious thing, start from the political side of things. It started at a basic level.

The impulse to improve the experiences of students was born of Zuma's need to achieve justice and 'prove a point', as he puts it, that no matter what your circumstances are, you can still become something better. Zuma didn't know his father until he was 17, but grew up in Swaziland with the sister of his aunt, whom he viewed as a grandmother. He describes her as 'a beacon of hope' who had 'all the elements of a person that wanted justice', who raised him with love, and developed in him a sense that it was important to fight for a good cause. Zuma saw his potential contribution lying in education.

## **From class representative to faculty council**

Zuma's journey into student political leadership took a slightly unusual route, as it began as an informal class representative in 2002, dealing with issues of teaching

and learning, and a lecturer who was apparently teaching the wrong subject – civil procedure rather than criminal procedure. After some demonstrations, the lecturer was subsequently fired.

Immediately after that situation, we then decided to have [elected] class reps now. People that are going to represent us, to discuss whatever our needs as students are. The Faculty Council of Law at the time would conduct the elections for class reps. I was then elected to lead the first-year students. And around September there were elections for the faculty council – the council that represents the entire student population within the Faculty of Law. And then I was elected to serve in that committee – the faculty council – which obviously sits in the Faculty Board and all of those committees within the department. Now you are looking at the broader issues of students within the Faculty of Law.

That is when I was recruited and I joined SASCO. The joining was just a peripheral issue. How I then got to be poached, when we were going for SRC elections, is that there were guys who were actually within the Faculty Council of Law – we were mainly men in our university by the way – people were leading in the SRC, almost 70 per cent were law students, interestingly ... Then they said, look, you need to be active in the structures of SASCO.

### **Motivation to join the SRC**

Zuma's entry into the political structures was motivated by his concern around teaching and learning issues.

For me, that was the most important issue, that the reason why we are here is that we need to excel academically. And the quality of education must be such that when we leave the university, we must be able to use it when we are out there. Because it is no use to have a certificate but you can't apply your mind, or you can't apply what you have been actually taught at varsity. Even when I am now invited to talk to students, I have been battling again about the same issues. The quality of students that we are producing sometimes ... I employ candidate attorneys, and I am so worried that the quality of our students is not [what it should be]. I think that there is more that we need to do. In terms of how they apply themselves. In terms of how they apply even the law that they have been taught. It may very well be challenges from basic education as well.

That is where my passion really was. What do you do after having obtained the degree, post the university life? But, obviously, the issue of financial exclusions as well was one of the things that was a driver. Because remember, I didn't have money to go to varsity, so for me, I knew that I am not the only child who did not have parents who could actually afford, or in fact, were willing, to pay for these fees. So those were in the main the drivers. Obviously

the issues of residences, the issue of safety becomes part of the package when you fight for the right of students.

## **Partisan politics**

### **External influences**

The political context of the time in KwaZulu-Natal province, of divisions between the ANC and the IFP, was mirrored on the University of Zululand campus.

The reality of the matter is that UZ is a highly politicised institution. Both from the student side, even to management. And the only way you could be able to transform or do whatever that you want to do in terms of the advancement of the interests of students, is through the set structures. Obviously, if you want to go into the SRC, you have to go via your political formations. But because of the historical challenge in the university between the ANC and the IFP from the 1980s, when the IFP stormed the university and killed a lot of people, when you get into the indoctrination of politics, even if you agree about what we want to achieve as students, as long as it comes from the IFP, I am not going to agree with it. Particularly because of the political violence that had engulfed the province.

Zuma paints a picture of a university that at the time was highly politicised right to the level of Council. Asked to explain what that means, he paints a picture of subtle influence being exerted at all levels.

If you have a VC, for instance, that would be inclined to listen to a particular grouping, they then make friends with those people that they believe are going to defend them. If you have a premier of the province being from that particular group, then it becomes inevitable that the VC would think, 'Maybe this guy, through the ministerial appointees, may be able to influence decisions of who goes to Council, and then my position is secure.'

And as students, you then find yourself in that sort of buffer situation, where you have this Council, you know, where it is highly politicised. I mean, obviously, if you look at the set-up of councils, even today, I mean you have your ministerial appointees, and so on. But whatever is there, I don't believe that you have actually focused on the academic aspect of such institutions.

At the level of Senate, it was not necessarily political party allegiance that dominated, in Zuma's view.

You may very well find your own academics and management having their own factions within the university. And those factions will then be used to

also buy the support of student leaders so that they get whatever they want to achieve. I saw that happening a lot of times, to the extent that even when we were in the SRC, you would find that a VC would have a grouping within your political formation that is not in the SRC, but that she or he will listen to. I had an issue with the dean of students at the time, who would always listen to a colleague of ours, who was not in the SRC. You know, you call a strike, and then you get a call from this gentleman, and he says, 'Call off that strike, I have spoken to the dean of students and he says he is going to give you what you want.' And I say, 'But how does he tell you that instead of talking to the SRC?' So you know, you always had those issues. And I think it's something that we need to look into going forward as a country in terms of having institutions of higher education being purely reservoirs of knowledge, as opposed to them being used as a space for political battles. Unfortunately, when you do that, even for the students that come out of institutions, it becomes very difficult.

As a former activist, I always find it difficult to employ someone who has not been politically rehabilitated to come and work for my business. Because I am not expecting somebody to come and give me politics in my business. I am expecting someone to come and deliver service to my clients. So, universities can't be wards ... or municipalities.

How does Zuma understand the purpose of different groups seeking influence?

Well, from my own observations, power goes with positions so that you secure your future, in terms of employment. But, again, there were a lot of things that were going on in terms of corruption within our institutions, particularly at UZ at the time. You will know that we have always been fighting around the issue of selling degrees at the university. You can't have academics selling qualifications because then it eats away the credibility of the university. That power is for people to sustain themselves within the institution. And remember, I'm told they have changed it now, during our time, as president of the SRC and the secretary-general, you would sit in the tender committee of the university. That is where you will see the issue of power at play, where people decide which company is going to be appointed for security on campus. At the UZ, for instance, there is catering, and someone will say, I need someone to distribute meat for this university for the next five years. I need someone for cleaning. And all those sorts of things. And those are some of the sins of incumbents, which in most cases have actually destroyed student leaders. It happened to me at some point, when I was actually lobbied by members of management. I wanted to leave when I was finishing my term of office but I was approached by a gentleman who said to me, 'Look, we want to retain you in the university. We know you are doing your master's. And you might not get it at the pace at which you are going. But if you do the thing

that we want you to do as management, we are going to pay you monthly, R15 000, to make sure that there is stability on campus.’ And I said, ‘I am not going to do it, and if you want me to do that, come and tell the students.’ And I did tell the students that I have just been lobbied by the management, that I am going to be paid so much so that I can sell you out. And that created a lot of tension between myself and senior management of the university. That was one of the challenges, in terms of managing the financial resources of the university. And I am hoping it’s no longer there. But in our times, they were the challenges that we had. And management would be sure that they divide the student leadership so that they were able to get their way.

### **ANC-SASCO vs IFP-SADESMO and IFP municipal bursaries**

The very strong identification with different political formations tended to determine the nature of student politics at UZ at the time.

Either you are ANC-SASCO, or you are IFP-SADESMO [South African Democratic Students Movement]. And we would obviously fight. If you go to a student body meeting, you would be lucky to finish the student body meeting. Because there would be fighting. Unfortunately, what didn’t help the situation, is that when we had issues on campus, leaders of both political formations, at the level of the ANC and IFP, would come to campus. And that would actually spike and fuel the tensions.

It was something very strange happened at UZ. From 2002 to 2004, the IFP was not very strong. They were just non-existent. In fact, AZASCO<sup>51</sup> was stronger than the IFP. But my assessment is that they started, through their municipalities, to issue bursaries for students. Through the government obviously; remember the IFP was leading in the province. So they started having more students within the university from rural areas with bursaries but with their indoctrination ... as a student coming from Ingwavume, for example, and you got a bursary from the municipality, the first thing that comes to mind is that the mayor gave me this, therefore, I owe them something. And my parents are IFP ... and that is how they then grew.

Another factor in the IFP’s growth was a particular leader who was able to ‘lure students to the IFP’ and to SADESMO, but since then, Zuma explains that SASCO has been able to maintain power, albeit with internal divisions that result in different lists that contest against each other.

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51 The Azanian Student Convention (AZASCO) was founded in 1990 as the Azanian People’s Organisation’s official student wing.

## Lobbying ANC-aligned Council and SRC members as 'deployees'

Zuma explains how the politicised environment of the university at the time affected the functions of the SRC.

When I was in the SRC, we had members of Council who were in leadership positions in the ANC at the time. So that would work for us in the sense that, if there is a position that we want to advance, we would request to meet with them outside the formal structures of Council. To lobby them for our position. But again, if you want to advance a position that is so radical and that creates a sort of discomfort to the elders within the political terrain, within the ANC structures, it works against you, because then you would be summoned to the structures of the ANC, to tell you not to raise that issue. Particularly around the issue of appointments. The issues of deployment are there, and they would say we expect that this one has to be the VC, and we would say, 'No, with our experience, we do not want her to be the VC.' And then you get summoned, and told to stop that thinking. That thing is not going to fly, this is what you are going to support. Now, unfortunately, you have to remove your cap as an SRC president. And wear the cap of a deployee now. Which then creates a sort of problem for you in terms of managing the real issues of students. It was good at the times where you want to achieve something, but it was also bad where the leaders, the political leaders, did not believe that what you want is a genuine cause.

For instance, the issue of fee increment, they would not actually subscribe to that. In most cases they would say, 'As much as you want a zero fee increment (the issues of #FeesMustFall are not new ... we had always been calling for zero fee increment), instead of talking about 10 per cent, why don't you negotiate and cap it at maybe 5 per cent?' We would say, 'We don't want that.' And we would be at loggerheads. And they would give you an instruction, and then you would have to implement whatever they said. Even the calling off of strikes sometimes. You would go to the VC's office during the course of the negotiations, and she would send an SMS to the leaders, whether within the region or within the province, and then you get a call. And then you go outside. And they would say, 'Call off that thing and then go and address the media outside.' And then that creates a problem for you, because students are waiting for you outside for you to give them the feedback in terms of whether you achieved the goals or not. But you have these political imperatives now, where you have to go and convince students why this thing can't go ahead. Without them having achieved what they want. So it was a bit of a problem.

## SRC internal organisation

The SRC model at UZ was an avowedly parliamentary one that students had to

learn to manage. To what extent had there been training for student leaders and support for the management of SRC affairs?

Interestingly, there was never any support in terms of how to manage. We just hired an external service provider to conduct an induction for the SRC. I think we got someone from KZN, in Durban, who had a company that used to train people. So he trained us, but again not in depth in terms of financial management. I think what we did in the main was the responsibilities of the president, the SG [secretary-general], the treasurer and so on, and also the drafting of the programme of action. That is where they focused. But financial management – nothing much.

### **SRC budget**

We had a budget of about R1.7 million, which came from the student levy – students were paying a particular portion towards the SRC. And we accounted for that budget, and I think we got a clean audit, I will have to check the financial statement, but what we did in the main is that we started going to other universities to benchmark as the SRC. We started also interacting with companies. I remember at some point we had presentations from ABSA, from Standard Bank, just to enlighten us about these issues, because we thought maybe we need to think ahead, and envisage a situation where we are outside campus now. And even leading, you know outside campus, how are you going to run the budget and so on? So that assisted us a lot, but in terms of support within the university, no. You just got a budget, and then there is a bash, you go to the dean of students, he approves, you come with three quotations. Because at that time we were actually sourcing quotations ourselves, which was a bit of a challenge for me, because then it exposes you, because if you get three quotations and these guys want to say, 'If you give it to me, then I am going to give you something.' And then you get that quotation, they approve, then you have a bash.

We were never taught project management. When you have a bash, when you have a Miss University of Zululand – how do you normally do it? Do you have security? How do you deal with issues of protocol, this and that? We were never taught all of those things. So you had to actually navigate and find your way.

Asked what the SRC budget covered, Zuma is direct, and applies the wisdom of hindsight.

I won't lie. The only way at that time that you would sustain your power was through entertainment. At least 70 per cent of our budget was spent on entertainment. I will not lie and say we were innovative and 90 per cent



went to bursaries, no. It went to entertainment. We had a proportion of a presidential discretionary fund, but it wasn't much. And it would, from time to time, be abused by your branch leaders. Because they would say, 'Here is a list of students [to receive the funds],' and some of them would not even meet the requirements. But in the main, what we did, instead of having bashes, the social ones, we tried to mix programmes. In the sense that, your religious sector as well, they would have their own programmes. For sport and so on. And even the academic programmes, for faculties, they would create their own programmes and then submit to us and we funded those programmes. But in the main, I wouldn't say the budget went to something meaningful. It did not. It went to entertainment.

### **SRC electoral model**

Zuma elaborates on the parliamentary governance model and the electoral system for the SRC at the University of Zululand, and the dominant roles of two political groupings.

Basically, we had a system where you vote for political parties. Obviously, you will have the names of people, but basically, you are either voting for SASCO or you are voting for SADESMO, and it was the winner takes all. If SASCO gets, say 3 000 or whatever votes, they then take the elections. But what then we did during our time, we said, look, as much as you are voting for the organisations, let's use it more for voting for individuals. Meaning, you vote for Zuma as the president and then, the general members, you vote for Thabo and for Cuba and so on. So that you count votes per individual. So we changed the constitution to be like that. That is why, during our term of office, you had two people from the opposition, because they were able to beat two of our people. No, in fact, it was won through the actual votes. And then, you had the religious sector, they would vote for the chairperson of the religious council, and then he sits in the SRC as a member of the SRC. And the sport as well, they would do the same.

The management of the elections, according to Zuma, was sometimes problematic, with questions of external political influence coming to the fore.

At the time, it was the IEC [which managed the electoral process]. The one for the country. Appointment by the university, and there was nothing wrong, in actual fact we had pushed for the IEC. But what then became a problem is that the presiding officer would be appointed and the staff who he would appoint (because remember the IEC would not ordinarily have full-time staff members that are running the elections) would be people from the area. And those people then would have political affiliations. So we had that

problem that, for instance, this guy that was a presiding officer, he works for a particular municipality, stationed there from the IEC. He then brought people, and you can see, I know this guy, he was just campaigning the other day – he was wearing the T-shirt of the IFP. And here he is, counting.

And there was an incident where big boxes of ballot papers came in, and they were already voted on. And we tried to raise that, and I think about 200 of them were then destroyed. And we said, but if they have been found, then it nullifies the whole process. And the university would say, let's vote and see whether it is going to be material at the end of the day. If the margin is too huge, then we will disregard that. But I said, the margin might be huge precisely because there are about 1 000 of these ballot papers that came in! So that was the challenge.

Unfortunately, we may also have used that system as well at some point, where you are in the SRC then you also want to push that the people that are appointed within the IEC must not be people who are hostile to your thinking. So I don't know how – I know it is the IEC, but for me it presents a problem, because if you go and take a teacher or principal somewhere, that you know that this person is IFP or ANC, why do you think that they are not going to take a position or a decision or posture that seeks to assist their political formations? And it happened.

But obviously, I must also put a disclaimer there, that as much as that might have happened, we probably contributed as well in terms of divisions. So, losing, yes, they may have been rigged, but also the manner in which we had disintegrated [following internal battles], we probably were not going to win convincingly anyway.

## Relationship with management

What was the response of university structures and authorities at the time to students raising issues of teaching and learning quality and other pertinent issues?

It depends on who is dean at the time. You will find some dean of students who is receptive and willing to listen, and some who would be very dismissive. And they will tell you: 'Look, there is nothing you can change here. These things have been like this for many years. You can't just come here and change things overnight. Your purpose is to go and study. So, stop causing havoc unnecessarily.' I had a number of encounters with lecturers. I know there is one that I had to now repeat one of the modules because he was saying, 'I am not convinced that you want to be a lawyer. Yes, you don't attend classes sometimes, but you are passing. But I don't know where you gain this information. So, you have to repeat the course.' And that was not necessarily because I was not performing, but it was just to ensure that you don't continue with the path that you are taking.

And I remember that at some point there was a gentleman who was heading security at the time who called me into his office and he said, ‘Mr Zuma, look, I have your transcript here. I have your academic results. First year, you are doing so well, you are getting 80 per cent and 70 per cent, and since you joined the student activism, with your politics and your faculty councils, they have dropped. We are warning you, stop these things, or otherwise you are going to leave this university without a degree. And you are likely to be expelled.’

These are things that were said. And I said, ‘I know that it is not you that is saying these things. Who has sent you to tell me these things?’ And he said, ‘Management is not happy, both at the faculty level, but also at the senior management level, with the manner in which you are conducting yourself.’

### **SRC strategies**

As Zuma explains, there were many strikes on campus at the time, about issues of accommodation – ‘you would not have hot water, whether it was winter or summer, and then the buildings themselves were just dilapidated’ – of food, NSFAS, financial exclusions and teaching and learning.

In hindsight, Zuma recognises that some of their issues may have resulted from the university’s financial challenges, but the main issue at the time was that students wanted to live in a safe environment.

The university was not fenced. We once had a huge strike around that. We live here, and the university is not fenced, and then we get mugged every day. And then we were told that the traditional leadership within the area, that donated the land, said that you can’t have a fence here, because the people must be able to move across the university. And we didn’t understand that. So those were real struggles at the time.

One thing we realised during my term in office was that the meetings per se don’t tend to be productive, because we tend to fight our political games within the student body meetings. So, we created a weekly newsletter for the university for the SRC to report to students. We put them on all noticeboards. We would have a number of issues, maybe today we would be reporting about transport for off-campus students.

In addition to those strategies, Zuma felt it important to connect with students in the faculties where the issues relating to teaching and learning were felt most keenly and where he thought the SRC could make a difference.

And then I said to the SG of the SRC and the team – let’s have a student body meeting, whether you have it once quarterly, or once a month – but I want to have a meeting with faculty councils. Because that is where students are. So, instead of going to a student body meeting, if you go to the faculty council

of Law, you will have the students sitting there genuinely expecting to hear about their own issues within the Faculty of Law. There will be elements who will try to ridicule the whole process, but there are those who are genuine, who want to know exactly what they will become after graduating. They will start telling others, look let's deal with real issues here, you can go and fight on politics outside. That is when we were able to deal with the real issues in terms of transformation. Go to the Faculty of Education – there were bursary issues there, *Fundza Lushaka*, and many other challenges – the placement of students and so on. Even the faculty with the social work department, because you had a number of students who were not being placed ... So, we are dealing with those issues. And those are bread and butter issues.

So when you get into a student body meeting after a month, you would have dealt with all of these issues. You then prepare a report which encapsulates everything that we have dealt with during these meetings. And remember, after these meetings we go to the youth/student parliament. That is where you then find these political leaders. And then you brief them there. And then you take resolutions in the student parliament. So, when I go to a student body meeting, then I simply say, 'We have engaged on these things with your leaders in the student parliament, and these are the minutes that show we have agreed on these things.' So it would then be disingenuous for them now to say they don't know anything about these issues.

In that way, the possibility of contestation was diminished and student participation increased. The strategy was similar when it came to students in residence.

After supper, we would call all the residents of that res, and then we briefed them about academic issues, and about issues in that particular residence. You go to east, you go to west – they were categorised like that. So, we dealt with them there. So, by the time that they get into the student body meeting, they already know exactly what you are going to say there. So even if somebody tried to be innovative and smart, they would simply laugh at them. Because the president has been there to brief them. I tried to be a bit innovative, that instead of having an organisational report by the SG, we would prepare a sort of state of the campus address by the president. So, when I delivered that, I sort of covered everything. And then the report from the SG would just be on programmes. But in terms of where we are in terms of students' issues, I would have covered that. And then when you answer questions, they respond purely on those issues. So, it sort of cripples you if you want to come with some political agenda because we would have dealt with that.

While strikes were an obvious strategy, and in Zuma's memory there were many in the 2002–2004 period, they were related to different leadership groups and the extent to which they were willing to listen and negotiate.

## **Personal journey in the SRC, post-election ‘war’ and prison**

Zuma relates how the SRC of UZ was going through various changes at the time he was on campus, with SASCO taking the SRC back from the independents in 2003. Then SASCO had its own internal squabbles, as Zuma puts it, with at one time an SRC president being expelled. In 2005, Zuma contested for the SRC president position, but SASCO lost to SADESMO, the IFP student wing, which Zuma attributes to divisions within his organisation. SADESMO in turn experienced internal struggles, and the president was not able to see out his term of office. At the end of the year, for the 2006/07 term, Zuma became the president. The period was not without controversy and trauma.

In 2005, we were arrested. I spent about 31 days in prison, because when we lost elections there was a huge war at the university. It was all over the news. And we believed, I will say we believed, whether there were facts or not, that we had won the elections. But the elections were rigged. And we had a strike, and we demanded that the VC retire – the late Professor Rachel Gumbi – and that she must not declare the elections valid. And she declared them. There was a huge war between us and the IFP and management. There was a bit of burning of cars and all of those things. And we ended up in prison. And the trial ran for about two years.

Zuma faced charges, as he reports:

It was intimidation. It was conspiracy to commit murder. It was attempted murder. It was public violence. I think it was, yes, malicious damage to property. It almost destroyed me. Because had I got a conviction, I would not be where I am. Fortunately, I won the case. But my two other colleagues – accused number two and three – they were not so lucky. They were convicted, and they got five-year suspended sentences. And the other colleague was doing law, and he just gave up. He didn’t even finish his degree. But fortunately for him he is working for a municipality now, don’t ask me how – but he is holding a senior position. The other one is working, he was doing economics. So at least it didn’t affect him so much.

I was so fortunate because the magistrate said they couldn’t find evidence in respect of accused number one, which was myself, and therefore I am acquitted. And the two were then convicted. That’s how I got lucky.

Zuma relates the story leading to his arrest, highlighting the underlying tensions of the time that sometimes escalated into violent protests:

We actually wanted to negotiate with the VC. And she said she is in Durban. We were supposed to meet around 2 or 3pm, and it couldn't happen. I remember the time, in fact I got delayed, because we had been summoned by the former premier, Dr Sbu Ndebele, to Maritzburg, to come and explain what is happening.

When I got back on campus, there was already a meeting of SASCO, and a decision had already been taken that must be mass rolling action. I tried to explain to comrades that here is some intervention from the leadership of the ANC in the province and we should tone it down. They said, 'You are the face of the organisation (at the time I was actually the deputy chairperson of SASCO in the province), but it doesn't mean that we are going to listen to you. We are going to do this thing. We are going to go to the VC's house.' So that is where the attempted murder issue came in. Because obviously students went there, and then they started throwing stones, and there were some petrol bombs, but obviously they couldn't reach the house. But you know, when you are being charged, people will bring all sorts of charges.

Well obviously, some of the things, the malicious damage to property [were real] – students did vandalise, you know your library, your SRC offices. And all those sorts of things. But when these things were happening, I was also busy negotiating with the security, the police and so on, I was not part of the actual strike. Hence the police said, this one here, he was actually working with us trying to calm things down, but obviously the doctrine of common purpose applied – you were leading these people. But it really affected me.

## Key challenges

### Teaching and learning matters

A major issue that occupied Zuma in terms of the quality of teaching and learning was the matter of apparently non-accredited programmes being offered.

During our time in the leadership of the university we realised that there were two challenges. The first challenge was within the Faculty of Commerce. That people were being taught accounting, but the university was not accredited to actually teach accounting for people to become CAs [chartered accountants]. There were not even professors within the Faculty of Commerce.

Zuma explains how they created a group of researchers within the SRC to find out how many professors there were in the faculties of commerce and law, and to verify whether they had the requisite qualifications, and in law, how many of them had actually practised as lawyers to help students gain some practical understanding as well.

Within the Faculty of Commerce we realised there is a problem. These guys are not accredited, and we went to the management and we said, ‘Prof., why do we have these programmes being offered, but then we are not accredited?’ And she simply dismissed the issue, and said, ‘You guys don’t understand these issues. I have been going all over the world to try and get money for exchange programmes, and here you are coming with petty issues.’

Unfortunately, if you had to do the research, you would realise that most of our students who were doing commerce ended up teaching or working for government because they couldn’t do anything, otherwise you had to go to UKZN or other institutions. Either do you honours there, or even have to redo some of the modules for you to then get a BCom degree, and then do your honours, and then you can then start dealing with issues of serving your articles as a CA.

But then again, one of the other issues that we were raising was around the issue of law. When you go to other universities that are doing accounting for lawyers, they are doing maths lit. And those are things that you will need when you run your own practice, but I had actually done research around this and I realised that most people who fail the board exams had not done accounting. And we wanted them to introduce accounting at the university, and they refused point blank. And I think it was introduced later on, in about 2008 or 2009, just after I had left.

## Curriculum issues

And I must tell you that that experience really destroyed me later in life. Because when I did my articles, I had to do PLT [Practical Legal Training], which is a course for six months, which you have to do to write your board exams. Now, I was introduced to this animal called accounting, which I have never seen in my life. I failed Accounting three times. And had I done accounting at varsity, then it would have prepared me for the board exams. So many people run away from the profession and become prosecutors because they can’t stand these exams.

So those were challenges that we had been tackling. If you go to the Faculty of Science as well, most of our students there ended up teaching in high schools because their qualifications were only as good as the paper they were printed on, but nothing to write home about. So, we said, we can’t take these things any more. We want these things to be transformed. Remember, the university has just transformed after the mergers of universities, we were now referred to as a comprehensive institution,<sup>52</sup> with an Act, to have a bit of

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52 South African universities are officially classified in terms of their programme and qualifications mix (PQM) into three types: traditional universities, universities of technology, and comprehensive universities.

theory and a bit of practical, I think it was 70/30 or so. And we were asking the university, and the Faculty of Law, where is the practical side of things here? All the people who are teaching us have never practised law. I can't be taught by someone that has never stood in front of a judge, you know. It is a battle I am taking on now as an attorney with the university, that they must stop teaching students theory only, because when you get into my own practice, everything that you were taught on campus, the first thing I tell you – take your books and throw them away. Here we are dealing with real human beings; we are dealing with real things.

Moot courts were there, but you would probably do two or four per year for your marks. But that is not what happens at court. Because when you get to court you are going to have to ... let me make an example. As a student, I knew nothing about something called 'conveyancing', I knew nothing about something called 'liquidation of estates', nothing! We were never taught anything about that.

Now, you get into your articles, and then you are told, here is a file and you are to make sure that this estate, you know, do an L&D account. And then you ask yourself, what is an L&D account? So, the quality of education is still a problem.

In expanding on his view of the quality of education, Zuma points out what from his perspective were problems with what is taught at universities, and how far it is from what is needed in practice.

It's too far from reality. Well, particularly from the experience I have in my own profession. What we get taught on campus is too far from reality. I have done hearings at the UZ for student leaders, and there will be a dean of students, dean of the Faculty of Law presiding, and then the prosecutor will be a lecturer from the Department of Law. And then you realise this is far from reality, what they are saying here. The procedures and everything is just flawed. Then that is what we produce for the country. That is how that issue came about. The issue of quality of education. Which I think, for me, is something that we still need to look into.

## Achievements

What does Zuma count among his main achievements as a student leader?

I think for me, it was to try and change the mindset of students. Because my observation at the time was that some of the systems that we were using as student leaders were flawed. Even before you negotiate, you start by fighting, you start by burning tyres. You start by destroying property. I don't believe in that. And I think at the end of my term of office, in fact for the duration of my



term of office, not even a teaspoon was ever destroyed. Because I said, when we have to negotiate with management, we have to do that. But when we strike, let's have peaceful demonstrations. I think that was the first achievement

The second one that I think is something that we achieved, was to bring back the culture of teaching and learning. To try and restore the dignity of our universities, because those are reservoirs of knowledge. So if you have people who are focusing on politics, but when it comes to their academic programmes, there is nothing, then unfortunately you have a society that is doomed, and is not going to succeed and the democracy that we have is not going to be sustainable.

And the third issue that we tried to achieve, was to make sure that students do not become dependent on the system, but they try to sustain themselves. Because everyone thought 'I must get NSFAS' and 'The SRC must find a way of making sure that I am comfortable'. No one talks to students about a plan for a bursary. No one talks to students about getting part-time jobs over weekends where you can then come back to school. You know, and unfortunately I think it is a culture that we have in society, and if you don't deal with it, you will always have the vast majority of our people on social grants. And I think we really tried to deal with that issue.

I think the last issue was to demystify the myth that was there, that once you become a student leader, you become a traditional leader in student politics, and you are not going to leave. I said, I need to get one term, get my degree, and leave within that period, and it was so fulfilling for me – when I graduated, I was the president of the SRC. So, I addressed the graduation ceremony of the university as a president who was himself graduating. So, it was something that was so fulfilling.

## **Lessons learnt**

### **Ethics**

From his student leadership experience, Zuma realised the importance of standing up for what one believes in, and keeping to one's own code of ethics. This is not always easy.

Sometimes you want to stand for the truth, but you must realise that not everybody around you believes that this is the truth. But if it is the truth, then you have to stand for it. And I think that is one thing that I learnt. No matter the circumstance.

But one of the painful experiences that I learnt from student politics, which then translated to my life post the university, was the manner in which politics is so polluted. That it tends to take away from your inner being in terms of

how you view life and how you want to live your life. Particularly around issues of scheming, issues of always plotting. You know, with politics, blue is not always blue. Someone's blue eyes may be green. But it's the politics of convenience that I think I have learnt. It is the painful part of student politics. I have learnt that you would have people that you believe, you know, you are supposed to be with them, and they are supposed to be supporting you, but because of some tactical manoeuvres and certain goals they want to achieve, you become an enemy. Because either someone outside the university believes you are a loose cannon, which I think that is one of the challenges that I had, that people believed that I was a loose cannon. I cannot be controlled. And that poses a danger in terms of their power. And unfortunately, I said to myself, that is who I am. For you to control me, I don't know how or what it is going to take. Because I think it is only God that controls me. Because I think what He did, He decided to hide what becomes eternal life. So, I don't know what is going to happen post my life on earth. So, I need to work on a daily basis to ensure that I have my space in heaven.

In making decisions as a student leader, Zuma drew extensively on his faith to guide him, which, as he recounts, was not always easy.

I am a Christian, and I am very strong in terms of spirituality. And it is one of the things that guided my thinking, even as a student leader, because I didn't believe in lying. Of course, as a leader, there are certain lies which you will tell to protect your people and so on. But I believed that making sure that you stand for the truth and your ethical applications, and accountability as well, I think that is one of the things that I learnt from my life as a student leader. That the most important thing is accountability, and if you don't account students will punish you. And I saw that in 2004, when we lost elections to the IFP, to SADESMO. That we were not accounting to the students. We were a group of SRC members that would go to the SRC office, then to our rooms, then people would start drinking, there was alcohol there. It is fine, but there was no sense of accountability. No sense of urgency. And I think that was one of the challenges that I experienced as a student leader, and that is one of the issues that I said during my presidency, that we are not going to have SRC members drinking in public. And as a result of that, I was actually labelled as one of the people that are very old. They were saying, look you are very conservative, maybe you need to leave the university, and it is one of the reasons that I didn't finish, technically finish, the term of office in 2007, as I took up the post at Legal Aid as a candidate attorney in about June or July. Elections were in September. So what I would do is I would then come back on campus on Saturdays and Sundays, and do my work. And student body

meetings would be on Saturday or Sunday. And then the deputy-president would do the day-to-day running.

I graduated in 2007. My plan was to leave in 2006, as soon as I got my degree, but then I was approached by the ANC not to leave. They said that the influence that you have on campus is what we need at this point. And therefore, please come back, win elections for us, and then you can decide to leave after you have won the elections. Because, I think they believed that my popularity at the time was the only hope that would actually save the organisation at that time.

I came back and I said to them, look, we had a condition, and I want to go and start my own career. And I didn't want to delay it. And I had observed student leaders during my time at varsity, spending 10 years, 7 years, and I said to myself, I did not come here for this – this is not my permanent home. I remember in one of my speeches, during the graduation, I said when you arrived here, during registration as a first-year student, you came through that door, at Bhekuzulu Hall. And when you leave, it is important that you leave through that very same door. Which is the graduation. And I said, and I put an emphasis on it, that this can't be a permanent home. Yes, it is a home away from home, but it can never be your permanent home.

Zuma relates how some leaders did indeed stay for many years – he cites one example of someone who arrived in 1999, but completed his degree only after Zuma had left campus in 2007, and names a few others. At one point, he and others had introduced the idea that SASCO executive committee members must demonstrate academic progress, and while there was 'a huge fight' about it, eventually it was adopted as part of SASCO's policies. He explains how having leaders there for many years tended to create divisions in an effort to continue securing positions and resources. While there were contestations about which leader to support at many points, Zuma firmly believed that differences at an ideological level should not become personal.

Because we understood that if I differ with someone as a deputy chairperson, it doesn't mean that it becomes personal. It means there's something ideologically which I don't agree with. And unfortunately, if we don't teach the current generation that, we will always have a serious challenge within the higher education sector. But overstaying yourself is a problem.

## **Infighting**

In reflecting on the external political interference that affected the SRC at the time, and the infighting within the SRC which was also a challenge, Zuma sees them as an opportunity from which to draw some lessons.

Some of the issues that we were fighting about, particularly amongst ourselves as student leaders, today I normally refer to them as nonsense, because I don't see a reason why we were fighting between SASCO and SADESMO. We may have had different ideologies, but the enemy was exclusions, the enemy should have been poor quality of higher education, and so on and so forth. So, we should have fought around issues of our thinking and the approach in terms of fighting these issues. As opposed to us saying, 'No, you come from the IFP, I can't listen.'

In retrospect, factionalism seemed to have obscured the real issues that needed solutions, and as Zuma reflects on the time, he points out what he has learnt from it.

It is something that I have learnt, and unfortunately we can't erase some of the things that we have done. What we have done now at least is to create a group of that time. I sat working with the colleagues within other political formations to say, maybe we need to go back to these universities and talk to the younger generation, and say look, when you grow up, these things are going to affect you anyway. You fight each other to the point where you become so personal, but post your student life, you want to apply for a position and you find him sitting there. He comes from the other political formation – you tried to destroy him, now what is he going to do? And fortunately, during our time, or during my term of office, one of these guys who were from SADESMO was in the SRC, so we started creating this sort of relationship. Which we have even today, so we chat on social media, we have lunches now and then, but I have a fear that with now the emergence of the EFF, now you have the new challenge, which is now SASCO, YL and the EFF. And it's something that is going to create a lot of problems for institutions of higher learning.

## Politics and real issues

During my term of office, we had two colleagues from SADESMO, and those are guys that I am saying are best friends of mine as we speak. In the boardroom set-up, we never had real problems although we differed ideologically, because when we went to the meeting, we dealt with registration, with getting reports from the faculty councils, and so on. Those were the issues. But that was the boardroom. Because there were no students there. No, when we went to the student body meeting, that is where the problem starts. Because they would go to their own structures to report. So then, information starts leaking, and then they want to advocate for something totally different to what we would have agreed upon in the meeting. And then it creates problems.

But fortunately, I started a new thing. I said, 'I want to have one-on-one meetings with all SRC members.' So we began to have those one-on-one

meetings, and then created some social programmes for the SRC. So apart from dealing with the day-to-day running of the SRC, we had a weekend out, and chilled, and got to understand our personal lives. And I said, 'Beyond you being a member of the IFP, we also are young, African children, who still are going to leave the university.' And interestingly, those guys, I work with them now. But it is not everyone. In fact, some of them were even ostracised by their own people within their political formations, because they believed they had actually sold out. I was actually forced, at some point, I remember during our term of office in 2006, I had to suspend one of them, on Christmas day, because calls were coming in that this guy was stealing from the SRC and you have not done anything after so much information was leaked.

This guy was actually from the same township in Newcastle, so I had to call him and say, 'Look, I have suspended you, but you know I have nothing personal against you, it is just a political thing.' But it had a serious effect in terms of how we were dealing with issues. Because you get into a student body meeting then it becomes something else, and I then become something else, because you are trying to please the students, and trying to make sure that our power is actually sustained and maintained.

I am not saying politics should be totally abolished in institutions of higher learning. But politics must be used as a vehicle to champion the interests of students, not to divide students. Because people go to Parliament and they debate there. But during breaks I am sure they go and sit and have lunch together and crack jokes about what they were doing. But what the society sees on TV, they then implement at grassroots. Unfortunately, they wouldn't know what political leaders do behind closed doors. Because, I meant they chill together. They take overseas trips together to go and work. But if you go to a township somewhere in KZN, they believe that Julius Malema must be dealt with, or Mmusi Maimane, or that we are not the ANC or so on and so on. The manner in which we use our politics sometimes is a problem, particularly for young people because what happens in universities is what is going to be the picture of the country in the next few years. So, if we don't deal with it there, my fear is that we are going to create a country that is not sustainable. A democracy which won't be sustained because of the nature of young people that we are creating. So, I think that is one of the challenges.

Not making it personal. And understanding exactly what politics is. Because I think SRC, and student leaders generally, don't understand what is the essence of politics. I believe all political formations, if you are to sit down with them, while they have different ideologies, what they want is to see the lives of people changing. The question is: which methodology do you use? So, it doesn't mean you need to fight each other.

## Access to resources

But also, one of the challenges in my observation, is the issue of resources with the SRCs. I mean people want to be in the SRC for all the wrong reasons. You want to have a university car for 24 hours a day. You want to have bashes. Even issues of kickbacks. I mean, those are issues that you can't shy away from – that service providers for all these bashes and all of these things ... You can talk about state capture at an apex level of things, and not deal with these things at a grassroots level. I mean, if these kids are getting these things there, then in fact, if you couple corruption with sophistication, then you are creating the most dangerous citizen. Because they know how to hide it, as opposed to a politician with a grade 11 or a grade 12, who would not actually understand how to manage the systems. At the SRC level, I think this is one of the issues that needs to be dealt with.

## Corruption

In elaborating on his view of the devastating effects of corruption, Zuma describes how he draws on the fundamental set of values that he believes should inform one's behaviour and practice.

Well, I have seen a lot of that, and unfortunately, post my university life, I have worked for government as well, before opening my own practice. One of the things that made me leave government was because of that, because there were certain things I wouldn't agree to. And precisely because I have an ethical obligation; as a lawyer, you are an officer of the court. And when you take an oath you are told that you are accountable only to the Constitution of the Republic, and nothing else. So, if I don't believe that something is within the ambit of the law, then it ends there. But also, growing up as a poor person, you understand that taking something that should be going to someone who is needy, is in fact, and should be, a crime. So, I have actually observed that, and I don't think that it is something that is nice to observe.

## Reflecting on #FeesMustFall

As a former student leader who had been arrested and charged, before being acquitted, how does Zuma view the 2015/16 protests, and more particularly, how arrested student leaders should be dealt with?

Look, for me it is twofold. Obviously, in terms of the law, you are not going to pardon someone prior to a conviction. In fact, that would amount to interference in terms of the systems of our justice system. But I think that there is something that can be done by institutions of higher learning. One,

around saying students have a right to demonstrate. They have a right to picket, they have a right to fight for what the cause – because in any event, if you look at #FeesMustFall, these are issues that we raised over a long period of time. So, it is not something new. So, government ought to have known that at some point, this thing is going to boil up, and it is going to get out of hand. And it needs to be contained. And I think government is partly to blame for that. Student leaders, again, are partly to be blamed in terms of the conduct. Because I don't believe that, for you to show the world that you are serious about the strike, you must then burn the university. I believe that you can close down the university without even a single car burning. You can make sure that the institution is ungovernable, but no one is dead, no one is injured, but you are just putting a message across peacefully.

### **A toxic and violent society reflected in the university**

I don't believe we should look at the issues of #FeesMustFall and student leaders in isolation. Our country is a highly toxic and violent society. When we look at the service delivery protests, I think it was around 2013 or so, if you look at the research, in one year you had about 10 000 service delivery protests, and all of them, they turned violent. Now, these kids at varsity, they are not learning these things from varsity, they learn these things at home. From the society where they come from. So, the set-up at grassroots level where they come from, you know, their family structure, the structure of the society, how society deals with issues, is going to translate into institutions of higher learning. But again, there is a need for political organisations to stop using students to achieve their political agendas.

#FeesMustFall for me, from where I am sitting, the issues of access to higher education, the questions of whether it is sustainable or not, is a debate on its own, whether the country is ready. From where I am sitting, I don't think we are fully ready for totally free education in the country. As long as you still have social grants, more than 10 million people on social grants, we are not going to be able to achieve that. Unless you want to create a society where people are just dependent on the state. But, I think the cause is justifiable, that students must have access to education, but the approach and the system used, is for me a problem.

### **Discipline**

Around the issues of the discipline, I am dealing also with a lot of discipline – you know within institutions of higher learning, I am representing students. Now, there is a case that is at court, about a university manager who says he was assaulted by student leaders. And I think again, management sometimes fuels these things in how they respond to the needs of their students. And how they engage them. Because just being hostile doesn't help.

But also, there is no training. Remember we spoke about training. I was never trained in how to go and negotiate with a professor. I mean, meeting a professor for the first time as a student, now you must go and engage. Remember, this person has written papers. These are people that are sophisticated in their thinking. So how to engage them, you have never been trained. So, what then happens, is that when you get there and you say – 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and they say, ‘substantiate’. You say, ‘But if you don’t want to give this to us, then we are going on strike.’ Because there is no training. So, I think there is a lot to be done in terms of transforming both our higher education sector and our society in terms of how we view life, and how we view our demands. Why can’t you have a specialised team of negotiators within these institutions to engage with these student leaders? And if it can’t then be resolved, then you escalate the issue to Council, to the minister and so on, and resolve the issues. Some of the issues are, for me, poor management, which we see everywhere as well. So those are some of the challenges that I think are there.

## **Impact of the student leadership experience**

Zuma’s experience of student leadership taught him many things that he took forward into his career and life after university – the importance of rational decision-making, on the need to have the strength of one’s convictions, and the importance of fighting corruption.

### **Impact on professional attitude**

Firstly, not to be too hasty in terms of taking decisions in life, your thought process. Think before you act, or take decisions, and that has actually assisted me. Particularly in my own business, to be able to make sure that how you deal with things properly, you first apply your mind. You don’t just speak without first thinking about what you are doing.

But also, the issue of putting yourself in other people’s shoes. When you are about to deal with a particular situation, and say, if I was in that situation, how would I be feeling? And then, what do I then do, if I am that person? Basically applying a principle of reasonableness, as a reasonable person in that position what would I have done? So, if I think about the challenges that we were facing as students, I would have translated that and taken that to the challenges of people that I deal with in my day-to-day life now as a professional.

Some of the things, of course, were negative. But I have taken the positive things. And I have actually learnt lessons which I am using now. That judging people and taking decisions on the basis of the posture of other people, does not assist in life. You must take decisions on the basis of what you think is right. Whether a person does not believe in your thinking, or whether they support your thinking, but if what you think what you are doing is right, you have to do



it. And I have learnt that during my time as an SRC member, I have always frowned upon corruption. And I have experienced those things growing up now. That corruption is rife in our country, not only in our country, but in the global village. And as a person who is a professional, you need to always make sure that you find yourself on the side of the law.

### **Impact on personal life**

The importance of being self-reliant is also something that Zuma tried to exemplify in his own life choices, for example in choosing to run his own law firm.

I refer to myself as a person that is self-made. And I always say, if I was able to achieve what I have achieved now, it means any African child, whether from a suburb or a rural area somewhere in South Africa, regardless of your religion, race, colour and so on, can do it. The only difference between the successful people and those that are not going to be successful, is the attitude. Yes, there will be obstacles. But the question is, what do you do with the challenges?

And I think, with my experience in life, and the challenges I have been exposed to growing up, without a proper family structure and without money to go to school, and the challenges as a student leader, probably I would have given up after my arrest and said I am not going to do this thing any more. I persisted, and then made a choice to leave the public sector when I thought I couldn't do that any more. I think every South African has a potential of being a successful person despite the challenges.

Zuma's tale of how he saw a stark choice between becoming a criminal or becoming a student and making something of his life as he fought to enter university, echoes in the lessons he outlines for others.

My wife was saying to me just the other day, that some professionals will prefer to go to the hospital and buy a medical file from a nurse or someone, and get a client and get R2 million. And I have always said, I don't mind if it takes me 10 years to get to the R2 million, but at least I'm able to sleep at night. So, I think, it really depends on what you want to achieve. The material conditions cannot necessarily define what your future looks like. It constrains your choices, yes, but not the ones you make.

I said to a chap I had just got acquitted – I don't ordinarily do criminal law, but the Legal Aid, sometimes you do that for just to contribute – 'Look, you just survived a 20-year jail sentence of attempted murder, and you are 21, and you have got matric, so you have now achieved the first phase of actually getting out of prison. The second thing that you must do, is to get out of the conditions within your township, get away from the bad influences. And change your life.' And I was saying to him, 'It's not only you. I grew up

with friends that were criminals, and most of them are serving life sentences, and some of them are back. But they made choices, based on the material conditions at the time. I could have decided to do the same, but obviously some of the things, I always say, it's also God's grace as well.'

I remember in 2001, it took me almost six months looking for a job. There is not even a single pub or restaurant that I went to – I went to all of them in Richards Bay and Empangeni, and everyone was saying, 'Sorry, no job.'

And I say, maybe that was a lesson, because had I got a job there, I probably would have been comfortable. I would have been a bartender even today. But God was saying, 'Look, you are not going to end there. I'm going to give you something that you are going to be able to create a legacy, and live with that permanently, and be able in fact to contribute and build and bring more Xolanis in society.' And I think everyone does have that potential. It depends on how you look at life. And again now, it is even more possible with the new systems with NSFAS and so on, with it being a bursary.

## Regrets

Zuma is refreshingly clear about what he would have done differently as a student leader.

The first thing, I would not have spent more than 70 per cent of the received budget on bashes. That is the first thing. I would have used that money to teach students how to write CVs. Which they can't do today. They don't even know how to present themselves in interviews.

And then, secondly, I would have tried to influence even more to ensure that the fights that we had at university did not polarise the situation in the manner in which it did. Because I can assure you, there were guns at varsity during my time, illegal firearms. People were arrested – there were attempts on their lives and so on. For what good reason? I am sure we can't tell you even today. So those are some of the things that I would have changed, given a chance.

Maybe also, to try to understand exactly what it means to be at varsity as a student. For all of us, because I think we didn't really understand the importance of the three years or the four years. Because it impacts in your future immensely. So those are three things that I think, given a chance, that I would have changed.

# chapter 8

## Zukiswa Mqolomba

University of Cape Town, SRC president 2006/07

*Denyse Webbstock, Zukiswa Mqolomba & Ntokozo Bhengu*

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### **Brief biography**

Zukiswa (Zuki) Mqolomba is a senior researcher, senior policy analyst and senior programme manager with research interests in economics, poverty and public policy. She holds two master's degrees: MSocSci in public policy and research, and MA in poverty and development from the Universities of Cape Town and Sussex respectively. She is a Mandela Rhodes Scholar as well as a Chevening Scholar. At the time of the interview, she was the director of Social Security Schemes at the Department of Social Development, but has since then worked for the African Development Bank in Abidjan and then as the chief of staff at the Competition Commission. She is currently the Senior Sector Specialist: Economy in the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation in the Presidency. As a member of a panel of experts at the Department of Public Works, she also provides advice on the development of job creation strategies.

This chapter is based on an interview conducted by Denyse Webbstock and Ntokozo Bhengu on 27 June 2018.

### **Early influences**

Zuki Mqolomba traces the influences that led to her choosing a leadership role in student governance back to her home life and early role models of strong women

who were determined to make a difference in their lives and those around them. As she recounts,

I was raised by a single mum. My father passed away when I was six. And I was also raised by a single grandparent. So, I was raised as part of a matriarchy of strong women who understood that their role was not only in the kitchen, or in the bedroom, but their role is also to transform the society at large. That background informed my desire to lead at university because I saw strong women leading in society and at home. I wanted to be part of that generation of people who led in society at large, and basically to leave behind a legacy for women, and black women in particular.

And also at my high school, at the all-girls' school, I used to be a prefect. So, my first taste of leadership was when I was a prefect in high school. I saw the power of student representation in decision-making structures of the school, and I realised that voices of students are an important player in shaping the transformation agenda in schools and in university life more particularly.

Apart from the values-driven matriarchal influences that Mqolomba describes, she counts among her influences a political awakening through a deeply personal and tragic circumstance when she was six years old.

My father was involved in the struggle ... he used to help people who were exiled and house them in our house and keep them away from police who were looking for them. My father was shot dead by Gqozo's people, the political principal of the Eastern Cape [the former Ciskei] at that time. Apparently, it's because they thought that he was Chris Hani because he drove the same car as him. They shot dead the wrong person.

My father was involved in ANC politics and making sure that the education sector plays a role in the struggle more broadly, because he was the principal of the school. I think that is an influence on my life – that my father was involved in ANC politics.

## **Context of getting involved at UCT**

Mqolomba's journey into student politics that began in high school continued into her university life when she began her studies at UCT. Her initial experience was as a head girl of Baxter residence. She later became a sub-warden of that residence and the deputy chairperson of the Humanities Student Council. After becoming the deputy speaker of the student parliament, she was elected as SRC president. Her main motivation, as she recalls it, was to ensure that student voices were included in decision-making structures of the university and that they were added to the transformation agenda of the university.

What was particularly important to her was

the fact that I was a young woman. I wanted to make sure that women are also represented in the decision-making structures of an institution, and young black women in particular, their voices are heard and they're able to shape and structure the conversations and shape the debates around transformation at the university.

### **Motivation to join the SRC**

Mqolomba sees her motivation to join the SRC as being in stark contrast to that of many others.

I think most people, most students, actually enter into SRC for financial gain, because it gives you the power to influence where budgets go. It gives you the power to influence which corporates advertise on campus. SRCs get paid, so we used to get paid on campus. So, most people will join the SRC to make sure that they have funding to finance their personal lives at the end of the month because they are in need of income, and they don't have income coming from home. The personal gain element is a strong motivation. You have to just make sure that your leadership development programmes champion ethics and the right intentions for wanting to join the SRC. And hopefully the democratic process for electing SRC is so robust that it indeed reflects the motivation of members when they campaign and it exposes those motivations to students as well.

While Mqolomba experienced that some student leaders were motivated by financial gain, she also believes it did not necessarily mean that they could not serve students and do useful work.

They were in the SRC, as long as they did the work. We didn't care what your motivations are actually – you can always change people's motivations by eloquently representing the correct vision and mission statement, and by having the correct programme of action, so you can channel those motivations into the right motivations. The payments, I enjoyed being paid because obviously it meant I could supplement my income and I never had to worry about issues of food, of accommodation and all those things. I don't think there's a need for payment but it's a nice benefit to have, it's a good incentive to have. There is a trade-off, because people could be working for the income, or they could be representing.

### **Affiliations**

Mqolomba describes herself as a pan-Africanist, an orientation that informed her

student political life. As an example of how this shaped her projects as a student leader, she cites the following:

I wanted to make sure that the university does not forget that there are struggles being fought and waged on the African continent that require us to take a stand on human rights violations across the continent. That is why, when I was president, we put together a proposal for a special dispensation for Zimbabwean students who couldn't afford to pay their fees because there was a problem with getting cash and dollars from the banks at the time.

Usually international students have to pay upfront. So we arranged for them to pay in instalments, just like South African students, to make sure that they were able to pay their school fees incrementally. I wanted to make sure that pan-Africanism resonates in my leadership journey and that it is part of my leadership contribution towards the African Renaissance.

Mqolomba was not affiliated to any political party until she ran for the SRC.

SASCO approached me to run under their campaign, and I became a deployee of the ANC Youth League, SASCO, and YCL, together the PYA, the Progressive Youth Alliance. So, I was a deployee of the PYA into the SRC and I was a SASCO deployee most particularly. So, my background, my SRC experience, was shaped by that political party. I campaigned under SASCO, but I also raised some of my personal convictions for why I'm campaigning. So, there wasn't like a generic motto or generic campaign strategy. They allowed us to bring individuality to our campaign strategies.

## **The SRC and internal organisation**

### **External influences**

Asked how she balanced being the SRC president as well as being subordinate to a student political organisation with its own leader, Mqolomba says that

I had a robust engagement and a robust relationship, a complementary and a contradictory relationship with my leaders. So I made sure that where we differed we differed robustly, and I presented the defence and the arguments in favour of why I think we should move to a particular direction and reminded them that this is the mandate of SASCO constitutionally and this is what we represent as an organisation on campus. So that's basically what I did, I reminded them of our responsibility on campus and of our values as an organisation and why this was the right direction to take at that particular point in time.

As an example of how she navigated such tensions, Mqolomba describes a time

when, as a SASCO deployee, structures and events outside the walls of the university had an influence on her activities, and she was forced to negotiate between the policy of her party and her own values and concerns.

There was a time when the opposition leader [in Zimbabwe], Morgan Tsvangirai, was beaten up by ZANU-PF, at the command of ZANU-PF. So, I organised a provincial-wide strike to Parliament, asking for President Thabo Mbeki to stop with the quiet diplomacy and to basically voice out his opinion when it came to human rights violations in Zimbabwe against opposition leaders. Now, this was a problem in my party because obviously ANC and ANC Youth League and SASCO were more aligned with Thabo Mbeki at the time, and also most importantly more aligned with ZANU-PF.

So obviously me going against the grain was a problem for the political party. And they even threatened to withdraw my membership from the party. And they threatened to recall me from being the president of the SRC if I went ahead with the strike. I had a choice now between the ethics of the student protests and basically complying with the mandate of my political party. And I actually chose to speak out against human rights violations because I didn't think that this went against, or was contrary or in contradiction to what we believed in as students in the political party itself. I felt that the values that informed the strike action and informed the protest action to Parliament were aligned to the values of SASCO. So that was my defence that our values are aligned.

This is a democratisation problem on the continent, and we as a democratic organisation believe that students have a right and young people have a right to inform the democratisation processes of their countries. That's why we had to support this provincial strike to Parliament against the human rights violations that were going on in Zimbabwe at the time. Then the head office of SASCO instructed the provincial leaders, and instructed the SASCO PEC, to stop the strike action. And we continued [laughs]. They didn't kick me out because I gave a defence that our values are aligned, this is a pan-Africanist movement for democratisation across the continent, and there's a role for opposition parties in the governance structures and in the politics of our countries. We need to make sure that our voices are heard. And that you stop the quiet diplomacy.

In the end, a memorandum was successfully delivered to Parliament.

### **SRC induction, training and support**

On the question of what support and training Mqolomba received as an SRC member and president, she has the following response:

We got training before – there was a strong Student Affairs department that ran programmes for leadership development for student leaders who are

involved in other structures of the student governance model. I was involved as the deputy chairperson of the Humanities Student Council; I was involved as the head girl of Baxter residence; and I was involved as the sub-warden of Baxter residence. So, I underwent a number of training programmes preparing me for the SRC, and they encouraged you in the development programmes to campaign for seats in the SRC. So, there is a strong, quite vibrant, student-friendly, student governance and Student Affairs department at the university that provided support to the SRC.

While Mqolomba does not remember whether there was specific training on how to manage budgets and practical management issues, she does recall training in strategic planning sessions for SRC members that were organised by the Student Affairs department. These sessions covered the different roles of the SRC, how the SRC functions in an institution, and what its purpose is intended to be. However, she notes that

they never went into the details of budgeting. But we did our own budgets; they gave us a budget and we were expected to allocate budgets to projects and to make sure that each portfolio has sufficient budget to run with its campaigns and its programme of action. We learnt by doing, hey, we learnt by doing. That's the only way that you learn.

Later on in the interview, Mqolomba qualifies that the budgeting for student societies was done by the Student Affairs department.

There was an administrator that looked after, that welcomed students. And received students and did the bookings for counselling sessions with students. So they did provide an administrator and they also provided a student governance officer who would give us counsel and perhaps mentor us, like a person who was previously in the SRC who became the student governance officer. There was also a director for student affairs who helped us fundraise for a student bail-out fund.

### **Fundraising for students in distress**

We initiated a student bail-out fund for students who were distressed, who couldn't afford to pay their university fees the following year, and who could get a bail-out from the SRC. The funding came from the advertisements by companies who came to the campus and advertised their services and products on the campus. We used to admit advertisement fees on Jammie Plaza as a way of raising a million rand for the student bail-out, and we asked the vice-chancellor at that time to match the million rand with a million from his office.



## Communication

Mqolomba paints a picture of a communication strategy with students in an era before social media became ubiquitous. The methods of communication were diverse. The main means was an SRC newsletter, hard copies of which were physically distributed to students on campus on a quarterly basis. The purpose of the newsletters was to inform students of SRC decisions, campaigns, and progress on dealing with issues facing students.

Then we had the student halls where we had student indabas at least once a year, where we shared with them the work that we've been doing as an SRC, and where they could hold you accountable for the work which wasn't done. We also had the student parliament which was representative of all student structures on campus. We sat at least once a quarter with the student parliament and we shared with them our vision and mission our strategy and our programme of action and how well we were doing with the mandate that they had given us as an SRC. We also had a student radio as well, we interviewed on student radio, and we had a student newspaper. So, there were a number of forums that we used. And when I left, I asked for an email communiqué with students so that we would be able to communicate broadly with the student body on the issues that we were dealing with as the SRC.

I think the current generation is lucky in terms of the social media that has become an attractive tool for them to utilise to mobilise student support on issues that they were campaigning for and championing. So, I wish that we had had that. Student social media did exist at the time, but it wasn't as popular as it is currently.

Individual students also had access to SRC members organised on a booking system managed by the student administrator on campus.

Students would make appointments with respective SRC members and they would hold sessions with them depending on availability and time. So, as the SRC we would make ourselves available for consultations once or twice a week, on this day, at this time. So, when students wanted counsel they could come at those times.

## The SRC's governance programme

### Clean governance and partisan politics

Mqolomba had a strong commitment to relying on her own convictions and values to guide her choices, which she sees as an enduring theme in her leadership roles. From the campaign trail to the presidency, Mqolomba sought to practise 'clean governance' by means of a compact between the different student political organisations and political parties.

When I ran for SRC president, my theme was that we want to clean up the governance structures of the SRC. Because at the time there was corruption and fraudulent activities taking place at the university at the level of student leadership. Where leaders were using SRC cars for personal use, and basically leaders were being overly politicised. Calling each other out and playing dirty politics against each other. So, my campaign was a campaign for clean governance in the SRC. And basically I won my campaign on the backbone of that.

Mqolomba describes how she took forward her campaign promise through putting together social compacts for student leaders and holding them accountable for violations of those compacts, especially at the level of the ANC, ANC Youth League, DASO, IFP, PAC (Azania) – that is, at the level of political parties.

We just said that we want to have an agreement with the political parties that there won't be any corruption activities under my leadership as the SRC president because it taints the reputation of student leaders across the board when there's corruption and fraudulent activities on campus by student leaders and where they are accused of spending SRC resources fruitlessly, and basically wasteful expenditure. And using or making use of the SRC vehicles without due reason, and for personal reasons.

Dealing with student leaders from different political affiliations was not easy, but the message was consistent that any corruption would taint all of their reputations and cause students to lose faith in the ability of the SRC to take their struggles forward.

Mqolomba believes the SRC during her presidency was a values-led one, which was successful in that she recalls few instances of corruption in her year, and that those that were identified were reported and leaders were held accountable. She notes:

Everything managed to work out. The social compact really worked well because we got commitment from the different political parties and their deployees to make sure that we commit to a clean governance and a values-led SRC presidency at that time. My team was comprised of independents, of DASO, ANC Youth League, SASCO and YCL representatives. So, it was a mix of people coming from an array of political affiliations. But I just focused on making sure that there's a strategy in place, so I put together a strategic document that informed the kind of programmes we would be running during the course of that year. I used that as a tool to lobby and to mobilise my team around a common vision for the SRC.

## Transformation vs decolonisation

In Mqolomba's view, the role of the SRC is to challenge the status quo – to be part of the transformation process on campus. Asked how this relates to more recent debates on decolonisation, Mqolomba has the following to say:

Decolonisation is deeper because it speaks of curriculum reforms as well and making sure that there is representation of people of colour, of women, of people with disabilities. But it is more an ideological tool that the students, the #FeesMustFall campaign used, to basically challenge the status quo. It's an ideological tool.

## The SRC and co-operative governance

### Committee representation

Mqolomba feels strongly about extending student representation in decision-making structures. At the time she was in the SRC, students were represented under the auspices of the co-operative governance framework. In terms of that framework,

Students only had two representatives of students at Council level, and a few student leaders were represented at Senate level, but mostly we were represented at Institutional Forum level. We had about 10 candidates represented in the transformation committee at the Institutional Forum level. So, at least there we were represented, but at Council and Senate there was little representation. So, we struggled to ensure that the student agenda was progressively realised on the campus.

The voice of the student body was, however, influential in the student parliament.

The SRC agenda is derived from the student parliament. Student parliament discusses fees, it discusses transformation quotas, it discusses worker rights, and worker rights violations on campus; so, the SRC literally got its mandate from the student parliament, who also held it accountable for ensuring that their role is realised on campus. The student parliament was widely representative, because it comprised student leaders of different societies from across campus. It was active and busy and it was engaged, and it debated and discussed transformation at length. And also it participated in the vice-chancellor's election process, making sure that we derive a mandate from the parliament of the kind of institutional leader needed.

Asked whether students had a voice in quality assurance matters, Mqolomba indicates that student representatives were involved in committees that did quality assurance work, but did not necessarily focus on quality assurance as an agenda item.

## Involvement in vice-chancellor selection process

Mqolomba recounts the level of student involvement in the selection of a vice-chancellor to succeed Professor Njabulo Ndebele.

Our favourite candidate, we wanted uhmm ... there was Cheryl [de la Rey], there was Martin Hall, there was Max Price, so those were the top three candidates at the time. We wanted Martin Hall to be the leader as the vice-chancellor of the university because he was quite effective in making sure that the transformation agenda took centre stage at university debates, at Council, at Senate and institution-wide. So, he was responsible for the transformation campaigns and the transformation agenda on campus. And he was quite vocal about the need for UCT to transform, to become an African, and not just a world-class university, but an African university through curriculum reforms and making sure that women, people with disability and people of colour were represented as lecturers and as professors. The agenda he had for the institution and the vision that he had for the institution was the same as ours. That he wanted UCT to become an African world-class university, and literally to bring back the African in an African world-class institution, that UCT claims it is.

Mqolomba describes a difficult nomination process in which the original shortlist was amended to include Martin Hall, who had not originally featured on it.

They wanted to exclude Martin Hall simply because there were a number of professors who complained that they don't like him. They don't like his leadership style; it's too authoritarian and forceful and demanding. But I think the reason why those professors didn't want Martin Hall is because he would have been a good candidate to push transformation on campus. They wanted the status quo to remain, so that's why we complained, and we said that we at the Institutional Forum where we had the majority representation had the power to take back the process and to make sure we start from scratch again. So, after conversations with the people who were in charge with the interview process, they then decided to revisit the list, and then they put Martin Hall and Cheryl de la Rey and Max Price as the top three candidates.

Our role in the VC selection process was to ask the hard questions. We asked Cheryl de la Rey what she has done to transform academia, and to make sure that more women and more black people are represented as professors and as lecturers at the institutions as the academic head of the university. We held them accountable on the transformation agenda, and our role was to ask the hard questions and to probe where people failed to probe. That was basically our role in the VC selection processes.

Mqolomba notes that the student voice as expressed through the Institutional Forum went unheeded, and that Max Price was the successful candidate.

### **Relationship with management**

Mqolomba describes the SRC's relationship with the outgoing vice-chancellor, Professor Njabulo Ndebele, as both 'complementary and contradictory'.

We fought when we had to fight, and on matters of mutual interest where we agreed, we stood in alliance together. On issues of fees we fought because they wanted to introduce fee increments every year. But then we were like no, don't increase, don't introduce fee increments every year, introduce them every three years just so that there can be some constancy so students starting in first year can plan for the fee increments to third year. We agreed on the need for debate and discussion on campus, and on making sure that students are actively engaged on issues that are facing South Africa. On that we were aligned.

She added that,

To be honest our vice-chancellor at that time was hands off; Ndebele was not a hands-on, actively engaged vice-chancellor, pursuing an agenda or a campaign on campus. He was an administrator. He was an intellectual and I respected the fact that he was intelligent. He wrote books and engaged in the public, but he wasn't a hands-on governor on campus. That was my critique of him – that he didn't push the transformation agenda hard enough. He was too gentle, he was kind, he was generous. But he wasn't hands on, he wasn't demanding or challenging or probing or provoking and that's the kind of vice-chancellor we needed at the time. Someone who would provoke and challenge the status quo on campus, without fear or trepidation.

## **Key challenges and projects**

### **Outsourcing**

One of the issues Mqolomba's SRC decided to confront was the issue of outsourcing of services which she believed had been introduced during the time of a previous vice-chancellor, Dr Mamphele Ramphele.

There was a dispensation and a legacy of outsourcing on the campus for a while. I think a 10-year period of outsourcing. And workers were experiencing struggles of being retrenched. Not earning enough. Not having enough job security. Not having income security. So, we wanted to challenge that legacy of outsourcing on campus. And to make sure that outsourced workers become

employees of the university. So that their children could also enjoy the benefits of their parents being employed by the institution. There was a strong alliance between students and workers at the time, so workers' struggles were students' struggles and students' struggles were workers' struggles. We wanted to make sure that we used our positions in the SRC to champion a campaign that said 'no to outsourcing'. And we basically said that we wanted to make sure that these people are employed by us. And that they can enjoy broader benefits as enshrined by the contracts that are issued out by the university.

## Forums

Another project was the introduction of a forum for debates on campus:

We invited speakers like Helen Zille and [Richard] Dyantyi, who was the MEC of Housing at the time, to come about issues that were facing South Africa at large. So, we would put aside funding to make sure that we could actually have a forum for debate and discussion with political leaders of our time. So, they could come and speak to students about issues facing South Africa at large. And the main topic there was transformation.

Asked whether there was any conflict with management around the speakers invited, Mqolomba's answer was that management allowed the SRC to run their own campaigns and programmes without any interference.

## Continuity

A particular challenge that Mqolomba faced was related to being in the SRC for only one year – the year in which she was doing her honours degree. She notes that,

The only challenge with being in the SRC for only one year is that there is no continuity. We wanted to say that an SRC term should be at least for a minimum of two years, so that you build institutional memory and institutional capability to represent students more effectively and efficiently at the various councils and at various forums where we were expected to represent students. We wanted a three-year term for the SRC – that was basically the discussion at that time ...

Some people actually recommended a sabbatical – there should be a two-year or three-year sabbatical for the president and the SG [secretary-general], because they are the ones who occupy the critical positions, so that they can take a gap from active study life and focus solely on SRC representation. I would have preferred a three-year term to run concurrently though, because I wouldn't want to extend my years at university, I would want to complete my university studies.

## Institutional autonomy vs responsiveness

On other challenges experienced by the SRC, Mqolomba singles out the matter of institutional autonomy, which she sees as a hindrance to the transformation project.

So, there is this thing called institutional autonomy that universities use not to heed to the directive of the government when it comes to transformation on campus. They use it as a resistance tool, and resisting changes that need to be introduced on campus, that come from government. So I would like to challenge that and say that institutional autonomy needs to be challenged and that the Constitution should allow the government to transform university life more robustly without fear or favour.

I trust the legacy of our predecessors and believe that if governments are moving on that legacy, then we can actually do a good job.

The thing is that knowledge generation and production is not ideologically neutral ... it's informed by people's ideologies. It is formed by vested interests and personal interests. So, the question is, who is higher education serving currently? Is it just corporate, or is it South Africa at large, looking at communities, societies at large? Is higher education in South Africa serving the purposes of responding to the needs and the challenges of the communities or is it just responding to the labour market needs of corporates? Because knowledge generation is not done on neutral grounds.

I believe in curriculum reform, for instance. I believe that we should look at what is being produced on the African continent, by African scholars, and most importantly, I believe that the curriculum should respond to the needs and the challenges of the poor people in our communities, and not just the needs of big corporates who are funding institutions.

## Lessons

We asked Mqolomba what she had learnt from her leadership journey in the SRC, and how it has shaped her in her further leadership roles.

My biggest lesson out of the SRC moment was the fact that it's important to lead people, to capture the hearts and minds of the people that you are representing and the people that you are leading. It's not enough to capture their minds, but you have to capture their hearts as well. That is something that I wish I would have learnt, and would have known about, when I was younger as the SRC president because I was mostly a competency-driven leader, wanting to lead on the basis of ideas because obviously this is a higher education institution, and it's about ideas, and the arena of ideas is a

playground of students and university life at large. But now, I have learnt that you have to capture their hearts as well so that they remember how you made them feel. I wish I had been a heart leader, representing both the hearts and minds of my students.

I also learnt personally that as a woman in South Africa, the world is my oyster. If I could be an SRC president as a young woman, and leading men, then it means the world is my oyster. So, the world is opening up and the opportunities will avail themselves to make sure that I take my place in society and not just in the kitchen. It literally built my confidence in my leadership abilities as a woman, making sure that I believe that women can also lead successfully and lead a group of men without alienating any of them.

## **Reflecting on #FeesMustFall**

As Mqolomba describes it, the SRC of 2007 at UCT was involved with a number of projects related to creating greater platforms for student voices to be heard on a range of transformation-related issues. Reflecting on the difference between that period and more recent SRCs involved in the #FeesMustFall movement of 2015 and 2016, Mqolomba has the following to say:

I think the difference between our SRC and the #FeesMustFall SRC, is that our SRC was more reformist, wanting to push for institutional reforms, as opposed to challenging the status quo and breaking the status quo at its foundation. So, this SRC is more destructionist and we were more reformist. Believing that we could actually use the structures in governance.

I think frustration at the student level would account for the difference, because students became frustrated that things were not changing through mere representation of students in different forums of the university. I think it's because you still have the old guard, the old guard is pretty much still dominant at universities across the country, in particular the previously advantaged universities. The old guard is still in charge. It's because for most people, becoming a lecturer and a professor is a lifetime career, so bringing about changes, mindset changes and changes in numbers, is a long-term struggle because people are looking at their careers in the long haul. For instance, at UCT they still don't have women professors and lecturers, and black professors are represented in smaller numbers. So, the transformation agenda is progressing slowly; things are not changing fast enough. And that is because the old guard is still in charge of the universities. And they are the ones who would determine the curriculum and the agenda of the universities, they are the ones taking up the majority of positions in Senate and Council.



Mqolomba maintains that in her time there was resistance even to a reformist agenda, and she describes a certain professor who,

When we were having transformation discussions on campus, he actually had his own discussions on why affirmative action and employment equity was wrong and why it should never be introduced in society. We faced him head-on. We wrote articles in the student newsletter and in the students' news clip. I have forgotten the name of the newspaper, but it is a student newspaper on campus where we would write our opinions of these discussions of this professor and robustly debate with him and challenge his assertions on transformation and the need for transformation.

Resistance by individuals as cited in the instance above was experienced as part of a more systemic or generalised kind of stasis.

UCT was a majority white, and a majority male university at the time. I remember saying to a friend of mine, I feel like I'm the SRC president for black women, queers. Because those are the vulnerable groups on our campus currently. The challenges of the white male students would be to do with parking, but the challenges of black young women had to do with fees, like: I can't afford to pay my university fees, I can't afford to pay for residence, I'm not eating at night, I'm sleeping in the library, I have to solicit money through the sex trade. Those were the challenges of students at that time.

They experienced a different set of challenges. And I felt that my mandate that I was carrying had to do with representing the vulnerable students on campus. And not to just look at issues of parking and parties and all of those things.

Mqolomba's approach to dealing with the white male students she talks about was to try to convince them of the importance of standing for the vulnerable members of society for the good of society as a whole. Was she successful in winning some of them over?

No, I tried to get them behind me by using Nelson Mandela as a tool to champion their interests and to align their interests with the vulnerable student in the campus. There was resistance to the transformation agenda because they thought they [white male South Africans] will not have a place at the campus any more. So, I said this is not what transformation is about, transformation is not about exclusion, it's about inclusion, and making sure that the voices and the people that were previously included in the agenda will still be included. It is not about exclusion. We are not anti-white and we're

not anti-male but we're pro South Africa and pro Africa. And that is how we managed to champion, and basically that's how we managed to mobilise student support on issues that are pertinent to vulnerable members of our community on campus.

Mqolomba's perspective on the student protests at UCT in 2015/16 is informed by a tinge of regret and envy.

I'm so happy that they managed to get Rhodes' statue removed, because that also was an issue that we were championing at the time, saying that the statue doesn't represent the current situation. We brought it up in Council but we never mobilised students on it as a single campaign like this current generation did. So, we explained that the statue doesn't represent some of the ideals that we want to represent as an institution, and it represents the power of the old guard. And it's actually offensive to students who feel alienated by the statue that is currently on campus. So those were the arguments that we would raise at Council.

But the fact that there were faeces, there was someone who threw faeces at the statue, and that made ... oh my God, I couldn't believe that someone would actually symbolically protest against the statue. It then became a call for action for student leaders to campaign against the statue, so that the statue becomes fully removed from campus.

## **National involvement and SAUS**

Another difference Mqolomba alludes to between the SRC of 2007 and those of 2015/16 was the level of involvement across universities and in national structures. She recalls that there was a national forum at the time, the South African Union of Students (SAUS), on which she sat along with 'ANC Youth League, YCL, SASCO, DASO, AZANIA and all those pan-African organisations', but she feels its effectiveness was limited because

Basically it was run by the national Department of Higher Education. They didn't have autonomy to run their campaigns. They were instructed not to go against the minister in charge of higher education because otherwise their funding would be removed. Each time they wanted to bring their minister to account for not pushing a progressive transformation agenda, they were instructed not to by officials of the department who were running the programme because the funding came from the department – so the funding would be removed. They were still trying to make sure that there were monetary contributions by SRC members to SAUS to make sure that it is an independent organisation, but they never got it running in our year.

The other issue she notes with respect to the effectiveness of SAUS at the time was the difficulty of creating a united student voice.

The thing is SASCO is a powerful presence across the country. So, they were able to basically champion the agenda for SAUS, as the deploying agent for the organisation. So whatever SASCO said had to be done, was done by SAUS – they determined who led SAUS basically.

What happened was that, the Stellenbosch University representatives then approached SASCO and said that we will support SASCO's agenda provided that there is at least one person in SAUS who is represented by our own institution. So, they negotiated for themselves to make sure that they enjoyed representation at SAUS level by forging a political alliance with SASCO.

## **Impact of the student leadership experience**

### **On professional career**

Mqolomba's reflections on how her SRC experience continues to have an impact on her life, particularly in terms of her career, include the following:

Currently I am a director in government. I became a director at the age of 28, and I have been leading men ever since. And now it's about capturing both the hearts and minds of my team members, and making sure that I do not alienate any one of them on the basis of a demographic difference. And making sure that I build confidence in them that I can lead them even though I am a woman. That there is no deficiency or weakness in me in the basis of my genitalia, but I can lead on the basis of my leadership competencies.

I have two master's degrees and I am doing my PhD at Wits. So first, I'm an educated woman and also I have got experience in public service, I have got five years at senior level experience, so I bring that to bear to the work that I currently do here at the department.

Mqolomba's career choices are strongly informed by her original motivations to join the SRC – the inclination to serve and to represent those who don't necessarily have a voice. And that has manifested itself in her leadership journey. Her academic work is concentrated in the social sciences. Her first job after completing her studies was as a graduate recruit in the position of HR administrator with Johnson & Johnson, from whom she had been granted a scholarship to cover her third and fourth years of study. She left three months later, noting that:

I realised that corporate wasn't for me. I couldn't cope with it. I was like, I am not happy here. I don't want to exist for the profit motive. I want to

exist to serve the people of South Africa. And I believe that service is done through the public sector. Then I went to the National Youth Commission, as an intern. I was there for about six to nine months. And then I became an assistant director for Research Policy and Planning at the Department of Labour, and that's where my career started.

On the careers of others who were in the SRC with her, Mqolomba notes that some have gone on to further leadership roles in a variety of spheres. One is reported to be a Member of Parliament under DASO for the DA, and to hold a high office for the Western Cape premier; another is an attorney who serves at the Constitutional Court. Another is in full-time ministry with her church, which carries out philanthropic missions, while, in contrast, another has become a multimillionaire 'tenderpreneur'. A further colleague she thinks became a communications speech writer for the then deputy president, Kgalema [Motlanthe] as well as the current deputy president, [David] Mabuza and for Cyril Ramaphosa when he was deputy president. She agrees that serving in the SRC had prepared her and her colleagues for leadership positions, albeit in different trajectories.

### **On approach to leadership**

In terms of her current approach to leadership, Mqolomba says she is building on some of the lessons she learnt and the reflections she has had about her experience, particularly about communicating with a team and paying attention to their voices and needs.

I have monthly meetings with each staff member where I ask them, are you happy at work, are you enjoying job satisfaction, how should I change my leadership style to accommodate your leadership needs? So, I've got monthly meetings with my staff members individually, to make sure that I connect with them and ask them how they feel and where they are when it comes to issues of work in their work environment. I'm drawing from the lessons that I learnt at the SRC – winning hearts and minds and making sure that I build confidence in women leadership, that I represent women effectively by being an effective manager.

### **Regrets**

In hindsight, what would Mqolomba have done differently in her time in student governance? Mqolomba's earlier comments on being values-led and her belief in the power of argument resonate in her responses.

I wish I wasn't a reformer but a disrupter, someone that disrupted the status quo and shook the world at its foundations. I wish I was that kind of leader

who shook the world at its foundations and not just tried to reform and change things through the existing structures because sometimes it doesn't work. So, I wish I was a disrupter and not just a reformer.

I don't know how that would work in my current life, but I think I would challenge more without fear or trepidation; I would be more challenging. I do write, I write articles for the *Mail & Guardian* Thought Leader and The Thinker. Now I want to have the courage of my convictions and not fear the backlash that comes with holding a different opinion. That's how I would challenge – through ideological engagement.

# chapter 9

## Kwenzokuhle Madlala

Mangosuthu University of Technology,  
SRC general secretary 2009/10, speaker of student parliament 2012,  
SRC president 2012/13

*Thierry M. Luescher & Kwenzokuhle Madlala*

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### Brief biography

Kwenzokuhle Madlala completed a National Diploma and a BTech in human resources management (cum laude) at Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT), and a Master of Management Science specialising in human resources at Durban University of Technology (DUT). He is currently the president of the MUT Convocation, a member of the MUT University Council, chairperson of the MUT Human Resources Committee of Council and deputy chairperson of the MUT Institutional Forum. Madlala works for the eThekweni Municipality's human resource department.

This chapter is based on an interview conducted by Thierry Luescher on 9 October 2018.

### Early influences

Kwenzokuhle Madlala was born and raised in Port Shepstone (KwaMadlala area), where he grew up in the early 1990s. It is from his experience of the conflict between the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and the African National Congress (ANC) in the area at the time, that he traces his first political influences.

So, there were serious rival wars between the IFP and the ANC. I think my first interaction with the ANC was when a house was burnt down at home

because we were accused of being ANC, and my cousin Sfundo Madlala was killed by an IFP mob and my grandfather brutally assaulted. We then moved from that section which was called Esabelweni to this place called KwaMadlala where I stayed and grew up from those early ages. From then I was involved in the ANC as a young boy of about seven, eight years. We were up and down toyi-toyiing every Sunday and all of that. So, I sort of grew up in the African National Congress. I grew up in that kind of an environment.

## **Context of getting involved at MUT**

Initially when Madlala came to MUT he did not participate actively in student politics. However, after SASCO lost the SRC election of 2007 to the IFP-aligned South African Democratic Student Movement (SADESMO), he was taken to task by his ANC comrades back home. He then became involved in organising SASCO at MUT in order to regain control of the SRC.

I went to Mangosuthu University of Technology in 2005. It was a technikon then. I came there for my diploma in human resources management which I completed in 2007 cum laude.

I then started my BTech in 2008 and I had not been involved in student politics for all that time. When I came in 2005, because in the village I come from, these things of career orientations and so forth were not done – I didn't even know that SASCO existed or anything like that. But when I came to the university in 2005, I saw a group of students with an emblem of the ANC. And I know the ANC. So, I did join SASCO, but I was not actively involved. I don't think I even attended one meeting because I was staying off-campus.

But in 2008 for the first time at Mangosuthu Technikon, SASCO lost to the IFP, to SADESMO. They lost to SADESMO; actually I think that was 2007. So, now when I go back home, it was news all over KZN. I go back home and people say: 'Hey, you are a comrade.' In a way, you know, you are made to feel bad. 'Hey, you are a comrade here, but there? What are you doing in that university?'

Because now it was IFP students who were in charge. And I think 2008 again they won. So, for me, that is what sparked my involvement. I then started to come close to those that were leading SASCO to say, 'Why are you guys losing? What is happening?'

We then started mobilising and I was instrumental in developing a programme of action, starting from my own building where I was residing. A programme of action which detailed how we were going to take back that power: door-to-door programmes; understanding how many students reside in this building and that building; locating the responsible people. There was also a point where we decided in SASCO, us as activists, that we were going

to launch the sub-committees of SASCO. This meant, every building must have a sub-committee of SASCO that is responsible for organising.

And then 2009 happened. Actually, I had still not availed myself for the SRC election because I was doing an in-service training with the municipality which I started at the beginning of 2009. Now, doing an in-serve this side, residing at a residence and being actively involved there, and doing my BTech at the same time. It was my first year in BTech because BTech was two years, but in 2008 when I started it, I had TB, so I had to go home and then I came back. And then I got involved.

## Reasons for supporting SASCO

Why I was not involved in the first place until this point? Well, my own observation was that SASCO had always been ahead of student issues. They understood the background of students: the socioeconomic background of students, the particular student that is attracted to that university. And they managed to ensure that they delivered, in terms of facilitating access as well as success of students on campus. Now with SASCO not being in power the students were struggling, to be quite honest. One of the most difficult things to experience as a person that is politically conscious is an acceptance of financial exclusion for students. When you see people financially excluded, it is unacceptable. It's a different case when it has got academic issues involved in it. But if it's purely on financial basis ... this is part of the things that also made me want to get SASCO back into power. It was not about me being in that collective, but it was about getting SASCO the right voice, giving it the right voice, in terms of institutional structures where it can continue to advance the interests of students.

Inasmuch as there were many demonstrations and fights, SASCO was still advocating the student issues – even during the period when they were out of power. There would be that particular demonstration and then management would say: 'SRC, what are the issues? Students are on strike.' Now the SRC is not the one that is raising the issues. So, a different voice goes up there, which we do not know what it says. And it made things very difficult.

And also, I think maybe the level of comprehension at that point, of issues, from the opposition party was not really at a level that inspired confidence from us that it would be attended to.

## Becoming involved in the SRC

Madlala reflects on his first nomination as SRC candidate for SASCO and the strain that the campaigning took on him – to the extent that he decided to resign from his in-service training at the municipality. He also explains the SRC electoral system at MUT at the time, where voters vote for individual candidates.



## Nomination as SASCO candidate

Now there was a Branch General Meeting [BGM] that was electing candidates for SASCO. They called me on a number of occasions when there were mass meetings, saying: 'Please take a day off today, there is a mass meeting, we need you to come ...' So, I would come there and I guess some people were impressed. So, in a BGM that was electing candidates, I was not there. They said I must come, and I said I was not going to come – I was at work. So, these comrades, what they did is they availed me in my absence.

I was nominated from the ground. But I had not accepted nomination because I was not there. But they said: 'No, he is available. He has informed us, and he has apologised.' So, when I came in the evening I was told that: 'You are a candidate.'

So, I got myself in that kind of a situation. Even though I just wanted to support them, because I had other responsibilities, now I am a candidate.

## SRC electoral system and campaigning

As a candidate, I had responsibilities of campaigning actively. We then campaigned and we were actively involved, because we wanted to really regain that institution, so that it is back in the hands of progressive forces, if I may say. The campaign was very intensive: it was class-to-class, door-to-door.

That time, the system of voting was that students voted for an individual candidate. So SASCO will release 12 candidates but on a scale of 1 to 12. So, it was important that every face is known by almost everyone in the university. So, it's unlike people voting for an emblem. Now they are going to ask: 'Who are you? Who are you?' So, you have to go to each and every residence, about nine residences, to ensure that at least you are known in all these residences. And you also have to go class to class. You go class visit, you articulate issues, you explain the agenda.

On the ballot there were about 24 candidates because there were just two organisations, if I remember correctly. SASCO could nominate up to 12 candidates. And you could only vote for 12 candidates. As voter, you can cross, or you can be disciplined and just chose 1 to 12, because you know these 1 to 12 are from your organisation.

So, the campaign was very intensive; it became very heavy on me. Now I have to be at class, now I have to be campaigning. Ultimately, I resigned from the municipality, my in-service training here. It was not a very easy decision to make, but you know, the way that growing up under those conditions, you know, politics was not just this thing of saying it's not personal. It was not just a game. I came to learn later, through my own observation, that for some people it was playing a game. Maybe I took it a bit too serious. But I had that thing in me to want to participate.

So, we won the elections then, 100 per cent, in 2009. All the 12 seats.

## Overall involvement in MUT governance

With a gap of a year, Madlala was involved in student governance at MUT for over three years; he continues to be involved as a member of Council from Convocation.

So, I was for one term SRC president. The election took place 2012; for 2012 to 2013 I was SRC president. But before that I was the secretary-general of the SRC in 2010. Which will be 2009 to 2010. In between, in 2012, I was the speaker of the student parliament. I had completed my BTech in 2010, and also went for my in-service training with eThekweni [Durban] Municipality. So, I was out of the institution and came back. Now I sit in Council as a member of Council because I am a president of Convocation currently.

## SRC internal organisation

During the interview, Madlala not only reflected on his first experience in the MUT SRC as SG and how student governance operated at MUT, but also his work as SRC president and the way the SRC organised itself internally, in relation to the student body, and representing student interests in the governance structures and committees of the university.

## Portfolio allocation

We won in 2009 and then we got into office. When I was elected, that's when I was deployed. You sit down in portfolio allocations and I was given the responsibility of being the secretary; the centre of power [laughs].

## Student parliament and mass meetings

It was in 2010 when we started to try to put things into proper context in terms of the student governance of the university. There may have been a student parliament before 2010 but I don't really know what its role was. Part of the things that we had to do was to review the SRC constitution.

When we came into power, we realised that there was a constitution that was in place probably from 1980 sometime when the institution was first founded. We worked to review it, to revive the student parliament to give it some power, because before then, I can assure you, it had no impact. So, it couldn't bridge the gap where you have an organisation that is raising issues and then an SRC, which is led by a different organisation, then miscommunicates and misrepresents that particular voice to the management. It becomes a problem.

The student parliament, how it is constituted, involved basically all structures. It was two representatives from all recognised structures: your political organisations, your churches, your cultural organisations, the sports union. We further extended it to faculties, to have faculty representatives, because we also said there must be faculty representatives. We had three

faculties, so two representatives from all three were sitting in the student parliament. We had a residence committee, which is formed of all chairpersons, so we asked for representation from there as well. And then we had the SRC obviously that sits in there. So that became the composition. And it had a clear mandate of holding the SRC accountable, approving the budget and all of those things. And holding the SRC accountable in terms of having input to the programme of action of the SRC.

We also had all forms of meetings. We had mass meetings. We had res-to-res meetings as the SRC; each res, going to each res to address the students there. In mass meetings, we'll have every student coming in there; and then we'll also meet with the student parliament which would be the leaders.

### **SRC and social media**

Reaching out and communicating with the student body does not only involve mass meetings and student parliament, but also updating students on key dates and events using social media. Oftentimes the handing over of social media sites from one SRC to the next is a problem if the social media accounts are not institutional, as Madlala's reflection also shows.

As an SRC and SRC president we had a Facebook page. Unfortunately, after me, we tried handing it over but because it was administered, it was very difficult. If it is administered by the institution, it is easy because an institution is always there. Now if it's administered by a student, because I'm the administrator, it is difficult. In 2013 as the SASCO SRC, we had it; we communicated with it things like the closing dates for NSFAS submissions; opening bashes and entertainment; the res applications start now, ends here, these are the documents you must bring; all sorts of things. So, we used it heavily. But it had about maybe 2 000 people. In an institution of about 12 000 people, that was not enough. But we did have a media page that we communicated by.

### **The role of the SRC: micro-level vs macro-level issues**

Madlala argues that an SRC should be involved in broader, institutional issues of policy and governance, but often gets bogged down by 'micro-level issues' that should actually be dealt with by SRC sub-structures such as a residence house committee or a student faculty council.

I have my own view in terms of what the role of the SRC should be as opposed to what it is, relating to that university. Mangosuthu is a very small university, it has only about 12 000 students. And also in terms of its design, it's very intimate if I may say. There is one campus and another one is just across

the road. You basically walk to the other one. So, it's more like one campus: Umlazi campus. So, if you are an SRC there, you are a trade unionist [laughs]. You have all the structures, housing committee, faculty reps and so forth and so on, but if a student has a problem with a roommate, they want to see the president of the SRC; if there's a problem in the class, there is a class rep, but no, they would want to see the SRC. So, as a result, you become very grounded, very operational. It has its advantages and disadvantages.

One of the advantages is that you are in touch with the reality of the people on the ground, on a constant daily basis – you touch them every day. Some of the disadvantages are that there are broader issues in the higher education sphere that you as student leaders must make a contribution and input to. And if you are not on campus for two days, it's an issue; they don't see you, they want to see you.

One of the things that we always complained about which comes into being when we are speaking about the role of the SRC, is that you would sit with Council. A decision is made. Council leaves, you go and sit with executive management to deal with the issue of the same decision. You move there – you have to deal with – even the tutor – to still deal with the same issue of that decision. And that makes you now get involved in all these parts, as opposed to you dealing with those issues at that level.

You communicate with your other structures in terms of governance – those structures – you communicate so that it goes in terms of levels. You know I used to say the only time when the president of the SRC should deal with an issue of a faculty is when the faculty rep and the dean have met, and they could not find each other.

Or when it becomes a Senate-level issue, not when it's still a class rep issue. But like I'm saying, the role did not evolve that much. Because even in 2013 from 2010, even in 2013, it was still activism – more activism – more and more operational activism. Even though we really made significant progress in terms of certain internal proposals on various issues of student development that will improve student's lives. I still feel that we were too confined to operational matters.

## **Co-operative governance**

As per the Higher Education Act, the MUT SRC is involved in the key governance structures of the university: at the level of Council, Senate and Institutional Forum. Madlala recalls other committees the SRC was involved in and the need for student representatives to be trained well in order to participate effectively. He also reflects on the modus operandi of his SRC when allocating student representatives and preparing for committee meetings.

## Key university governance structures and the need for training

In terms of representation, we were represented at all levels. Council is very critical for the SRC to be involved there. The manner in which it happens, still today, I feel that there is a lot of training and development that needs to take place so that student leaders understand their involvement and participation at that level.

It is important that they are there; it is another debate what their role should be when they are there. Some issues that are dealt with there are confidential; some issues that are dealt with require a particular level of comprehension of issues. And there's not a single training that you get before you go and sit in those structures. And you are just a student, you know. But I think Council is very important.

The second one I think is the academic board, or now I think it is called Senate, which deals with academic issues and so forth. A very important structure as well because we have long adopted a concept of 'Nothing for us, without us'. That is where issues of curriculum are dealt with; issues of academic exclusion and inclusion are engaged. So it's important that the students' voices are heard there, because they are the end-user of that product, so if they are engaged upfront, it makes a really meaningful contribution.

But also other committees are important. For example, we had an academic calendar committee which deals with how the academic year is to go, when there has to be recess, when it's going to be exams. It's a very important committee as well, because there are sometimes realities that the SRC brings into perspective. For example, it's easy for the institution to say, 'Classes will commence on 23 January,' but the reality is that the registration will not be closed by then because of some financial difficulties and all of those things. You may end up now having people that are attending and some people that are still trying to register, and already they start on the back foot. So, there are many, many other important committees.

## Allocation of SRC members to committees

Given that the SRC constitution did not prescribe which SRC members and other student leaders represent student interests on which governance structures and committees, the SRC allocated committees according to the portfolios of SRC members as well as their interests and expertise.

In terms of our constitution, there is nothing enshrined in there about committee allocations. How we used to do it, is that we were identified in terms of the responsibilities of the portfolio. For example, in the academic calendar committee as well as the Senate, we would have our faculty officer in there, because the faculty officer deals with academic exclusions and all those kinds of related academic issues.

We would also maybe go a bit beyond just the portfolios of the office and look into each individual's knowledge and expertise. So if, for example, we had me who is in HR and we had an HR committee, then I would be representing there. Each member sat in two committees. And then at Council level, we would have the president and the secretary of the SRC.

### **Caucusing SRC positions for agendas and meetings**

I put in place a *modus operandi* of the way things should be that we caucused committee agendas. But sometimes it becomes impractical with the kind of load, particularly in the kind of university where the SRC becomes too operational.

Sometimes you remember *today* that there is actually a meeting. So, at times, it would happen that we do sit down and look into the agenda items and give input and advice and guidance. Ideally at times, we would call in the Progressive Youth Alliance, we would call the chairs and secretaries and say we are going to Council in a week's time. Or maybe even before that, because you need to put in agenda items too, which closes some time before Council: 'What are the issues that we need to put in the agenda?' We did at times.

### **Key challenges, issues and protests**

Rather than listing all the issues his SRC had to deal with, Madlala reflects on the injustice of student leaders identifying a key issue, raising it in various formal settings, eventually organising a protest about it and then being disciplined by the university for protesting (e.g. by being suspended or even expelled). However, when eventually the same issue is taken up by the management and implemented, management takes the credit and the student leaders who originally put it on the agenda remain without any acknowledgement and restoration.

### **NSFAS meal allowances and purchasing food off campus**

I remember at some point, we had proposed back in 2009 that firstly, there was no funding from NSFAS. Funding was coming from NSFAS but it was not covering meals for students at that time on our campus. We got NSFAS to assist with covering it; we wrote memorandums and so forth – and ultimately meals were covered.

Now, we had an issue that when we did some benchmarking at one of the other universities, we realised that students were getting some money into their accounts to go and buy groceries. And now we said as an SRC: 'No, we need to get this thing to happen here.' Why? Because internally we have just one cafeteria, which does not accommodate people who are vegetarians and all of those things. You just have standard meals at highly exorbitant prices that are unreasonable basically. But now we don't have an option because the money is in your student card. Whereas we have got stoves on campus at the

same time, which means that you are allowed to cook, but what am I gonna cook? So, we wanted to introduce that.

### **Student protest, management intransigence and taking it to Council**

It was going to be under IntelliCard at that point. So, when we fought on campus, we striked and all of those things, but management told us that it was impossible for that to happen.

So, we had those kinds of issues as part of the agenda for Council to say: 'This is a proposal; this is the background to the issue; we have tried to engage management; they are not coming in. We have done the benchmark to ABC. This is feasible.' Then we'll add those issues to the agenda for Council.

### **Management claiming achievements without acknowledging students**

Madlala laments the fact that when students protest, many are expelled; yet the protests are for legitimate matters, seeking to get management to be responsive. Once they are addressed, management claims the achievement, while the students remain expelled without any restitution.

Some of the disadvantages of being a student leader is that during our own protests, many people were expelled from the university – they are still expelled today. But you know, now I sit in Council as a member of Council, because I am a president of Convocation currently. Now you sit there and the university communicates this and that as an achievement: students are able to dish at Pick 'n Pay and that; and no one is worried about getting those people [who were expelled] back because basically that means you fired those people for wrong reasons.

There are still students who were expelled because of the protest about this very issue. Now for the university having achieved this, it says: 'Wow, look we've done great,' but credit is not given nor is there any restitution given to those students. No one remembers those people. And even when the university speaks about it, it will never speak about it as an initiative from our students. It becomes an institutionally owned thing: 'We are helping our students.' No one speaks about the struggle of getting there. How did we get to that part? How many casualties did happen? And during the student struggles, the same managers were standing opposite saying, 'It will never happen. It's impossible.' It has happened because we had to sit down, write proposals and all of those things.

### **Management's attitude to student issues and lack of responsiveness**

I think because I've been involved with almost all angles of the university now, except university management, being a student, a student activist, and I've been on the other side. Let me tell you what is the case – the case is that no one

pays attention to details in this university. They are not, I can tell you why; it's not only in Mangosuthu University of Technology. When I speak about attention to detail, I mean first of all the attitude of management in most cases towards student leaders is not a positive attitude. So, whatever they raise, is normally met with resistance – uncalculated resistance – because student activists, if they are properly orientated, they create work for management. A lot of work.

When we come with these proposals, you've got your own standard as well that you are involved in. And then you need to go and test this benchmark. Go and look into the feasibility of this, go and start engaging Pick 'n Pay, engage Shoprite. And if you are a lazy person, you are not going to want to do that. So, the easiest way out is to say, it cannot be done.

### **Management presenting a rosy picture to an uninformed Council**

Now when it ultimately happens, what management does to counter is management always seeks to present a good picture to Council. So, they will say: 'No, the university is stable; everything is okay, students are happy.' And Council sits down, because Council is also at the very higher level there, in the ivory tower. They don't take their time to understand even the universities that they lead. They just come in for a meeting and out. And papers, in most of the cases, are not a true reflection of what is happening on the ground. Remember this manager cannot say: 'Ay, I'm failing, things are not working out.' They will always project a good picture.

### **Management and Student Affairs taking credit for student ideas**

So now, when things ultimately happen, for example, that proposal thing, when things ultimately happen, now this manager is going to argue that, 'As the Student Affairs department we have introduced an initiative of getting students to now ...' Because they want to take credit. Because remember, they are on performance pay as well; they want to get recognition as well. And now I'm going to be honest and say: 'Where does this initiative come from?' I'm telling you, most Student Affairs departments survive on ideas of students who unfortunately cannot copyright their ideas.

And they then present these things only when they have succeeded of their own. I don't think it's a breakdown of institutional memory; I think it is more of they want to claim these things and then they get a round of applause. And no one asks: 'But where did this actually come from?'

### **The pain of students not being credited and expelled from university**

I'm telling you that the pain that I feel when people had to go on a demonstration and fight for something to happen, and then when it happens, no one speaks about them. No one speaks about the fact that they are still unable to access



any university in South Africa because they are expelled from one university. But everyone just celebrates that: 'Wow, the university is doing good; taking care of its students.' As though someone sat down in a corner out of care and sincerity and said, we need to get our students to have this.

## **The need to transform councils**

Talking about the problem of a lack of responsiveness of governance structures and management, Madlala makes the example of a burning issue coming to Council. Yet, because councils are too removed from the student experience, they don't see urgency in dealing with a matter, which eventually causes student strikes and protests. Hence, he proposes that councils need to be transformed to reflect a generational mix including more and younger members.

### **Lack of urgency**

The issue here is that councils need to be transformed. When we came into Council last year, we started introducing more, younger guys to Council. And it's a positive thing. You need a generational mixture; you need expertise, experience and so forth. But you also need younger people with an open mind. Councils in most cases, don't find a sense of urgency.

Let me tell you what happened the other year – I'm not sure if it's 2011 or 2010. You follow these processes or even if you don't follow them, but you get a burning issue on the Council agenda towards December – an issue probably related to fees for the following year. Council has a long agenda, they deal with their issues, and they then say: 'No, this one we will defer to the beginning of the year.'

They are not time-effective. They are not thinking about the fact that at the beginning of the year – even if you have a special Council meeting – it is going to sit around. End of January, students would have started registering. This is a fees issue which has got cost implications. So you are now a student leader; the university does not have a declaration in terms of fees. The year begins and this is where strikes come in, because you have made proposals on where you've answered some questions.

### **Lack of transparency**

And also the transparency of Council when it comes to student leaders is an issue. You are just told that there's no money in the university, but there is an increase of 10 per cent to executive management. You know, you think, I mean, 'Does this thing make sense?' You just check some of the privileged universities. They are giving some people 7 per cent, not even 10. You are an underprivileged university, which has got students predominantly from poor backgrounds. Management gets 10 per cent and your issue is deferred – the one

that you are proposing – deferred to the following year. It becomes frustrating. Come beginning of the year, if Council wants, it can postpone that meeting for March. And you think but you are then to now go and retrospectively apply any decision instead of us having dealt with this thing immediately.

## **Reasons for protests**

Having discussed his experiences with management and Council, Madlala outlines what he sees as the two main reasons why student strikes happen: the lack of responsiveness of management and the University Council, and partisan contestation among student organisations.

### **Student frustration with management and Council**

That's where strikes come in, because now the frustration goes to you as student leaders. The registration fee has increased and all of those things. And they go ahead in some cases and implement what you had contended against.

And in some instances, you find that the delegation of authority is not working in favour of students. So, you got certain decisions that can only be taken by executive management. And maybe there are four, and two just take leave beginning of the year – January. They are coming back in February.

I remember at some point, one of the demonstrations of the many demonstrations we had: the registrar at that point was the only one who can extend registration – authorise for the extension of registration – who can take certain decisions also in terms of academic exclusion; and he took leave! He took leave, there was no acting registrar, there was nobody. He took leave, and there was no deputy registrar; there was a post, but the position was not filled. And he took leave! And we said: 'You've got the whole year, we don't want to go into what you do the whole year. And management, why do you approve leave for someone during registration process?' That is where this feeling comes from, that you are not taken seriously as student leaders.

I think an underlying issue there is that they don't necessarily want to take a decision; but they won't be honest. For example, they don't want to extend registration, but they don't want to tell you that, 'No, we don't want to extend registration,' so they rather say, 'No, the issue is that the registrar is not here.' And we can't do anything, you know. So that unwillingness to take decisions is a factor there.

That is where the issue of strikes comes; the principal aspect of strikes.

### **Partisan rivalry among student organisations**

There is also a different aspect of strikes, which is a political aspect of it, which is a reality of most institutions where there is serious political rivalry. Students are never going to be satisfied with everything, so at times it happens

– I'll be quite frank here – that strikes are used as a political campaign for you to legitimise yourself or to inspire confidence as an organisation.

## **Reflecting on #FeesMustFall**

At the end of 2013, Madlala left MUT to work for the municipality. Around 2015 he registered on a part-time basis for a master's at MUT. Taking the long view on student struggles for access and funding, Madlala argues that #FeesMustFall was not new at MUT.

### **#FeesMustFall was no surprise – it is a long-standing struggle**

By 2015 I was not any more involved on a day-to-day basis, but I was in support. What we raised during the #FeesMustFall was that for us this was not a beginning of the struggle. For us, MUT when I first came there, the registration was R1 000 for an annual course. I think up until 2014 or something, for a long period of time.

We have always fought for access and we have always fought to ensure that fees were kept to a bare minimum. For the institution, as we speak, it has some negative consequences because there is a heavy student debt for the university. We are advocating that there must be other means of covering for that student debt. We are predominantly a university where 80 per cent of people are NSFAS dependent. So, we fought to keep prices low, we have basically always fought for free education.

### **Only historically advantaged institutions are heard**

So, the call for #FeesMustFall did not catch us by surprise, but I think it caught the entire media and the entire South Africa by surprise because now these previously advantaged institutions were starting to speak. Because only then they were feeling the pinch of it. We had long felt it; we had long fought for it. But obviously, because we speak in the dark corners of Umlazi, no one actually cares about it until it is there ...

So, it's the same thing: whatever we raise and strike about, it's different. We can strike and burn down the university for all that matters. But if Rhodes holds up placards for two seconds, the media, eNCA, everybody is there: it's a national crisis. It illustrates – it exaggerates but it illustrates – the issue around having a voice that projects into the broadcasters.

### **Marikana and the unresponsiveness of government**

Sometimes we say in order for issues from the marginalised to be heard, they need to burn down a library or they need to burn down a community centre. And then everybody cries: 'Oh, why you people burn down a community

centre?’ Meanwhile we’ve been protesting for three months already but nobody listened.

The reality is, no one really cares. We strike there for the whole week or whatever, it’s the same thing for people of Marikana: no one cares. The people of Marikana struck for four months and no one cared, until they were shot and died and then some people were acting as if they did not know that these people had been on strike for four months.

### **Renaming and removing statues is not a priority issue at MUT**

When asked whether there was a decolonial, intersectional campaign at MUT before or alongside #FeesMustFall – something like #RhodesMustFall, #OpenStellenbosch or #AfrikaansMustFall – Madlala chuckled.

No, that was the least of our worries. Look, someone may argue against what I’m saying but our issues have always been bread and butter issues. We’ve always laughed when students in one of these universities were striking for parking. You know we understood though: they are privileged.

We’ve got many buildings that are named CR you know ... Even the name of the university and the possibility that it may be changed. But as students we never really had energy to focus on those kind of things because at the very hardcore essence is the issue of access: a student needs to get into a class.

### **Prioritising access to higher education as a way out of intergenerational poverty**

There’s nothing more difficult than seeing a student carrying bags and having to go home because they are poor. And that is what we experience – those are our realities. And go home to what? Because obviously the family cannot afford education. Go back to poverty and do what? Go and look for a job at Shoprite? Perpetuate the same generational intergenerational poverty?

So those were our issues, those have always been at the centre of our hearts.

So, we support these calls for decolonisation; we’ve supported them, but we’re not at that level. And it’s the same thing when people are talking about the fourth industrial revolution. It excites everyone and for them it is something they need to deal with. And then there are some people who are not even in the second or third industrial revolution. So, we can’t really put our energy there and say we want to put down a statue. It is the correct principle but let’s focus on the basics first: financial access, academic access, retention, progression ... to improve the infrastructure to better the lives of students. That has been at the heart of the struggle that we had to fight.

It is a matter of prioritising. That is the argument. It’s the same argument I’ve always had against the multimillion costs for renaming roads, changing

street names. I'm saying, it's important but is it urgent given the current economic status and so forth? Is it something that we must say is first priority? We take money and instead of building clinics, we are renaming the street. I don't think it should be our priority.

### **Management supporting students during #FeesMustFall**

In 2015 and even before that, the management of the university had said: 'We can give you buses because this problem is beyond us. We understand the issue that the students can't afford.' And it was actually going to happen.

It was at that point that NSFAS when there was some funding that was left from these universities that normally underspend, these privileged universities, NSFAS would take it and give those monies to us. So, I think there was actually some intervention. There was actually a programme of action that was committed to by both students and management.

So, the call was a genuine call. We even said we are not going to close down campuses, just so that we appease those who now have all of a sudden woken up to this reality that fees are a challenge.

### **Decolonisation and decommodification as two sides to freeing education**

#FeesMustFall was a good thing to be raised but it was not properly guided. Firstly, I don't think that it went the right direction. I also don't think that it got the necessary results, because there was not enough debate around it.

You see, when we found the discussion on the tables of SASCO around the issue of fees, it was within the context of free education. But free education had two components to it: the content of it, which I believe is even more primary, and then the financial aspect of it.

The aspect of freeing educational content is decolonising education in a different way. The question that the country needs to respond to is whether we want to have many graduates of this calibre that we have. It is a dysfunctional calibre of graduates outside the context of employment. It is only functional within the context of employment. So, the education system teaches these graduates that you must be employed to be a productive citizen.

Or do we want to focus on changing the education system such that it is able to produce a community activist, a person that is able to invest their skills, ability, knowledge and talent for the development of their society? We need an education system that responds to the needs of society more than it responds to the needs of industry, which cannot absorb the number of graduates that are produced by the education system. You see, that is an approach which will then move over to say that that particular kind of education must be accessible so that we get more people of that nature, moving us as a country to where we want to go.

## The outcomes of #FeesMustFall

But the manner in which #FeesMustFall was approached – it came with a zero fee increment – I mean what was the outcome of it? It was a no fee increment.

Ultimately what we received from our former president was a declaration that there will be free education; but that does not exist. You see some people are even celebrating it, as if it is already in existence. They are celebrating the declaration as if it is in existence, when it is not practically there. And it is going to take us maybe 10 or 15 years for it to be there, unless certain things change with our economic structure as a country as well as in the political willingness.

## Improving student governance

When he was asked what he would like to change about student governance, Madlala reflected on his initiatives to change the SRC constitution to establish and operationalise student governance sub-structures.

When I came in as president of the SRC I already knew what I would like to change. The first project I wanted to have was to launch structures of the SRC to properly constitute student governance. Student governance is not the SRC; it is all the structures that are involved in the governance of that particular university. So, I wanted to get residence sub-committees in place; I wanted to get the faculty reps which would then be responsible for ensuring that the class reps are functioning accordingly; get everyone in place and then hold a workshop.

My hope was that we were going to develop a booklet on each and everyone's role. You can blame some of these class reps, but they don't know what their role is: they think it's just to do projects and notes when the lecturer is not there. We wanted to form a booklet and workshop with these people on their responsibilities. Train the class reps so that they know what their role is.

## The need for SRC training

Given that student leadership development is a typical function of Student Affairs, Madlala was asked if this is not done by the Department of Student Affairs at MUT. He said:

No, they are not doing it. And unfortunately, sometimes these deans of students, these people, they interfere with SRC things.

Madlala then recalled that as SRC they received some induction organised by Student Affairs:

As an SRC, you go for an inauguration training; they call it SRC induction. What it does is that you just get different heads of departments coming to communicate to you what they do. Someone will first tell you the vision of the institution and all those big plans, and then you get someone who will come and tell you about what Student Affairs and these departments do.

After reflecting on the induction his SRC receives, Madlala outlines what he feels are key training needs of an SRC, including the need to be trained in time management skills, counselling, negotiation skills, and so forth.

But I don't feel that this is a training. Because in a training on what it is to be an SRC, you should be getting a two- or a three-day training, where you get an expert in the area of leadership or whatever the case is, coming to make presentations to you, coming to tell you about time management, how you juggle your studies and this; emotional intelligence; how to deal with problems of people here.

Students who have been raped, have got AIDS – come to the SRC office ... how do you deal with that? They trust you, they pour out their problems to you. So, you are not trained in those things. Negotiation skills; basic skills.

They expect us to sit with management and their departments and everyone there, and negotiate on fees or whatever the case is. But no one ever comes there and says: 'Here are negotiations skills. These are things you must look for. These are bargaining things.'

## **Publicising and giving recognition to student representatives**

So, student governance: get the structures proper. And then give them the necessary recognition. By that, I mean, if you go to a faculty, there must be a picture of a faculty representative there. Students must know, if you go to residence whatever, there must a picture of a student who's a representative with their contact details. The student population must know who their first point of contact is, so that it is not only the SRC that has got calendars in the entire university. But you expect students to go to a class rep. Some don't even know who their class rep is.

Have a chart with the entire student governance with the president on top, SRC officers, how it goes down in terms of your functional structure. Legitimise them and introduce them to the necessary officials in the university. Your dean must know, here is the faculty rep, here is the person you will be liaising with. The head of Student Affairs must know here is the chairperson of the housing committee, the head of sport. If you do that within the first month or two, you have got your governance in order. You then are able as the SRC to focus on certain things and monitor the functionality of this governance to ensure that it really performs.

## **A concerted system of student governance and administrative support**

Madlala thus envisions a concerted student governance system.

Once you have that structure, you can have structured meetings that are going to be part of your student governance structure. You know that every month your faculties sit, or your sports union or whoever sits. Then all these people need to submit their reports to the student parliament via the SRC, because the SRC must sign off everything.

However, when it comes to the administrative support for such a system, it has not been forthcoming.

We had one person from Student Affairs as administrative assistance. They did all of that, except the minutes which were the responsibility of the secretary. What this person used to do is basically everything. If we wanted transport, we would requisition it and give it over to her, for her to process forward. But we understood also that there was only so much that she would be able to do. But part of that, I think administrative support is very important because it feeds into the success rate of SRC members in terms of their academic work. Because if they have not got sufficient support structures, they do all these things and then they end up lacking on their academic work. And the only thing the country does is cry: 'SRCs stay for long and they don't graduate.'

### **The need for academic concessions**

Madlala felt that it was unfair for SRCs to have the kinds of responsibilities and pressures that they do on their time without getting any academic concessions.

I still do cite the example of how unfair it is when you are an SRC. I remember over a number of occasions, you just get a call from the vice-chancellor saying: 'I know you've been wanting a meeting with me. I am now available.' And that call comes at exactly the time when you are about to start a class. And he tells you, 'In the next two hours I'm leaving; I'm gonna be off.'

So, you obviously have to cancel attending the class, and no concession is made for that. No one is going to be giving you special attention for that class that you did not attend or anything like that. And there are times when you get a call once you are in class, you see it's the vice-chancellor, and you go out, and you leave your class. And there are no concessions.

## **Lessons**

Madlala offers a number of lessons from his student leadership experience. For future student leaders, he recommends that they get their first degree before



getting deeply involved in student politics and SRC, in order to have something to fall back on. He also cautions future student leaders not to become affected by the 'celebrity syndrome'. For management and University Council, he recommends that they recognise the importance of student leadership and focus on the content of what student leaders put to them.

### **Lessons for aspiring student leaders**

It is not easy when you are an activist at heart, to be a student leader. Some people take this as an extra-mural activity. I think it's better for those that do so, because they don't put their hearts in it: if students want to see you and you are not there, you are in class, you switch off your phone. But if you are an activist, it's not a very easy role.

Some of the students are coming from really disadvantaged backgrounds. Your family is waiting there for you to finish but then you get involved in SRC and you find yourself not finishing in time. That's why we said for you to be an SRC, you must pass at least 60 per cent of your module to qualify. We put it in the constitution.

We put two things in the constitution; some people were not happy with those two clauses. The first one of 60 per cent, the second one we said, 'No first year will be able to contend.' First-year students can't contend. At Mangosuthu right now, it's still the same. If you are a first year, no matter how much potential you have, you can't contend for SRC.

But I would go further and say, 'Have your first degree.' I would recommend to someone if they wanted to be part of the SRC, get your first degree. Obtain your first degree because should anything happen, you have something to fall back on. We cannot limit you how far you go in terms of activism. Should you get expelled, for example, you have a degree and you can still get a job.

### **Caution against the 'celebrity syndrome' of SRCs**

SRC members at the same time must guard against the celebrity syndrome; you can easily get carried away! The celebrity syndrome is when you suddenly feel like a celebrity when you are in the SRC. You can easily feel like a pop star and you can get carried away. And some people get carried away and they lose it forever.

You are known on campus; you've got girls liking you; you've got everybody.

And you forget about your studies; you forget about your background; your success chances are then diminished; you are excluded. You then become basically a person that has no direction.

So, it's very important that student leaders are able to absorb the excitement that comes with those responsibilities as well as the benefits that come through, so that they are able to mature and also still study whilst advocating for student issues.

## Recommendations for management and Council

The existence of student leaders is very important. Management and councils need to take a different approach to student leaders. These student leaders are the same ones that become future leaders at some point. How we treat them now and build them, whether we build or break them now, has an impact on the future we try to create.

When I first sat in Council, the very first meeting we sat in Council, we had prepared a memorandum of two, three pages on various issues. Council took about two to three hours correcting grammatical errors on our document. Grammatical errors! The content – they could see what we were trying to say. We tried to write this document in English; we are not English speaking. But they took about two to three hours, and that is breaking young students who have got a potential to become something in future. So those kinds of things; these bureaucratic processes and all that; the university must guard against.

## The impact of the student leadership experience

Looking back at his two terms in the SRC and his term as speaker of student parliament, Madlala describes his student leadership experience as having had a positive impact on his life. In terms of his career trajectory, the impact has been mixed to date because of the time he lost when he was in the SRC; in terms of his overall development, the impact has been very much in his favour.

### Impact on career trajectory

Having been in student politics has impacted on my career good and bad. When I resigned at the municipality's in-service training to go and be in the SRC that was a shot in terms of my career because it took me about four, five years before I could get back in the system of working. So, it really, really worked against me. People who I was with at that time are far ahead of me. It was really a drawback for me in terms of my career and I have not been able to recover.

But the knowledge that I've learnt and my state of thinking and all of that – I know that at some point in the future I will recover that time. But currently I'm not deployed; I'm not a spokesperson in some office. So, I've not got any work through political deployment or anything like that. But I gained knowledge and experience which is very valuable for me as a person.

One of the things that I learnt during student politics was negotiation skills, presentation skills, the whole of 2 000 students that you address. These are things you learn down the road. You have to think on your feet: they ask you any question, any time, and you have to think on your feet. So, as a result, I always say, if you don't want to employ me for a position, don't call me for an interview because once you call me for an interview, you're going to be forced

to employ me. In my world, I've been through seven interviews and I've been employed every time I've been interviewed.

It really works in my favour. Your ability to express yourself. For a person that studied in a rural area, it has also improved my vocabulary in a very good way. Also, the ability to write, because you have to write memorandums there. You have to write a lot of things. And the understanding of government. So, there's quite a number of good benefits.

### **Impact on political attitudes and active citizenship**

Having been in student politics has broadened my mind. Like I said, I come from an ANC background, but I did not understand certain things. You start to understand the different economic theories, different political philosophies. You have a broader outlook on life. You understand your class differences and the structure of society.

It has not changed my political outlook but it has more sharpened it for me to now say, I understand where the country is and I have a view about where I think it should be. It even helps, when there are these commentaries that are called for on land issues, on the National Health Bill; I'm able to make my contributions because of my outlook now to life.

I do consider myself as an active citizen. I'm currently not leading anywhere or any structure for that matter, except in the Convocation of the university and in Council, but outside of that I'm not in leadership. But I get involved in a lot of activism work. Recently we've had to assist one of the street kids, go back and find their family in the Eastern Cape. We had to help her with a lot of things – reshape her current order, arrange for psychological assistance that side. So there's quite a lot of things that you get involved in because now you've got this consciousness different from a person who's never been involved. You know, they just mind their own business. So, right now, when you hear that the workers are striking, you say eish ...

I do participate in protests, not all of them, and I definitely vote. I'm a member of the ANC and the ANC is in good standing. So, I actively am involved and where I'm called upon to lead, I'm available to do so.

### **Impact on personal and family life**

It has impacted on my personal life; I did find a fiancé but unfortunately we broke off some time. There is quite a lot of love in the SRC [he laughs]. And also you learn a lot of things: in power, out of power, in power, out of power. You learn that people in most cases are not attracted to you, but to what you have because you get people, even in your relations with business people, your relations with women, for example, when you are in power, it's a different thing. When you are out of power, it's a different thing. But it allows you to be able to test people's consistency in your life.

So you get a girlfriend when you are in power. You lose power, you lose her. She wants to come back when you have power again, you know those kinds of things. But you get to understand.

## **Fixing the education system: people's education for people's power**

At the close of the interview, Madlala shared his views on how the education system in South Africa needs to be reformed to better serve the country's needs, namely to produce graduates that are not only employable but who can apply their competences in different contexts.

### **Producing graduates who can apply their competences for societal development even outside the context of employment**

I think the education system partners have got a lot to discuss. The flaws in our education system are at the centre of what we find ourselves as a country and no one seems to be paying attention to the quality of education.

I hear of task teams left, right and centre; but I have not heard of a task team that is looking into the curriculum that is offered. The entire education system, from primary education to the higher education system, has been hugely compromised. A person that will graduate today is still a product of a post-apartheid era.

We should be fully responsible for the kind of citizen we produce today. If a citizen that goes out with a qualification today, let's say a qualification in accounting, but in a spaza shop at home they can't calculate their finances, we should ask ourselves what we have taught this person.

If that citizen is a lawyer, but sits at home and people are abused, and this person does not assist because he's waiting to be employed by a particular law firm, we must say there is something wrong with our education. We must take full responsibility to change the curriculum so that it responds to the needs of our society.

### **Putting society's needs before those of industry**

And industries must also respond to the needs of our society. It must be society first. In the current order, it is industry first. We teach people so that they can respond to the demands of industry. And when these industries cannot absorb these people, they are loose cannons; they are just floating in the air because they are waiting for industries to absorb them.

That is what we should be talking about in terms of how we restructure our curriculum, because the reality is, education is a critical sector. These are discussions that must be honest between society, government, industry, student leaders, vice-chancellors and everyone. This thing of academic freedom: to

what extent does it go and to what extent does it benefit our society? As well as this institutional autonomy: autonomous from what? These institutions are a section of our society that must be able to breathe life into the society that they should endeavour to develop.

# chapter 10

## Lorne Hallendorff

University of Cape Town,  
SRC sports coordinator 2011/12, SRC president 2012/13

*Thierry M. Luescher, Lorne Hallendorff & Nkululeko Makhubu*

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### **Brief biography**

Lorne Hallendorff is the chief operating officer of a tech start-up in the property industry. Before that he worked as a consultant for a global management consulting firm. Hallendorff completed a bachelor of business science in finance at the University of Cape Town in 2013 while he was SRC president. He is a fellow of the Allan Gray Orbis Foundation.

This chapter is based on an interview conducted by Thierry Luescher and Nkululeko Makhubu on 21 August 2018.

### **Background and getting involved in the UCT SRC**

From primary school years, Lorne Hallendorff has always been involved in school leadership. He attributes this to an innate desire to make a positive difference, and to the joy he gets from seeing what effective leadership can achieve. Thus, when he came to the University of Cape Town (UCT), he got involved in the house committee of his residence and eventually took the opportunity to run for SRC.

The majority of my schooling was at St John's College in Johannesburg, which is where I first got involved in leadership positions. I was the head of school in the preparatory school and then I was the head of school again in the high school. I think that I have a predisposition to put myself forward for positions

of leadership because I enjoy the opportunity to shape and change things for the better. I think what I'm ultimately after is the opportunity to look back and be able to say 'that is better because of my influence'. It is a drive that existed from a young age and it persisted through to university.

The first time I had an opportunity to be part of a university leadership structure was at the end of first year when house committee nominations came around. I had spent a year in Rochester residence. There were a number of things that I thought could be better, and so I ran on the basis of those.

I was supported to become the deputy head student. I wasn't sure if I was going to run for SRC at the time. I thought I might give the Commerce Students' Council a try the next year. However, at the end of 2011, a procedural error with SRC nominations forced the election committee to open SRC nominations for a second window and in the second window I decided I would run as an independent candidate with a good friend, Kwadwo Ofori Owusu. We ran under our own brand: CIA, which stands for Communication, Integration, Action.

Both Kwadwo and I were elected on the back of a campaign that aimed to tackle important student issues, while maintaining a fairly jocular approach to the elections through the James Bond image we sought to create. We did all of our campaigning in full tuxedo and bow-tie.

At the 2011/12 SRC constituting meeting (where the elected SRC members vote among themselves for the various positions in the SRC) I was elected as the sports coordinator and my running-mate, Kwadwo, was elected as the transformation coordinator. Our president was Insaaf Isaacs of SASCO. It was a rather tumultuous constituting meeting in which a major change of allegiance which swung the presidency was only revealed through the votes. It was the first time I found myself directly caught up in real politics.

When I ran again the following year I was elected as the SRC president for 2012/13.

### **Political affiliation, party politics and portfolio allocations**

Hallendorff was not aligned to any student political organisation but ran as an independent candidate for the SRC.

I was an independent. I was inspired by the likes of Sizwe Mpofu-Walsh and Melvyn Lubega, who were both former St John's College schoolmates of mine.

In 2010, my first year at UCT, Sizwe was the SRC president and Melvyn was the vice-president external. Sizwe had run a very successful independent bid to become the president and was hailed as an excellent president during his term as well. A combination of inspiration drawn from Sizwe and Melvyn,

along with not having a political home of my own, meant that I was quite clear I wanted to run as an independent.

When asked about external political influences and, for example, the influence of the EFFSC during his time, Hallendorff said:

I think individual student leaders were influenced by the ideals of major South African political parties but I believe direct external influence was minimal in practice. External influence certainly peaked at SRC election time, but eased off somewhat once the positions were settled and we were running our course. There was no EFFSC at the time.

During portfolio allocations in his second term, the SRC was split and Hallendorff, as an independent, was able to get backing from SASCO to become the SRC president.

To control the SRC positions required nine people to form an alliance. Seventeen SRC members were elected by popular student vote and then the 17 would meet in a constituting meeting chaired by the IEC and vote amongst themselves for the SRC positions. With nine seats, you controlled the allocation of portfolio positions.

In my year the split was seven independents, three SASCO members and seven DASO members. This put DASO in a very strong position because all they needed was two independents to side with them and they could take the presidency. However, the particular group of independents that had been elected were quite determined that the independents as a bloc were going to control the SRC. We also knew that it was highly unlikely that SASCO would establish an alliance with DASO, both because of what was playing out in national politics, and because of how the relationship between SASCO and DASO had broken down during the SRC constituting meeting at the end of 2010. By managing to stick together as a group of seven independents, we suddenly had the upper hand.

Conversations with SASCO yielded an alliance that could work. The independent bloc and SASCO shared similar views on important issues. Perhaps one of the most important views we shared at the time was our stance on race-based admission criteria at the university.

With the backing of the independent bloc for the presidency and the backing of SASCO for the independent bloc, I was nominated for president unopposed. DASO had tried many avenues to sway independent candidates, including offering the position of president to one of our members, but the bloc remained firm.



It was the first SRC constituting meeting in three years where there were no major surprises that came out of the vote count. Independents, Keenan Hendrickse and Mangi Gondwe became vice-president external and secretary-general respectively. SASCO member Rekgotsfetse Chikane became vice-president internal.

## **Becoming student politically aware**

### **From 'micro-level issues' to the big picture**

In retrospect, Hallendorff considers the initial motivations and issues that he had on the agenda when running for the SRC in his first term as relatively 'minor issues', such as library opening hours. These were the issues that affected him and his friends. He soon realised that there were much bigger issues such as financial exclusions, academic exclusions, and even instances of rape affecting student performance, which he would need to grapple with as a student leader.

Initially I ran for SRC on more minor issues such as 24-hour library access. My friends and I couldn't study in the library late at night and so that was an issue I was very well aware of and could campaign on.

However, student governance exposed me to far more important issues, such as financial exclusion from the university. I guess I hadn't really realised how serious of an issue financial exclusion was until I was interacting with students from all walks of life via the SRC. Suddenly I was exposed to really serious student issues.

### **Becoming aware of financial and academic exclusions**

In addition to seeing what other student leaders were taking up, Hallendorff became very quickly aware of the plight of other students when he was the SRC student representative on university committees dealing with student finances and academic exclusions.

I was placed on the undergraduate students' financial aid committee in my first year on the SRC. Specific financial aid cases would come via the committee and we would have to make calls on how the university should address requests for additional financial aid or non-payment. It was incredibly eye-opening to get a window into the struggles of some students on campus.

A watershed moment for me was sitting as the student representative on the academic appeals committee of one of the faculties. We would consider students' appeals against academic exclusion. Some appeals included stories of rejection at home due to sexual orientation and even rape on campus. Moments like that certainly changed what I cared about and focused on as an SRC member.

## The role of the SRC and support

### SRC induction

There was a handover from the previous SRC in the different portfolios. The Department of Student Development led by Edwina Brooks had a team which supported and encouraged us. There was an allocation of human resources and finances to bring us up to speed. Edwina and her team gave us space to create our own handover, and encouraged us to invite previous SRC leaders to come and talk to us.

At the start of both of my SRC terms we went away as a group for various strategic planning and team-building sessions. In 2012/13 we went to a beach camp in Paternoster with no electricity. We had a fire and the ocean a few metres from our tents, which made it a great place to get to know the team better and talk about the year ahead.

### The multiple roles of the SRC

For Hallendorff, an SRC, as the custodian of student interests, has to play multiple roles within a university: as a social justice champion, an involved voice in university policy development, a service delivery watchdog, and a leader in building community and social cohesion.

The mission of the 2012/13 SRC was to be a socially conscious and innovative custodian of student interests. I think striving towards such a mission plays out in a few different ways.

Firstly, I think an SRC should champion social justice issues on campus. It needs to identify those issues that are most appropriate to tackle and try and change people's attitudes and behaviours for the better. Everything from race-based or gender-based discrimination to disability access on campus.

Secondly, you need to be a very active and involved voice in policy development at the university. The SRC acts as the student voice in important committees such as Council, Senate, the finance committee and the academic councils. SRC members need to be actively commenting on and recommending changes to policies to improve them.

Thirdly, the SRC acts as a service delivery and policy delivery watchdog. The university has a duty to provide certain services and carry out its policies in a fair and transparent manner. If the university does not, the SRC is there to ensure that the matter is raised with the relevant academic or management staff. For example, through the work of Lwazi Somya, the 2013 SRC wrote a letter to a DVC about G4S, which was the outsourced security company on campus, highlighting the manner in which they were contravening the terms of their service-level agreement regarding how they were treating their workers.

Finally, an SRC should play a role in building community and cohesion within the student body. Something I worked on as sports coordinator in my first term on the SRC was reviving the intervarsity sport event between UCT and Stellenbosch. Each SRC also had an entertainment coordinator who would try and make sure that Thursdays on Jameson Plaza would include an event where people would gather and have a bit of a laugh or engage with an important campus issue or national issue.

Given the complexity and amount of work involved, there is an argument for SRC members to perhaps consider being involved for more than one term.

I think SRC members would be able to achieve far more if they served a minimum of two years. There is an incredible amount to learn about the university in order to be an effective SRC member and a lot of it is difficult to learn from outside the SRC. I also think plans to effect major policy changes would be very different if an SRC member knew that they had two years to try. Momentum is always lost when the baton is handed from one SRC to the next.

## **Co-operative governance**

The SRC of 2012/13, led by Hallendorff, practised a collegial, co-operative governance approach to the determination and representation of student interests, even if he never refers to ‘co-operative governance’ himself. This is also illustrated in his discussion of ‘strategies and tactics’.

### **Relationship with management**

When asked about his SRC’s relationship with the university management, Hallendorff recalls that he had generally a very good relationship with Dr Price, the vice-chancellor of the university, but that there was also a time when they were at loggerheads.

On the whole it was a good relationship. I met with the vice-chancellor at least once a month in his office. Dr Price had an open-door policy towards the SRC and was readily available over email or phone if needed. He was very good about making himself accessible.

### **Butting heads on the process of changing the admissions policy**

We did have disagreements though. For example, we had a process-based run-in on admission policy changes. The university had recently received a report on alternative ways to appropriately identify previously disadvantaged students for admissions purposes. At the end of 2012 the Council had given a timeline for discussions and consultations to take place on the implications of the report. The SRC’s understanding of Council’s decision was that we had

the year of 2013 to gather input from students on the report. After all, it's not a quick exercise to gather broad student input.

However, the vice-chancellor put motions to the Senate regarding admissions policy changes in about March of 2013, which took us by surprise based on what had been agreed at the Council meeting. It forced me to argue in the Senate that we should not be considering the motions due to the fact that the SRC needed more time to take motions to student assembly. The Senate agreed that they would not vote on the motions until later in the year.

Overall, I enjoyed a very good relationship with Dr Price. Any disagreement was strictly professional. He was always very willing to consider differing points of view and he genuinely wanted to achieve outcomes that would be best for UCT students.

### **Relationship with the student body**

If the relationship with the university leadership involved informal meetings with the vice-chancellor and the formal meetings in university committees and governance structures, the SRC reached out to the student body in a variety of ways: via the student assembly, using social media and email, meeting students in the residences, and by setting up an SRC mobile office. The SRC mobile office brought the SRC to the different campuses and was active during important student events.

The standard means by which the SRC interacted with the student body was via student assembly. Student assembly was once a quarter, and was mostly attended by student leaders representing faculties, residences, societies and sports clubs.

We made use of social media as best we could. Twitter and Facebook were the main platforms for us. We got the university to agree that we could use the all-students mailing list, which previously the SRC was not allowed to use.

We also set up what we called the SRC mobile office by purchasing a branded gazebo and some banner flags. We would take the SRC mobile office to different campuses or put it up on Plaza on a Thursday when there was a big event. We made an effort to try and be present so that at least people would have an opportunity to approach us if they wanted to.

We also made an effort to directly approach students to get their opinions on important issues. We did this by going door to door in residences in the early evenings, or we would attend residence meetings and encourage students to give us input. In particular, we embarked on a drive to obtain input at residence meetings on our year-end fee change proposal.

As much as possible we tried to go out to where the students were rather than simply letting them know that we were in the Steve Biko Building if they wanted to come to us.

## Strategies and tactics

### Trying to tackle major issues using the formal route

In the consultations with students using the SRC mobile office and door-to-door meetings, Hallendorff's SRC encountered similar matters that would two years later be taken up in campus-wide and nationwide student campaigns such as #FeesMustFall and #StopOutsourcing. His SRC's approach was to follow the formal route of making proposals in committees, believing that the best argument could win.

We tried to tackle issues that were a concern for students at the time. Issues such as admissions policy criteria, fee increases and outsourcing of support services such as cleaning and security.

I think we were taking an approach that was more in line with how it was expected to be. We mostly used the regular avenues of writing a proposal, taking it to the relevant meeting, having it escalated based on the governance structure and so on. I was trying to get student leaders at the time to attempt this approach as much as possible, arguing that the best argument in the room will win.

We did exactly this with our fees and financial aid proposal. I spent a great deal of time with Hardy Maritz, a financial manager at UCT, understanding the finances of the university as best as possible, including sources of funding and what those funds were used for. I believed it was very important to be properly informed about the finances of the university if there was any chance of convincing the finance committee or Council that the SRC knew what it was talking about. I believed a well-informed argument would have a far greater chance of winning support.

I think that, as a first port of call, it is very important to show that the approach of reasoned argument was attempted. However, I'm certainly not excluding more radical approaches. There is a time and place to adopt a more radical approach if reasonable argumentation falls on deaf ears.

### Mandating student representatives for committee work

Hallendorff argues that to be able to effectively represent the student voice in university committees and governance structures requires student representatives to act on an SRC mandate and present a collective student view even if that is not in line with their personal views.

We tried to work on the basis that people who were appointed to committees needed to keep abreast of the major issues and decisions coming to those committees and bring those matters to SRC meetings. The matter would be discussed and the SRC would take a position. The student representative

would then attend the next university committee meeting with a mandate from the SRC. SRC members were expected to argue the SRC's position at committee level rather than a personal view.

As an example, the university was considering having exams on Fridays and Saturdays in order that they could spread out the timetable to give more time between exams. The aim was to avoid some students having three consecutive days of exams. Personally, I was an advocate of Friday and Saturday exams in order to spread the load out more. In the first SRC I was on I had argued that three exams in a row had a material, negative impact on someone's ability to perform in those exams. One way to avoid three consecutive days of exams was to extend exam days to Fridays and Saturdays. The SRC would take issues like this to the student assembly.

This particular matter was brought before the student assembly ahead of the Senate meeting where a decision would be made. I made my case at student assembly and was unable to convince the student representatives. As a result, in the Senate meeting I argued the position of the student assembly and SRC, which was not my personal opinion.

We tried to operate in a similar way on all important policy matters: the student assembly must have its say, then it goes back to the SRC, and then the stance of the SRC is decided. Timelines sometimes made it difficult to always follow the same process, but I tried to push the correct process as much as possible.

The downfall of such a process is the pace of decision-making slows down. However, higher-quality decisions should be made. There are various pros and cons. I certainly had a predisposition to drive more conventional processes.

## **Key issues**

An SRC has to deal with a diversity of issues over a term, some of which make headlines even in the local newspapers, such as UCT's admission policy. As the reflections of other SRC leaders of the pre-2015 years show, there is a great deal of continuity between matters taken up by their SRCs and those that eventually came to define the key issues of the decolonisation and social justice student movement of 2015/16.

### **Race-based admissions policy**

A key issue that Hallendorff's SRC of 2012/13 was dealing with was the proposed change from an admissions policy of the university that took race as a proxy for ensuring equity in student admission, to one that would use different criteria.

There was a bubbling discussion about whether we should move away from a race-based admissions policy to various other factors that would identify previous disadvantage.

Towards the end of 2013 we gave our considered view of what we thought of the proposed changes to the admissions policy. In short, the SRC opposed any changes to the race-based admissions policy. We felt that it remained the best proxy for previous disadvantage, and that the new policy was not developed enough to be able to work.

## Fees

The UCT SRC's stance to try and keep fees as low as possible has a long history.

There was an ongoing debate about fees happening within certain student governance structures and among small pockets of students. Nothing on the scale that happened in the #FeesMustFall movement, but it was definitely a talking point amongst many student leaders. There was a big push from Sizwe Mpofo-Walsh, for example, to keep fees as low as possible when the annual increase was up for decision in 2010. Sizwe's work definitely filtered through to SRCs afterwards. The two SRCs I was on took an approach of engaging with the university regarding fees and financial aid. Our aim was to keep fees reasonable and increase financial aid for poorer students. I think we scored some minor victories, but I think frustration amongst certain students regarding fees was building and patience with following due process was starting to wane.

## Rape and the 'kNOw, it's not okay campaign'

We had a peaceful university march early in 2013. One of the defining events of the beginning of the 2013 SRC year was the rape and murder of Anene Booysen, which happened in Bredasdorp [a village about 160 km from Cape Town] in February 2013. It was orientation week at UCT when the rape took place and it really put the abuse of women in the spotlight. As an SRC we felt that it was very important that our reaction was used to create awareness about the violence many women face in their daily lives, especially with students coming onto campus for the start of the year, many of them first-year students far away from home.

Together with the SRC, the university put together a large march. Classes were cancelled for a period of the day and everyone marched from Middle Campus to Upper Campus. It was one of the biggest gatherings I've ever seen on Jameson Plaza.

Our transformation coordinator at the time, Marissa van Rensburg, ensured that tackling of violence against women remained a prominent feature of the work of the 2013 SRC. She ran an excellent campaign called 'kNOw, it's not okay'. She had a whole lot of posters around the university about things that are not okay to do or say and hosted some events.

I think the context we found ourselves in definitely contributed to the issues we took up as an SRC.

### **SAUS and the student charter**

In keeping with its overall modus operandi, the SRC 2012/13 also formally worked with the national SRC federation, the South African Union of Students (SAUS), to try to address broader issues, such as the development of a South African charter of students' rights and responsibilities.

SAUS had new leadership under Thabo Maloja and Tebogo Thothela. They were looking to rejuvenate the role that SAUS played across the country. I became involved by attending the SAUS conference in East London at the beginning of the year, which is where we took the first steps towards developing a national student rights charter.

### **Reflecting on #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall**

Considering the matters that Hallendorff's SRC was dealing with, he does not think that the emergence of the #RhodesMustFall or #FeesMustFall campaigns was surprising; rather, they represent a continuity and radicalisation of the broad student movement ... after patience had run out.

### **A continuity of student demands and frustrations**

I wouldn't say that 2015 took me by surprise. These were issues that had been under discussion long before I was on the SRC. I knew that issues of transformation and fees were discussions that were ongoing. Increasingly, these issues would have been a source of frustration for student leaders who kept on seeing the same conversation happening at committee level and not enough of a step change taking place outside of those committees.

At committee level there was a lot of agreement *in principle* that did not result in much else. Of course, eventually someone is going to say: 'We have had enough of everyone agreeing in principle, let's see some action!'

### **The three transformation demands: student body, staff body and curriculum**

A major issue at the time was the pace of transformation of the student body, staff body and the university curriculum.

Curriculum transformation increasingly became an issue in 2013. UKZN made it compulsory for students to study one semester of Zulu, which helped catapult curriculum transformation into the spotlight. On the back of the UKZN announcement, the UCT SRC made a proposal that the university



make a single semester of African studies, including learning a language for a semester, compulsory for all students.

An example of a staff transformation issue that the 2013 SRC faced was a proposal that the university was considering to extend the retirement age, which we wholeheartedly opposed. We conceded that it was a complex issue and that there were special circumstances in which it might be appropriate, but we certainly opposed most instances of extending the retirement age because of the profile of person who would end up staying longer at the university.

## **The Rhodes statue as a symbol**

I think that symbolic changes are incredibly important and can begin a lot of momentum towards other changes. Any movement is going to struggle to rally people based on a policy document. However, if you can rally around a symbol then you are much more likely to gather momentum. I think it made sense to target something that represented the source of many of the injustices that we currently still see perpetuated in South Africa.

The Rhodes statue was one of the most prominent statues at UCT, both in terms of size and position. A large number of students would walk past it every single day and have to see it. Targeting the statue was very effective in the end.

## **Views on #RhodesMustFall and other campaigns**

During the time of #RhodesMustFall I was out of the country working in Ghana. I certainly supported the movement. I saw in the movement, not from everyone, but from certain parts of it, an apolitical movement with a very clear, positive objective that was willing to engage in both peaceful protests and intellectual engagement with the issues at hand. Apart from what kicked it off, I saw it as a very mature movement in many ways, a maturity which I think was often lacking in other student movements.

## **#FeesMustFall**

Just like #RhodesMustFall, I support the ultimate aims of #FeesMustFall. The opportunity to learn, at any level, should be available for free to anyone who wants to pursue it for as long as they want to pursue it. The right to develop and train your mind in an area that you're interested in and capable of excelling in is very important for self-actualisation and should be something that we grant everyone.

However, I think that free education becomes quite complex in the exact mechanics and roll-out. You can't switch to free education in a day, but you certainly should make it a goal.

## The effectiveness of the Fallist movement: stepping outside the bounds

When asked about whether he thinks the Fallist student movement was successful, Hallendorff states:

There is no simple 'yes' or 'no' answer to that question in my view. It really depends on how success is defined. That said, in many ways I believe the Fallist movement was successful. The fact is, because of these movements, issues of transformation and financial access to education are far more prominent on the agendas of universities. There is far more pressure on the leadership of those universities to really make meaningful changes for the better.

## Peace-time vs war-time: the example of #Shackville

To borrow a bit from well-known business author Ben Horowitz, there is somewhat of a peace-time vs a war-time approach that a student leader might take to address an issue, depending on what needs to be achieved. You may have times when you simply need incremental changes, tweaking here and there. This requires a peace-time approach in which you do the research, craft a proposal and approach the appropriate governance structures.

However, a peace-time approach may not always be best.

One of the more creative 'war-time' approaches I am aware of was the #Shackville protest at UCT in 2016. A group of students erected a shack between Fuller Hall and Smuts Hall on UCT campus in protest of an alleged accommodation crisis. Of course, erecting a shack in the middle of a UCT parking lot is quite a disruptive approach. However, the symbolism of bringing a shack from the Cape Flats, which you can see in the distance from UCT, and putting it right in the face of the university in between Smuts and Fuller, is impressively masterful in its imagery, even if technically it is unlawful.

In this scenario, a group of students stepped outside the bounds of the governance committees that I so often tried to work through, and all of a sudden the issue of access to accommodation at UCT had far more impetus than it would have had if that same student group had written a proposal and gone to sit on a committee to discuss it.

My personal approach was to work through the university governance structures, but there was an occasion in which I used more of a 'war-time' tactic. In the 2012 SRC, Fadzai Chitiyo and I were pushing for the university library to keep study sections open 24/7. The executive director who could make the decision vehemently opposed the proposal. She made her opposing case using a variety of practical difficulties which Fadzai and I thought could be easily overcome. In the last meeting we had on the matter, Fadzai and I

threatened a library sit-in after 10pm (when the library used to close). A few days later the executive director conceded and provided a reasonable timeline for making 24-hour study space available. Had we continued our original peace-time approach it is very likely that we would not have achieved the same outcome.

There is a time and place for peace-time tactics, which I mostly employed. However, there is also a time and place for what could be called 'war-time' tactics.

## Lessons

Against his experiences in the SRC and reflections on what has happened since then in student politics, Hallendorff proposes a few ways in which the SRC and student representation in university governance could be improved, including nurturing a better 'succession pipeline' into the SRC, perhaps longer SRC terms, and incentivising SRC members to do a second term.

I would want there to be longer terms and more thinking through a pipeline of succession. Unfortunately, a pipeline of succession is difficult to achieve because we can never know who the next group of leaders will be. Regardless, I would like there to be more careful thought given to the next group of leaders. Ideally, upcoming leaders should be sitting on relevant committees, understanding relevant university policies, meeting relevant people at the university and so forth, such that your first quarter as an SRC member is not spent working out how everything works.

A major benefit for me during my second term on the SRC was the knowledge I had gained from my first term. Towards the middle of my first term, when I decided that I wanted to run again, I started positioning myself to build up my knowledge base. I agreed to fill in for other SRC members at committee meetings when people weren't available. I put my hand up for things that other SRC members were trying to get out of because it was coming towards the end of the year. As a result, I had already attended a Council meeting before I became president. I had already sat on the finance committee and the undergraduate student funding committee. I had already had a couple of engagements with the vice-chancellor, Dr Price.

I also think there could be much better coordination between SRCs, perhaps via SAUS, to deal with important issue on a national stage. Longer terms would also help achieve better national coordination.

If these are some of Hallendorff's proposals for improving student governance, when asked what lessons about leadership he would like to share with future student leaders, he mentions three leadership traits:

First, be patient. I think sometimes student leaders will want to react very quickly to criticism or get something done quickly, perhaps haphazardly, before it has been thought through carefully enough.

Secondly, be humble. Not just humble in your general attitude but be humble enough to change your mind when presented with a good reason to do so. It's important not to stick to your guns just because an idea was yours initially.

Thirdly, have the strength to believe in and take an unpopular stand on issues that you are fighting for.

In summary: be patient, be humble, believe, and take a stand. And of course, work hard. An SRC has to be abreast of a large number of issues facing students and it is hard work to be effective.

## **The impact of the student leadership experience**

Looking back five years since he was in the SRC, Hallendorff notes a number of key learnings from the time. He particularly emphasises that the student leadership experience has made him much more socially conscious.

### **Impact on personal and political attitudes**

I think student leadership helped me to gain a much wider perspective on the experiences of a much broader spectrum of South Africans, which I certainly did not have before student leadership, and definitely would not have now without student leadership.

### **Impact on potential career or political trajectory**

A public service career at some point remains a possibility for me. My leaning is certainly, in part, borne out of the hugely positive experiences I had as a student leader.

# chapter 11

## Hlomela Bucwa

Nelson Mandela University,  
SRC public relations officer 2013/14, SRC president 2014/15

*Thierry M. Luescher & Hlomela Bucwa*

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### **Brief biography**

In November 2016, Hlomela Bucwa was sworn into parliament to represent the Democratic Alliance [DA] in the National Assembly. She was then still completing her final year LLB at Nelson Mandela University. When this interview was conducted, Bucwa was the youngest member of the National Assembly. Since 2019, she is working for the office of the Democratic Alliance and has become the political assistant to DA members of the provincial legislature in the Eastern Cape. Bucwa has recently obtained her LLB from Nelson Mandela University. She seeks to pursue a master's degree in public administration in the future.

This chapter is based on an interview conducted by Thierry Luescher on 11 September 2018.

### **Early influences**

When I interviewed Hlomela Bucwa in Parliament, she was just in between portfolio committee meetings. Settling down to reflect about her SRC leadership experience at Nelson Mandela University (NMU), she started by explaining what drives her commitment to be a youth leader.

I was always someone who has been passionate particularly about communal growth and making a difference. Having been born and raised in a township, there's always been a lot of issues. So, I told myself given the circumstances which I was born into that I would focus at school to become a doctor and just save the next person. Among the subjects I chose was history because I thought it will be an easy thing to get out of the way, because I wanted to focus on maths and science. To my surprise it was actually challenging but not academically but in terms of my understanding of how society operates. It challenged me as a person to dig deep inside, prepared me to understand that as a young person and as a leader you have to read and understand policies.

## **Coming to university and becoming politically active**

Bucwa recalls her first year at NMU, starting an LLB degree and wanting to develop herself holistically. She became involved in the debating society and by engaging with fellow students, her university environment, and her reading, she realised that there were a number of things that needed to change in her faculty and the university.

I got to varsity and in the first year I wanted to do everything except for politics because of the stigma that politicians are corrupt and they fight to go out there to empower themselves and not fulfil the mandate.

As part of the debating society, the law society toast masters school at the Nelson Mandela University in my first year in 2011, I saw people with the Golden Key and I said to myself, I want to become a part of that. I wanted to develop myself holistically, not just in books but to be holistic in terms of how you relate to society and others. I wanted to study law because I wanted to become a human rights lawyer, so I felt I'm not going to be standing there and scribbling in court, I need to debate and I need to articulate myself.

I was studying law from my first year and I did my LLB – that woke me to challenge the status quo to want to become a better human being and engage with fellow student leaders, particularly seeing some of the plight that students found themselves in. I took it then upon me to become involved actively; not in politics still, but in terms of saying how do we change the policies of the institutions, through the law society; how to challenge the law faculty to become more diverse, to become more accountable and to become more transparent.

By the time Bucwa was doing her third year of LLB, she was deeply involved in the student organisation of the NMU law faculty:

I was the deputy chairperson of the Law Student Society in 2013 and I was also the deputy chair of the ILSA, the International Law Student Association.

So, I was quite involved in that capacity and for me that's where the passion was evoked to understand that in fact there is power and you can use politics as a tool to bring about the change that you seek. And it's not about the stigmatisation and stereotypes [of politicians being corrupt], but about what can you bring and be the difference.

She had her first achievements in terms of making a difference, which inspired her to do more all the way to becoming SRC president.

My first achievement was as part of the Law Student Society. I was treasurer so I would see a couple of students who did not have food and some struggles and some were sleeping in the computer labs. So, I said: 'Guys, lets raise funds!' So, we raised R5 000 at the time and it was much because it was my first project. And we went to the street and the robots and we asked for donations like in a RAG.

To give that to a senior student who looks at you with so much gratitude ... it makes you understand that your age at times has no impact. When you get the success story later and someone invites you to their graduation and tells you that because of that one meal you gave me hope and you gave me understanding that I need to continue ... So, I went to that graduation crying saying, like, did I really do that? But to feel that I contributed to someone to achieving their goal, it's what inspired me to continue to do more.

I think my ultimate favourite it must have been in the SRC as president having the ability to raise over R9 million to help student funding, and we raised R4.2 million for bail-out funding for students who have a debt and can't register for the next year. You find that someone wants to continue with the diploma but where can you apply with, who is going to give you a proper job? So, for me that was a highlight.

## **Becoming involved in the SRC**

Bucwa was elected to the NMU SRC as public relations officer in 2014 and did her second term in the SRC as SRC president in 2015. In both cases she ran as a member of the Democratic Alliance Students Organisation (DASO). Her first term in the SRC DASO was in the 'opposition'; in her second term, DASO was in the majority.

### **Partisan politics, the structure of the SRC and portfolios**

Bucwa explains how portfolios are allocated in the SRC according to party affiliation. Those of the organisation that got the majority of SRC seats – the organisation 'in governance' as she calls it – will get the most desirable portfolios, while members 'in opposition' will be allocated more marginal portfolios.

We've got about 21 central SRC members, which is the executive; faculty council, composed of faculty reps and one person becomes an academic officer; Oppidani Council, which deals with the issues of students off campus; we've got your public relations, transformation and community development and safety officers. These are the positions which are given to an opposition and because no one wants them. They just threw that at us; so, I was the public relations officer in my first term in 2014.

Bucwa also recalls how DASO lost the majority in the SRC election in 2013 after having cancelled a major 'bash' and other mishaps. For her, this was a moment where she realised that she loved her organisation, which put the students' well-being before the likely consequence of the organisation becoming unpopular.

DASO was in governance in 2013, and there was an intervarsity party that collapsed due to the weather as it was outside. So, you know, DASO and the SRC took the decision – that's where I realised that I love my organisation – it took the principled decision that we would rather lose the elections than put the lives of students at risk. Hailstorms are coming; we are outdoors with a tent that is collapsing. So, if people want to throw stones or whatever, so be it. Let's rather cancel this event and students must be transported to go home. And people were losing it and they threw bottles and all of that. It was chaos! – 'Pay back the money!' by the time EFF had already been saying – 'Pay back the money'. So, because of that and there was also promise to have tablet devices which were delayed, and so we lost that election in 2013 so you can imagine. SASCO won.

The experience of losing the election as part of the DASO team for 2013 and ending up as an opposition member was humbling, yet it made Bucwa also reflect and strengthen her resolve to continue in student politics, even against the wishes of her parents.

And to me that was a disappointment because I always contested and won things, from Law Student Society my first year I made it to the executive. So, it was very strange to experience being part of a team or campaign and lose. It humbles you; it makes you sit back and say, where did I go wrong and where can I improve? But more importantly it strengthens your belief in something – was I really interested in this politics thing? – because I could have chosen to leave it. My parents were saying: 'Why are you putting yourself into this? You are wasting your time!' So, I say to them I will never start something that I am not gonna finish. So, I made a commitment and I promised myself and I was campaigning to people. saying this is what I will change. So even if I'm in a different scope let me rather go.



## **SRC internal organisation**

### **Induction into SRC: DASO and Student Affairs**

The student governance has its own sort of a strategic planning that just tells you how the processes take place. And that was one of the gaps that we identify when I was the SRC 2014.

We started a training programme in June which is now a common thing as in DASO and has been adapted nationally, but we have a leadership training form – we said, ‘Look this is not fair that now we found ourselves in the Students’ Representative Council and we have to sit with the VC and at ManCord and we have no particular training and understanding how do we do this.’

We did this as DASO not as NMU Student Affairs; we would write to them to say look we think a more comprehensive training will be great, because we do have an induction. So, we get inducted.

Induction is there so the vice-chancellor comes and most of management to acknowledge you as SRC, and you take an oath basically. To say that we as the SRC students will abide by the constitution of the SRC and the rules of the institution and etc.

### **Handover from one political organisation to the other**

Like other student leaders, Bucwa also resents the lack of handover from one SRC to another when a different student organisation wins the elections, as it ultimately is not in the interests of students.

In 2013 we had a handover because it was our peoples that were in governance before but there was no official handover in 2014 when I go into SRC presidency; there was no official handover. In fact, we found the office was locked and we had to go to get a locksmith to come and open the SRC office, just because there was no access.

And this is one of the things: the intolerance of student leaders particularly from different political parties is a huge problem, because it sets you back ... It’s not only about you and the party loss, but think about the impact it has on students who are coming to get access and who are coming to knock at the door and there is no one there. So, there is someone who might have a huge predicament but there is no service or assistance.

And when I look at it, if the SRC fails, it does not fail the party, it fails the students and that’s a huge impact on the responsibility that they have. So, I fundamentally believe in running the induction. I left our files there and decided to be mature about it. It’s fine: here is access to the emails to say this is how we do it.

## The role of student parliament

In the problematic handover process from one SRC to the next, the student parliament can play a positive role as it reports on matters that remain to be addressed.

For my portfolio I did not get anything; no report from the previous SRC. But what we had was a report from the student parliament, which talked about how things are going to be resolved, etc. and that's the other thing of accountability which was lacking.

## SRC performance management and accountability

Bucwa outlines how she came into her second term as SRC President and developed a strategic plan for the SRC. As a matter of accountability, she would use this plan and the performance indicators she established to report to students and student parliament on her SRC's progress.

When I became SRC President I remember that in November and December, I was busy drafting a strategic document of what are my key objectives that I was going to achieve: access and success, social cohesion, accommodation, etc. ... how do I wish to transition the SRC ... Then everyone was wondering and asking: 'Why are you doing this thing? We never had this.'

But that's how we became so effective, because we were operating on the basis of that. I had a mission and vision and core values I wanted to look at, and the strategic objectives. And every month we would try to give an update to students, and every quarter you will have an SRC term report from the president to say, this is where we are, this is what we are doing. And I realised, 'Oh well, this is not working,' and I did another one for the second semester. And I had to say: 'Here is the revised strategic document.' And you know, that is the culture.

I took that to parliament because I had to also present a presidential report to parliament. I presented that. And there was an organisational report from the SRC secretary; there was financial report; and we would make those public on a quarterly basis. I would have the strategic report, the organisational and financial report. Because the money of the university is actually subsidised; and it is students' money. So we have to account to them and have correspondence about it.

## Student parliament

The parliament is composed of all the student societies; all the structures get a delegation, and political parties will have four because we have four different campuses and each would have a chairperson.

## Campus SRCs

We did not have campus SRCs, but the new constitution now apparently wants campus SRCs. This coming election would have campus SRC elections. The thing is with us our campuses are not that much far; you walk from north to south, it's about five minutes, and Second Avenue is literally about 10 minutes' drive. Then the only further one is Missiondale, which is in the location, eBhayi.

## Keeping in touch with students: meetings, walkabouts, emails, SMS, social media

Bucwa explains the various ways in which her SRC of 2015 stayed in touch with students, using multiple means: SRC indabas, SRC campus visits and social media.

We held SRC indabas on a quarterly basis but also every month I would plan a visit to a campus: actually it will be twice because one will be for the SRC and one for the party. I would brand it so that we associate with the achievements with the organisation so we gain our strength. It is very important for me to be always on the ground, because it keeps me abreast on what the challenges are. And because sometimes you could easily get carried away sitting in the office – you become too organisationally involved and you become administrators now more than representatives.

We had those monthly walkabouts and visits to the residences and particularly off-campus residences because some students are being exploited and being subjected to inhumane conditions because they can't afford proper accommodation, so I wanted to check those statuses and support them.

We had quarterly mass emails to students; we also did try some SMSs but it cost us.

I also had to open my Facebook account to everyone and people would want to flock ... The SRC also had a Facebook account, Twitter account, and Instagram account so that people can communicate. [Bucwa laughs] We had those accounts and we'd get DMs there and inboxes ... So, we had a system that basically myself and the secretary would have access to those pages and immediately respond ... the people must be responded to within 48 hours. That would help to be responsive as well because sometimes people can't access their emails, because they are far or whatever situation that might be.

## Co-operative governance and the power of the SRC

Upon becoming an SRC member, Bucwa realised that the SRC represents students in a number of important governance structures and committees and therefore has the power to influence decision-making at the university.

We realised how powerful the SRC is: We sat on the transformation committee, we sat on Senate, Council, the safety committee, the library committee, there was the IF – the Institutional Forum which makes critical decisions – we even sat on the tender committee. We sat on the committee dealing with screening the applications when we were looking for the new DVC and we sat on the selection panel as well. We sat in most ManCord and we had quarterly ManCord meetings with management.

The university also had a Student Support Services Council [SSSC], so the SRC executive met once a month with the dean of students, the director of student governance, the officer of student housing and residences as well.

So, we did have representation.

And then, the faculty reps will sit on faculty boards.

What we further advocated for that year was representation in the committees dealing with appeals and exclusion because there was previously no students. And that helped to decrease the exclusion rate, especially in that year. There was a bit of accountability. For example, there was a case in law where we took a principled decision that if a case [of exclusion] is because the student is on NSFAS, for financial reasons, they should not be excluded because what was happening with the centralisation of NSFAS was that students were not getting allowances for several months, not getting book allowances, and so forth – so that's still a problem till now. And that made a huge impact: if we did not have a student leader there who understands the dynamics, we would not be able to convince the dean and also the panel of lawyers there.

## **Key achievements and challenges**

Bucwa's key achievements in the NMU SRC relate to matters of student finances: fundraising money for students and, in the previous year, leading a small march on financial aid which raised a lot of awareness. Conversely, key challenges relate to student politics and governance itself, SRC maladministration and insufficient financial oversight on the part of Student Affairs over the SRC.

### **Fundraising R9 million in two months**

First and foremost, Bucwa considers fundraising as her SRC's key achievement while she was president:

Having the ability to raise over nine million to help student funding – for me that was a highlight! We raised R4.2 million for bail-outs because we know if you have a debt you can't register for the next year; and at that time BTech students didn't have funding. You find that someone wants to continue with the diploma but where can you apply with, who is going to give you a proper job?

So, we needed to raise some funds, and we raised the funds with my team in like less than two months. Initially what we did, we had a budget as SRC of R3 million. And we asked ourselves: what is our mandate? Is it simply to host parties while we have a national crisis right now, where NSFAS just became centralised and that would have excluded a lot of people? So, we said let's rather take R400 000 that we have and let's go there to the institution and to Council and challenge them.

We went to our VC – very vague and very scared – and we said: 'Look we've got this amount of money. Here is a list of individuals who are getting excluded, here are the photos of the young pupils who have to pack their bags and go home. You and the institution you can double this amount because you have a responsibility as a leader.'

We did not take for granted the documents of the Council or SRC policy and that we could also request the financial statements because this is a public institution, and then would see how much reserves you have. So we challenged them with that and they gave the funds and so we found ourselves with R1.2 million and we went to NSFAS and we said this is your fault, to the Department of Finance and the institutions and that's how we got to accumulate that amount of money, because we challenged everyone. It was about giving the little that you can and with that so many people's dreams were not going to be delayed or even denied.

### **Financial aid and NSFAS march**

This links to her first SRC term when in 2014 she led a march on financial aid and NSFAS in July, and her personal experience of having been funded by an NMU loan in her final year.

The protest I led the year before – but it was not a protest it was a march because we had applied for permission and all – was a march on financial aid and NSFAS because they had no allocations given to students by July 2014. So, we had a march. It looked like a joke to some people because there was like 50 of us.

But the impact it had when we posted that thing on social media, when we attached the memorandum, the university responded. And our office was flocking with thousands of students who were saying, 'I have a problem, here is my name can I sign this,' etc. So, they had access to the Facebook account which had about 14 000 likes.

### **Problems with student governance**

Bucwa mentions two matters that she experienced as problematic with student governance: that some students would undermine the SRC's authority, and that there was insufficient oversight by Student Affairs over SRC spending.

I was so frustrated with student governance. I think if people want to be politicians, they must be politicians. I make a case in point: In #FeesMustFall there was a complete isolation and disacknowledgement of the SRC. People who were part of the movement now would stand up and ask: 'Elected by who? And on whose mandate are you speaking?' Hence you find that there were quarrels in the student body respectively. So, for me it's something that is very problematic in the student governance as a whole.

I think for me it is important to have principled individuals in the student governance bodies: from the dean to the directors and to the deputies. The maladministration that takes place is ridiculous! To come to the SRC with the debt of over R50 000 in debt from the previous year and you starting off with that. You go through the statements and you see approved hotel rooms, bars, cars hired. So those are the things I would really like to extract.

It is a failure of Student Affairs to have a proper oversight. We had a budget of R3 million! Imagine you had never seen so much money and you've got access, so there needs to be proper oversight. I didn't even have a cheque book, but you'll go to our office and say look we need this and make submission that we would approve, there was a budget.

## **Reflecting on #FeesMustFall**

### **NSFAS dysfunctionality as a cause of #FeesMustFall**

When asked about the causes of #FeesMustFall, Bucwa stated emphatically that NSFAS was a major cause: 'NSFAS dysfunctionality is the correct word.' Being a member of the National Assembly when she was interviewed in 2018, Bucwa further intimated the following:

We had a statement today by the minister stating that NSFAS is now under administration. I think it is unfair that it took so long for the issue to be picked up. We felt it in 2015 and that's what instigated us to raise those funds. We saw the challenge.

What we always instilled in ourselves was to become solution-driven leaders, leaders who propose – and that is something that our management always appreciated – yes, we would howl, then tell you what the problem is, and then we would propose a solution to it, because that is very critical; but at the end of the day it can't be that there's people who have been appointed as administrators and we have to do the work for them. It's ridiculous. The SRC is not there to do the admin of NSFAS.

Now you take a system: Nelson Mandela University was one of the best when it comes to financial aid distribution. That's why they were put in the pilot project to say: give us your best practices and let us adopt them. Now you find that you place this institution under a centralised system in an office

of just 20 people and that supposed to see over 150 000 students – it was problematic!

You could call the call centre for an hour! How do you expect a person who is sitting back at home in Lusikisiki to be on the phone for an hour? It's ridiculous! You are asking them to submit things online and they don't even have smart phones – how much more now they have to walk to the post office to email and scan. So, for me it lacks a human understanding of the digital divide dynamics of what is happening on the ground. And it's all got to move with transition to a technological world, etc. but if your basic principles and processes are not adopted – it's problematic!

Secondly, there's always an expectation created that it's for all: 'We can fund everyone, please come.' But that's not what the reality is, they don't have money. And the reason why a lot of people don't pay back is because they feel like I was frustrated with this process or whatever.

So, we had those challenges. And we tried to curb it. And then #FeesMustFall started.

### **Leadership approach during #FeesMustFall**

I think there was not a more testing time in my leadership than that. I understood the works; I understood the dynamics of students; I understood the frustration of the students because I have been there trying to assist. And we wanted to also retaliate. But we also came from a political party that had a different stance. We don't believe in shutdowns; we believe in resolutions and submitting proposals, and that the rights of others should not be suppressed because of a minority. And you find yourself in an institution like NMU that has a bit of inequalities and imbalances in itself, so indeed some issues would not affect everyone. Because now the response is so aggressive and people are not giving others the opportunity to answer and to understand what is the course of frustration. It just, you know, blew up!

The day #FeesMustFall started we were going to have the VC awards. I was part of the outgoing SRC. Handover had not happened yet. We had the SRC election in September, and I think two weeks later #FeesMustFall started. But if you don't take control of this thing and show leadership, people will riot. And I asked: why do they want to protest, this is an issue of Wits? But others said: 'We want to show solidarity.'

#FeesMustFall – I agree in principle, and we have made submissions and that time we were busy with the fee negotiation process, negotiating an increment, trying to meet the institution halfway: 'This must not be there; no registration fees; there must be additional residence bills, there must be adequate shuttles ...' So, we were basically trying to negotiate and understand that indeed, that there is no way that the institution can't increase. Once you sit in Council you realise what actually happens and you actually say that 'oh shuttles cost 15 million'.

So, I went to this meeting and imagine I was the only female in this group of males. So we have a meeting unplanned then they decide they want to go crash the VC awards – Oh God Jesus! I mean I'm in front of this thing and I get a call from a constituency leader: 'What is this? Why are you shutting down the school!?' So, I was like: 'Look, I'm still the SRC president. What I fear is that we will let go of the issue because we don't believe in shutdowns, then we allow anarchy; but if the SRC is there perhaps campus would be calmer.' And also we are the ones who are going to be held accountable. And we are the ones who people would listen to.

I still was sleeping and to be woken up at five and the bushes were already burning. And that is where leadership is critical. To say: 'Look, the issue is genuine and don't delegitimise the issue because of the manner that we do it in. So we are going to sit here in peace. And so noone should ill-treat you if you are sitting down here. We are singing, and we are not burning anything, and we doing our own thing.'

And it was a tough time because you sit there in the heat and people say: 'No, this is unfair.' And there are people chirping, saying: 'No, you are useless.' But we've been there since January and we understood the issue. There was personal abuse when it comes to #FeesMustFall. There are people who hijack #FeesMustFall. Then it kills the true essence of what you are trying to fight for.

### **#RhodesMustFall, dialogues and language policy**

Bucwa also reflected on the impact of the #RhodesMustFall campaign on student politics at NMU.

In March there was #RhodesMus Fall; it touched something. At NMU, there wasn't an institutional process following #RhodesMustFall; there were the transformation dialogues; there were discussions; to incorporate something in the curriculum: philosophy, history, or whatever, what teaches people who we are. And that this should be in the first year that you understand the dynamics. But there was nothing to the extent like it was with UCT.

At George campus, because George is more Afrikaans, we did challenge the language policy. I remember we had a meeting and they said no there is simultaneous interpretation in Xhosa and Afrikaans and we made a note to students that if you're struggling ... Hence I said we were very solution-driven. And we did believe that if you have an SRC why should you be out of class? It was about being proactive.

### **Key moments in 2015**

#### *The transformation summit*

When asked about her experience of the second higher education transformation summit from 15 to 17 October 2015, which immediately preceded the national



shutdown as part of the #FeesMustFall campaign, Bucwa recalled the following:

I was there and it was an interesting time, in all honesty. And it started then. There was a lady that stood up and started expressing the issue involved, fees, etc. And we were told let's go and caucus. And the only people from the DA was myself and I think Greg at the time from UCT. And we agreed in principle on the issue of no increase in funds and how do we adopt a system that can incorporate to pay for the rest of those who can't afford.

But it was a bit hostile – like we need to attack these people 'basiqhela kakubi' [isiXhosa for 'they are taking us for a ride'] and all of those things. And I was like: 'Wow, let's not lose focus! What is it that we really want to achieve? Do we want to start a revolution?' I know Frantz Fanon says: 'Each generation must discover its mission.' But I don't want a point where the means actually violate the very thing that we are trying to achieve.

I remember when they were saying that a woman must talk, and 'Hlohlo you will be speaking', and I was like, 'No, why must I speak?' 'Because you are a leader!' But it was also unifying and what I wanted to emphasise is that let's not be divided; let's be unified as student leaders and let's present the issues. But there was a sense of a 'them-us' in the presence – them being the minister and VCs; and we the movements, and the movements were very vocal: #RhodesMustFall, #OpenStellenbosch at the time, and I forget the other. So it was great being on that platform and to experience and seeing what exactly is the turmoil and the frustration.

#### *Meeting the minister at the transformation summit*

The meeting with the minister was very heated, no one wanted to hear anything from him. We were like: 'Ah, this is nonsense!' and we were not listening. Firstly, what we wanted to do, was like, 'Chief, if you don't resolve this thing now you'll see what happens tomorrow.' So he says: 'No I don't have authority hana hana president.' And we said: 'Okay sure.' We'll see, and then: the shutdown. And that was a dominant thing. We even had a WhatsApp group as SRC presidents.

And then there was also a frustration with SAUS because they were supposed to be representing us; they sit with these guys all the time. They just come as: 'Comrades, fear nothing, we are with you.'

#### *Party politics and the NMU shutdown 2015*

At NMU, I was forced to shut down. Because remember it was also political, as a SASCO campaign. I got a call saying that if you don't take up this thing, it might reflect badly on the party as though we were anti, that we are not pro-poor, and we are anti-black, and that's why we do not want to support. So, I stood there and I got burnt by the sun for days.

### *Meeting the president at the Union Buildings*

I remember the meeting with the president in the Union Buildings as well; the people were saying: 'Why did you go?' Wits had released a statement on the day that they are not going, so now it looks as if some of us are sell-outs for going to the meeting. But my secretary-general was there and had to take charge of everything. I remember that we had to wait outside and someone sings ... we are going to throw him with stones, and the security had to say he's not coming.

For me it was heart-breaking then, because we were standing on this side and police were shooting at our students from across. And for me this was disheartening because you are a leader, you are prepared to be at the forefront and to lead them, and not being told to move aside. That's when I felt that this is just tripe and there's nothing that this is going to achieve.

We are students of institutions of higher learning and there is no such thing as zero per cent increase – how does anything increase by zero? There was not even the minister of finance, so who's going to tell us if this thing is sustainable and what's the proposed solution to move forward? Hence I was saying that this was just to show face, to calm us down, that we've met the president, but nothing was going to be resolved.

### *#FeesMustFall 2016 and the trauma of it*

Hence in 2016 again it got worse. Actually that was the worst, when people had to be now study via e-learning, which was an impact for a child who stays in Motherwell, for example, where the only access to a wifi you can get is to go to a Motherwell library. There were people who suffered and people who were traumatised who were sleeping in jail.

There was a day when I was on campus and cops came inside the premises and getting into the residences and I was like, 'Where are we going to be safe now?' So, there was a bit of trauma that came with it.

I would have hoped that we actually achieve more tangible solutions for the change that we want to see. Because even now, this fallacy of a free education for first-years but what happens when you are in your second year, and your third year? And hence we continue to have cases like what happened in Bloemfontein, where a student decides to take her own life because the system is failing.

## **The impact of the student leadership experience**

### **Impact on academic performance**

You can imagine from coming from the Golden Key and I was the academics office of the Golden Key and to finishing my degree two years later. That is the structure. Yes, it had a huge impact, I mean as an A-student I was looking

very high – jobs from the top law firms, which has great exposure and I made a couple of advocacy. But when you get to that there's hardly any time to go to class, to focus fully on your studies because you have to be on the ground.

### **Impact on career trajectory, political attitudes and active citizenship**

I don't think I should be where I am today without it. It has formed me and contributed to the strong, independent, critical thinker I am today. It has made me understand that an issue might not affect me today, but I don't know where I will be tomorrow. It made me rise above my own individualistic concerns for the greater good of the society.

It has made me understand how to balance life, and how to be a social human being, but also know that sometimes you need to retreat and be by myself. To understand that I can have work, I can have family, I can have relations, and I can achieve what I want to achieve.

But also it has made me not to give up, because there were many times that I felt this is too much or I'm tired or – but it made me to keep going stronger and stronger – like I said there is nothing more humbling than the post I get from people saying: 'Look you are my inspiration, I look up to you, thank you for being the person you are.' Or someone saying, 'Hey Sis, I just want to tell you that I've got a job; you might not remember me but you gave me that fund in 2015 and then I graduated.' I would be like 'Wow!' – Like: 'Please my mom would like to meet you and we want to come back and thank you.' I mean I'm a 21 year old and here is a parent coming at me to say, 'Look my child didn't have fees and has been saved by your efforts.' Or even a plea from the parent; you understand that you have a huge responsibility. So those things have sustained me to understand that sometimes it's not even who you are that matters or where you come from; but if you are determined you can be someone who people look into your eyes.

So, it had a huge impact and responsibility as well. Because at that time, it was like I couldn't go party like a normal, a 19 year old or do certain things; be careful who is your partner, etc. To find myself in the space I am today, I'm more comfortable because I understand the implications, I understand I'm a public representative and the people look unto you.

### **Impact on personal and family life**

Oh, my bae disappeared thanks to student politics! I never had time, thanks to student politics, I never had time! It happened, there's no joke about it. If you don't have a strong support base, you are not going to make it – you need it. So, my parents didn't agree with it; after all I was sent out to study, and now what is this politics thing?! Now they are like 'Ah – mhm' – I made a right choice. But at the time it didn't seem quite right.

I've got a great relationship with my parents, because I would often come home tired or cry to them, so they were a source of strength to me. Family, I've drawn closest with most of them now.

I've lost a lot of friends in the process because we don't all think alike and I don't like selfish people – not to say you must give your all – I also don't have time. But there are also strong relationships that I sustained.

At a personal level, I mean personally I'm fine. I think God has sustained me this far and also my faith has brought me to some sanity in this chaotic world we are in. I'm quite happy with where I am.

## **Closing remarks**

Bucwa mentions in closing some of her convictions and what it means for her to be the youngest member of the National Assembly now, and being a black woman in politics. On the one hand she says that 'identity politics are very crucial ... being known, or different'; on the other hand, Bucwa asserts that

I want to be the best candidate – not because I'm black or female – [but] because this is the most competent person. I try to always respond and not see myself as a victim, and I know I'm previously disadvantaged but I try to stay away from that stereotype of mindset. But when you are in an environment as complex like politics, which is male dominated, your voice sometimes is not appreciated as much.

# chapter 12

## Vuyani Ceassario Sokhaba

University of the Western Cape,  
SRC deputy secretary-general 2013/14, SRC president 2014/15

*Thierry M. Luescher & Vuyani C. Sokhaba*

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### Brief biography

Since July 2018, Vuyani Sokhaba has worked at the Northern Cape Department of Roads and Public Works. Prior to that he was at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) doing postgraduate studies. Sokhaba has a BA in political science and a BA(Hons) in history from UWC.

This chapter is based on an interview conducted by Thierry Luescher on 21 September 2018.

### Early influences

Vuyani Sokhaba grew up in Upington, Northern Cape, in a family that was closely involved in the liberation struggle. In addition, Paballelo Senior Secondary School in Upington where he schooled has a history of learners being politically aware and active.

I was raised in an activist family, who were active participants in the struggle for national liberation and involved in the cultural revolution in our community and town, from renowned local community footballers to renowned and revered boxers. The little town, and in particular my local community of Paballelo, where I was born and raised in, was like many other black townships in South Africa, menaced by constant state-sponsored repression and socio-

economic disparities. Between 1983 and 1986, the residents of Upington's African township of Paballelo were most active in the struggle against rent increases, taxes, the tricameral constitutional reforms, and their resistance to the arrest of local activists.

What is today known in the annals of South African resistance history as the Upington 26 and later Upington 14: The death of Tshenolo Lucas Sethwala, a resident of Paballelo, had set off a series of events, which led to the imposition of the death penalty; this was to follow as the fate of those who would eventually make up the 25 (later to be known as the Upington 26). It was for the first time in the history of South African trials that 25 or more people were convicted for the death of a single person; dramatically placing Paballelo at the centre of attention in the Northern Cape and subsequently the world. The standard procedure under which the 25 accused were charged with was the doctrine of common purpose.

I am a product of that historical heritage which played a huge role in the evolution of my revolutionary conscious; I understood the plight and strife of our people from an early age. My coming of age or as the German translation would have it, my personal *bildungsroman*, is as a result of my family and community's collective consciousness.

### Reading about politics and first university experiences

Sokhaba did his matric in 2005. After completing schooling, during his early university years, he also started reading vigorously about South African political history, political economy and philosophy, which shaped his political views.

I did my matric in 2005. Between those years I wasn't much politically awakened, but I was aware at least of what was going on around me. I started picking up a book in one of my father's collection, a book titled *The Reflections on the Origins of Black Consciousness in South Africa* by Themba Sono. The book had a special chapter on Biko, the history of SASO, and white liberalism. Biko argues that white South Africans who opposed apartheid still benefited from racial privilege and could not be the engines of meaningful political change. The difficult task of creating a more just and equitable form of governance instead depended upon the political activities of those most marginalised under apartheid rule, namely, the black majority population. So, I started becoming aware about young people and students being in this particular struggle.

In 2006, I started my university education at the University of Johannesburg [UJ], at Doornfontein campus. I studied sport science because I couldn't get into Wits. My father worked at Wits University at the Business School in Parktown as an HR official. But we applied late actually, and then I got a place at UJ.

My debut into student politics was one of a lonely journey into the crevice of political organisation; I became aware of the organisation as a fraternity of

the conscious that merged at a common point. UJ at that time presented to me an opportunity to unbundle many entangled meanings of activism and organisation. Though at the time I may not have been part of the ‘cohort of noticeables’ on campus as I would later turn out to be at UWC, I was still presented with a window of opportunity to understand the common cause of the organisation.

I could learn later that the journey to discover new paths was mostly done through seeing with new eyes and this was ignited by an early qualification made by Marcel Proust, a French novelist, critic and essayist, who said: ‘The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new lands but seeing with new eyes.’

I spent most of my time between 2006 and 2008 immersed in historical literature, biographical in particular. It was through reading these biographies that I would come to understand what it took for those who fought for our freedom.

Between 2009 and 2011 I went through an academic hiatus due to financial challenges that led me to drop my studies altogether. I was, however, fortunate to have had the drive for academics and that drive kept me believing in my return to university to pursue my studies.

In the period of my hiatus I was involved in social movements, grassroots socialist organisations, through my association with Khanya College, a social justice movement based in Johannesburg, under the stewardship of socialist activist Oupa Lehulere. This was the time I got into heavy contact with Marxist literature. This changed my world outlook; I started understanding the underlying contradictions of our social existence. Through this interchange, like Dambudzo Marechera opined in *The House of Hunger*, ‘there was not an oasis of thought which we did not lick dry’,<sup>53</sup> and this reference to me was, of course, related to my *weltanschauung*.

## Getting involved at UWC

Sokhaba recalls how he started at UWC while still reading at a high level and debating with other student leaders. He joined the ANCYL, SASCO, the YCL and he eventually became a candidate for the central house committee, which is the student body representing residence students at the university.

I started at UWC in 2011. I did a BA degree. I majored in politics and communication and in English literature.

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53 Marechera, Dambudzo (2009). *The House of Hunger*. London: Pearson Education.

The history of the University of the Western Cape, as a previously segregated institution for a particular race of people, first exclusively for African coloured and later became an integrated institution for both African coloured and African black South Africans, was one of the first signposts that intrigued and impressed me. I was also largely drawn by its heroic standing against the apartheid regime. UWC coalesced its academic standing with the historic mission of the national liberation struggle; it empathised with the popular resistance of the 80s.

It did not take me long to be immersed in the local campus politics: I formally joined the Progressive Youth Alliance structures made up of the African National Congress Youth League, Young Communist League of South Africa and the South African Student Congress [ANCYL, YCLSA and SASCO]. I was further roped into the student governance structures: I first served as the general secretary of the central house committee, in short known as the CHC, a student governing structure responsible for all residences of the university, ensuring that all accommodation matters concerning students be addressed and being a strong advocate for student dignity in the residences of the university.

As I established myself in the broader student movement and as I subsequently got elected into the SRC as the deputy secretary-general 2013/14, and after my first term I was elected overwhelmingly together with my organisation, SASCO, to take over the mandate as president of the SRC during the period 2014 to 2015, I literally came full circle because all these developments coincided with my academic progression.

By the time I became SRC president, I registered for my master's in history and I was also a history tutor for first-years. The contribution by UWC became far-reaching; it broadened both my intellectual, personal and social scope. The relations I established amongst the student base and with my comrades were a joyful contradiction, though some contradictions even followed one well into the afterlife of active student politics. This, I would argue, was because there was a lack of understanding of the demarcation between the personal and the political; the latter was not understood as developmental.

## **The SRC and the battle of the two Brians**

A defining matter of Sokhaba's first term in the UWC SRC as deputy secretary-general was a very divisive and highly public conflict between the chair of the University Council and the university's long-standing vice-chancellor, in which the SRC also took sides.

The period between 2012 and 2013 could be considered both institutionally and politically as one of the most volatile for UWC in recent years – perhaps



with the exception of the period 2015/16 that witnessed the inferno of #FeesMustFall that spread itself quite uncomfortably across institutions of higher learning in South Africa. My debut in the SRC was characterised by a fight that stretched itself over three years; a fight that threatened to drag UWC to the brink of collapse. This was dubbed by the *Cape Times* and various other media houses as ‘the battle of the Brians’.<sup>54</sup>

In this standoff between Brian Williams, who was suspended as a member and chairperson of Council but still remained the president of the university’s Convocation, and the rector, Professor Brian O’Connell, students were caught in the cross-fire, the institution’s image was battered, the student body was divided and the SRC had to take sides.

We took the side of Brian Williams, whom we supported to win back his position as Council chair. The SRC believed at that time that the university had at its highest levels in the executive a ‘deep state’; that in the dark corners of the university laid a powerful mafia ring led by the chief financial officer of the university. The protracted battle took a sharper turn when the court ordered the university to reinstate Williams as the Council chair. Williams regained his powers and started probing into a university security tender worth R20 million that had been awarded to a security specialist company which had no prior history of rendering security services to the university.

As for me, I had never met Brian Williams before; I had never seen him before – his name was legend – I could only hear the comrades who would refer to Brian Williams or BW. But I knew very well who Brian O’Connell was. I had a lot of respect for Brian O’Connell, but also we had an idea of his leadership at the time of UWC – that it was not the intellectual left idea of UWC.

So, the battle was about what was happening within the university: the procurement of certain contracts, tender contracts and all of those things, and the building of Kovacs residence, which came before in 2012 when we were led by Christian Phiri. At the time when we became SRC, it was no more just about the Kovacs building.

And so there was this debate between the SRC and I remember Brian Williams having a great influence over that ... Even though I never met him, because he only met with the president and the secretary and with the ANC Youth League leadership.

And then we started pushing for a shutdown of the university; the first shutdown in my time of being at UWC; the first shutdown since the NSFAS strike in 2010.

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54 See, for example: Powell, I. (2014). UWC’s ‘battle of the Brians’. *Cape Argus*, 2 June; Abarder, G. (2014). Two Brians battle for soul of UWC. *Cape Times*, 6 June; Thamm, M. (2014). The life of Brians: What the hell is going on at UWC? *Daily Maverick*, 11 June.

## Orchestrating a shutdown

On a compact campus like UWC it was easy to inform students by putting up posters and organising a shutdown. As deputy secretary-general of the SRC, Sokhaba remembers how he made posters and posted them all over campus on Sunday night, ahead of the Monday shutdown.

So, in my time, the first one of the shutdowns was one that we orchestrated when we said that we are going to cancel and disrupt all classes. Brian O'Connell must go. That was in 2014. I was doing my final year with you in politics. We said Brian O'Connell must go.

Meanwhile, the comrades of the YCL started calling me in saying: 'You are actually fighting for Brian Williams? Who is Brian Williams? He wants the influence on who must become rector, and who must then have control in Council, and who must then have the whole control of the university through Council, so that he can determine.' So, I said to comrades: 'No, I don't know this guy.' All I know is the SRC statements that I have been part of drafting to the *Cape Times* and to students, the posters that we've been writing and slogans – that is the struggle.

I remember NEHAWU coming to call us into a meeting saying: 'But comrades, what are you doing?' So we explained our position to the NEHAWU provincial executive committee.

The Monday we called for a shutdown. We said: 'The revolution will not be televised.' We had those posters put up the Sunday evening ... posters that I wrote the Sunday night [laughs]. So, we printed them in A5s and posted them all over university, posted them at the main gate at Robert Sobukwe Road, posted them there by the train station where most of student come in. We proceeded to the B Block lecture theatres, we passed B Block and we went to A Block, where there was a law final-year class test. We disrupted that class. The police came, and we spread, and we started shutting down all the classes. Moving up and down, up and down. There's even a picture of mine on the front page of the *Cape Times* where I'm standing on top of a lecture table, with the students sitting and we call off the whole lecture.

## Interdict, High Court and the end of the shutdown

When the university interdicted the student leaders and the SRC, Sokhaba was one of the student leaders who appeared in the High Court. The process was sobering in that the SRC's lawyers and the judge told them to stop protesting and go back to class.

So, the university then gave us an interdict. We were 12 on the SRC, but we were 14 on the interdict. I think I still have it, the copy of the interdict given by the university to us.

And then the comrades proceeded to go speak to Brian Williams that we have an interdict, but we are more than determined to pursue this beyond the interdict. But because it would then have ramifications in terms of breaking the interdict, we needed to be prepared for defence in court. That was the process then. It was a huge fight; intense tension in the university.

We went to a law firm – I will never forget this – where we were sat down in a boardroom with one of the lawyers there – a white lady. And she asked us: ‘Okay I see the interdict, here’s the interdict, here’s what the university is saying. But are you guys telling us that we should help you to retract the whole interdict so that you can continue disrupting classes, and disrupting university traffic flow, and disrupting university operations?’ We got the discouragement: ‘Listen, we are not going to assist you, go back to class.’ So that was kind of more of an existential question. Eventually we had to go to a police station to certify and all of those things because now we were challenging the university.

My first time appearing in the Western Cape High Court in Cape Town was when Judge Yekiso was presiding over our case. Judge Yekiso – who believes highly in education and students and struggle and study – said: ‘Look guys, you guys are wasting your time and you are wasting my time. I would say that you guys must go back. I don’t want to see you in my court any more.’

I could not pin down who was actually covering our legal fees for the lawyers. But we went to court. I was never part of the meetings with comrades speaking with Brian Williams; and Brian Williams was never even at a court appearance.

So, the interdict stood but then the university said we are going to use our own disciplinary processes within our institution. So, it stood and I think it ended because then there was an issue that we should not be seen around protest actions. The shutdown ended and classes continued as usual but the tension was still there.

## Were we misled?

In the process of reflecting on the SRC’s role in the battle of the two Brians and the brief 2014 shutdown, Sokhaba can’t help but feel ambiguous about the episode and his role in it, as he is aware of rumours that some SRC members had taken bribes. But not having been part of the inner core, he does not know what really went on and what really was the motivation behind the SRC leaders’ support for BW.

One of the failures that I realised, where the turning point came consciously to me, was when I started understanding that I do not realise the struggle we are in now. Probably because I did not understand the background workings; what actually motivates us here to even go to an extent of wanting to have the rector leave. On the one side, it was the VC Brian O’Connell, ‘Manie’ Regal, the CFO, and it was Ramesh Bharuthram, the DVC. And then on the other

side, it was the SRC with Brian Williams and certain elements within the Council.<sup>55</sup>

Now this is one of the issues that were raised to me by the comrades from the YCL saying: 'We are pretty much sure that you don't know that one of the motivations out there which is being said is that these comrades are taking bribes and you are getting nothing. You are just in it for the heart but it is not actually about the heart.' But I did not think that the senior leadership was misleading. I think they believed in a particular project and they stood by it until today. When they recall, they will tell you: 'You remember what we showed you guys then which you did not want to see, this is why the university turned out this way.'

Later on in my presidency I clashed with them.

## **Becoming SRC President for 2014/15**

The aftermath of the battle of the two Brians continued to have consequences for student leadership at UWC, leading to a breakaway group of student leaders from SASCO that contested elections as ALUTA, and the disbandment of the SASCO branch leadership. Sokhaba came in as SRC president for SASCO focused on student interests and rebuilding the SRC.

### **SASCO, YCL, ALUTA and PASMA**

Partisan contestation between the student political organisations at UWC was a big feature of Vuyani's experience in student governance. This was not the UWC-typical PASMA against the Progressive Youth Alliance rivalry (see Mlungisi Bafo's chapter), but largely within the PYA itself, between SASCO, the YCL, the ANC Youth League and factions within them. Sokhaba recalls the political constellation leading up to his election as SRC president in 2014 and beyond.

In the build-up to the 2014 SRC elections, there was a huge fight between the grouping that was in the SRC and the leadership of the ANC Youth League. Because then SASCO was taken over by the comrades that I would refer to as the comrades of the YCL, the new provincial leadership was in our favour so the SASCO branch was disbanded and a branch task team was established which came from our side, the YCL. So, we then had to formulate an SRC. So, comrades said: 'Look, you come from the SRC, you will continue, but you'll continue as the president. You are going to become our presidential candidate.'

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55 See: Powell, I. (2014). UWC's 'battle of the Brians'. *Cape Argus*, 2 June.

But even before that, the comrades that I mentioned broke away out of SASCO and they formed ALUTA. They contested SASCO in that election when I was presidential candidate, so my former comrades in SASCO were in ALUTA now. They contested, and it is being said that they have been funded by Brian Williams to contest us, SASCO. But eventually we won.

In fact, we took eight seats, ALUTA took two seats, and PASMA took two seats. And that's how Lindokuhle 'Roza' Mandyoli from PASMA became the deputy president in my term, out of a discussion with the provincial executive Committee and SASCO local branch, to say that if we want to build a strong SRC, we have to use comrades' talents in each of the portfolios we are going to be giving to them. Let us not misplace each other; let Roza take this because he's a former deputy secretary also before me of the SRC. We took him just to spite ALUTA, and we gave ALUTA the two lowest portfolios in the Council. So, then I was president in 2014/15, when I started my honours, I became president.

When we formulated the new SRC, we spoke to the SRC comrades to say that we come from a hard time of the Brians, and the university student leadership started disintegrating so the university student body politic was infiltrated by these outside forces ... You know, management this side and Convocation this side because there was a huge fight with Brian Williams. It was a culmination of a series of issues that we then inherited. So, the idea of my SRC was that our posture would be purely for students, our posture would be for students, and trying to repair the damaged image of the student body and the Representative Council. So, we started mending relations with the management and we started mending relations with all different political players and parties who were prior at sea.

## Key challenges, issues and protests

When asked about the key issues that the SRC of 2014/15 had to deal with, and the way of engaging with these issues, Sokhaba quotes Frantz Fanon: 'Each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfil it, or betray it.'<sup>56</sup> The key issues he recalls and reflects on are the SRC's role in the selection of the new university leaders, transformation and staff equity, student funding and the SRC's position in opposing financial and academic exclusions, food security, and in relation to the student movement emerging with #RhodesMustFall, #OpenStellenbosch and so on.

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56 Fanon, F. (1969). *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press, p. 206

## **Selection of a new senior university leadership and employment equity**

As member of the SRC, Sokhaba was part of the selection of senior university leaders. The battle of the two Brians not only had far-reaching consequences for student politics at UWC; it also impacted on the selection of a successor to the long-standing vice-chancellor, Brian O'Connell, when the preferred candidate, Prof. Saleem Badat, withdrew his candidacy. In addition, Sokhaba's SRC was involved in the selection of a new DVC of Student Affairs.

We studied the submission of Saleem Badat but Saleem pulled out because of the tensions [from the battle of the two Brians]. And then Pretorius became our second choice, but academics did not agree in Senate. They said he's more of a technocrat. But of course, at that time we said 'anything better' than – whatever. If Saleem will pull out, with the letter that he sent, remember, he can pull out then it's fine, we will settle with Pretorius. So, we agreed that Tyrone as a former student, graduate and academic staff, and a dean, who went on again to work at Monash, and all of that, and University of Pretoria, he must come back.

So, the new VC, Tyrone Pretorius, came in my term. I was the one who welcomed him. And I was the one who gave a farewell send-off to Brian O'Connell, so I was between the leaving and the arriving of Brian O'Connell and Tyrone Pretorius. So, when the leadership of UWC changed, I was there. When he arrived, one of the most pressing questions that we asked at the time was ... on transformation – before we spoke about the fees, we spoke about transformation. This was based on transforming employment equity, looking deeply into the policy and whether it is acting the way it is written. We had no black dean of any faculty at UWC, until Prof. Martin became Dean of Law. So, we raised those issues.

When Prof. Tshiwula left, we said a proper replacement would be an African from South Africa to become DVC. When I became the president in fact, we said 'no no no', we want an African black which is Dube, who is currently there. We were presiding even over the rector interviews and as part of the higher appointments committee. So, in my term, it was now trying to engage around equity and transformation.

## **Student funding, financial and academic exclusions**

We raised the question of obviously funding and the academic question; academic exclusions and financial exclusions will always be the lifeblood of the SRC. The priority mostly was on students who did not have the funding, who passed previous year and who did not have even the funding for the coming year. So, we had to focus on our financial agreement; funding for the next year to register.

And also those who failed who have historical debt, who still do not have even the funds to pay for this. We told ourselves we are not going to get

entangled with red tapes of the university. If it was according to our wish and our powers, everybody must go and register.

That's why when we had to go to academic committees for exclusion for students who did not qualify to register for the next academic year, not based on their funds, others are paid up, others don't owe, but because they failed the previous two academic years, so they had to be excluded academically and denied access to register. So, we had most, we had 86 per cent of success rates of those. I still remember we had a newsletter that came out highlighting our successes within it.

### **Opposing academic exclusion: the doors of learning shall be opened**

One of the things that we debated and one of the fountainheads of our position when we entered those academic exclusion committees in each faculty was we always raised the question of extenuating factors. We said: 'Look, as much as a student would be sitting in class, we do not know how he or she came to class and where he or she came from.' And we based that debate on our conviction of our left leanings. We said: 'Look, there are students who enter the classroom with a lot of baggage.' We used their academic records and we must say also, when we went through the academic records, because it is presented as in a pack, in a committee ... When we go from round to round, from each student to student, you get the academic history of the student and some of them, you got the sense that this person never picked up.

So, we had to use a subversive argument in order to qualify us as student leaders. We told ourselves: 'Look, as our principle as student leaders we are not going to stand here to mitigate between what the student has or does not have. But what we are going to stand for is one thing, the student must register.' So, we came in with that particular philosophy. So, for us it was about the student must get in.

But how we thought about those ones that were out, we left them to the question of the university. So, for us it was about the student getting in. And correctly as you say, there was also a challenge of the question of if you are going to be returning, aren't they clogging up the space. And we created another angle of argument and said that but you guys know very well that your university is still suffering from an infrastructural backlog, the University of the Western Cape has more students than it can accommodate. We said: 'Improve, you guys, that's your question, improve your infrastructure and improve your academic staff and improve, so that all of the students ... because at the main gate that you enter, it says, you took a slogan from the Freedom Charter of 1955, to say that "the doors of learning shall be open".' And that idea came from what Gerwel called becoming the academic left, who would need to respond to the democratic ideals.

We even came to a point where we gathered all of those students in an operative way. But not all of them at one time in one space. But opening the communication lines and showing them alternative ways. Because we never left them in the dark and many of them came back. Even post-SRC when I was still at UWC I would see them, some of them. They would greet and they would be quite happy with what we did with them, and others would still refer back to those moments when they almost lost their lives in terms of hopes and dreams and so on. So, we had to come to a point where we said, 'Look, you are essentially indebting yourself deeper and you are also making things very difficult for yourself. It's January, I mean, it's Feb now and as it looks, since your faculty or your department has already been fully booked in terms of seats in the lecture hall and the modules being left in your faculty, you are wasting your time. What we can rather do, we will contact UNISA on your behalf.' So many of them went to UNISA, especially the law students and the accounting students. But there were those ones we had to fight for.

### Engaging with a 'killer module'

Coming to that point, now this is where one of the things that actually was the highlight when it came to academic issues, one of them being when we were faced with a dilemma within the Faculty of Law in the fourth year module of corporate law. I was called in one day by Professor Bharuthram, the academic DVC. He called me in and he said, 'Mr President, we have an issue here. If you look through your records, you would find that most students represented in the Faculty of Law during the academic exclusion committees. Look at those records, you will find that those are exit students who have been repeating for more than three terms one module. There's a red flag there.'

We called in Professor Martin, the Dean of Law, he brought all of his records and he said: 'I have been teaching Law for quite a long time. And I took two years to teach corporate. And here is the records, and here are 133 students sitting and clogging up my, the space, to exit. So that I can bring in these new ones; so they must graduate.' But you know what is disheartening is the fact that this ones who are still sitting here, they are losing their time and opportunity outside there, because it takes only so much years for you to become a credible lawyer.

So we sat with that dilemma. We called in the lecturer of fourth year. We called him in. The attitude that we found, in fact that I found, and it was one of my submissions to that meeting in the boardroom between myself, with the DVC: Academic and with the dean, is to say: 'Look, the attitude that I can get is the lecturer himself does not understand his class. The lecturer understands the students as statistics. That is where the contradiction is.' On that day, the decision was taken that he be shifted from the fourth-year module; exit the module corporate. Somebody else came in. What happened was when



we went to graduation, many of those senior students who had been sitting, clogging up the modules, because of that one module, were graduating. They had to go to do their clinics; they had to go to do their articles.

## **The academic calendar, academic staff equity and a socialist pedagogy**

In Senate, key issues that we dealt with were the restructuring of the academic calendar and equity in the academic staff – before the curriculum. Back then, you still could say we were not yet at that gear of calling for the transformation of the curriculum. We were trying to call for a more socialist or socialistic type of interactions between the student and the lecturer. This is what we also called the pedagogical question of how relations between teaching and learning operate.

Those were the questions that we raised – of teaching and learning, and how then that plays out, in fact, and goes over to the financial, and how finances can have an impact on teaching and learning. So, we debated all of those questions.

## **Food security**

The food security question, we introduced it. It became the Ikamva Lethu Fund which until today UWC has institutionalised. Before the new idea of #FeesMustFall, our report said there must be a standardised student fund that must come outside of the SRC budget, but of course, the SRC making a contribution. My SRC was the first to make a contribution outside of its budget to student food security on campus. We took out R200 000, around there, we said look we are pledging. It became the Ikamva Lethu, a student bursary fund. We raked in more than R300 000. My SRC did not call it Ikamva Lethu. We called it a food security programme.

We said, okay fine, we are taking it out and pledging it – there it is. We said to the university financial department; write out our check, put it there, let all other departments in the university to also pledge and other departments came. Financial aid office said we have R250 000 to pledge.

We drew up a list from our existing list we see of students without funding, without NSFAS, who were actually indigent. We listed them all, wrote down their student numbers so we would call them in so that they could go to Financial Aid and get food Pick 'n Pay vouchers, each with R2 000 in it. So, we helped 300 and something students. Akhona 'Connie' Landu took it forward when she became president, she called it Ikamva Lethu. And we tried to manoeuvre before our relations went sour – we tried to manoeuvre and get pledges from various government departments to assist in our objective to rid our campus off the scourge of hunger, we managed to get the help of the then minister of energy, an alumnus of the university, Minister Tina Joemat, to pledge R1 million.

## **#RhodesMustFall, #OpenStellenbosch, #FeesMustFall**

When the #RhodesMustFall and #OpenStellenbosch movements started at UCT and SU, Sokhaba as SRC president of the historically black university in Cape Town was invited to partake. He recalls the debates he had with the UCT SRC president and with comrades at UWC around starting a similar movement on his campus.

When #RhodesMustFall started, I was president; when #OpenStellenbosch started, I was president.

When the whole transformation debate started, I was president. The transformation question was really a highlight within my SRC ... There is the arrival of #OpenStellenbosch and the language question; but at UWC you had what you call the equity question especially in the academic sector. Then you had the rise of the black students at Rhodes University, the Black Student Movement. So, I moved in between those struggles.

And I was president just at the doorstep of the outbreak [of #FeesMustFall] because a week before I handed over ...

### **Relationship with UCT and Stellenbosch**

When #RhodesMustFall started at UCT, the UWC SRC was visited by people from UCT. But the issues at UWC were different.

I met with the UCT president, Ramabina Mahapa, oftentimes and the former deputy president who was suspended at the time, the lady. Ramabina, he wrote a letter to all presidents – an open letter to all SRC presidents. I wrote a 14-page response to him. In that I ask critical questions. He was saying about transformation, but my debate with him was that you are calling for transformation based on the context of UCT. Now I gave him a context, since he's on the mountains and I'm in the bush. I gave him a context to say that before we even start with the transformation of UCT and UWC, we must start a transformation between how UWC can become equal to UCT on various factors. So I challenged him to the question of how a UCT student can be the same as a UWC student, how a postgraduate UCT student can access UWC more easily than a UWC postgraduate can access the archives at UCT, how we can share the intellectual materials together. We must transform in that sense; all the universities of the Western Cape, how can they become one. I challenged him on a lot.

That was the transformation debate. There was also a time when I was invited to Rooiplein, first time, #OpenStellenbosch. A well-attended rally. I have a clip where I was on *News24*. I delivered a short speech on the language question, on why Stellenbosch needs to open. It was an official invite by #OpenStellenbosch, Greer Valley, they were not part of the SRC. And this

other comrade invited me – comrade Duma, he wrote in the *Mail & Guardian* some time ago. I was the only president of an SRC that was there.

### **A transformation movement at UWC and the role of the SRC**

In the context of UWC there was on the one hand the question about the legitimacy of a student movement led by partisan student organisations, while these organisations were affiliated to the SRC. On the other hand, it was about the content of the movement.

At UWC, we didn't have a movement like #OpenStellenbosch. In fact, at UWC the huge debate was, that ALUTA was pushing to emulate or to mimic what was happening at Rhodes and so on. So, our debate was that you are a student structure affiliated to the SRC. And we have all these other PASMAs and SASCOs, and all this student bodies, church, what what. We said, how about a movement outside of these affiliated structures rather than a movement within the affiliated structures which will dilute the whole idea of affiliation to the SRC. And my debate was that the SRC cannot become a movement on its own. And I wrote about it again

We had this debate where I was debating this idea with my SRC and even in my political report, as I exited, at the AGM, where I debated the position of the SRC throughout the term; on what our alignment with the governance of the university, how we wanted to align ourselves so that we must become agentive in the decision-making of the university. So, the contradiction between the management and the student body, I argued, with my rest of my essay, was not that much helpful if you look at it. It was only on the basis of how do we want to be remembered: Do we want to be remembered as problematic, or do we want to be remembered as agents of change and transformation on the student material conditions?

### **The start of UWC's #FeesMustFall and partisanship**

The SRC elections of 2015 produced another SASCO-led SRC, and having lost the election, a group centred around Pasma and Sokhoba's former SRC vice-president, Roza Mandyoli, decided to start a #FeesMustFall campaign at UWC.

At the time when #FeesMustFall broke out, it was my last week, and a week later, there the call came to increase fees, and there was a meeting at parliament, which we as SASCO, the PYA structures, were invited to go to.

The new president of the SRC at UWC, Akhona Landu, came into office in October 2015, who was the former secretary in my SRC. And the deputy president, Lindokuhle Mandyoli, who was from Pasma, the chairperson of the Pasma branch, started organising the week later. So, I remember approaching him and saying: 'But comrade Roza, what's the issue? Let's talk.'

And he said to me: 'Look, these people will not handle this matter like we would have in our SRC. So, I'm mobilising.'

But one of the motivations that we debated heavily was the motivation of partisanship, their challenge with the establishment, and of course, the African National Congress. And so SASCO could not stand by watching the African National Congress as a partner ... because what marries us is the idea of the national democratic revolution, and with the other PYA structures, YCL and with COSAS, and we said look guys, we will not stand here watching a SRC that we have deployed being bashed and being pushed aside while you guys want to pursue a narrow nationalistic agenda to overthrow the government. That was our position.

That's when the breaking point came, when SASCO national sent out a communique to say that students must go to class. Then SASCO was called selling out. And so this other ultra pan-African movements then started organising themselves, and the EFF also taking space. And then they started with that rallying call. And that's how we lost the plot at UWC, when the SRC was nowhere and there was a good two months when the SRC was on the run.

When the zero per cent announcement came by Zuma on 23 October 2015, you will see there is an article where I am interviewed as well but I was interviewed now as a post-SRC president, as the former, because I'm two weeks former, because I was the only go-to guy between the disgruntled forces who were not SASCO, with of course my connections to Roza and them and with some elements of former SASCO, because they were in ALUTA, who sided with the anarchist guys because they wanted to expose the current SASCO SRC. But the assistance did not come strongly through the PYA because the PYA also started retreating. So, you had a vacuum that was then overtaken by these loose groupings – we would call them loose groupings – but which were essentially led by PASMA forces.

So it started 2015. I remember, after the announcement by President Zuma of the zero per cent increment. That same afternoon was the march towards airport. As they were approaching Bishop Lavis, the four-way stop when you turn into Cape Town airport, they were chased back by the police. They wanted to shut down the airport. I said to Roza and them: 'You are leading the students to a cul-de-sac. It's fatal because it's a national key point.' So those are also the debates on the fatality of the #FeesMustFall comrades.

Roza was essentially now overlapping the SRC, that is why there was this wild call of #SRCsMustFall, if you remember. They had this anarchist idea of governance; because even when negotiations came between the rector and the #FeesMustFall leadership and the SRC, the SRC came up with a lot of concessions in terms of how they can mitigate and remedy the situation ... To say that okay, comrades are calling for the R140 for the student card must be lowered to R70. There was a lot of things. That the 10 per cent fees that would

be added, must be relooked at. There were a lot of issues. But these comrades outside the SRC, they had the political backing and sentimental value, which our comrades in the SRC lost.

At the stadium mass meeting, they were referring to me as the legitimate president. So, whenever PASMA comrades met me they said: 'Here is the president.' They did not recognise Akhona because they felt Akhona was too much in the management's pocket. And that also made me fairly unpopular – very much – to my comrades. So, when I became the deputy chairperson of the province of SASCO, there was this hard feeling between us.

## **SRC between partisan #FeesMustFall structures and individuals**

After elaborating on the way the decision to protest is taken in a constitutional manner at UWC (see below), involving the SRC and a student mass meeting, Sokhaba argues that contestation between partisan organisations and the SRC and individuals outside the SRC can create problems for all sides, and the real issue, addressing genuine student interests, can get lost.

Sometimes we lose it in between, based on our overlapping agendas and our overlapping objectives; we lose it, which I would say in the #FeesMustFall, comrades mostly suffered, losing the objective. That's why most comrades are still today languishing in jail or facing hard times – going up and down to court – passions overlapping and the itch to be revolutionary more than what you can really, the scope of revolutionism that you can practise.

And the problem of pushing each other off the cliff, like they tried hard with SASCO. So SASCO had to fight back, if you remember, through 2016 they had to fight back into position. And it took over most of the campuses. It was only at UWC that PASMA succeeded.

At Wits University, Mcebo Dlamini and others pushing still even after his term, but he wanted also to outpace Fasiha and co., outpace them with Vuyani Pambo of the EFFSC, they were trying to outpace the current SRC leadership. It was almost exactly the same thing that happened with the lady that was president, who went to work as a researcher in the ANC, Nompandolo Mkhathswa when she was president. So, there was this thing of trying to push off the SRC and trying to take over the space and build your own base. And also for the record, the debates that were there, the ideological posture, they did not find each other.

## **Ideological debates and posturing**

### *Pan-Africanism and Fanon*

For instance at UWC, there was a debate taken over by the pan-African camp and that debate was about Pan-Africanism itself, how does it find resonance in the question of free education, and how does it find resonance in the question

of fees. And there was a question of feminism. And there was a question of intersectionality. And there was a question of the overthrow of the state. The slogans were written down and graffiti on the walls.

So, there was a saturation of ideological leanings and ideological postures and I would argue, there was also ... you know when somebody is overdressed, does not necessarily mean that they understand fashion. The same thing came with the application of Fanon. Overdressing on the question of Fanon, on what Fanon means, on Fanon's philosophy or a revolutionary thought on violence.

So, many comrades make tactical and ideological mistakes. They had an idea but the execution, I would argue, was very much wrong. Imputing the question of violence in justifying the burning of a library was unFanonian.

### *Feminism*

Imputing the idea of feminism and equality amongst the sexes and with the sexes was also taken to the extreme to the extent whereby the feminist groupings on campuses were dealing with hard questions of female abuse and rape and all of that, but also overdoing and overstepping their role with hunting down men; seemingly stepping out of the scope of *respecting*.

### *Justifying burnings and class*

End of 2015 the computer lab, Cassinga 1, had been burnt out. The one next to the student centre that side of it was also burnt. Mark Seale's office, the res management office, the coffee shop by the new building, the new Res Life building. So, they burnt the coffee shop and the new offices of Mark on top. So, there was a whole lot of burning.

We had a mass meeting about the burning: 'Comrades, but what motivates the burning? Because the next day you must be using this. Because the lecturers and the rectors do not stay here. And comrades you are talking about outsourcing and insourcing the workers. You are talking about the workers.' They were imputing the class question, which again they overdressed and could not understand. Because the question which I asked was that how can a student lead the working class because first of all, class is a compact. Class is one. Working class is one.

So, we said students cannot represent the workers, there are unions. But if the unions are absent then we must try by all means to engage the workers. How can you build your own – it's an ideological question as well – to say that students can lead the workers.

### *Consequences: high failure rates, dropouts, a 'war zone'*

So, there was this whole violence about the whole manner in which these questions were approached. And unfortunately, all revolutions and even wars have their victims. And this is what many comrades suffered. We had a high

failure rate between those two years, very high failure rate when comrades resumed committees to sit – remember I was a former at that time but I was very much involved in trying to understand ...

You can just ask for the records at UWC. High dropout. There was too much tension in January, I'm talking about January 2016, too much tensions – and also the October and November happenings – which come back to a student populous that does not recognise itself. You end up having less student programmes and more backdoor operations; you just see things happening but there is no interaction. You're in a Cold War type of atmosphere within the student body; it's like a post-war society. You know how Berlin looked like after the World War: bombed out. With lots of security on campus. It looked like a war zone.

## **Representation and activism**

As an SRC there is a difficult balance between representing student interests in the formal structures of university governance, and protesting. When asked about the relationship between representation and activism, Sokhaba argues that an SRC should first exhaust the formal decision-making structures before deciding on protesting. He also explains how the decision to protest is taken by means of a formal student mass meeting at UWC. He starts by giving the following example:

One of the challenges that I faced when I started in January 2015 officially now trying to start my office and operations with the SRC, there was a grouping that wanted to stop the registration process by protesting. They were outside of the SRC, made up of elements within the PYA and also emanating from the other structures outside the PYA. So, my approach to them was: 'Why would you wanna do this, when you have leadership which can protest inside those statutory bodies?' Even in my report I debate this question of why SRCs must position themselves as the organs of student power. I debate it hugely to say that the conditions differ and I use Mao's simplification of dialectics.

So, if UCT raises a question of fees, it does not necessarily mean that UWC can also raise it because the fees scale of UWC is lower than the fees scale of UCT, you understand. Those were the questions, the kind of up and down we had with the question of – if we are going to stand up and shut down and strike, it should be that when we have exhausted, as SRC we should have at least exhausted all these avenues – the Council, all statutory bodies, Senate.

### **UWC picketing policy vs student mass meetings and protests**

We had the picketing policy of UWC that was about to be amended in the student development and support services committee chaired by Prof. Tshiwula. That picketing policy was sitting on the table for successive SRCs

since 2010 – debating and not signing off this thing into policy about how to picket and what to do before picketing.

We said, you are now trying to police (what we called back then) our passions. We cannot wake up and say today we wanna strike – no, we strike based on the material conditions. So, if you are telling us to first come and give you a picture of the route you are going to take, we said now you are policing passions. Revolutionaries do not operate on plans when they do a revolution; it's based on their passion and what Fanon calls the 'spontaneity of struggle'. So, we said we are not going to be policed – if we feel today that there is something that is not right in my spirit – as a student body, we will do it.

But protests, I want to put it, protests are not occurring willy-nilly or sporadically just out of the blue. Students call mass meetings. Mass meetings chart the way forward for what is the agenda and also debate the agenda. People think that it's purely just anarchic passions being thrown around. No! Mass meetings have got structure; they are chaired and there are interactions.

There are a lot of technicalities when it comes to calling and conducting a mass meeting. We used the technicalities skilfully; not to suppress the questions that were raised, but to suppress the ulterior motives pushed by the opposition.

We mastered the idea of the political game at the student body level. So, we knew exactly, in fact, opposition politics. The High Court judge Erasmus once said in the Western Cape court, when SASCO went to court, when we were almost disqualified from participating in 2013/14 elections: 'One thing we must commend about this is the fact that it is showing that democracy and student activism is on a high level at the University of the Western Cape. I wish that all other universities can take note.'

And you would know that, and many comrades will tell you, at bush there's politics. We engage ideologically, you can engage procedural questions of what is an order, what is a point of exigency, we can sit the whole day in a meeting debating those things ... point of privilege! [laughs]

What I'm arguing is that protestation is not just done as feverishly as it is seemingly being put out there; that students just wake up and protest. There's a structure to it. Sometimes we lose it in between based on our overlapping agendas and our overlapping objectives, we lose it – which I would say in the #FeesMustFall comrades mostly suffered: losing the objectives.

## Lessons

When asked about his advice to future student leaders coming into the SRC, Sokhaba argues that it is important for an SRC leader to be mindful of the complexity of a university, the fact that there will be different personalities with different agendas, and that it is important not to pre-judge but seek alliances with whoever can assist to further student interests.



It is well known that there will be a clamour for attention from all different sections and not everybody and all people have the same genuine agenda or the genuine motives to see that you that you better the conditions. There are some that come with ulterior motives for their own personal agendas or their own sectoral agendas. And the fact that the university is a very complex structure; complex in the sense of the different personalities.

What I would advise for many student leaders who come and lead the SRCs and even the next ones tomorrow, to be cognisant of those different complexities. The labour questions, the student questions, and in fact also the student interrelation questions as a community, and the managerial question of how your SRC relates to it, how it postures itself. For what I have learnt, every SRC that postures itself, postures it until it exits. For instance, if an SRC enters and says that: 'Comrades, we are enemies to these people, these people are our enemies; you will end your turn as such.' If you say: 'Comrades, our work here is to make alliance with whoever can assist us in helping our students that is the outcome we are going to get.' That is why when we finished our term, we had one of the best records in attending to student issues. And one of the only SRCs that had the most programmes in one single term. In fact, the food security question, we introduced it.

Sokhaba also provides some advice on the personal character traits that an SRC student leader needs to have to be able to stomach the challenges that students bring to a leader: to be humble and able to identify with other students' struggles; to be able to face challenges. He also emphasised the need to have 'clarity of analysis', prepare well for committee meetings as an SRC collective and draw on the support of postgraduate students.

One of the things that I learnt is the interaction with different student issues. There were hard issues that one had to deal with. You know students would come to you. Students who did not have food, or students who stayed at home, who will tell you, I am going home but the conditions at home, the material conditions ... So, one of the those [the lessons] being the compassion and the humility that you have to have to other people's struggles. The other thing is your stoicism. You have to be stoic, a person who takes in a lot. You need to have the ability to actually take challenges and be strong, okay, in the cold face of adversity.

And the other thing is precision in terms of the precision that you'll go into in a challenge: clarity of analysis. If there is a question, and this is where the challenge comes to most student leaders: we are mostly challenged because we are looked down by management because we are not on the thinking level or capacity as they are. When we go to Senate, the academics think: 'They

are our students so they are not thinking on the same level as us.' So, the precision, the clarity, that's where the respect comes from. And that is what I gained and what I learnt.

Why we were one of the better SRCs in submitting submissions in committees before they sat is because we would study committees' packs. I created a committee of students who were not part of the committees, who were not SRC but senior postgraduate students, who formed part of the study committee of packs. So when we go into, it's not only the SRC that takes up the decision, it's about the whole student, senior student, views and postgrad. That is why my SRC was the first in the history of SRCs to form a postgraduate forum which is now a legitimate body. Because there was a gaping area between postgraduate questions and undergraduate questions. Because postgrads would confuse the SRC to be an SRC of undergrads. So many questions that we had to deal with were postgraduate questions.

## **The impact of the student leadership experience**

At the time of the interview, Sokhaba was completing his master's degree while working full-time for the Northern Cape province's government. He considers the experience of having been in student leadership at UWC very beneficial to his career path and personal growth.

### **Understanding organisations**

You see organisations, especially government structures, what mostly makes them up is leadership: there are people heading up departments, there are people below, managers. Understanding structure, hierarchy, authority; the complexity of organisation and lines of communication; clarity and understanding policies; and understanding community.

### **Understanding community and political management**

The sense of community, communalism, trying to live in and amongst different and contradicting personalities and identities. That one has equipped me very well because there would even be instances where one would view what's happening outside now in our communities, where elected people cannot handle the passions and cannot speak to the people, whereas they are the official elected.

And how you can manage community contradictions and how you can manage complex questions that you sometimes do not know the answer to; but how you put yourself inside those questions and pretend as if you know the answers but you don't. That you learn even within that period of not knowing, by just being skilful by taking up all different views and angles and challenges.

## Being part of the change: university and society

There has also been an impact on political attitudes or your ideologies. It has positioned me to where I feel I am, I was very privileged. Because I can understand things that I would have otherwise not have understood if I was part of that movement of change and part of that movement within the academy, because I was at university. But my ideological outlook was even more strengthened with the conviction that the university is but just a microcosm of the broader society.

And the fact that I being part of the university, and this is one of the most idiomatic that has been used by comrades of SASCO, to say that we are members of the community before we are students. So, when I exited the university, I did not lose my autonomy to the university. The university lost its autonomy to me so that I can pursue my scientific skills that I've attained, and my political skills through activism through years of skilling that I can practise even outside of the gate of the university.

But you continue learning. Even here where I'm sitting currently, I'm learning a lot of things. Different human relations and work relations, how do people interact as a first timer.

## Impact on career: a philosophy of thinking and work

It therefore also has an impact on my current work because managers take note. One of the first impressions was what I did at university; not what I studied, but what they see online, what's on my CV. Because government departments in themselves are also research units because it's 'paper pushing'. As you can see, it's not where people are actually building a school here, but the ideas of building a school are being 'paper pushed' around here. So it's part of the research as part of a complex paper push: it's policy, it's funding.

So, to me, I take this space and I consume it in the sense that I consume the university itself and its complexity. And I have learnt, in fact, one of my professors who I like – Premesh Lalu – who highlighted to me and said: 'The university must also be seen as a complex space of labouring. You would be sitting in your office, you will hear machines going on and off. It is not in the lecture hall that the unknown exists, it's not the academics fussing around ideas of what can make the world a better place. It's about what is being done in the here and now.' So for me I take that in as a kind of a philosophy of thinking and work.

## Impact on personal life

As for its impact on my personal life, my love has always been outside the university, because even before I came to university I had her and still have her. In fact, my personal life changed my attitude a bit because I came in as a leader in every aspect of my life.

# chapter 13

## Mpho Khati

University of the Free State,  
SRC first-generation and first-year students 2014/15,  
SRC vice-president 2015/16

*Thierry M. Luescher & Mpho Khati*

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### **Brief biography**

Mpho Khati is a fashion designer and fashion model, and the owner of the African print clothing and accessories fashion line Indlovukazi. She completed a BA in sociology and criminology at the University of the Free State (UFS), where she was also involved in various capacities in student leadership in the SASCO and ANCYL branches as well as the SRC.

This chapter is based on an interview conducted by Thierry Luescher on 17 September 2018.

### **Early influences and coming to UFS**

Mpho Khati grew up in a religious home in the rural Free State. Her upbringing, her experiences of struggling to get into UFS and her first-year experience at the university, became major points of reference for her later involvement in student leadership.

I'm originally from a small location called Kutlwanong in Odendaalsrus, here in the Free State. It is a few kilometres from Welkom. My parents don't have any political backgrounds. They are extremely religious, so they are just like, 'You have to study and pass and come and help us.'

So, I came to the UFS in 2013 to do my first year here. Coming here as a first year, all you just want to do is to study, you know. All I just wanted to do is study and even me getting access to the university, it was extremely difficult.

I thought I was going to get a bursary because I was a very bright student in high school. I was the best-performing learner, RCL and all of those things. So, I thought I will get a bursary but I didn't.

I almost thought I was not going to make it to university because I was going around with a family friend trying to approach local business people in Odendaal and Welkom for them to assist. Trying to get a Department of Education bursary. But with everyone that we tried – the municipality, the church, everyone you know, local small entrepreneurs – nothing worked out.

And I was certain that this year I might have to take a gap year, which was going to be very detrimental because small towns are full of crime. And a young hopeful person that wants to make a change in a community – now you are subjected going back to the community again and possibly working at Pick 'n Pay or other retail stores, just to save up for the following year.

So that was my reality for the first few months of 2013. And then in the eleventh hour, a local businessman said, 'Okay cool, I'll pay for your registration while you wait for your NSFAS or any other bursary to emerge.' And then I registered late and I got access to the university and I was staying in the location for some time. And then eventually I got access to res as well. Later in the first semester I received a bursary from my municipality, Lejweleputswa. And as I was staying at the location, it was extremely difficult because you have to take two taxis, three taxis. And sometimes you have classes at seven, at eight in the evening. So you see how it is not fair for you to be an off-campus student. You don't have internet. All of those other issues.

But even through all of that, I was just determined to study and pass because my parents told me, 'You see, it was difficult for you to get in, so you can't get in and play.'

So, I got in and the first year I was very committed to going to classes. I registered for BSocSci. I initially wanted to do law but I didn't apply for the extended programme because my Mathematics marks were not as they stipulated in the requirements. So I then did BSocSci and the career advisor told me, 'If you want to change in your second year, you can.'

But then I was doing psychology and other social sciences, sociology and criminology, and I fell in love with it. I liked the content; how I could relate it back to the community. So, I stuck with it. So that's what I did.

## **Becoming involved in the SRC**

Khati reflects on the way she became involved in student politics and eventually in the SRC of the Bloemfontein campus, where she served two terms, from the

end of 2014 to the end of 2016. During that time, she experienced change at different scales: from a system of non-partisan to partisan SRC elections at UFS, and being a student leader during the most testing period in the South African student movement since 1994.

### **Joining SASCO**

Khati recalls how she decided to get involved in student politics as she gradually became aware of the history of racism and other injustices at UFS and the current challenges marring the institution.

During my first year, I was not participating in any student politics. And then in my second year I joined SASCO. I was considered the prodigy.

I joined SASCO but I didn't understand why it existed. Coming from high school you are very naive about issues.

So the SASCO students showed me a list of the things that SASCO had achieved over the years in terms of fighting racism in the University of the Free State, and how it is necessary for more people to join so that debating can continue, and the fight continues. So, what's very interesting because I could not understand why there continue to be such social injustices still at university level.

And at the time when I was in second year, there were still separate Afrikaans and English classes. And it was one of the things that they were raising in their concerns. And even like with us, first-years, second-years, we will complain that the Afrikaans students get a better scope than us and all those other issues that would emerge.

So, I was interested and then I joined SASCO. After joining and because I'm new, I was volunteering. I was in the BEC. I was just volunteering whenever I could.

### **From non-partisan to partisan SRC elections**

In her second year of studies, Khati was nominated by SASCO to stand for the UFS SRC on the Bloemfontein campus. However, at the time the UFS SRC constitution did not recognise partisan affiliations for SRC candidates, and hence Khati had to stand as an independent. This changed for the 2015 election. Khati elaborates:

In my second year, they nominated me to stand, but in 2014 we could not stand as political parties; we were independent candidates. But you know that you are standing under the banner of SASCO and you will champion SASCO's interests and issues, which are generally student issues.

During my term in the SRC, I now became more conscious of the issues, and it was now difficult to pretend as if things were just business as normal – a

normal sort of situation. So, I stood again for SRC vice-president towards the end of 2015.

In 2015, political parties were now allowed. The constitution had to be amended because we felt that it contributes to student apathy. As students we are members of the broader society; this is a democratic state and people have parties that they want to vote for. We felt like a party system is more organised in terms of raising and championing issues, because you get a mandate from that particular association. And we also felt that it would increase student participation because as individual candidates, no one sort of gave you a mandate or held you accountable.

There was someone from EFFSC; it was PASMA, SASCO and DASO. There was also Afriforum. And there was an alliance with the ANC Youth League – but the YCL only started last year, at the time it wasn't yet. But broadly speaking we had a PYA.

I must say that with the change of student politics and political parties participating on campus, there was less student apathy than it used to be before then. There was a lot of consciousness on campus even when we just hosted dialogues where we were addressing issues, there was a lot of participation. Student enthusiasm was more alive on campus than I've ever seen in my stay at the University of the Free State.

Just by them being able to set up by the Bridge, which is the student centre, and singing and do all of these things, student organisations helped in making people more aware about the issues, about the imbizos. Because they also want representation. They also want to say we were there, and it is not only an SRC victory; it's also our victory. It helped a lot in terms of participation and conscientising the student movement populous.

## **The SRC and its relations with the student body**

For Khathi, the role of the SRC is to champion student issues. Hence, she emphasises the need for the SRC to continuously communicate and consult with the student body, using various means including social media, the student parliament, and policy forums (i.e. imbizos). The latter were frequently called in order to develop memorandums to hand to the university management.

The SRC is a student body that is meant to champion student issues. It is a body that mediates between the student and the university management. There is an SRC constitution which stipulates all of these issues, and there is also a student parliament where students also have a seat in there. And they can engage the SRC to say these are issues. Student parliament is more of a formal platform where students can submit their issues to say, 'As our SRC, we want you to do this and that and that.'

Even at the beginning of the SRC term, each SRC member has to approach the students to say as portfolio, these are the projects that I want to do for my term. And the students need to say: 'Yes, you can go ahead or we don't agree with this portfolio's programmes.' So SRCs are basically supposed to do that.

Social media, such as the SRC Facebook page, other electronic media, as well as physical meetings with the student body in mass meetings and imbizos were the main ways in which Khati's SRC used to communicate and consult with the student body.

We had an SRC Facebook page. We would release statements on the Facebook page because we understood that most students were on social media. But we also used the university mediums, where the university would communicate with students on our behalf on BlackBoard, or send students emails or even SMSs, when we were organising imbizos.

We really tried to have constant communication with the students in the form of imbizos at the amphitheatre by the library. Our intention was to be student-centred. Whenever we were writing a memorandum, we would call students. Once we had the memorandum worked out and we had to canvass at an imbizo. Then we organised to march to the Main Building to hand over the memorandum. We always made sure that everyone, all the SRC members communicate with their constituencies. So SRCs of campus residences and off-campus students, they make sure that they inform all the primes and the Primes inform the house members, and then the house members come; and SMSs, emails ... it is more intentional for off-campus students because they always rely on their emails and BlackBoard.

And then we would communicate a time to say, 'Okay, today we are meeting at the Bridge, maybe to collect points for a memorandum, to draft a memorandum.' And as the SRC, we make sure that it is well written, well structured, put all the points. And sometimes we would even read it out; we would call an emergency council meeting, read it out to all the SRC.

## **Co-operative governance and protest marches**

Khati's SRC had established a process of developing memorandums as a way of presenting student concerns to the university management. As she explains here, this process came about as a way of addressing their frustration of working through the structures of co-operative governance, which were not responsive.

### **The frustration of working through university governance structures**

I was a member of the central SRC because of my position as being the vice-president. Most of the time when Lindo [the SRC president] is maybe writing



or he has another commitment, I'd have to also go to the Senate meeting and represent him as the alternate on Senate. Internally in the SRC as the vice-president I was also the chairperson of the projects committee and all of that, the policy committee and disciplinary committee of the SRC.

In my two terms, I felt like the SRC is sort of like a buffer structure between the students and university management where it feels like we are doing something materially to improve students' lives and push for progressive policies to fast-track transformation, we are working, but management frustrates us so much that a lot is not getting done.

So, for example, you would submit an issue, like the issue of the shuttle system, or free internet. All these issues that we've always been submitting, to the university management as the SRC. And then they will say: 'You have to submit it to Council, and Council will present it to the university Senate.' But these bodies, they don't sit every day. Now it is the beginning of your term, and they will say Council will sit in March. And the central SRC will sit in March. You sit as the central SRC including the Qwaqwa SRC president and you submit these issues. And then they'll say, 'Okay, we acknowledge these issues, we'll submit them to Senate in June.' They submit them to Senate and by the time you get a response it's nearing the end of your term.

The new SRC repeats this same process. So, there are these many structures in between that frustrate you as an SRC and make you look like you are not doing work. But they'll say, it's bureaucracy; things must happen, you can't just make decisions; it's a university, we're not running a spaza shop.

So, you go back like five SRCs back and we've been raising the same issue but nothing has been resolved, because when the new SRC comes in, they think they are raising new issues. And they raise it the same way and there's no continuation because they have been frustrated the same way.

You try to do the handover where we explain these are the things we were trying to achieve. But even with them, they can't say, fast-track the former SRC's issue. They will be subjected to the same process to submit it formally: let the central SRC sit, let us submit it to Council, let us submit it to Senate, let us submit it to this body, and there ... and there are always also other structures that are set in between.

## **Memorandums as a tactic**

When asked how the SRC then tried to operate given this experience of the formal processes, Khati said:

Our main tactic was just submitting memorandums. With a memorandum you would get a 48-hour response as opposed to waiting for Senate to sit. So, all these issues that we would present to Council, we would still write a memorandum because students do not understand these frustrating processes.

People get agitated – so we will present a memorandum.

With one of the memorandums, Prof. Jansen called a university assembly to respond to the memorandum and a lot of the issues on the memorandum were addressed.

So, memorandums were one of our most effective ways of getting a quick response from management. Also, when you are presenting and reading it out to the student population, they now see that these people are not just sitting in blazers in offices, but they are actually trying to effect some change.

In our term, we probably submitted five or six memorandums. They are all archived on the SRC Facebook page. We were even calling ourselves ‘the SRC of memorandums’ because we would just submit when we would get frustrated. Our intention was to also cause that agitation to them to see that these are burning issues – you can’t just sit and relax! Not that they were sitting and relaxing, but we wanted to show the urgency of the issues we were raising.

### **The making of a memorandum**

We will communicate to students that today we are taking points; tomorrow at 12 we are meeting here at the Bridge and we will be marching to the Main Building. So, we would send out as much communication as we can for students to know.

Student political organisations were very much involved. Remember, there was the SRC portfolio Student Associations and Dialogue. What we would do is when we were collecting issues for the memorandum, we would call all the student formations under the banner of the SRC Student Associations and Dialogue, and get their issues. The understanding was that they represent a particular constituency that is maybe not physically there, but if the chairperson of SASCO or of another student movement or a civil movement is there, then we have them covered.

And because most people are also on campus, they would just see people gathering at the Bridge. Even the ones that were not informed, they will see that when we start singing that, ‘Okay, there’s something; there’s a movement.’ And then they’ll join. And we’ll march. But we’ll obviously communicate to the university vice-rector or the rector that we are coming, so that they are expecting us. And obviously we would get our confirmation from the secretary that the rector is there at the time, because you don’t want to march and the person you are marching to cannot receive.

### **Marching and handover of the memorandum**

I think the University of the Free State students have always been very peaceful in terms of their protesting. We would march and the only thing would be that we sing or sometimes we would have a silent march, which would not end in silence because comrades want to sing.

But the reception was always that Prof. would say, 'We acknowledge the memorandum,' and we stated when we are presenting it that this is a memorandum of demands. Here are our 21 demands, or whatever amount. And we expect a response in 24 or 48 hours on our demands. So, he would just acknowledge it and then sign it and say: 'Okay, in 48 hours we will convene and I will give a response.'

### The reason for singing struggle songs during a protest march

The idea of the singing, I think, it is just to build a momentum because you don't just want to be walking there. And most of the times, we would sing struggle songs. The songs would also remind us of the struggle that the generation before us fought, and we are the generation that is trying to take the baton forward. The singing is also, I think, a political symbol and we understood that this is a revolution and even in the past, during apartheid, people would sing. It is a protest or a struggle culture that you sing, and that you sing revolutionary songs that have a meaning: they inspire people. Most of the songs we sang had a message and the message from the song was conveyed through the march. And sometimes students would just be singing for fun, because they enjoy singing and running around.

When asked if she had read the book by Prof. Jonathan Jansen, the former UFS Rector, called *As By Fire*,<sup>57</sup> in which he wrote that students were singing to intimidate him and they were insulting him, Khati responded that she had not seen the book. She said:

I don't think it crossed our minds to say, 'Let's sing to intimidate Prof.' Like on other campuses where there is a protest, there is always singing. It's just the culture of protest for us.

Prof. Jansen thought a lot of things ... But I don't know, maybe it is because during #FeesMustFall a lot of students were raising that Prof. Jansen must go as the rector, so some of the struggle folks felt, they would change the names and they would sing about him and say he must go. So maybe he heard his name in one of those songs and totalised the whole thing, and said you are singing to intimidate him. But then the idea was not for him as an individual to be intimidated. I don't think [he would even have understood the lyrics], but because he has African colleagues, maybe he would ask for them to interpret.

### Improving student governance

Khati proposes that speeding up the decision-making processes in university

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57 Jansen, J. (2017). *As by Fire: The End of the South African University*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.

governance would be a great improvement of student governance. She also thinks that making student parliament a statutory student governance structure, and having management representation on it, would be an improvement.

Definitely I would want the decision processes to be fast-tracked. I don't have a formula now, but it must be fast-tracked.

And I think one thing that could help is if the rector could also have a seat in student parliament and maybe come once a term to account to students. And maybe for the Higher Education Act to also recognise student parliament as a legit body where students can raise issues.

But if university management could just in general communicate better with students and be more open.

## **Key challenges and issues**

During Khati's two terms as SRC member – in 2014/15 in the SRC first-generation portfolio, and in 2015/16 as vice-president of the SRC – she was exposed to a diversity of issues that her SRCs dealt with. Some of these issues strongly resonated with issues raised by the student movement campaigns further afield, dealing with issues of racism, access and attrition, fees, and so forth.

### **First-generation, first-year students**

In my first term, I stood for SRC first-year and first-generation students. Because the first part of my first year I stayed off-campus, I could understand off-campus student issues, especially the first-year issues of off-campus students, and because I am a first-generation student. At home, my parents, my sisters, no one has been to university before. That's why my parents were just like: 'Just study. You are the first. You are the breakthrough of the family. Just study. It will bring some dignity to the home that someone from our home is now a university graduate. And you are gonna be able to inspire your younger sister as well and many other people that come after you.'

In the office then, one of the things that I realised and that I tried to address is that first-years come – especially first-generation students – and then drop out in the first year of study. A lot. And not because the content is difficult for them and they cannot grasp it, but mainly because of the environment. Most of them come from the third-quintile schools, the disadvantaged – the previously disadvantaged, still disadvantaged – schools. They come here, and the tools of learning are very different than what they had in their communities.

It's about adjusting to university life, adapting to the culture, using technology because most of the schools, they don't have computers. When you get here, your lectures, your slides are on BlackBoard and you've never used a computer before ... So, I tried, in my term of office, addressing that: I started

a mentorship programme which was called Kovies Succession Mentorship Programme. I think it's still there. The SRCs that came after me, they tried continuing with it. Students in their final year of study that are also first-generation students that have made it through the odds, now they're here to motivate other first-years.

### **Exposure to UFS racism and the anti-racism campaign**

So throughout the term, we really, really were introduced to a lot of issues. Now in my 2014/15 term, there were a lot of incidents that happened on campus that showed that racism is still there; it is just swept under the rug of the university.

I don't know if you recall but the issue of Damani Gwebu who was ran over by two white students with a car. This happened during the term of SRC president Phiwe Mathe. Just to give you context of the case: he was coming from the study locker or somewhere on campus, and two drunk students ran over him and then they beat him. It was a huge case. So even in our term, the case was still ongoing, the court proceedings, and we were exposed to it.

During our term in 2015, the Say-No-to-Racism Campaign on campus was also launched with the Institute for Reconciliation and Social Justice.

### **Renaming buildings, removing the Swart and Steyn statues and #RhodesMustFall**

Like at UCT and on other university campuses in 2015, the issue of institutional culture and changing commemoration on the university campus – removing statues and renaming buildings – also came up at UFS. Khati recalls the way the UFS-specific process coincided with, and was reinforced by, #RhodesMustFall at UCT.

In one of the memorandums we proposed the renaming of buildings. It was not a fight that was started by us, just a continuation. And even though it was not done immediately in our term, it was done shortly after we left office: some buildings were renamed.

We were also agitating in conversations about that CR Swart statue, that it must not be there because we believed that it does not represent what the university stands for, what the university vision is.

And even in our term, we saw those things materialising, and the two SRCs that came after us, you see now that there are conversations around the statue of Steyn as well being removed. So, we were effective as much as some of the things were not immediately done, but there was change that came.

It also reflects the impact #RhodesMustFall at UCT had on this process. We learnt about #RhodesMustFall on social media during the UCT protests, and there was also a #RhodesMustFall debate that I watched on YouTube.

*Hitler and the Nazis, CR Swart and apartheid compared*

Khathi explains how her SRC had already requested the removal of the CR Swart and MT Steyn statues from the Bloemfontein campus in 2014, having arrived at making such a conclusion independently from what happened a few months later at UCT.

You know with SRCs, there is normally an overseas trip, an educational trip for the SRC. So, in my first term, 2014, we went to Germany and we learnt about Hitler. And one of the things that we took from that and we even wrote a report to the management about that to say that in Germany now, all the statues of all these people that participated in the war, in the Holocaust, and the Nazis and everyone, they are in the museums. You don't go in public spaces and you just randomly see a statue of Hitler or his people. They're all in the museums. So, if you want to learn more about them, the information is preserved in the museum.

Thus, at the University of the Free State, in the context of South Africa at large, we are also saying that should be the discourse; that should be what's happening. But obviously our focus was the University of the Free State because that's where we were and we were saying, 'The university took us overseas to learn. Now we've learnt. Now we're writing a report based on what we've learnt.'

We were not saying that these statues must totally be removed from the face of history, but let them be preserved in museums. That's where they belong, and people that have a particular interest in learning about Steyn, that have a particular interest in learning about Swart, then they'll go to those spaces and learn about that.

Leaders like Swart who introduced so much apartheid legislation that was very oppressive; Steyn who was part of the negotiations towards the Union of South Africa which removed all citizenship rights of black South Africans; those type of people you can learn about them in the museum but we do not need to encounter them in our university space.

So, we did that trip to Germany at the end of 2014 and wrote that report when we got back. Because it was part of our tasks: you are going there to learn, and after, you have to make submissions and compile a report and submit.

The statue of former apartheid-era state president CR Swart was vandalised and removed by UFS students in the aftermath of the February 2016 #ShimlaPark riots; the decision to remove the statue of MT Steyn was finally made by the UFS Council in November 2018. The CR Swart law building is now called 'Equitas' and various other buildings that used to be named after apartheid-era leaders have been renamed.

## Fees, financial exclusion and the Right-to-Learn campaign

Fees for us was not a major issue; we thought of it more as a government issue that is beyond us. In my first SRC with Mosa Leteane as SRC president, there were a lot of memorandums that we wrote: is it possible for the university to at least not increase the university tuition?

When I got in as vice-president with Lindokuhle Ntuli as president, the first thing that we launched was the Right-to-Learn Campaign, with the notion of raising funds for students because deregistration – financial exclusion of students – has always been an issue with all the SRC presidents. So, we wanted to raise funds.

Khathi explains the UFS policy of deregistering students as a form of financial exclusion.

At UFS, if you have failed to pay after a certain time – we'll give you maybe until the first term for you to pay a certain amount of your fees – and then if you fail, the university has no choice but to deregister you. Because you failed to pay your registration fee.

What the university does is they call 'provisional registration': they will say that registration for an off-campus student, for example, is R6 700. Then you can pay R2 000 to be provisionally registered. You can attend classes but by a certain date in March or April, you should have paid the remaining. If you fail to pay the remaining, then they have no choice but to deregister you, because if you fail to pay at that point, how do they know if you will have the rest of the tuition? So, a lot of students were now being deregistered – even final-year students! – which is even more painful because you are almost done but because of fees, you have to be deregistered.

The SRC's Right-to-Learn Campaign was able to raise R1 million to prevent students from being de-registered but it was not enough.

So, we launched the campaign, and we wanted to raise funds. And we raised one million from the campaign, but you know with figures, and especially with us young people, we've never really dealt with such a lot of money. So, in our heads we thought one million – it's a lot – we can help students.

But it was not enough to address this issue. We realised that the issue is bigger than us; government must intervene because we can't continue raising funds like that. We will raise funds to help students with textbooks, other small issues, but the bulk of students will continue to be excluded.

After the Right-to-Learn Campaign and we raised money, we helped a number of students to not get deregistered, but the issue was still there and there was nothing to do but communicate with the management to say: 'Can you please give students an opportunity to continue with their studies?' At that time, we were still waiting for the DHET; they were going to increase

the NSFAS budget or something like that. So, we were saying, government is promising, so don't deregister students as yet. So, let's see what NSFAS is saying because most students have applied for NSFAS.

But there was a lot of unrest because access is a huge issue, especially with students knowing that they will go back to the same communities that they are trying to get away from.

## **The 2015/16 student movement at UFS**

Given that her terms in the UFS SRC coincide with the emergence, first and second wave of Fallist campaigns, Khati's reflections on her student leadership years provide a fascinating account of a campus-based timeline of student movement events in 2015 and 2016. In her reflections, Khati calls 2015 the 'diplomatic' period, having argued before that the UFS students were always very peaceful and disciplined. However, the #ShimlaPark incident of February 2016 changed the dynamics on campus drastically, ushering in a 'radical' period.

### **University assembly and the language policy review**

In 2015, there was a big assembly, where Prof. was responding to many issues we raised. But those times things were still very diplomatic. We were just: give us a response and then we just try to work with what we have and watch how things will change.

We were raising issues of patriarchy. We would say in terms of our lecturers, our deans – we don't see a lot of female representative. And we raised issues of access for disabled students. We raised issues of what's happening in the medical faculty because African students would still complain that treatment for them and the white students was different, because the Medical Faculty is still a bit secluded and they have their own internal ways of doing things.

Then the language policy review was going on throughout 2015 and as the SRC and student body we had to make submissions. There was an online poll where students had to participate and there were the verbal and written submissions. There were many polls, voting polls, in the residences. I think the idea was to get as much representation as possible before the university would move forward.

For us we just saw it as a human rights issue that the playing field needs to be level. It can't be level because of the injustices of the past, but now we have an opportunity to at least give everyone the same treatment.

And the understanding was that, even to us, English is not our first language but we can't come here and learn in English. Therefore, everyone needs to be given the same class, the same content, so that at least we can say that if we are getting certain marks, it is not that for another group, the conditions were more favourable.



## UFS participation in #FeesMustFall 2015 and social media

How did the UFS participate in #FeesMustFall? Khati explains:

The official shutdown was coordinated on social media. There was a WhatsApp group and there were also closed groups on Facebook and Twitter as well. I remember, even on the SASCO groups there were messages to say: 'Okay, today shutdown!' But I think for SASCO, the contradiction was that SASCO falls under the ANC, so they can't sort of boycott their own government. So we were trying to be very diplomatic about the whole #FeesMustFall and #Shutdown. But other activist movements, especially in the Western Cape, the Fallist movement and other pan-African movements across the country, they were more radical because they are not ANC and they can organise these shutdowns.

So, it was on Facebook and a lot of students heard about it. And they came to the SRC to say, 'There's a message on this day that there is a shutdown, so what are we doing?' I remember we called an SRC meeting to say, this is what is happening: universities across the country are shutting down. What is our position as the SRC?

So, it was coordinated on social media. And then obviously with other institutions having more media coverage, they got more coverage, I guess that's what sustained the campaigns.

## Organising the #UFSshutdown as part of the #nationalsshutdown

We were new in office and we were all from different parties, different associations, and our common goal was just to lead students. Now there is this call for a national shutdown; there is a momentum and student issues can be heard. We saw it and called an immediate meeting that, 'Okay cool, our position is that we are also going to shut down.' And obviously in the Council there are other members that disagree and say: 'No! You can't shut down. Other students want to go to classes.' But we say if we continue with business as normal then the university will not even take us seriously. And it is not just about us, but it is a call that is bigger than us: 'We can't be bystanders when there is a huge revolution, a moment for change, and we must also be on the right side of history and participate.' So, we are clear that as an SRC we will shut down.

We sent communiques to students that we are meeting at the main gate in the morning and that there is a shutdown, and off-campus students and everyone must come, but there won't be any classes.

And student associations as well had their own meetings, and they called us to their meetings to engage. The term that they used was: 'What is the "line of march"?' They wanted a directive from us to say, 'Okay we are shutting down, but how long are we shutting down? What is the process?' Because we've never

shut down to that extent before; it was a new experience; we've never shut down, but we are shutting down.

So, we wake up very early the next morning, obviously the previous night we gave each other tasks: 'Please, go lock these gates.' Because there's many gates: there's the medical gate, there's the main gate, there's the Universitas gate, there's gate 6. So, let's all go to the different gates and shut down in the literal sense.

We sat almost like until the early hours of the morning to devise a plan. The aim is to ensure that there is no business at the university. Students cannot go into classes, because it won't be a shutdown [if they can]. And there were a lot of students that were not even part of the meetings that were there, mainly on-campus students. Off-campus students mainly stay in the location; when they see a message on Facebook that the SRC is shutting down, it is sort of a process for them to come to the shutdown; so they'd rather stay back.

We did shutdown and immediately there was police. There were police at the different gates and they tried to disperse us. The police came and the immediate thing was not rubber bullets, there were loud hailers: 'Just go home.' Just how police in South Africa usually are: 'Go home, you can't do this.' They called Lindo, they called me, they called other student leaders to say: 'Speak with your people. You cannot do this. We are giving you such a period of time to stop what you are doing, otherwise we will have to act.'

We probably shut down for a week or so, and everyday other students would see the solidarity all over South Africa.

## Disagreements over revolutionary tactics and UFS black intellectuals

There was the march to Parliament in Cape Town, there were all these memorandums, and even us we wanted to march to the provincial government offices. You know, in student movements there are a lot of voices. And other students read this different to us and others maybe were influenced by Fanon or other scholars, and because they were influenced by other scholars they would say: 'This is a revolution and a revolution is not a bed of roses. So, we can't be here just singing our lungs out. So, let's get tires! Let's burn because the university must see that we are serious.' And then the SRC would say, 'No! That's not the objective. The objective is for us to shut down.' But you know students, they always want ... we always just want momentum to say: 'Here we are! The university is shut. But then what?' Because we must sustain this thing for the whole day. Now we've shut down and it's 10am. So, we gonna sit here and sit, what are we gonna do? Add spice to the shutdown [laughs].

## The black intellectuals at the UFS

And there was a group, they were not really SASCO, they were not Pasma, but their whole ideological background was more pan-African, and also

very influenced by the American black liberation, Black Panther. I used to sometimes attend their group; they were more on literature and that you know. In the discussions, we would speak about what Muhammad Khalid said, or Marcus Garvey, or Dr Crenshaw.

But they were more thought leaders, thinking and not really organising. It was people that did not really resonate with SASCO politics because they thought that it was partisan, and they also did not really resonate with PASMA because of how disgruntled the mother body is. They thought, 'Okay cool, we are in the university and we are intellectuals – let us exchange books and let us read and let us discuss these philosophies.'

But they were not really a group that had a major impact; they were always just part of the discussions. Whenever we were raising an issue, they would give their view to say: 'No, you can't do this. Let's not repeat these mistakes.' I think because they were exposed to a lot of literature, they helped a lot in terms of what is the approach, what is the line of march, what do we do now – in terms of just giving content to the whole student movement.

### **The meaning of #FeesMustFall: zero increment?**

As the days went, the university management as well tried to engage us as the SRC, because when we were shutting down. As much as the call was #FeesMustFall, the call was not for all the fees to literally fall. We were fighting for a zero per cent, because there was that huge increment.

It was a #FeesMustFall movement but we were fighting for that increment. Parallel to that the university was still trying to engage us to say: 'Let us see what we can do to explore the possibility of a zero per cent. We will put measures in place to see that as a university we can cut and what we can do and how government can also assist us.'

So, there were also those processes in place where everyone was just trying to get to a solution. But I think as student leaders we understood that the university is not the enemy, if I can put it like that, but the enemy is the government, because they are the ones that are giving universities the subsidies. It is not like the University of the Free State just randomly wants to increase fees, but the conditions are that universities must have funds and fees depend on the amount of subsidy.

Then the announcement comes from President Zuma that there will be a zero per cent increase and students go back to class.

### **Sustaining #FeesMustFall after October 2015**

One of the ways we would coordinate #FeesMustFall is we would have meetings with other leaders from across the country. I've been to two of those meetings. This way we would keep in contact as leaders – both SRC and others who were just in the student movement. So apart from us seeing it on

the WhatsApp group, we would meet and discuss, okay what are the issues that you guys had at Free State.

For instance, there was one in Johannesburg, early in December 2015. It was a debate facilitated by Rethink Africa. #TransCollective was there, and #RhodesMustFall. And then during the same week, the next day or two days later, there was another one. I remember, all the students were now given transport, the leaders were flown and given transport and accommodation. And all of us we were now in Joburg. And there was also another one, but that one I couldn't make it to.

There was this protest that started at Wits but there were student leaders from other institutions but it was only at Wits, they wanted to have like another continuation of #FeesMustFall, but it didn't really gain a lot of momentum. So, there was another meeting that they would invite us to. And say, 'Mpho if you can't come, don't you know anyone that will be able to come?' So there was like continuous effort to meet as student leaders but it was obviously, it would be very rare to get the ones from 'smaller-nyana' institutions like North West. It would be Durban, UFS, Wits and sometimes UP. And obviously UCT.

We would have meetings with Blade [Nzimande] and SAUS would be there as well – in those meetings we would have with the former minister of higher education. But they also actively tried to come to campus to engage us, tried to get our issues so that they could advance them in SAUS. But it was not as effective, maybe they were just following their own processes.

## The #StopOutsourcing campaign and #ShimlaPark

Another, different thing that happened in the context of the University of the Free State which sort of made things to escalate was the rugby #ShimlaPark incident.

So, the #StopOutsourcing campaign was happening and for the students, student issues are also interlinked with workers' issues because it is one university; they are part of the system. We can't watch them suffer because these people are our parents and if they are still outsourced, then they can't even pay fees for us.

### *Monday morning: striking workers, students and the police outside campus*

So, there was that incident – this was after #FeesMustFall, the following year [in February 2016]. There was that incident where workers were protesting and students were part of the protests but students were also raising other issues that they are facing.

And the university, the police came and then they locked everyone out of campus. Now, the workers and the students were trying to get to use another gate to enter campus, but the police became reactionary and started shooting rubber bullets at everyone. Extremely violent.

In the footage that one of the photographers had, the students and the workers were fleeing the scene and the police were shooting rubber bullets from behind, which is not even legal. So that happened.

*Monday evening: protesting on the rugby pitch and the attack by the spectators*

So as students we were like: 'There's a rugby match happening and we've been trying to get Prof. Jansen's attention on this issue of outsourcing,' because the workers and the students tried to engage the university on many instances and now there's a rugby match happening and it cannot be business as usual in such a situation. And then we went there to the rugby match.

I was part of the students. There were quite few females; there were maybe three or two of us that were on the pitch at that point. But for me personally, I did not foresee the attack coming. I think none of us saw it coming. We thought we will just get on the pitch and then sing because we knew that it was live on television. So, we thought okay, let's get in there.

But even getting into the Shimla Park Stadium was a hustle because the gates were locked and there was security and all of that. And then we finally got onto the pitch and we started singing. And then as we started singing, the rugby fans and parents started coming onto the pitch to attack us, the protesters.

Given that the protesting workers and students were black and the attacking spectators were white, the conclusion that Khati and others reached was that this was a racist incident.

I think that's one of the things that made campus to continue in the following year, for there to be unrest. Now we thought at least we are past this thing [of fee increment], but there is another issue here, which is racism. And given the history of the University of the Free State and the racism incidences ...

Surprisingly, the match continued; it was delayed, maybe like 10 minutes delayed. We obviously got off the field because now we had been attacked. And the match continued on that evening. The university released a statement and Prof. also expressed how disgusted he was and how disappointed he was with the act of the white students, and what they did, and that he does not condone that.

But surprisingly then, we were given disciplinary hearings [laughs] for disrupting the match and all of that! Mainly us that were protesting. They said the white students were given disciplinary charges as well, but how do you select in a mob of people, that this one I'm gonna give, and this one I'm not gonna give.

But with us, it was very easy for the university to identify us because we've always been a constant. Myself, the SRC president and other student leaders.

You know, in student politics there's those constant people that you always see: MoAfrika will be there, so and so will be there, and on the footage of the rugby it's more or less the same faces. So, it's easy to victimise them, to give them charges.

#### *Monday night: stand-off at Vishuis*

And there was an altercation between the black and the white students at the residences, at Vishuis, and there was the police. I was there. It was intense! Even parents came. So white parents came and they had weapons. It was intense because maybe they thought it would escalate to something bigger. The police came and they tried to disperse everyone, and the black students were still very angry at what happened on the rugby field and they knew that it was mainly Vishuis students because we saw the yellow overalls that they were wearing. So, because they were wearing res uniform, we knew from which res they were. But the police came and they sort of dispersed everyone.

#### *The post-#ShimlaPark weeks: removing statues, renaming buildings*

It was tense for weeks because it was this 'them-us' thing. Even the people that were not part of it, but they just generally saw it as 'us versus them'. The black students versus the white students. And for me, I also felt like it has taken the university back. We can't ignore the fact that the university has been trying by introducing a lot of things for transformation but such incidences – it raises questions ... if the university has not been dealing with it, if they've just been sweeping it under the rug ... now it's just exploding. So, it was tense for weeks.

It was after #ShimlaPark that students physically tried removing the CR Swart statue and they were trying to do many, many things to it. And I think the daughter or the granddaughter of CR Swart came and she was like: 'If you guys are going to do this to my father's statue, then you might as well give me the statue, I'll keep it at my house or I'll keep it wherever.'

And then students spray-painted the law building with a new name that they felt it was deserving. They named it Robert Sobukwe law building.

In that week, a lot of residences got new names and trees. For us renaming the buildings, the trees, everything, it was another way of representation because we exist at the university both black and white. But for us as black students, there's no name that really resonates with the people that we know fought against apartheid and other injustices. So, you check, like female residences, male residences are all these names that are quite foreign to us and most of them are not even that progressive. So, we wanted to show to the university that we also want to be included in this space. Hence Wag'n-Bietjie was named Winnie Mandela residence and there was another one that was named Lillian Ngoyi. And there was Robert Sobukwe and the SRC building was proposed to be called Steve Biko building, which it is now called.

And some of the trees were called Marcus Garvey, Gaddafi, Robert Mugabe, Winnie Mandela ... Names that students who went around came up with, and the one that has the monopoly over the spray paint [laughs].

## **FEM – The Free Education Movement as fallist movement at the UFS**

Khathi explains how in the course of 2016 the Free Education Movement emerged at UFS and eventually became the major group on campus to carry forward the demands of #FeesMustFall 2016.

The SRC could not always be at the forefront of #FeesMustFall issues, because of the nature of the SRC as sort of a diplomatic structure. So, we had to resort to another structure that is mainly for #FeesMustFall issues. Asive [who became SRC president in 2017] was one of the leading people of FEM and I think SK [who was interim SRC president in 2016/17] as well, and other students at the time.

FEM emerged on its own, but it was sort of like in alliance with the SRC, because SRC members would attend FEM meetings. It was a structure of its own for #FeesMustFall; it was not really part of the SRC, but it was in alliance.

FEM was UFS-specific. In other institutions you would see that there are Fallist movements, other movements that are not part of an SRC. I think student activists as well, they wanted a body that's not SRC. Because the SRC has to go through many channels and they cannot be as radical as maybe they want. So, FEM was equivalent to a Fallist movement: all forms of oppression must fall: patriarchy, homophobia and all of these things because they are oppressive. Like on a campus like UCT, at UFS we wanted something to show that we are trying to raise issues.

## **No SRC election in 2016 and #FeesMustFallReloaded**

I can't remember the specific reason why, but in 2016 the SRC election was delayed. It normally takes place in August, but now the university wanted us to continue until the end of the year and then they will elect another SRC in the new year. I think it was because of the disruptions during the course of the year, and now they asked us to continue.

But all of us, we just wanted out. We didn't want to continue because our studies had already suffered a lot and we didn't understand why now we must continue. At the time, most of us were really losing interest in the SRC because we felt like we had served our term. And for me specifically, I had served two terms. I felt I just wanna get out of the SRC so that I can focus on getting my academics back in order.

#FeesMustFallReloaded also didn't really get a lot of momentum because now it was more of a debate: the zero per cent that we were initially fighting

for ... now activists are saying that access is still an issue and people generally don't have money to get to university. Now how practical is it for fees to literally all of them fall? So, it didn't get as much momentum as the initial 2015 #Fees. But I did participate as an activist in solidarity with the movement but it didn't get momentum.

## **Militarisation of campus, victimisation of student leaders and depression**

It was very depressing to be part of it because we would constantly get victimised. Remember the universities were highly militarised by the private security. Everywhere we go, there's this private security. And there were a few incidences where at the res where I was staying, the private security was there and they were looking for specific people, including myself. So, it was starting to be very, very unpleasant.

So, towards the end, all of us we were – me personally I was – very depressed and psychologically not up for activism or anything; I just needed a break. My studies had suffered a lot, and now my worry was that I've lost my bursary because I was supposed to finish that year. And also at the same time, my parents started calling me because I would be in the media most of the time. And my mom was like: 'You know what, try to stay out of it, because we fear that you will get suspended from the university and once you get suspended, how are you gonna finish your studies?' They didn't understand that by being at university my eyes became open.

## **The impact of the student leadership experience**

The interview with Mpho Khati took place less than two years after she left the SRC. Nonetheless, she can already identify key benefits and impacts that her experience of student leadership has had on her life, in terms of generic skills as well as her political attitudes and involvement, her career and personal life.

### **Self-confidence and public speaking skills**

A key learning for her is to be self-confident:

It was a very testing period for me. I've really learnt to have a backbone, because students would come and everyone has their own ideas of what they must do and what is radical and what it means to be an activist. But we as leaders at the time, we had to take a stand and stick with it and try to steer students in the right direction. So, I've learnt to have a backbone and to trust my decisions and to also be very consulting in the leadership style. Because now you are representing everyone; you are not only representing yourself, as much as personally you might have different beliefs. There are other 20 000



plus thousand students that you are representing. So, I had to be strong and learn that you have to be firm in your ground.

Public speaking (and knowing how to prepare for it) is another skill she has perfected during her time in student leadership:

The ability to speak in public comes with student leadership because you are always given a platform to address students. And you have to learn to think on your feet. In order to do that, you have to invest in yourself as an individual by exposing yourself to more reading material so that even when you are speaking you are not just speaking out of a vacuum but there is some content to what you are saying.

In my case, I had to familiarise myself not only with campus issues but issues in general, and issues that affect mainly women. I was only the first or second black female SRC vice-president, so there was a bit of pressure as well as an inspiration to other people. So, I always had to know what I'm talking about.

### **Impact on political attitudes and active citizenship**

At political-party level, I'm not leading in particular but I'm just an ordinary member. I'm more of an activist than a party person. So, I try to participate in all forms of activism. Now recently with the women's shutdown, I was part of it. So, I just try to participate like that.

### **Impact on academic life, professional life and career**

I started my clothing line while I was still studying in the midst of everything. I had my clothing line and then I realised, I have more passion for entrepreneurship. But obviously as I said earlier, I studied social sciences. Now I see my passion lies with having a boutique, having businesses in the fashion industry. So, I'm doing a business course now so that I can get into the Wits Business School for the postgraduate diploma in business administration, with the hope of doing an MBA in the future.

I realised that especially as a black entrepreneur, most of our business remains a small business and they never grow to great heights like Foschini or other big business moguls. So I thought, let me empower myself with business knowledge so that I can grow the business, other than just being a creative because I also feel like most creatives, we don't have the entrepreneurial knowledge, and entrepreneurs as well don't have the creative knowledge. So, I'm trying to mesh the two and focus onto the fashion industry.

Even my fashion, it is deeply influenced by my politics. It's African fashion; it's another way of expressing myself without talking to say, 'In the current

state, African fashion is another way for me that I can decolonise fashion: let people wear it as a daily wear, as opposed to always wearing ties and all.'

### **Impact on personal and family life**

I wish I had found a love in the SRC – but no [laughs]. But I made new friends with other SRC comrades because for me, their pain is also my pain. I've made great friends even with Mcebo [Dlamini from Wits] and even other comrades. Even when they were in jail, I would make efforts to go and see them.

Even Nompendolo [Mkatshwa from Wits], we were friends. I guess 'cos we were both female and we would meet a lot in these meetings and we would have more or less the same struggles.

### **Closing thoughts: decolonising the university, decolonising South Africa**

As her closing thoughts, Khati reflects on the way her eyes were opened during her experience in student leadership and her experience of debating the challenges marring the University of the Free State and South Africa more broadly.

There is this saying in SASCO: 'Universities are microcosms of society and they mimic the issues of society.' I've always heard that in meetings but I never really understood it. But when I was in student governance, I really understood and learnt that we as students, we form part of a bigger community and the university sort of mimics that and mirrors it. So, if there's no change in the university, it becomes difficult for us to have change in society.

I also learnt that when we were discussing the decolonisation of the institutions – if you are going to decolonise the institutions, it means we must also decolonise the country because the country in its entirety is also still a bit colonial. My eyes were opened in terms of all those issues.

And the other thing that I became aware of is, universities I don't think were created with black people in mind, because of how it is difficult for us to navigate the university space. For example, if you come from Limpopo or wherever, and you have to look for space or for res, there is no waiting residence or area where you can stay in this window period while you are still looking for accommodation. There are a lot of students that after registering they are going back to the train station or are just trying to sleep wherever they can.

This institution, was it created with us in mind? Maybe it is one of the things that need to be addressed, now that large groups of people are still coming and they don't have the resources like the other group. Even with these other measures in place, like NSFAS, they take time to pay. Bursaries take time to pay. And in the interim there are a lot of students that fall through

the cracks and maybe they even go back home. So, it's just an awakening of how the injustices of the past are still prevailing now in subtle ways.

If we decolonise the institution and the country is still colonial – the university produces intellectuals, scholars and a workforce for the country and the information that we are getting from the university is decolonial; but you are coming to work in a country that has colonial systems, how are you going to apply that? So, for example, if the student studying economics and they are learning maybe, for example, let's say, socialist economics, how are they going to apply that in a capitalist country? So, for me, there is a direct link even in other ways.

Because I'm now working in the fashion industry as a designer, I've noticed, for example, in fashion that models, people that we see on TV, in magazines, they still have a petite structure which for me is a representation of white women's bodies, light-skinned complexion, straight hair. It's very rare, even as a kid when I would page through magazines, I would not see anyone with dreadlocks or an afro. I would just see a particular colonial image of what the standard of beauty is like.

Even when you go to our schools, when you go to our education system: it's only recently that government has introduced history as a compulsory module. You still see that the history that's being taught is more colonial – you learn more about the World War I, World War II, the Cold War than you would learn about your African history. And African history is very broad; it's not just South African history. Even me myself, I've only learnt African history now when I was taking history at university at a second-year, third-year level. So, I think that the content of the syllabus is still very much colonial. Even the university content itself is still very much colonial.

And even just for agricultural purposes: In the history it shows as if black people never farmed before, and it gives a wrong impression of our existence as black people in the country, on the continent at large. I think maybe now it is because universities are obsessed with getting international standards and they forget that the local standard should first be met.

# chapter 14

## Continuities and discontinuities in student leadership: Has co-operative governance failed?

*Thierry M. Luescher, Denyse Webbstock & Ntokozo Bhengu*

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### Introduction

In 2016, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) published *South African Higher Education Reviewed: Two Decades of Democracy*, which took stock of 20 years of higher education transformation. In his foreword to the publication, the CEO of the CHE, Narend Bajjnath, argued:

Higher education in South Africa in the post-apartheid era has never been more volatile than it is currently, some two decades into democracy, yet it is, contradictorily, perhaps the part of the entire education sector that has advanced most in terms of achieving national goals of quality, equity and transformation. There is much that higher education can claim to have achieved: integration as a system from its fragmented past; an established quality assurance and advisory body; a single dedicated national department; a fundamentally altered institutional landscape; greater access and a radical change in the demography of its students, with an 80 per cent growth in the number of African students; higher research output and international recognition through large research projects, more attention paid to teaching and learning, to curriculum and to student support; the implementation of a governing framework for its educational offerings; the allocation of financial aid to many more students than twenty years ago; and having nationally coordinated projects and grants to address some of the identified areas for improvement.

Despite the many advances and achievements of higher education outlined in this review, however, the student protests of 2015 and early 2016 have given expression to underlying faultlines in quite a dramatic way. The pressures of worsening underfunding in the context of enrolment growth, and increasing student expectations and frustrations with respect to access and financial aid, have led to widening fissures in the system. This review has identified, in addition to under-funding, the limits of academic staff capacity as a further crack in the foundations that threatens to widen and have a detrimental impact on the quality of provision.<sup>58</sup>

Baijnath's argument is that despite the incisive changes in South African higher education, which were aimed at addressing the apartheid legacy of divided, unequal and highly inequitable provision, there remain 'underlying faultlines' in the system, as the 2015/16 student protests demonstrated. In particular, he notes underfunding in the face of the massification of black higher education, and related to that, growing student frustration with respect to access and financial aid as the main causes of the 'widening fissures in the system'. He urges that 'immediate solutions to the particular crisis that higher education finds itself in need to be found, but it is important that any future courses of action are informed both by rational analysis of empirical data, and reflection on and understanding of the directions, trends and trajectories of the system in the past'.<sup>59</sup> In this chapter, we try to do precisely that.

With this final chapter, we seek to draw out a set of findings from a first analysis of the reflections of the 12 featured student leaders.<sup>60</sup> To begin, we provide an analysis of the data as a whole. We then analyse the chapters in pursuit of responding to the tough questions asked in the opening chapter of this book:

- Has the post-apartheid regulatory framework for higher education governance failed?
- Have the provisions for student representation failed?
- Is there need for a reimagining of higher education governance and student leadership therein?

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58 Baijnath, N. (2016). A word from the CEO. In Council on Higher Education, *South African Higher Education Reviewed: Two Decades of Democracy*. Pretoria: CHE. p. ix

59 Ibid.

60 We say 'a first analysis' because it is our hope that other researchers will mine the material presented in this book more deeply and ask other questions of it. The original transcripts are also available from the HSRC's national research repository, as long as research ethics clearance has been obtained.

Inevitably, the analysis in this chapter covers only certain issues and can only provide explanations for why students made the particular choices they did, or developed in certain ways, or behaved in certain manners, based on their own accounts. This predisposes the analysis to focus on rationalisations of actions informed by hindsight, which suggests paths chosen were more rational and deliberate and determined by individual agency than might actually have been the case, given the messiness of broader, sociocultural and political influencing factors. A much broader study of the macrosocial conditions that influenced the way in which student leaders understood their roles and the actions they took would provide deeper and possible alternative explanations for their decisions and behaviours, and this would be a fruitful avenue for further study. Questions that could be further pursued include: To what extent were leaders' engagement styles – combative or based on boardroom-type negotiation – affected by their sociocultural contexts? To what extent were actions determined by relationships with national political bodies and are there any patterns to be observed? What influence did funding or the lack of it have on personal leadership choices?<sup>61</sup>

The narratives presented suggest tantalising indications of political manipulation in some instances. Personal motivations were perhaps based more on individual need and aspirations than social justice ideals, and actions may have been based on far from clearly formulated notions such as 'decolonisation' than they are made out to be in the reflections. In short, there is a need for further study, for critical engagement with the reflections, and possibly much more work of a historical nature, to explore such complexities further.

Other areas for further study include an analysis of institutional responses to the issues raised by students to understand better how some continuities, such as funding and accommodation issues, have remained seemingly intractable. While the works of Jansen and Habib lay out the view from the perspective of university vice-chancellors,<sup>62</sup> and our work provides the perspective from the point of view of SRC presidents and student leaders, a critical engagement with both perspectives, as well as with the views of national-level role players (e.g. in the Ministry of Higher Education, NSFAS, SAQA, etc.) remains to be done. The ongoing work on institutional cultures will also need to be broadened (to include universities beyond the usual suspects) and deepened, to understand better how different institutional leadership contexts framed the approaches, actions and effectiveness of student leaders and why and how they engage with and respond to the students' voices.

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61 We are grateful to the peer reviewers of the manuscript for pointing some of this out to us.

62 Habib, A. (2018). *Rebels and Rage: Reflecting on #FeesMustFall*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball; Jansen, J. (2017). *As by Fire: The End of the South African University*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.

## Continuities and discontinuities in a quarter-century of student leadership

Given the timespan of the book, the historical contexts of the individual chapters differ markedly. Some of the reflections from the earlier periods are situated in the immediate post-apartheid context, where the student leaders like Prishani Naidoo (chapter 3) were involved in debating questions on the implications of the transition to democracy, charting a new policy direction of higher education, and participating in the policy processes that eventually led to the 1997 'settlement' enshrined in Higher Education White Paper 3 and the Higher Education Act of 1997. Student leaders from the following period had to deal with the question of how to make the new framework of co-operative governance work (see Jerome September, chapter 4), how to make student representation work within their institutions, while at the same time attending to matters such as student access, funding and success, and their correlates of academic and financial exclusions, to mention but a few.

As the general student body changed over two decades and began to resemble more closely the national demographics, so the elitist nature of higher education waned. In a representative, massified higher education system and institutions, the inequalities present in society at large become increasingly evident in higher education, presenting new challenges for student leadership and conflict with university managements, the Ministry and entities such as NSFAS. It is said that universities are a microcosm of society; as they are increasingly reflective of the broader society, they also reflect its stark contrasts, its division and the ills that are afflicting it, like inequality, poverty and the threat of unemployment, high levels of crime and violence, including gender-based violence. Student political culture will also more readily reflect the ways of engaging with politics in the communities students come from.<sup>63</sup> Thus, if in the early 1990s littering on campus was considered a radical act of political protest and defiance, by the mid-2010s, the calling nature of fire had become one of the primary ways to gain the attention of an increasingly leaderless and unresponsive political class and university leadership.

### A bird's-eye view of student leaders' reflections

Considering the full dataset, the content analysis of the data shows that what has been at the forefront of student leaders' reflections in the foregoing chapters is always 'students', the 'university' and the 'SRC'.

These three terms are at the top of the list of our analysis of a tree map of the 100 most frequent (stemmed) words across the chapters. They are followed by terms like 'issues' and 'politics', 'institutions', 'campus', and 'thinking', and eventually

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63 Booyen, S. (2016). Aluta continua! In S. Booyen (Ed.), *Fees Must Fall: Student Revolt, Decolonisation and Governance in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press. p. 314.





SAUS. A contrary movement splintering the political compact in the student body occurred through the alignment of different student groups with national political parties. This started in the late 1990s and early 2000s with the establishment of student branches of the Young Communist League (YCL), the ANC Youth League (ANCYL), the Democratic Alliance Students Organisation (DASO) as well as a revival of the Pan Africanist Student Movement of Azania (PASMA) on some campuses. The Freedom Front Plus and Afriforum emerged on some historically Afrikaans campuses in the mid-2000s, and in the 2010s the Economic Freedom Fighters Student Command (EFFSC) began to mushroom. SASCO aligned itself with the ANCYL and YCL in the form of the Progressive Youth Alliance (PYA), albeit not without occasional in-fighting and breakaways (see, for example, Sokhaba, chapter 12).

The more direct role of political parties in mediating campus-based interests, and even directly influencing student activities on party-political lines, becomes ever more apparent in later chapters. Most of the accounts are from leaders who were members of the majority party elected, but as a counterpoint to these narratives are those from leaders who found themselves effectively in opposition to the dominant SRC, like Hlomela Bucwa in her first term (chapter 11), or part of a minority in terms of race or gender, like David Maimela (chapter 6).

### **The SRC and the student body**

One of the continuities is the difference in experience between those SRC leaders who served for more than one term compared with others who only served one term. It seems to be a common view that it takes a long time to become familiar with the formal processes and how universities work, such that those serving just one term do not seem to get to participate in ways that ensure that the co-operative governance processes are effective.

The ways in which student leaders engage and communicate with their student constituencies and the broader student body have also changed over time. From the second half of the 1990s, there is the emergence of student parliaments as a vehicle to engage with the broader student body and student formations, with more or less success, depending on the particular institutional context. Some leaders from the earlier periods describe how they used basic print media (newsletters, pamphlets and posters) and direct meetings for communicating with the student body; more recent accounts highlight the importance that electronic media – first email and eventually Facebook and other social media – has had on the way in which students can be informed, conscientised and mobilised around particular causes and events. As one of the contributors commented about the fee campaigns of 2015/16:

They realised it laid in a simple hashtag – that was our Arab Spring moment!  
– the power of social media. And so, they were able to craft that into a simple

catchy slogan: #FeesMustFall says it all. It was all encapsulated into that.  
(September, chapter 4)

With respect to SRC administration and budgeting, there are significant differences between how these were managed at different institutions as well as across time. In some instances, particularly in historically black university contexts, SRCs seemed to have had access to large budgets with few checks and balances in place (as Bafo's chapter 5 indicates), while in others, these were administered by Student Affairs divisions, consequently with higher levels of scrutiny and tighter oversight. A number of student leaders speak to the importance of ensuring that the incumbent SRC provided entertainment (for electoral purposes!), particularly in the context of the post-liberation 'Boom Shaka' generation, and attest to how budgets were often used for 'bashes', and sometimes even for corrupt money-making schemes. As one said, somewhat acerbically, about the way organising a bash would work: 'You call SAB and SAB comes in. You say, "Give us stock for R80 000; we give you a cheque of R80 000." We sell that stock, whatever we got as profit, we shared amongst ourselves.' The roles played by Student Affairs divisions thus differed across different contexts; in some, they played a developmental, educational and supportive role, providing administrative guidance and oversight and a sense of continuity, being repositories of institutional memory and sources of institutional capacity, while in others, they seemed to rely on student ideas and issues to justify their existence (see Madlala, chapter 9).

Many of the contributions detail the multiple roles of an SRC. Lorne Hallendorff in chapter 10 outlines them as follows: identify social justice issues on campus and champion them; have an active and involved voice in policy development in the institution (e.g. fees, timetable); be a service delivery watchdog; and build community and cohesion in the student body (e.g. using sports). Beyond these, others speak to the role of SRCs beyond the institution in influencing national debates and in playing a conscientising role among students with respect to the serious issues of the day.

### **Substantive issues and demands**

Despite the long timeline from 1994 to 2017, there is a continuous thread running through all the chapters about an enduring struggle against exclusion – financial exclusion, academic exclusion, and exclusion from knowledge deemed relevant by students, and from the systems and values that ought to underlie higher education in a democratic South Africa. While the language and concepts have changed across the periods, and 'transformation speak' has given way to theories of decolonisation in some quarters, the central student concerns have remained doggedly similar.

The key issues are well known: academic and financial exclusions, student funding, student accommodation, institutional transformation and institutional culture

(including residence cultures), the relevance of the curriculum, teaching and learning in the classroom, as well as matters of governance itself. We have argued that the #RhodesMustFall and related 'decolonisation' campaigns as well as #FeesMustFall 2015 and its iterations in 2016 and beyond, worryingly illustrate an apparent lack of responsiveness of higher education authorities. This lack of responsiveness includes a tendency to 'pass the buck' back and forth between institutional and system levels, whereby either side tends to opportunistically evoke notions of institutional autonomy or public accountability, an abrogation of public responsibility or alleged interventionism. The matter of student fees is a sad case in point.

### **Student fees, institutional cultures and the curriculum**

The issue of student fees is writ large as one of the main continuities in terms of the issues with which SRCs have had to contend. Access to higher education for black and female students and for poor and working-class students is an enduring issue running through the narratives, although the focus changes over the years from struggles against financial exclusions, to attempts at making NSFAS work, and eventually #FeesMustFall. Even as the #FeesMustFall campaign progressed, there was a shift within the student movement from keeping higher education affordable to making it altogether free for the poor and 'missing middle'. Given the correlation between race and class in South Africa as a legacy of colonialism and apartheid, the issue of student fees has always been a double social justice imperative, namely to redress the inequality of student access in terms of both race and class. How the related debate lived itself out in terms of the admission policy of an elite university can be seen in Hallendorff's reflections (chapter 10).

In the earlier accounts, there is some concentration on institutional culture and curriculum transformation, but there is relative silence on these matters until the accounts in the later years of the period, particularly in the explosive times of 2015/16, and in relation to the way the #RhodesMustFall movement has taken up the matter. Where student parliaments had been relatively quiet, suddenly they emerge alongside the campus-based movements and campaigns (like #OpenStellenbosch and #AfrikaansMustFall) to fulfil the roles that had been intended for the institutional forums which, in many institutions, had largely become de facto defunct in the middle part of the period under discussion, or had been side-lined as just another procedural hurdle in the governance process.

Behind the narratives it is clear that in the earlier years, much energy was being expended on establishing a new order within a social justice agenda – new structures and processes, and new ways of funding students through NSFAS. Somewhat mirroring the national context, in the middle part of this period, in which neoliberal concerns were uppermost and many institutions were dealing with the exigencies of mergers and incorporations, the social justice discourse seems to have become displaced and individualised by the struggle for the financial survival of students. This struggle was seen to be largely confined to rural and historically

black institutions, which, despite perennial student protests, did not occupy centre stage and were largely ignored by public media. When the systems that had been set up, such as NSFAS, began to founder under inefficiencies and the sheer weight of expectation and demand, and when the problems could no longer be dealt with through special programmes designed to ‘patch up’ the system, and when a critical mass of need finally struck the historically white institutions, the system was ripe for all the underlying issues of poverty on campus, racism, sexism and harassment to surface in student protests that exploded relatively suddenly. All this happened in spite of ongoing research into the student experience which showed how fast the kettle was boiling.<sup>64</sup>

### Student protests

Student protests are an enduring feature of SRC tenures in most of the accounts in this book, particularly where the formal processes are considered to be too slow to respond adequately to student grievances. As Maimela argues:

If you look at the history of higher education instability, or rather contestation, at the ups and downs of the higher education sector in terms of stability, every few years it shows some form or another of upheaval or instability that reaches a boiling point. So the emergence of the #FeesMustFall movement is not an outlier and it is not a new phenomenon but rather a continuation of that kind of a thing. (Maimela, chapter 6)

The accounts also detail a repertoire of strategies and tactics for articulating student needs, which become ever more radical and destructive, and different reasons for student protests. Sometimes, as some leaders admit, protests were used to placate constituencies and to be ‘seen to be doing something’. In some contexts, student protests were not necessarily about substantive issues, but were intertwined with local politics and an expression of partisan and factional battles beyond the campus. However, as Sokhaba from UWC instructs:

But protests, I want to put it, protests are not occurring willy-nilly or sporadically just out of the blue. Students call mass meetings. Mass meetings chart the way forward for what is the agenda and also debate the agenda. People think that it’s purely just anarchic passions being thrown around. No! Mass meetings have got structure; they are chaired and there are interactions. (Sokhaba, chapter 12)

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64 For a review of 10 years of literature on the student experience in South African higher education, see Kerr, P. & Luescher, T.M. (2018). Students’ experiences of university life beyond the curriculum. In P. Ashwin & J.M. Case (Eds), *Higher Education Pathways: South African Undergraduate Education and the Public Good*. Cape Town: African Minds. pp. 216-231.

Another point about protest marches that was raised by some leaders is that, whereas some protests may have seemed intimidating to university managers, they were not really intended to be. Mpho Khati speaks in chapter 13 of the singing of old and new struggle songs during protest marches as a way to unite students and express a common feeling. As she says,

The idea of the singing, I think, it is just to build a momentum because you don't just want to be walking there ... Sometimes students would just be singing for fun, because they enjoy singing and running around. I don't think it crossed our minds to say, 'Let's sing to intimidate Prof.' (Khati, chapter 13)

Jerome September (chapter 4) provides an insightful general list of the main reasons for protests. Among the top reasons September notes are: slow and stalled decision-making processes in universities, which can drag on beyond an SRC term; a lack of political will by a university leadership or students to follow through on a particular issue; that management doesn't understand the urgency by which students need their matters addressed and, conversely, student leaders also need a 'quick win' to be seen to be achieving something. But then, he adds, there is often comfort and certainty in the long-winded decision-making processes of a university as a surety that any long-term decision has been well considered.

### **The biographical impact of participation in student leadership**

A final continuity evident from the reflections of the interviewed student leaders is the seminal nature of their student leadership experience to their further development – irrespective of how rewarding, frustrating or traumatising it may have been. For most, the impact has been life-changing. As one put it:

That was the transformative moment for me ... What I was when I arrived to what I was when I left student life; it's two different people. It took my life on a journey that I don't think it would have gone on, had I not had that experience. Absolutely fantastic. To this day, it's the lessons I learnt then that I can apply to my role and to my job. (September, chapter 4)

September's career in student affairs and services is certainly an important case. Nonetheless, it is interesting to see how most former student leaders have moved from politics and political activism to becoming professionals, mostly with a public service orientation. Almost half are in active public service positions in national government departments, a public entity, or in local or provincial government. Two are practising law, one is a municipal councillor and another was a Member of Parliament at the time of interviewing. Two work in university contexts, one as

an academic, another as a senior student affairs professional, while another two are active in the private sector as entrepreneurs.

In all cases, their student leadership experience did not come without sacrifices, in some cases triggering depression, yet all reflect on how the experience eventually improved their self-confidence, their ability to speak in public and think on their feet, their agility and their ability to deal with difficult situations. For a number of them, the experience gave expression to their fundamental impulses to improve the lives of people around them in one way or another.

Student activism by its very nature is a temporary thing. It's an episode in one's life, and one can't be a student activist forever. By its very nature, it doesn't outlast graduation. But of course, there are things to be done in society and when you graduate, you must find your rule book to pursue the values you thought you were pursuing. And they don't have to be in political parties. (Sikhakhane, chapter 2)

As evidenced in their accounts, the student leaders have all attempted to write their rule books in the different trajectories their lives have followed after their student leadership mandate.

### **Student representation**

One of the core themes in this book that is dealt with in this chapter is student representation, and how it has changed over time and in different contexts. In the earlier narratives, we noted scepticism, but also some enthusiasm, regarding the implementation of co-operative governance and the formalising of student representation in structures and SRC roles. There are discernible differences in SRCs' approaches, with some being able to use the formal structures more or less effectively, and others finding them too long-winded and obstructionist for addressing student issues. Against the background of the 2015/16 student protests, we started the journey of traversing almost a quarter of a century of student leadership in South Africa by asking the questions: Has the post-apartheid regulatory framework for higher education governance failed? Have the provisions for student representation failed? Is there need for a new reimagining of higher education governance and student leadership therein? We asked these questions in light of the stark reality that despite the provisions of co-operative governance and the statutory means that provide for student interest representation, and various other ways to alert university leaders to student concerns, student protests are a recurrent and frequently violent part of life on many South African university campuses. To focus on these questions specifically, the next section revisits the regulatory framework for student representation and then analyses student leaders' reflections on higher education governance and student representation in more detail.

## Student leaders' experiences: has co-operative governance failed?

The national regulatory framework for higher education sprang from a historical moment informed by the transition from apartheid to a democratic system of governance in the national political arena. In the face of a crippling apartheid legacy and pressing demands for a reform and reconstitution of the higher education sector, a new higher education policy set out to profoundly transform and democratise, reconstruct and develop the sector.<sup>65</sup> In 1995, President Mandela appointed the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) to advise the minister responsible for higher education on *inter alia* the constitution of higher education; goals for higher education; the institutional landscape; the governance of the system of higher education and its institutions.<sup>66</sup> In its final report, the NCHE provided a succinct analysis of the apartheid legacy in higher education and charted a way forward for the transformation of higher education.<sup>67</sup>

The NCHE proposed 'co-operative governance' as a model of decision-making for the higher education system as a whole as well as for the governance of institutions. In the conception of the NCHE, co-operative governance was to be understood within the context of the transformation and restructuring of the higher education sector as a set of principles, structures and procedures that could accommodate the different interests of higher education role players and effect policy compromises.<sup>68</sup>

The proposals of the NCHE were given effect in the Higher Education White Paper 3 (White Paper) and the Higher Education Act of 1997 (HE Act). In terms of governance, the White Paper argued that 'the governance of higher education at a system-level is characterised by fragmentation, inefficiency and ineffectiveness, with too little co-ordination, few common goals and negligible systemic planning. At the institutional-level, democratic participation and the effective representation of staff and students in governance structures is still contested on many campuses'.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, the White Paper argued, 'the transformation of the structures, values and culture of governance is a necessity, not an option, for South African higher education'.<sup>70</sup>

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65 Hall, M., Symes, A. & Luescher, T.M. (2002). *Governance in South African Higher Education*. Research Report. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education. p. 19.

66 National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) (1996). *Report: A Framework for Transformation*. Pretoria: HSRC. p. 265.

67 *Ibid.*, pp. 171–172.

68 SASCO, however, rejected the final report of the NCHE, holding protests against it nationwide. A memorandum to the minister of education noted amongst the demands of SASCO, that broad transformation forums should be established with fully vested powers (unlike the IF), that SASCO and SRCs should be recognised, and privatisation of services on campuses should end (*Varsity*, 1996f).

69 Department of Education (1997). *Education White Paper 3*, Section 1.4.

70 *Ibid.*, Section 3.1.

Co-operative governance thus provides for specific governance structures at national and institutional level, their composition, delineated functions and relationship to other bodies and it identifies a set of higher education constituencies. Moreover, the principle of democratisation of governance in higher education implies a spirit of mutual respect and tolerance in the interaction between different constituent groups that is conducive to a well-ordered and peaceful community life. Concretely, this involves a composition of governing bodies which should be representative of all affected groups and processes of decision-making that are democratic, participatory, transparent, and able to hold the leadership accountable.

The analysis across all twelve chapters of the former student leaders' reflections shows that in the early and mid-1990s, there was still a debate in the student movement as to the place of students in decision-making on higher education. In the later periods there is considerable variation in the way student leaders approach co-operative governance arrangements, differing between institutions, the personalities and cultures of managements, and the effectiveness of student representation, vacillating between trying to make formal representation work, and engaging in alternative ways of voicing student interests.

### **The lost debate on transforming higher education governance**

The chapter by Prishani Naidoo illustrates some aspects of the debate in the student movement in the mid-1990s around student representation. She recalls how in her time in the Wits SRC of 1995/96, 'the discussions and debates started happening whether we sit on Council or not'. One of the fears of student leaders was that the SRC would become 'part of the university management, and we will be making decisions about other students'. At the same time, there was also the debate about the actual organisation of university governance, 'this idea that the Broad Transformation Forum would replace the Council', and that the ways universities were governed would fundamentally change. However, as Naidoo correctly argues, 'the whole critique that was there from the early 90s about existing structures of governance got lost' (Naidoo, chapter 3).

A legacy of the early debates on the lack of legitimacy of councils and senates – not only because they were demographically not representative but also because they did not reflect the aspirations of a transformed, progressive higher education governance culture and structure – was the statutory creation of the Institutional Forum as an internal transformation advisory structure, and the principles underpinning co-operative governance.

Jerome September recalls, for instance, that during his two terms in the UCT SRC (1997/98 and 1998/99), there was a serious attempt by the SRC to practise co-operative governance. The UCT SRC accepted the kind of changes proposed in the 1997 HE Act, which meant that the SRC appointed student representatives to participate in Council and Senate. At the same time, the executive committee of the Broad Transformation Forum of UCT now became the Institutional Forum.



Accordingly, 'what it would mean for us [was] to sit on these committees and be so-called co-governors' (September, chapter 4). September felt, however, that the new governance system was not really designed to empower students:

At times I was feeling that this is a way we are actually being managed, because suddenly all the energy must go to this structure as opposed to previously where you could just march or write a petition or do whatever. (September, chapter 4)

In Naidoo's recollection of her participation as SRC vice-president, she is also quite critical of the new way of 'managing student leadership'. Her recollection was the feeling of being overwhelmed by having to wade through thick agendas – 'these thick documents with pink, green and yellow pages' – and participate in discussions that she 'hated', not being able to impact on the agenda-setting and being told in the course of discussions that 'your voices have been heard and you have been consulted', as if this would settle a matter. Naidoo remembers how she said to the senior professor who had put her down that 'consultations don't just legitimise a process', but that having been heard must mean that 'you must have some impact on the process' (Naidoo, chapter 3).

As these examples show, from the earliest days of implementing co-operative governance, student leaders felt that this was not really working in their favour. And it was clear already then, as Naidoo says:

We got disillusioned in that time because we were being frustrated by buying into a process and then not having our grievances addressed in ways that we thought were acceptable. (Naidoo, chapter 3)

The logical conclusion was to go back to protesting when necessary, as 'you will never win anything at the table that you can't win in the streets' (Naidoo, chapter 3). The relatively timid protesting at the time – which included things like throwing over dustbins – was taken most seriously up to the highest level. As Naidoo recalls:

I think it was in 1995 that Nelson Mandela summoned all student leaders to the Union Buildings ... He just lectured us for like 45 minutes about the need for us to be more disciplined on campuses in that kind of fatherly reprimanding voice: 'I will bring my army and police into your campus if you do not stop with this nonsense. Just tell me what you want, I will go to Anglo-American, I will go and get the money for you ... Get your honours, get your master's, get your PhDs.' That was his line. 'Leave it to us to do the other work.' (Naidoo, chapter 3)

In short, it would appear that a relationship that has since become normalised emerged already in the early days of post-apartheid higher education governance and leadership. The manner in which student representation in co-operative governance operates in practice is inadequate for a number of reasons (which will be considered in more detail below). Student leadership therefore requires that certain student grievances are taken 'to the streets'; and the response of university leaders and government is 'leave it to us', along with using repressive means to suppress resistance.

### Trying to make co-operative governance work

The 1997 settlement meant that SRCs became an integral part of a university's decision-making structures and, with their participation, SRCs co-legitimised the structures, processes and operations, no matter their actual efficacy in terms of addressing student demands. For some incoming SRCs, there was sufficient institutional memory, support and continuity to understand quickly how to organise themselves for representation in the governance structures. Where these are lacking, there was a lot of confusion, as the reflections in chapter 5 of Mlungisi Bafo, former SRC president of UWC, show.

In some cases, the SRC constitution provides guidelines on which SRC portfolio officer is supposed to sit on which committee. In other cases, such guidance is not available, as Kwenza Madlala, former SRC general secretary and SRC president from Mangosuthu University of Technology, recalls:

In terms of our constitution, there is nothing enshrined in there about committee allocations. How we used to do it, is that we were identified in terms of the responsibilities of the portfolio. For example, in the academic calendar committee as well as the Senate, we would have our faculty officer in there, because the faculty officer deals with academic exclusions and all those kinds of related academic issues.

We would also maybe go a bit beyond just the portfolios of the office and look into each individual's knowledge and expertise. So if for example, we had me who is in HR and we had an HR committee, then I would be representing there. Each member sat in two committees. And then at Council level, we would have the president and the secretary of the SRC. (Madlala, chapter 9)

Trying to match individual SRC members' interests, knowledge and expertise with the focus of a committee is therefore one way in which SRCs have tried to live up to the challenge. However, a frequent mention in the accounts is the need for training. How can students be expected to participate effectively in university governance structures without having been trained and without receiving ongoing support? Madlala argues:

Council is very critical for the SRC to be involved there. The manner in which it happens, still today, I feel that there is a lot of training and development that needs to take place so that student leaders understand their involvement and participation at that level.

It is important that they are there; it is another debate what their role should be when they are there. Some issues that are dealt with there are confidential; some issues that are dealt with require a particular level of comprehension of issues. And there's not a single training that you get before you go and sit in those structures. And you are just a student, you know. (Madlala, chapter 9)

Madlala's reflections also show that he feels student representation at the highest levels of university governance is important, not only in Council but also in Senate, 'where issues of curriculum are dealt with; issues of academic exclusion and inclusion are engaged. So, it's important that the students' voices are heard there' (Madlala, chapter 9). His argument overall is that there should be 'nothing about us, without us'. He notes that there are other important committees for students, for example, the academic calendar committee.

It's a very important committee as well, because there are sometimes realities that the SRC brings into perspective. For example, it's easy for the institution to say, 'Classes will commence on 23rd January.' But the reality is that registration will not be closed by then because of some financial difficulties and all of those things. You may end up now having people that are attending and some people that are still trying to register, and already they start on the back foot. (Madlala, chapter 9)

Zuki Mqolomba, former SRC president of UCT, also feels strongly about the importance of student representation in university committees, and about extending it further.

Students only had two representatives of students at Council level, and a few student leaders were represented at Senate level, but mostly we were represented at Institutional Forum level. We had about 10 candidates represented in the transformation committee at the Institutional Forum level. So at least there we were represented, but at Council and Senate there was little representation. So, we struggled to ensure that the student agenda was progressively realised on the campus. (Mqolomba, chapter 8)

When Hlomela Bucwa (chapter 11) became a member of the SRC of Nelson Mandela University and eventually its SRC president, she found that the provisions for the SRC to represent students in a number of important governance structures and committees gave it much power to influence decision-making at the university.

We realised how powerful the SRC is: we sat on the transformation committee, we sat on Senate, Council, the safety committee, the library committee, there was the IF – the Institutional Forum which makes critical decisions – we even sat on the tender committee. We sat on the committee dealing with screening the applications when we were looking for the new DVC and we sat on the selection panel as well. We sat in most ManCord and we had quarterly ManCord meetings with management.

The university also had a Student Support Services Council, so the SRC executive met once a month with the dean of students, the director of student governance, the officer of student housing and residences as well. So, we did have representation. And then, the faculty reps will sit on faculty boards. What we further advocated for that year was representation in the committees dealing with appeals and exclusion because there was previously no students. And that helped to decrease the exclusion rate, especially in that year. There was a bit of accountability. (Bucwa, chapter 11)

Bucwa further argues that the authority of the SRC comes from being able to represent the student experience authentically, justifying student involvement by what Aristotle called ‘the expertise of the affected’ which is encapsulated in the analogy ‘only the wearer of the shoe knows where it pinches’.

Overall, these reflections of the former student leaders are thus supportive of formal student representation on existing governance structures in general. At the same time, they raise several important points: one argument is that having more student representatives on a particular governance structure or committee would make student representation more effective; another is the need for training and support to bridge the gap between the ‘novice’ student representatives and representatives of other constituencies that have longer terms and more experience. A third point is about the sources of an SRC’s authority, namely its ability to represent students’ views authentically as well as its potential to mobilise students to take a matter ‘to the streets’. In all of this, the rapport between SRC and university leadership will also be critical. The following sections engage with these points more deeply.

### **How many student representatives should there be in a particular structure?**

The question of how many student representatives should be involved in a particular governance structure and its committees leads into a deep philosophical debate about the nature of representation, which is at the heart of the frustration that student leaders express with the co-operative governance model. As argued above, the policy-based conception of student representation provides some guidance, however cryptic – from the manner of appointment of student representatives, the composition of the different governance structures, to rules in terms of the roles

of representatives – that hint at the different manners by which a constituency's interests can or ought to be represented. In political theory, two fundamentally different manners of representation are distinguished as the 'trustee model' and the 'delegate model'.

In the trustee model, it does not really matter how many representatives a particular constituency has in a decision-making structure as the task of the representatives is to serve their constituents by exercising 'mature judgement' and 'enlightened conscience' (as Burke<sup>71</sup> expressed it). Trustee type representatives have discretionary authority to act in *their* best judgement on behalf of the constituency. This also means that trustees may be persuaded by the force of another trustee's argument to change their view in the 'enlightened' debate that ought to happen in a decision-making structure. The delegate model, in contrast, does not afford the representative discretionary authority. Rather, the representative acts on a mandate and is meant to serve as a mere conduit to convey this mandate to the forum. If the argument does not win the day and a compromise is required, a new mandate must be sought from the constituency.<sup>72</sup>

In university governance structures and committees there is typically the idea that a representative should act as an 'enlightened' trustee. For example, the HE Act stipulates that 'the members of a council ... must participate in the deliberations of the council in the best interests of the public higher education institution concerned'.<sup>73</sup> It is therefore the institutional interest, rather the interest of a particular constituency, that representatives are 'trustees' of. Others also argue that 'having a representative merely as a delegate would make fruitful rational deliberation difficult and render representative committees or councils quite useless'.<sup>74</sup> The question of how many representatives from a particular constituency should be on a committee is therefore less important, but the general argument is that 'allocations [of membership] should be determined with the purposes of the university in mind – which implies that groups whose activities are more centrally concerned with those purposes, such as faculty and students, should have greater representation'.<sup>75</sup>

Most of the former student leaders have, however, a different view of how student representation and decision-making in university structures should operate, and where they are able to put in place a functioning way of operating during their short terms, they tend to operate on a 'mandate' basis. The reflections

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71 Burke in Luescher, T.M. (2009). *Student Governance in Transition: University Democratisation and Managerialism*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Cape Town. p. 30.

72 Thompson in Luescher, T.M. (2009). *Student Governance in Transition: University Democratisation and Managerialism*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Cape Town. p. 30.

73 HE Act (1997), Section 27(7)b.

74 Luescher, T.M. (2009). *Student Governance in Transition: University Democratisation and Managerialism*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Cape Town. pp. 29–30.

75 Thompson in Luescher, T.M. (2009). *Student Governance in Transition: University Democratisation and Managerialism*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Cape Town. p. 30.

of two former SRC presidents from very different institutions illustrate this. Madlala from MUT recalls:

I put in place a *modus operandi* of the way things should be that we caucused committee agendas. But sometimes it becomes impractical with the kind of load, particularly in the kind of university where the SRC becomes too operational ... Ideally at times, we would call in the Progressive Youth Alliance, we would call the chairs and secretaries and say we are going to Council in a week's time. Or maybe even before that, because you need to put in agenda items too, which closes some time before Council: 'What are the issues that we need to put in the agenda?' We did at times. (Madlala, chapter 9)

Similarly, Hallendorff from UCT argues:

We tried to work on the basis that people who were appointed to committees needed to keep abreast of the major issues and decisions coming to those committees and bring those matters to SRC meetings. The matter would be discussed and the SRC would take a position. The student representative would then attend the next university committee meeting with a mandate from the SRC. SRC members were expected to argue the SRC's position at committee level rather than a personal view. (Hallendorff, chapter 10)

The argument here is that in order to improve the quality of decisions taken, it was preferable for agenda matters to be debated at constituency level, i.e. in the full SRC (or even involving the student assembly), and the student representative would then bring a mandate into a governance structure such as Council, Senate or any of their committees. The trade-off was that it would increase the workload of SRC members and that 'the pace of decision-making slows down' (Hallendorff, chapter 10).

The notion of 'caucusing' committee agendas implies that a particular student representative would enter a committee with a mandate. However, as Naidoo's earlier reflections aptly illustrate, the student view may easily be without impact. The same sense of a lack of impact is also implied in Hallendorff's comments on the emergence of #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall:

We tried to tackle issues that were a concern for students at the time. Issues such as admissions policy criteria, fee increases and outsourcing of support services such as cleaning and security. I think we were taking an approach that was more in line with how it was expected to be. We mostly used the regular avenues of writing a proposal, taking it to the relevant meeting, having it escalated based on the governance structure and so on. I was trying to get student leaders at the time to attempt this approach as much as possible, arguing that the best argument in the room will win. (Hallendorff, chapter 10)

While Hallendorff argues that ‘as a first port of call, it is very important to show that the approach of reasoned argument was attempted’, he does not exclude ‘a more radical approach if reasonable argumentation falls on deaf ears’. Hence, as far as the UCT student demands related to #RhodesMustFall are concerned, or those of #FeesMustFall, he argues, like others, that he was not surprised by the emergence of this wave of protests, precisely because the same matters had been raised continuously year after year without any success. In other words, it would appear that the argument – however well or badly presented – fell on deaf ears for years.

What emerges from the views of the former student leaders is that a fully fledged way of operating in a ‘mandated representative’ manner is not accommodated in university governance structures and committees, and it requires the kind of support for student leadership that only few universities can provide. University management members and many academics tend to prefer a ‘managed approach’ to keep meetings few and short and to move through the packed agendas of committees expeditiously. This, however, does not always afford student representatives a generous consideration of students’ views. If students insist, the result may be at best that an agenda item is deferred to a task team, sub-committee or later meeting, to afford it more thorough consideration. This then misses the point of the urgency with which students often need their grievances addressed – which September noted above as one of the reasons for protests. What alternatives are there for student concerns to be raised?

#### *Marching and handing over memoranda as alternatives*

There are discernible differences in SRCs’ approaches to representing student interests. Some, like Hallendorff and Madlala, used the formal structures more or less effectively, while others had to bypass them for various reasons (see Maimela, chapter 6), or found them too long-winded and even obstructionist in addressing student issues. Mpho Khati, former vice-president of the SRC of the University of the Free State, tells a story that resonates widely:

So, for example, you would submit an issue, like the issue of the shuttle system, or free internet ... And then they will say: ‘You have to submit it to Council, and Council will present it to the university Senate.’ But these bodies, they don’t sit every day. Now it is the beginning of your term, and they will say Council will sit in March. And the central SRC will sit in March. You sit as the central SRC including the Qwaqwa SRC president and you submit these issues. And then they’ll say, ‘Okay, we acknowledge these issues, we’ll submit them to Senate in June.’ They submit them to Senate, and by the time you get a response it’s nearing the end of your term. The new SRC repeats this same process. So, there are these many structures in between that frustrate you as an SRC and make you look like you are not doing work. But they’ll

say, 'It's bureaucracy; things must happen, you can't just make decisions, it's a university, we're not running a spaza shop.' (Khati, chapter 13)

As the former leaders' reflections show, student issues are based on a problem that has been identified and needs urgent attention – like transport or access to the internet – and once a matter like this comes to the attention of an SRC, it has typically already gathered a fair amount of frustration in the student body as a whole. To address such issues requires leadership and management skills, and a sensitivity to student issues, and responsiveness on the part of university leadership. Moreover, given their short terms in office, SRCs need to be seen to deliver effectively and to have a legacy which they can refer back to in the coming elections. Looking back, an SRC member needs to be able to say: 'We brought free internet to campus' or 'the shuttle system was started because of our SRC' as much as a student organisation needs to be able to say the same when canvassing in the next election. Some accounts indicate that this was often not understood by university leaders who could have instituted interim measures that swiftly responded to a student concern, while the permanency of a new operational policy or service could still have been considered in governance structures.

When student leaders perceive a comment such as 'it's a university, we are not running a spaza shop' as patronising and arrogant, they will find alternative ways of voicing student grievances. A frequently mentioned alternative to the committee route is to submit memorandums. Khati reflects:

Our main tactic was just submitting memorandums. With a memorandum you would get a 48-hour response as opposed to waiting for Senate to sit ... students do not understand these frustrating processes. People get agitated – so we will present a memorandum. (Khati, chapter 13)

Several of the former student leaders in the foregoing chapters talk about the tactic of submitting memorandums as a way of getting the attention of university leadership and having grievances addressed more speedily (e.g. Madlala from MUT, Mqolomba from UCT, and Bucwa from NMU). Khati also describes the process of making a memorandum in detail in her chapter.

Typically, the handing over of a memorandum is the culmination of a protest march to a university leadership's main offices. It may also be, like Bucwa reflects, published in social media and gain the sought-after attention of the authorities in this way:

So, we had a march. It looked like a joke to some people because there was like 50 of us. But the impact it had when we posted that thing on social media, when we attached the memorandum, the university responded. (Bucwa, chapter 11)



The 'deadline' set for a response to a memorandum is often linked to the threat of protest. In this respect, it is a rather brutal way of setting an ultimatum. As Khati argues (and the experience of her SRC during Prof. Jansen's vice-chancellorship shows), it is, however, more effective than the formal route. Nonetheless, the reception of a memorandum (or other kind of student submission) may sometimes be frustrating. As Madlala remembers,

When I first sat in Council, the very first meeting we sat in Council, we had prepared a memorandum of two, three pages on various issues. Council took about two to three hours correcting grammatical errors on our document. Grammatical errors! The content – they could see what we were trying to say. We tried to write this document in English; we are not English-speaking. But they took about two to three hours, and that is breaking young students who have got a potential to become something in future. So those kinds of things; this bureaucratic processes and all that; the university must guard against. (Madlala, chapter 9)

Madlala's reflection is a telling – if perhaps dramatised – account of yet another way in which student representatives feel they are being belittled rather than developed in conditions of extreme inequalities of power. Throughout the book we encounter student leaders' reflections on constellations of authority where their agency and subjectivity is under immense stress as they seek to represent the student voice. In a context where there are such porous boundaries between student representation and protesting, some of the reported attitudes and behaviours of senior managers and councillors (as encountered, for instance, in Madlala's account) fall short of reflecting a governance philosophy of mutual respect and tolerance.

### **SRC relationship with management**

A university's senior leadership plays a key role in setting the tone for the manner of engaging with student leaders. This section highlights some of the reflections of the former student leaders about good and bad relations, informal meetings, and the way university leaders can indeed play a leadership role even when it comes to student issues. But what leadership approach is appropriate in a co-operative governance context? Muzi Sikhakhane shares his view:

I suppose leadership is never a position of extremes. Leadership by its nature is a centrist position, and it's about managing contradictions better to achieve whatever it is you set yourself to achieve ...

I think that engagement about real issues rather than just ideological waffling works better. Because all human beings, if you sit with them closely, they do want justice, they do want freedom. What curtails them is their own

prejudices and their past that they bring to a discussion about the present.  
(Sikhakhane, chapter 2)

In Sikhakhane's view then, leadership in a university context is about addressing opposing views by way of sitting together closely on equal terms, seeking to find the common ground, and creating a common understanding and compromise. In some cases, a university leadership may need to display more wisdom in engaging with student interests than an SRC itself may display. A prime example thereof is recalled by David Maimela when the predominantly white SRC of UP did not adequately represent the specific issues that black students experienced in the mid-2000s at that university.

As discussed in chapter 6, while SASCO was not in the majority in the UP SRC, Maimela notes that the university leadership realised that only white representatives were represented in the formal university structures, so they were open to hearing black students' views and clearly listened with intent. This account illustrates that for the student voice to be heard, somebody must listen. In order for the grievances of a constituency to be addressed, those in authority must be responsive, lead and be accountable. Maimela's reflections suggest that the wisdom of leadership may require wider consultation – not to undermine an SRC but to ensure that the full diversity of views, even of a minority, is taken into account.

Some university leaders in the narratives appear to be quite receptive to students' views, while others seemed uninvolved. The examples about the different leadership styles of successive vice-chancellors from the same university are illustrative of the impact of personality on leadership style as perceived by a student leader. When Zuki Mqolomba was SRC president of UCT in 2006/07, the then vice-chancellor was Professor Njabulo Ndebele, whom she describes as a gentle and generous intellectual, but not someone who would support her SRC's fervent pursuit of a transformation agenda:

To be honest our vice-chancellor at that time was hands off; Ndebele was not a hands-on, actively engaged vice-chancellor, pursuing an agenda or a campaign on campus. He was an administrator. He was an intellectual and I respected the fact that he was intelligent. He wrote books and engaged in the public, but he wasn't a hands-on governor on campus. That was my critique of him – that he didn't push the transformation agenda hard enough. He was too gentle, he was kind, he was generous. But he wasn't hands-on. (Mqolomba, chapter 8)

When asked about his 2012/13 SRC's interaction with the senior university leadership, Hallendorff gives an account of a much more direct, hands-on approach.

On the whole it was a good relationship. I met with the vice-chancellor at least once a month in his office. Dr Price had an open-door policy towards the SRC and was readily available over email or phone if needed. He was very good about making himself accessible ... Overall, I enjoyed a very good relationship with Dr Price. Any disagreement was strictly professional. He was always very willing to consider differing points of view and he genuinely wanted to achieve outcomes that would be best for UCT students. (Hallendorff, chapter 10)

If good university leadership involves critically constructive, perhaps generous and gentle ways of listening to student voices to seek a common ground, the opposite is also evident in the variety of student leaders' experiences. As the former student leaders show, leadership approaches and attitudes towards student leadership within universities can differ widely. Xolani Zuma, former SRC president of the University of Zululand, adds his views with respect to senior Student Affairs professionals:

It depends on who is dean at the time. You will find some dean of students who is receptive and willing to listen, and some who would be very dismissive. And they will tell you: 'Look, there is nothing you can change here. These things have been like this for many years. You can't just come here and change things overnight. Your purpose is to go and study. So, stop causing havoc unnecessarily.' (Zuma, chapter 7)

Zuma also recalls the abuse of power he perceived by university authorities, threatening his expulsion for organising students and taking the university to task over core issues of teaching and learning quality (for details, see chapter 7).

I remember that at some point there was a gentleman who was heading security at the time who called me into his office and he said, 'Mr Zuma, look, I have your transcript here. I have your academic results. First year, you are doing so well, you are getting 80 per cent and 70 per cent, and since you joined the student activism, with your politics and your faculty councils, they have dropped. We are warning you, stop these things, or otherwise you are going to leave this university without a degree. And you are likely to be expelled.' These are things that were said. And I said, 'I know that it is not you that is saying these things. Who has sent you to tell me these things?' And he said, 'Management is not happy, both at the faculty level, but also at the senior management level, with the manner in which you are conducting yourself.' (Zuma, chapter 7)

While this account may be interpreted as a friendly warning not to neglect his studies, for Zuma the fact that the message was brought to him by the head of security, and the add-on that 'management is not happy with the manner you are

conducting yourself' clearly did not feel like the former, but rather like a threat. Madlala also reflects on the attitude of university leaders, as well as the leadership of Student Affairs, towards student leadership:

It's not only in Mangosuthu University of Technology. When I speak about attention to detail, I mean first of all the attitude of management in most cases towards student leaders is not a positive attitude. So, whatever they raise, is normally met with resistance – uncalculated resistance – because student activists, if they are properly orientated, they create work for management. A lot of work ... And if you are a lazy person, you are not going to want to do that. So the easiest way out is to say, it cannot be done. (Madlala, chapter 9)

If a negative and dismissive attitude provides one kind of example, Madlala's reflections in chapter 9 illustrate cases where management members deliberately misinformed a Council, or took credit for a student initiative. As Madlala argues: 'I'm telling you, most Student Affairs departments survive on ideas of students who unfortunately cannot copyright their ideas' (chapter 9).

Another counterpoint to the more positive experiences recalled by some is Sokhaba's reflection of the UWC SRC's role in 'the battle of the two Brians'. At the time, Sokhaba was serving his first term in the UWC SRC and found himself at the margins of a battle between the then chair of Council, Brian Williams, and UWC's long-serving vice-chancellor, Brian O'Connell and his deputy. Why did the SRC executive stand so staunchly behind Williams? Sokhaba reflects in chapter 12:

Where the turning point came consciously to me was when I started understanding that I do not realise the struggle we are in now. Probably because I did not understand the background workings; what actually motivates us here to even go to an extent of wanting to have the rector leave ... Now this is one of the issues that were raised to me by the comrades from the YCL saying: 'We are pretty much sure that you don't know that one of the motivations out there which is being said is that these comrades are taking bribes and you are getting nothing'. (Sokhaba, chapter 12)

While this is the only example of a speculation by a former student leader in this book that others in the SRC had been bribed to take certain positions – in this case, to the extreme of trying to force a vice-chancellor out – it is not the first such accusation to appear.

The relationship between university managements and student leaders is clearly often a very fraught one, and begs the question of what constitutes a healthy relationship between university leadership (and by extension the senior student affairs professionals) on the one hand, and student leaders on the other hand. Whose responsibility is it to ensure that there is a healthy relationship characterised

by mutual respect and tolerance, year after year, with successive generations of student leaders? Certainly, this is a hard task; but it cannot be acceptable for a university leadership to abrogate responsibility for protests and argue that the reality of perennial student protests is 'students' culture on this campus'.

As September has argued, the threat of student protests, and actual protesting, are mostly the outcomes of a lack of timely, and appropriate leadership responses to student grievances. Certainly, it depends on the issue involved, but his view is that it was 'often the combination of advocating in structures and protests that was more impactful' (chapter 4). While some students may experience a good march as fun (as Khati's account shows), and while there may be reasons for protests that are not quite as genuine as others (as shown in Bafu's chapter and others), responsive leadership could assist in providing alternative forms of entertainment and channelling partisan competition into less divisive forms.

Despite some of the accounts that provide negative views of university managements, others portray a different, and more mutually respectful and constructive relationship between student leaders and senior university leaders in general, and vice-chancellors in particular. As Sikhakhane's reflections from the early 1990s show, when the potential for adversarial relationships was at its height, there was a certain humility and understanding that mutual respect was essential for the powder keg not to ignite. Sikhakhane recalls:

We were able to engage management meaningfully, and the entire student leadership. There would always be people who didn't see eye to eye with the management, and there were those who didn't agree with us, but they treated us with respect. I still remember Judge Carol Lewis, who is now a judge in the Supreme Court, and I had to appear before her all the time. We differed sharply, but one thing we did was engage with each other, and that was important. She was very good at that level, and when she differed with us, she would call us to a debate. There were others we never had a relationship with, those who humiliated students in those engagements. There were a couple of them, and students didn't have a good relationship with some people ... But the vice-chancellor, Bob Charlton, I found that engaging with him as a human being was more meaningful than my engagement with some of the people who boasted they have been liberals before. I found that as a human being, he was much more sincere to deal with than some professors who I found to be more prejudiced than they imagined. There is always a contradiction between what students want and what management wants – it is never going to be smooth – but I think we were able to manage that relationship. (Sikhakhane, chapter 2)

If it was possible then to 'bridge the gaps' and 'manage that relationship', how may we be able to move forward today with the governance of higher education

almost a quarter of a century later and having amassed a wealth of experience and knowledge on what works and what doesn't, to guide us?

### How to move forward with co-operative governance

When the White Paper of 1997 and the HE Act came into force and co-operative governance began to be 'implemented' in the universities across the country, a saying made the rounds among student leaders: co-operative governance means, 'We govern, you co-operate.' The 'we' referred to senior university leaders and the 'you' to student leaders. As Naidoo's reflections illustrate, there was already scepticism towards the co-operative governance model in the student movement when it was first proposed; and the attitudes of senior academics and university leadership that she encountered towards student leadership were mixed at best. The reflections of others, such as September, Bafo, Mqolomba, Zuma and Maimela, also show that student leaders had vastly different institutional experiences when trying to carry out their roles and to make student representation work. Unequal institutional conditions have persisted throughout the decades, and the process of mergers and incorporations in the mid-2000s in some cases even exacerbated governance problems, along with the marginalisation of student voices in some institutions.

At the outset of this chapter we referred to the CHE's landmark review of higher education in 20 years of democracy published in 2016. Part of this work is an analysis of higher education governance conducted by a task team led by the former chair of the NCHE, Prof. Jairam Reddy. The task team's review provides a periodisation of higher education governance under democracy and a sustained account of how the initial hope for a democratisation of institutional-level governance (1994 to 2000) gave way to a rise of managerialism (2001 to 2009) and eventually to ever-more widespread institutional crises of various kinds (2009 to 2014).<sup>76</sup> While the historically advantaged and metropolitan universities had had various problems to contend with, it was in the historically disadvantaged universities, especially the rural and peri-urban ones, and in some cases in components of the mergers, that governance failures were of such a nature that assessors and/or administrators had to be appointed, the latter taking over the functions of Council and/or the vice-chancellor.<sup>77</sup> Among the key causes of governance failure at Council level and beyond identified in that review were factionalism and the 'stakeholderisation' of governance. It argued:

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76 Lange, L. & Luescher-Mamashela, T.M. (2016). Governance. In Council on Higher Education (CHE), *South African Higher Education Reviewed: Twenty Years of Democracy*. Pretoria: CHE. p. 112.

77 Ibid., p. 128; Hall, M. (2015). Institutional culture of mergers and alliances in South Africa. In: Curaj A., Georghiou L., Cassingena Harper J., Egron-Polak E. (Eds), *Mergers and Alliances in Higher Education*. Cham (Switzerland): Springer. pp. 145-173.

Unions, students, and in some institutions convocations, sitting in Council seem to be unable to understand that their role is not that of stakeholder representatives. This trend, together with institutional circumstances, means that councils can be and, in effect are, often unable to fulfil their fiduciary role.<sup>78</sup>

Among the reasons it advanced for the ‘stakeholderisation’ in councils were dysfunctional and ineffective institutional forums – which had precisely been designed as forums for stakeholder delegates to negotiate compromises – as well as various forms of factionalism, partisanship, and low-level corruption affecting governance.<sup>79</sup> A related point was the finding that academics and students were the ‘two fundamental casualties’ of managerialism. With respect to students in particular, it argued:

Students, despite noises about student-centeredness, have in the managerialist conception typically been reduced to being clients of the university, thus often replacing pedagogy with edutainment, the normative nature of education with marketing and communication campaigns, and their role in university governance to acting as sounding boards on user committees.<sup>80</sup>

The CHE task team then proposed ‘a post-managerialist system of decision-making and accountability’ which it characterised as a form of knowledge-based management of, and for, transformation. Among the features of such a post-managerialist governance, leadership and management system, it proposed that:

Re-centering academics and students as the heart of the academic enterprise will not only increase the knowledge available at the centre and re-insert fundamentally critical voices into the management discourse, it might also help to give effect to a ‘thick’ notion of academic freedom in which students’ rights to quality education is included.<sup>81</sup>

The CHE task team sought to translate these arguments into practice by proposing a form of transformative and distributed leadership within a context where a resuscitated Senate would return to the heart of institutional governance, in keeping with academic rule as a practice of academic freedom. Furthermore, it argued

it is important to reflect on the role of student leadership as custodian of the student interest and how statutory representation of students in Council,

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78 Ibid., p. 129.

79 Ibid.

80 Ibid., pp. 133–134.

81 Ibid., p. 134.

Senate, Institutional Forum, Student Services Council and, last but not least, the SRC itself, can give effect to a conception of students not as clients, but as members of the academic community, partners in their education and co-producers of knowledge.<sup>82</sup>

The reflections of the former student leaders in this book provide some material to elaborate on the points raised by the CHE task team, which resonate well with some of the experiences described by them. Thus, to conclude we will take them in turn: the principled matters raised in terms of academic freedom, academic rule and the way students' role is conceived in governance; the matter of the structural relations between governance bodies; and the role and functioning of the SRC.

### **Living the principles of co-operative governance**

The new model of co-operative governance proposed by the NCHE and adopted with some modifications by means of the White Paper and HE Act, envisioned the democratisation of existing structures and the establishment of new structures of governance at national and institutional levels, as well as the inclusion of previously excluded groups in the governing bodies of higher education. 'Democratisation' was to be the principle applicable to a transformed governance system:

The principle of democratisation requires that governance of the system of higher education and of individual institutions should be democratic, representative and participatory and characterised by mutual respect, tolerance and the maintenance of a well-ordered and peaceful community life. Structures and procedures should ensure that those affected by decisions have a say in making them, either directly or through elected representatives. It requires that decision-making processes at the systemic, institutional and departmental levels are transparent, and that those taking and implementing decisions are accountable for the manner in which they perform their duties and use resources.<sup>83</sup>

The starting point for the revival of 'a well-ordered and peaceful' university community is a renewed commitment to a democratisation of governance. Integral to this is the idea of equality – everyone's vote counts equally, everyone's voice deserves to be heard. Hence the need for mutual respect and tolerance in the interaction between different constituent groups, and the requirement that 'those affected by decisions have a say in making them'. Living the principle of democratisation in higher education governance would require moving a step on

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82 Ibid.

83 Department of Education (1997). Education White Paper 3, Section 1.19.



from the prevailing managerialism diagnosed by the CHE task team, towards a recentring on academics and students and the less hierarchical system of governance desired by Naidoo and others. As Naidoo notes:

From the #October6 group came the slogan ‘Towards a public African decolonised university’ and the discussions around decolonisation included structures of governance and the need to imagine a very different system of working together that doesn’t reproduce hierarchies. (Naidoo, chapter 3)

### **Making student governance work – at all levels**

With respect to student leadership and representation, a multidimensional approach towards levelling the governance arena and creating a governance system that is ‘democratic, representative and participatory’ could start by helping students to develop a comprehensive system of student governance. Madlala’s reflections in chapter 9 on how to improve student representation are particularly insightful in this respect, given the breadth and recent nature of his student leadership experience and his current role as chair of Convocation at MUT.

When I came in as president of the SRC I already knew what I would like to change. The first project I wanted to have was to launch structures of the SRC to properly constitute student governance. Student governance is not the SRC; it is all the structures that are involved in the governance of that particular university. So, I wanted to get residence sub-committees in place; I wanted to get the faculty reps which would then be responsible for ensuring that the class reps are functioning accordingly; get everyone in place and then hold a workshop. We wanted to form a booklet and workshop with these people on their responsibilities. Train the class reps so that they know what their role is. (Madlala, chapter 9)

A comprehensive system of student governance thus involves well-functioning structures across all sectors of student life, but particularly with respect to academic life in and out of classrooms, departments and faculties, and life in and out of residences, on and off campus. Similarly, Zuma (in chapter 7) speaks of the importance of having class representative systems and faculty councils in place for students to play a meaningful role in the governance, delivery and quality of teaching and learning.

Yet it is not sufficient to get the structures established and functional; the university community in general, and students in particular, must also understand the roles of the different structures, and who plays those roles.

If you go to a faculty, there must be a picture of a faculty representative there. Students must know, if you go to residence whatever, there must a picture

of a student who's a representative with their contact details. The student population must know who their first point of contact is, so that it is not only the SRC that has got calendars in the entire university. But you expect students to go to a class rep; some don't even know who their class rep is.

Your dean must know, here is the faculty rep, here is the person you will be liaising with. The head of Student Affairs must know here is the chairperson of the housing committee, the head of sport. If you do that within the first month or two, you have got your governance in order. You then are able as the SRC to focus on certain things and monitor the functionality of this governance to ensure that it really performs. (Madlala, chapter 9)

### The need for training

Putting in place a functioning student governance system cannot be done by student leadership alone. Student leadership development and student governance support are typical functions of Student Affairs departments. When Madlala was asked if such support had been available to him, he said: 'No, they are not doing it. And unfortunately, sometimes these deans of students, these people, they interfere with SRC things' (chapter 9). Moreover, in his view, training an SRC, or residence committees, faculty councils and class representatives, involves much more than what is typically offered. He comments:

As an SRC, you go for an inauguration training; they call it SRC induction. What it does is that you just get different heads of departments coming to communicate to you what they do. Someone will first tell you the vision of the institution and all those big plans, and then you get someone who will come and tell you about what Student Affairs and these departments do.

But I don't feel that this is a training. Because in a training on what it is to be an SRC, you should be getting a two- or a three-day training, where you get an expert in the area of leadership or whatever the case is, coming to make presentations to you, coming to tell you about time management, how you juggle your studies and this; emotional intelligence; how to deal with problems of people here; students who have been raped, have got AIDS – come to the SRC office ... how do you deal with that? ... Negotiation skills; basic skills. They expect us to sit with management and their departments and everyone there, and negotiate on fees or whatever the case is. But no one ever comes there and says: 'Here are negotiations skills.' (Madlala, chapter 9)

Although Madlala is talking about only a few days of training, ideally student leadership development and training courses should be conducted across the term and target not only incumbent student leaders at various levels, but also aspiring ones, in order to nurture a new cadre of student leadership. Some institutions do already offer in-depth and ongoing training, mentoring and supervision, while

others offer only a few days of induction. In this regard, it is important to emphasise that there remains a lot of inequality (or ‘differentiation’) amongst institutions and Madlala’s experience may not be as typical and generalisable as it is made out to be. The general point is that *all* institutions ought to be resourced to a point where they have the capabilities to conduct such training and equip student leaders to participate effectively. After all, universities are amongst the most complex social institutions in existence and to be able to participate effectively in their decision-making mechanisms requires a lot of learning. Moreover, the lessons learnt in student leadership are truly life-lessons (as shown in the reflections of student leaders on the biographical impact of their experience).

### Providing administrative support

Several former student leaders also commented on the pivotal role played by SRC administrators. For instance, Bafo (chapter 5) recalls:

And there was a lady there by the name Nondumiso. She worked for Student Affairs but since left UWC and went to work for HESA. At the time she was also a SASCO member but employed by the institution as the head of SRC admin. So management knew that we thought that she was suspect and of course wanted to have our own admin.

[But] I refused to fire Nondumiso. She was working as an admin person and she had all the institutional knowledge. Apart from that, here was someone that was renting a flat with a two year old and for me to say she must be fired, or removed somewhere else, what would I be gaining from doing that?

After we were elected into the SRC, we did not have the official handover from SASCO members because they were bitter about the elections; it’s normal ... We inherited a structure where there were no inventories, nothing. The computers were wiped; everything was cleaned, nothing. And the only person who was there to guide us, was the very same person Pasma members were saying I must fire, Nondumiso from Student Affairs. And the argument was that we had nothing except this person to guide us through the process. (Bafo, chapter 5)

Madlala also reflects on the importance of Student Affairs’ support for an SRC in helping with administrative processes and logistical matters. In addition, he argues that good support also impacts positively on student leaders’ academic progress.

We had one person from Student Affairs as administrative assistance. They did all of that, except the minutes which were the responsibility of the [SRC] secretary. What this person used to do is basically everything. If we wanted transport, we would requisition it and give it over to her, for her to process

forward. But we understood also that there was only so much that she would be able to do.

But part of that, I think administrative support is very important because it feeds into the success rate of SRC members in terms of their academic work. Because if they have not got sufficient support structures, they do all these things and then they end up lacking on their academic work. And the only thing the country does is cry that ‘SRCs stay for long and they don’t graduate’. (Madlala, chapter 9)

### **Structural interrelations, student representation in institutional governance**

In her chapter, Khati proposes a number of matters that would improve student representation. Top on her agenda is speeding up the decision-making processes in university governance and making them more accessible to students: ‘Definitely I would want the decision processes to be fast-tracked. I don’t have a formula now, but it must be fast-tracked.’ Khati also thinks that making student parliament a statutory student governance structure, and having management representation on it, would be an improvement.

I think one thing that could help is if the rector could also have a seat in student parliament and maybe come once a term to account to students. And maybe for the Higher Education Act to also recognise student parliament as a legit body where students can raise issues. (Khati, chapter 13)

What Khati has in mind is for student parliament to be taken seriously enough for the vice-chancellor of the university (who is also the chair of the Senate) to ‘have a seat’ on it and account to it. While this may sound like an outlandish proposition, it resonates well with the CHE task team’s finding on the importance of high-level linkages between governance structures. With respect to the Institutional Forum, that study found:

If, as the legislation proposed, the role of the IF was to gather stakeholder views of the variety of matters that constituted the purview of this structure to advise Council on, the failure of the IFs could result, and indeed it did in many cases, in growing factionalism of councils. There are few cases in which IFs have performed their role effectively and, in some of these, it seems that the fact that the chair (or co-chair) of the IF was occupied by a senior member of the university ensured the existence of a productive link with council.<sup>84</sup>

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84 Lange, L. & Luescher-Mamashela, T.M. (2016). Governance. In Council on Higher Education (CHE), *South African Higher Education Reviewed: Twenty Years of Democracy*. Pretoria: CHE p. 124.

## Let students lead

While there are many examples of ways in which student representation could be improved and effect be given to a more meaningful and constructive role of student leadership in higher education governance, an insight that can be derived from the reflections of the former student leaders is that institutional conditions are various, and relevant solutions are best found co-operatively at that level. To move forward will require new partnerships, imagination and courage. Can students be trusted to lead such a process? Sikhakhane and Naidoo argue that one of the most important contributions of #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall was intellectual: that they opened up a new discursive space to chart new ways of thinking and doing, with notions like decoloniality and the call for free, decolonised higher education. In Sikhakhane's words:

I think the essence of student activism – what makes it – is its honesty and independence ... And I think students [should] truly, every day – as they did with the #FeesMustFall, #RhodesMustFall – continue to help us, because that is their road: to intellectually lead us into areas we fear thinking about ... To ignite us to think courageously about things we have become lethargic about, and things we have learnt to accept – even if they are wrong ... All of us tend to be aligned with certain things that are set. Only students can do that for us, because they have the courage to defy the accepted narratives in society. Only students tend to force society to think critically, even about those idols we have created. (Sikhakhane, chapter 2)

The narratives from student leaders in this book have documented a number of different journeys. In the first instance, the immediacy of each student leader's personal growth through experience and having to face the challenges of student life and leadership in often very testing conditions shines through in their first-person stories. At the same time, there is a journey across time as the analysis traverses different generations of student leaders, emerging and consolidating legislative contexts, and the vagaries of political and economic conditions. This chapter has sought to reflect some of these continuities and discontinuities, highlighting specific insights that may help in shaping student leadership in the future and provide material for national and institutional policy development and improved governance practice. But most of all, the individual reflections have allowed a glimpse into the lived realities of a dozen student leaders who share a passion and a commitment to the service of others who, like them, have embarked on a higher education journey in search of a brighter future.

## About the editors

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Webbstock has a PhD in policy studies from UKZN, in which she focused on a conceptual exploration of institutional autonomy in higher education. She also completed a Postgraduate Diploma in international relations at the University of Amsterdam, which included a training period at the Netherlands Ministry of Overseas Development Assistance. Her honours degree (with distinction) was in political philosophy, while in her BA she majored in English literature and political science, for both of which she received certificates of merit. Having been active in student politics in her university years

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Webbstock's research and publishing has focused on higher education matters. As Director of Monitoring and Evaluation of the CHE she was responsible for the CHE's publications, including *Higher Education Reviewed: Two Decades of Democracy* (2016), *Reflections of South African University Leaders, 1981–2014* (2016), a number of issues of the CHE's scholarly journal *Kagisano* and of publications including *BrieflySpeaking*, *VitalStats* and the *Higher Education Monitor*.

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The book is important for current and future leaders of higher education institutions as it provides insights into the thinking, aspirations, desires, fears and modus operandi of student leaders. A 'must read' for current and future student leaders.

– Prof. Narend Baijnath, Chief Executive Officer,  
Council on Higher Education

*Reflections of South African Student Leaders 1994-2017* brings together the reflections of twelve former SRC leaders from across the landscape of South African universities. Each student leader's reflections are presented in a dedicated chapter. Key topics covered in the chapters are:

- Personal background and context of getting involved in student leadership
- Role as member of the SRC, SRC model, SRC electoral system
- Involvement of political parties in student politics and the SRC
- Ongoing communication and consultation of the SRC with the student body
- Relationship with university management and support from student affairs
- Co-operative governance and student representation in university governance
- Main challenges, student grievances and demands
- Reflections on #FeesMustFall, #EndOutsourcing and #RhodesMustFall
- Lessons for current and future leaders of higher education institutions



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