

Student Governance in Africa: Thematic Summary of Key Literature

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide a brief overview of certain themes and perspectives identified in literature on student governance in Africa. The paper addresses itself primarily to reflective student leaders and scholars interested in the subject. In accordance with the literature, the paper highlights the importance of the macro-political and macro-economic context in understanding the dominant forms student governance has taken. The paper briefly clarifies the notion of 'student governance' in relation to other key concepts found in scholarly literature on student politics. Then the actual content of scholarly literature on student governance is reviewed thematically in relation to (1) forms of and responses to student protests; (2) student government; (3) student representation in university governance; and (4) student participation in system-level governance. Lastly, the paper outlines a proposal for a high-level debate on student governance in Africa.

In sum, the paper finds that there is a wide range of forms of student political involvement in higher education governance. From the governance perspective, these can be analysed first in relation to their formalisation and, secondly, with reference to relevant levels of regime governance. Informally, students participate in higher education governance by employing a range of protest forms which extends from co-operative-informative forms to highly confrontational and militant ones. Student protests have attracted more scholarly interest than any other aspect of student politics.

The formal inclusion of students in higher education governance is a more subdued topic in the literature. At the level of student governments, some isolated studies have emerged. Typically, student governments are distinguished in terms of their size, electoral system, resourcing, and internal constitution. At the level of institutional governance, formal student governance typically takes the form of the inclusion of student representatives in various governing bodies of the university

(such as senate, council, faculty boards, committees and working groups). There is evidence in the literature that student participation in African university governance is both wide-spread and increasing. Lastly, a number of forms of formal student participation at the state or national level of higher education policy-making are also identified.

At the example of two different analytic perspectives the paper illustrates that student governance can be interpreted either in terms of the range of forms or the substantive commitments students express in their political involvement. The first perspective is applied in the main body of the paper. It acknowledges explicitly the historical dimension of various forms of student politics and their embeddedness in the macro socio-political and economic context. Using this approach, the study of student governance is more closely related to the neo-institutionalist approach to governance. A second approach takes issue with the general principles involved in particular forms of student governance. A debate based on this approach is outlined at the closure of the paper.

Given that this review describes and analyses literature on student governance across various national contexts and types of higher education institutions in Africa, the findings and conclusions are necessarily couched in quite general terms and broad brush the diverse and the sometimes even contradictory developments found in student politics across the continent. An attempt has been made to retain and illustrate some of the rich tapestry by collating ranges of variations and taxonomies. However, the main focus has been on similarities in literature that signal a main thrust of arguments, findings and conclusions, so as to provide a starting point for further comparative and case study research.

1 The Importance of Context

For the most part of the 20th century, developments in African higher education have been intricately linked to national and international politics, and African students have played a significant role in both. From the beginning of the 20th century, African students and student movements campaigned against Africa's colonisation by European powers and struggled with increasing determination for African independence in the 1940s and 1950s (Adu Boahen, 1994). After independence, the provision of higher education on the continent expanded rapidly (Sawyerr, 2004). Social justice and democracy continued to dominate the political agendas of students well into the 1970s (Adu Boahen, 1994). During this period, African students generally paid no tuition fees, enjoyed free board and lodging, and in addition even received a stipend (Sawyerr, 2004: 4). In the course of the 1980s, however, the steep decline of African economies (to the extent of collapse in some cases) has opened the way for structural adjustment programmes, and, concomitantly, the increasing withdrawal of public financial support from higher education. A concurrent rise in student enrolments has caused huge problems with regard to the quality of the learning environment (Sawyerr, 2004: 8). As a result of this changes, the political terrain of student politics also shifted increasingly from political governance to economic governance, while, at the same time, student activism became increasingly confrontational and violent (Federici, 2000; Mazrui, 1995)¹. In many countries, students were involved in mass coalitions with civil society, and played no small role in bringing about Africa's "second liberation" in the 1990s (Mazrui, 1995). Only in the lattermost part of the 1990s and the first years of the new millennium a turnaround in

¹ In francophone Africa this development set in approximately ten years later.

the dire economic situation and a recommitment to African higher education by both state and donors could be observed (Sawyer, 2004: 37).

Scholarship on student politics univocally and convincingly argues that African students have enjoyed for the greatest part of their involvement in Africa's governance being a legitimate part of the political order - this quite in contrast to students elsewhere in the world (Munene, 2003: 118; Emmerson in Altbach, 1989: 5; Altbach, 1991: 247, 257). It is widely acknowledged that African students drew on a pool of legitimacy established in the history of student political involvement in African liberation and replenished by their boldness towards post-colonial authoritarianism and externally imposed economic austerity.

Therefore the main thrust in the most authoritative scholarly literature on student governance since African independence is that the state of African nations, in terms of their macro-political and macro-economic realities, has been mirrored in the state of higher education and the prestigious national universities in particular, and that in this context, students' political attention has concentrated on macro-political and macro-economic governance rather than on higher education precisely because the true locus of authority in higher education has been outside of higher education institutions. This tendency, of course, attests the political astuteness of African students to correctly identify and engage the locus of authority; on a quite different note, the phenomenon also strikingly illustrates one of the pitfalls of a higher education system that lacks substantial autonomy (here particularly in terms of resourcing and governance).

Lastly, the concern of African student politics with African political and economic development and self-determination across the 20th century provides a contextual justification for the implicit claim made in this paper that the study of student governance in Africa must necessarily extend beyond the study of formal structures and processes ("models of governance") and also interrogate student protests and other forms of informal student political activism as quite *legitimate* forms of student governance.

2 Conceptualising Student Governance

What is 'student governance' and in what way is it different from 'student protest politics', from 'student politics' in general, or from 'student government'? One of the problems found in the review of literature on African student politics is precisely the lack of rigorous definition of these terms. 'Student governance' is largely a conceptual enigma in African scholarship; the notion of 'student government' is completely absent. When reference is made to student participation in university governance, it is hardly ever done so under the rubric of 'student politics'. More often than not, the notions of 'student politics', 'student activism', 'student unrest' and 'student protest' are conflated.

I propose that a clarification of these concepts should be approached by referring to the study of higher education and the discipline of political sciences. Generally, the term 'student governance' is a derivative from 'higher education governance' or 'university governance'. In South Africa, 'student governance' has come to mean descriptively the participation of students as active agents in the governance of

higher education². A more rigorous definition of 'student governance' requires an acknowledgment of (1) the multi-levelled nature of higher education governance; (2) aspects of student self-government on campus; and as noted above, (3) the various informal ways of students' intramural and extramural involvement in regime politics.

The notion of regime politics provides a crucial conceptual distinction between the study of politics in general, and the study of governance. In accordance with Hyden (1992, 1999) governance refers to politics at the level of the regime and thus to the question "who sets what rules when and how"? This is analytically quite different from distributive politics, or the study of "who gets what when and how", which concerns itself in higher education primarily with policy matters.

Studying student governance therefore involves taking account of the multiple levels of higher education governance - from the classroom level to institutional governance, and from policy-making at system level to the politics of international donor funding; it is concerned with the nature of the rule systems that govern the sector and students in particular; it studies the maze of formal arrangements and informal relations and dynamics that simultaneously enable and diffuse authority among the different role-players. Its study is "the web of governance" (Hall, Symes and Luescher, 2002), and how students locate themselves and are located within these constellations of power and authority.

For further clarification, it is also important to locate the concept student governance in relation to other concepts commonly used found in studies on student politics. Firstly, "student" means a person who is duly registered for a higher education qualification at a university or similar institution³. The collective of students at a particular university is called the "student body", and all student bodies of a country combined is called the "general student body" (Badat, 1999: 23).

Literature on African higher education sometimes conceives of students as "beneficiaries" of (public) higher education (World Bank, 2002), as "clients" or "customers" to the university, or even "consumers" or "recipients" of higher education (World Bank, 2002; Zuo and Ratsoy, 1999: 13-14). With respect to governance, students are sometimes called a "stakeholder" or a "constituency" in higher education (Otieno, 2004; Morrow, 1998; NCHE, 1996: 178). The different conceptions of the student have very different governance implications. For example, a client may be involved in corporate governance as a stakeholder for reasons ranging from notions of consumer democracy to marketing purposes (e.g. to instil brand loyalty). Yet, where does that leave the public good dimension on the one hand, and the notion of an academic community on the other? The study of student governance would have to grapple with those issues.

Conceptually, "student politics" is best used as an umbrella concept to refer to all political activities of students (e.g. Munene, 2003). While numerous scholars attest to the typically oppositional nature of student politics, actions of student protest, demonstrations, picketing etc. are best called just that, and student politics or student political activism are rather defined as broader categories.

² A critical study of 'student governance' would also have to grapple with the converse notion of 'student governance' as the governance of students as passive subjects in higher education.

³ Used as shorthand to refer to all types of higher education institutions, including institutes/universities of technology, colleges, etc.

“Student organisations” and “student movements” are then the platforms from which student politics is organised. They are usually national, inter-institutional or institutional. According to Badat (1999: 21-22) a student organisation can be defined as “a collective of students whose basis of affiliation to the organisation is either political, cultural, religious, academic and/or social. Student organisations are usually voluntary membership organisations within the student body of a higher education institution or the general student body. Student movements are distinct from student organisations in that movements are broader entities, typically consisting of several organisations with no formal individual membership. Student movements are more often the platform from which student protests are launched (Badat, 1999: 22).

Student organisations with compulsory or statutory affiliation of an entire student body typically go by the names of “student union”, “student guild” or “general student association”. Where the general student body is concerned one speaks of national student unions (e.g. NUNS). The executives of institutional student unions and guilds (often called just that or, as in South Africa, students’ representative councils) constitute a “student government”. This is a term not generally used in African higher education and scholarship, but quite common in American literature. It provides a useful conceptual means to designate these, typically officially recognised, formal structures of student governance. Student governments are the most conspicuous expressions of students’ claims to academic self-rule. The dual purpose of student governments is to exercise authority over the student body (particularly with respect to extra-curricular activities of students on campus and life in residence halls) and to represent the student body (especially vis-à-vis the authorities).

Having defined the subject under study a bit more clearly, the following section now gives brief overview of some of the main themes and perspectives of scholarly literature on student governance.

3 Key Themes and Perspectives

Mokubung Nkomo (1983) calls the variety of forms of student political activism the “patterns of behaviour” found in student politics. There are numerous ways to study the various forms and analyse and classify emerging patterns. Scholars of student politics in Africa are most interested in the oppositional side of student political activism and the investigation of the causes for, forms of, and responses to, student protests. Beyond that however, formal involvement of African students in politics, be that by means of student governments, student representation in university governance or the formal participation of students in system-level governance, is seldom studied. In the following section an attempt is made, by means of the thematic review of scholarly studies (and the addition of some supportive sources), to provide a point of departure for future detailed empirical studies of student governance.

3.1 Student Protest

Amongst studies of student politics, descriptive and explanatory case studies of specific events of student protests are most prevalent. These case studies point out the variety of ways in which students articulate their concerns and grievances, be that in relation to higher education and conditions in specific institutions or countries, or on national or international issues outside formal structures and processes of governance. Thus, student protests can be studied as informal student governance

as far as they represent an application of unwritten rules of student participation in regime politics and are employed outside the formal structures and processes of governance (Task Force, 2000: 59). The variety of forms of student protests adds an informal and infrapolitical⁴ side to models of student governance.

Student protests rely for their effectiveness on the response they receive within the higher education institution and, if they concern wider political or social issues, the response in wider society. The ways activists articulate their concerns are therefore often conditioned by the response they expect (Altbach, 1991: 249-250; Alence, 1999). Thus, the patterns of responses to protests have to be studied concomitantly with forms of protests.

The literature notes a dimension of protest forms that ranges from co-operative to confrontational ones. Less confrontational forms of student protest typically seek to inform, educate and instigate debate. Such moderate tactics include:

- “Publishing books, periodicals, journals, newspapers and pamphlets; organising meetings, congresses and conferences, holding symposia, debates lectures and seminars” (Adu Boahen, 1994: 12).
- The use of mass media such as newspapers, TV and radio stations to voice student concerns, or establishing student-owned campus media, including websites, are tactics used by student leaders and organisations in Africa and world-wide to voice their concerns (Zuo and Ratsoy, 1999: 16; Ojo, 1995: 36, 98; Adu Boahen, 1994: 12 and 18).
- Informal information exchange between student leaders and policy-makers inside or outside a higher education institution are a common strategy sought by both students and university executives (Zuo and Ratsoy, 1999: 16-17; Ojo, 1995: xv-xvi, 94; Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, 1973: 61-63). With respect to South African higher education, Hall, Symes and Luescher (2002: 99) found that informal exchanges between students and senior administrators can be one of the factors that result in serious governance problems.

Often well-reported in public media are the forms of student protest which academic literature intermittently refers to as “student unrest”, “indiscipline” or “misconduct”. They are geared towards, and often result in, a breaking of institutional rules (e.g. student code of conduct) or even of state or national legislation (Lipset, 1964; Ojo, 1995: 4). They include mass meetings, the organisation of rallies, protest marches, street demonstrations and strikes, class and examination boycotts (Adu Boahen in UNESCO, 1994: 12; Maseko, 1994: 78).

The more militant forms of protest only emerged after 1935 in Africa and mainly amongst francophone and Muslim African students (Adu Boahen, 1994: 17-18). In South Africa, the radicalisation of students occurred little later, mostly due to the National Party’s win of the majority of parliamentary seats in 1948, the formation of an exclusive Afrikaner government and eventually the formulation and implementation of apartheid policies (Beale, 1994: 45-63).

Student protest has various creative forms. For example at the University of Dar es Salaam, students used to have a well-known tradition of last resort to raise a concern: “The Punch” – a shaming campaign of posters with iconoclastic sketches

⁴ The notion of infrapolitics is borrowed from James Scott’s (1990) brilliant analysis of forms of resistance of subordinate groups.

and writing about a campus or national personality (Africa Events, August/September 1990: 34-36).

Protest action by students can be unpredictable to the outsider and become highly confrontational, aggressive and even violent, on or off campus (Mathieu, 1996: 25). Rampaging, rioting and looting on campus and in residences, laying siege on senate or council meetings, and even the torching administrative buildings have occurred. Often such protest action can result in serious damage to life and property. The kidnapping of senior university authorities (usually Vice-Chancellors) and even torture of kidnapped persons has been reported (Ojo, 1995: 48).

In response to violent student protests, a university management or government often chooses to call police to interfere; a response that often results in bloodshed and the loss of student lives (Altbach, 1991: 250; Ojo, 1995: 89-91). The violent repression of student activism is often a factor in "increasing both the size and the militancy" of activist movements (Altbach, 1991: 250). As a short-term strategy, repression may work well; for the long-term, however, it may prove counter-productive, sowing "the seeds of later unrest" (Altbach, 1991: 251).

The choice, which forms of protest activity to employ, however, is not straightforward. Outright confrontational tactics are often a measure of last resort; they witness to a polarisation of interests on a campus and/or in society at large. The lack of channels to pursue co-operative tactics or a lack of responsiveness from co-operative tactics may give rise to the pursuit of more confrontational ones; hence, the choice of tactics may be generally dependent on the responsiveness of the political system. For example, Siphon Maseko observed that to oscillate between protest action and negotiations with authorities in order to achieve students' objectives was a common tactic at the University of the Western Cape (South Africa) in the 1980s (Maseko, 1994: 85). Another instance is the 1988 crisis at the University of Benin (Nigeria); this case also highlights the pivotal role of the senior executive of the institution, the Vice-Chancellor in particular, in discharging student protests (Ojo, 1995: 91; also see: African Concord, 1988: 34).

With respect to student political activism and student protests, an important part of scholarly literature seeks to determine the factors that explain the emergence of student protests, or what Nkomo (1983) calls "the complex patterns for behaviour". The review of this topical area of scholarly literature is subject of another paper.

3.2 The Formal Organisation of Student Governance

In contrast to surveys of student protests, so far, no international comparative survey of formal student participation in African higher education governance has been published. However, from references in overviews of higher education in general, isolated case studies, and supportive primary sources, it is possible to construct an incipient picture of formal student governance in Africa.

Formal inclusion of students in African governance has taken three principal forms:

- (1) establishment of student governments on university campuses;
- (2) representation of the institutional student body in certain structures of university governance;
- (3) involvement of national (or institutional) student organisations in higher education policymaking.

Student governments are the officially recognised institutional executives of the student body (often conceived of as a student union, student guild or student association) and go by names like Students' Representative Council (SRC) or cabinet.⁵ Rarely in Africa, there is a division between an undergraduate student union and a postgraduate union. SRCs typically serve the dual function of representing the students' interests in institutional (and national) governance and in overseeing the political and social activities of students and student organisations on campus.

Student governments are typically structured along various functional spheres. This structure typically revolves around a central body – the SRC - and sub-structures that organise student life in residences, faculties, sport and recreation. Sub-structures focusing on the academic interests of students of a particular faculty or programme can include student faculty councils and class representatives; the interests of students in university halls/residences are protected by hall/house committees; and the extra-curricular artistic, athletic, and recreational interests of students may be organised by means of specific clubs and societies (also called sororities and fraternities), variably overseen by sector councils such as sports councils and societies councils or directly by the SRC. The portfolios of SRC officers (at times called ministries) closely reflect the formal organisation of student life on campus. (NSGRS, 2001)

The structure of student governments may further involve a geographical dimension. In multi-campus universities, 'satellite SRCs' might be established that are connected to the main campus SRC in various ways. For example, at the University of South Africa and the KwaZulu-Natal University, a federal-type structure of student government has evolved (Koen, Cele and Libhaber, 2004: 2)

Several types of African student governments can be identified on the basis of size and electoral system.

- A first type is relatively small (9-15 members) and made up primarily of representatives elected from student residences/halls (e.g. Rhodes University, Dar-es-Salaam University, University of Ghana) or from the faculties (e.g. University of Mauritius).
- A second type of SRC is also small but members are drawn from candidates proposed by student political organisations (typical in many South African universities). Elections are conducted by using a majority, single-constituency electoral system across the whole institution.
- A third type of SRCs is typically large, comprising up to 50 members elected on a party basis (list voting system). They constitute a student parliament and then elect a cabinet as its executive. This type can also be found for example at University of Venda and University of Pretoria.
- A fourth type of SRC is also small but candidates run on an individual basis, at times to fill a specific office/portfolio (e.g. University of Cape Town, Rhodes University).⁶

⁵ Unless otherwise indicated, this section on African student governments uses own data and data provided on websites of a random sample of African universities. SRC will be used as a short-hand for the various types of institutional executives of student governments.

⁶ This taxonomy is only indicative of the diversity of student government models. At Makerere University, Uganda, for example, student parliament ("Guild Representative Council") comprises of 105 members that are mainly drawn from residence halls. The guild president appoints a cabinet of ministers from the members of student parliament.

Apart from elections, the most common means of consultation with and accountability to the student body are mass meetings and the creation of student parliaments. Koen, Cele and Libhaber recently observed a shift in South African student politics away from using mass meetings to the use of student parliaments that are composed of representatives from various student clubs and societies. (Koen, Cele and Libhaber, 2004: 3; also see: SGR Support Team, 2000: 6)

Most student governments supplement the services offered by the university to students. Such services typically include peer counselling, the provision of financial assistance and assistance with academic and administrative problems. Some student governments offer study facilities and services, run businesses such as bookstores, book exchanges, internet cafés, photocopy services, tuck shops and restaurants, or oversee the provision of such facilities and services to students. Therefore, they have to work closely together with the senior management officials in student service departments, particularly a university's dean of students (or director of student affairs) and student development officers. Moreover, many student governments have hired professional and support staff members to run their offices and certain businesses. (Koen, Cele and Libhaber, 2004: 4; Ojo, 1995; also compare: Zuo and Ratsoy, 1999: 11-12)

The resourcing of student governments is very unequal. Typically, student governments finance their activities from allocations from the university budget, membership fees, business profits and levies on campus business activities, and through fund-raising activities. In the South African case, Koen, Cele and Libhaber (2004: 2) found extreme discrepancies in the budget allocations for student government in a sample of South African university. It must also be kept in mind that the ability of student governments to supplement their resources by charging for certain services they offer or accessing local sponsorships and engaging in fund-raising activities depends to a great extent on the institutional and national context.

At this point, there are few studies that attest to the extent of formal involvement of students in university governance by means of participation in key governing bodies such as council or senate. In his overview, Munene argues that students continue to have minimal or no say in African higher education decision-making (Munene, 2003: 121). There is evidence, however, that this view may not be correct. The extent to which some students in African higher education are formally involved in the governance of their institutions has been strikingly illustrated at the case of the University of Cape Town (UCT) for example (SGR, 2001). At institutional level, UCT is governed by a council, senate, and institutional forum, and a complex system of 118 committees and sub-committees (30 of which fall under faculty boards), 16 working groups and 10 Boards of Directors/Trustees. According to the findings of the University's student governance review (SGR, 2001: 2-3), the UCT student body is represented by elected student leaders in 32 of the 118 committees and sub-committees, and in six of the working groups.

While the case of the University of Cape Town may not necessarily be representative, there is evidence to suggest that there is formal student representation in institutional governance in Africa, and that it is increasing (Otieno, 2004; Eshete, 2003). Certainly, representation in committees on student welfare is widespread. It has been argued that this is most respected by other members (e.g. academics) and most rewarding for students since these committees address themselves to students' immediate welfare needs (Ojo, 1995: 93-94; also see: Cele *et al*, 2001: 11). Students in African universities are also increasingly members of governing bodies dealing with the academic functions of the university, such as senates, and their sub-committees at the faculty and department levels; student

representatives in many countries also participate at the highest level of institutional governance, in such bodies as councils (Unitwin, 1998). A scant survey of a sample of African university websites conducted for the purpose of this paper is inconclusive (Table 3).

Table 3: Student Representation in Key University Structures

Institution	SRC	Council ⁷	Senate ⁸	Other
Alexandria University (Egypt)	Yes	No	-	-
Kwame Nkrumah University of S&T (Ghana)	Yes	2	-	-
Makerere University (Uganda)	Yes	2	2	Yes
Rhodes University (South Africa)	Yes	Yes	Yes	All levels
Universidade Eduardo Mondlane (Mocambique)	12	2	-	-
Université de Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso)	-	-	-	Faculty-level
Université d'Alger (Algeria)	-	No	No	Faculty-level
University of Cape Town (South Africa)	15	2	5	All levels
Univeristy of Dar-es-Salaam (Tanzania)	10	-	-	-
University of Ghana	Yes	2	-	Yes
University of Mauritius	9	1	1	Yes
University of Zimbabwe	Yes	Yes	-	Not Faculty

Source: Official university websites, 2005 (except Ghana: 2003; Zimbabwe: Unitwin, 1998; Uganda also see: Lutaakome et al, 2005).

Key: "Other" refers to student representation in structures other than Council or Senate. A dash "--" indicates that no data was available on the website. "Yes" indicates that the structure (or student representation) exists; "No" that there is no evidence of student representation on the structure. A number, e.g. "5" indicates the actual strength of student representatives on the structure.

Table 3 indicates at a small sample of twelve universities taken from across the African continent the wide spread but unevenness of student representation. At the majority of the sample universities (ten out of twelve), students have organised some type of student government (only the websites of the Université de Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, and the Université d'Alger, Algeria, are silent on the topic). Furthermore, the survey indicates that students are represented in the university council of at least 3/4 (eight) of the universities. Only in two North-African universities, the Université d'Alger in Algeria and the Alexandria University in Egypt, students do not seem to have representation in the highest decision-making body. Looking at student representation in academic governance, the picture is more uneven. The data is only conclusive on five cases and indicates that students are represented in the senates of at least four of the twelve sample universities. Again it is at the Université d'Alger where students are not represented in senate. Lastly, looking at student representation at faculty-level it is interesting to note that at the Université de Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, and the Université d'Alger, Algeria, students are represented at faculty level, as well as in most other universities. Only at the University of Zimbabwe, students are seemingly not represented at faculty level (but have representation at Council level).

From the brief survey summarised in Table 3, an interesting hypothesis emerges that may be subject to testing, namely, that at universities in anglophone and lusophone

⁷ In francophone universities figures for *conseil d'université*, *conseil d'orientation* or *conseil d'administration* were used.

⁸ In francophone universities figures for the *conseil scientifique* and *conseil pédagogique* were used.

countries students are generally more likely to be represented at the highest levels of university governance whereas conversely in francophone countries, students only seem to be involved in governance at faculty level and below.

Formal student involvement at the system level of higher education governance (i.e. national or provincial sphere of governance), is also scarcely documented. The reviewed literature indicates a number of forms:

- Formal student participation in the policy-making process by means of
 - Inclusion of student leaders on policy-advisory bodies
 - Inclusion of student leaders on the executives of governing parties
 - Other formal processes of consultation in the policy-making process (e.g. formal invitation for submissions on draft policies)
- Democratic rights of students as citizens

Student unionism and democratic citizenship are two important and complimentary enabling factors for the participation of students in policy-making at the national level.

Student unionism pertains to the corporatist type of representation and gives students a formal voice at the national level by means of an officially recognised student union (as one amongst several higher education stakeholder bodies). In South Africa, this type of representation has taken the form of the inclusion of students on the national Council on Higher Education⁹. In other countries, including Nigeria, Ghana and Ivory Coast, students have had officially recognised student unions at some point. Official recognition provides similar ways of formal access to the policymaking process. For example, in the case of Ivory Coast, the national student organisation was at some point an official wing of ruling party and represented on the party's national executive committee (Daddieh, 1996: 58; Ojo, 1995: 46, 48; Adu Boahen, 1994: 19).

Students may also be able to formally participate in the policy-making process by making submissions or appeals directly to the ministry and/or parliamentary committee on higher education, to commissions of enquiry, in the drafting process of new policy (e.g. NCHC process in South Africa, 1995/96). Participation in this case depends on the political system; the more democratic a country, the easier it is for individual students, student groups or student organisations to make input into the process of policymaking (for an extreme example see: Carnegie Commission, 1973).

At this point, it is impossible to capture the rich diversity of the African student political landscape or to even adequately outline the contours of it, given the limited literature available. To provide a much more nuanced picture of student governance in Africa would require, on the one hand, much more empirical and comparative studies, especially on formal student involvement in the governance of universities and in national policymaking. On the other hand, more critical and theoretical work is also required – work that can draw from disciplines like political studies, sociology, education and higher education.

⁹ The Council on Higher Education (CHE) has two main functions: In its advisory capacity, it statutorily advises the Minister of Education on all issues pertaining to higher education. In its executive capacity, the CHE's Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) is mandated to ensure quality in South African higher education. Students are represented on the CHE and the HEQC.

4 Stakeholders, Democracy and Students' Academic Freedom

A governance perspective on African student politics literature ought not to stop at taking an account of the various forms of political interaction; rather, it can take a variety of additional directions. For example, the current literature allows student leadership and scholars to interrogate fruitfully some of the substantive issues and important debates in higher education, e.g. debates concerning student access, equity, quality and funding. All these debates have resonance in student governance and one could well ask whether student leadership is well-placed to participate in them. The rise of private higher education across the continent and the absence of student political activity in private institutions (Munene, 2003); the growth of religious student movements and their impending role in student governance (Koen, Cele and Libhaber, 2004); such debates are topical in African student politics.

To take the governance perspective unto yet another level of abstraction, I would like to propose that young scholars interrogate the question of the legitimacy and justification of student involvement in governance. In the past, some of the key scholarly debates related to the appropriateness of the *in loco parentis* rule (Ojo, 1995). The related governance debate has evolved. Today, the question is less about the "parental responsibilities" of teaching staff. The past authoritarian paternalist view of authority in higher education has made way for a rather instrumentalist one that views student participation in governance as a means to improve communication between students, academic staff and management with the purpose of reducing incidents of student protest (Vice Chancellors Committee, 2000 in Otieno, 2004; Alence, 1999). In this view a set of narrowly defined criteria governs student involvement. These include the relevance of a particular issue to students, students' notional commitment and expertise, and the sensitivity or confidentiality of matters dealt with in a particular governance structure (Zuo and Ratsoy, 1999).

Lately, studies on higher education governance tend to use a vocabulary of terms like 'stakeholder' and 'stakeholder democracy' (e.g. Otieno, 2003). These terms have been used in corporate governance for a while now and may have entered higher education discourse on the back of managerialism. In any case, concern of how to accommodate stakeholders in corporate governance cannot be equated with the question of what the role of students or academic staff in university governance should be. For one, the typical university has neither shareholders nor the equivalent of a Board of Directors. Curiously it is with striking regularity that studies of stakeholder governance in higher education tend to neither conceptualise their terms appropriately, nor to identify who the concrete stakeholders are and what exactly their respective stakes would be (with its implications for governance). Following Wally Morrow's insightful analysis, I would argue that to identify students as a homogenous and structurally-defined stakeholder group in higher education is a feat riddled with problems (Morrow, 1998). It may be more fruitful to leave the notion of 'stakeholder' aside for the moment and concentrate on 'democracy' rather.

The advantage of examining the term 'democracy' is that it immediately focuses the attention on two crucial issues: (1) the definition of the 'demos'; and (2) the principle of self-determination.¹⁰ By concentrating only on these two elements, we can already start an argument on how students should be involved in higher education governance. Firstly, if we focus on students only as a community, the relevant 'demos' is the student body and thus, any claim to legitimate governance would have

¹⁰ Not that in the discussion of 'stakeholders' these two issues would not feature, but the problem of defining 'stakes' obscures rather than clarifies the question.

to be resolved in terms of the legitimacy of the regime and the student leadership in the eyes of the student body. In accordance with the principle of self-rule, any issue that concerns the student body only should be resolved legitimately by the student community. Thus we can argue that the entire sphere of extra-curricular student life ought to be governed autonomously by students; any claims of oversight on the parts of faculty or administration would have to be judged as paternalistic and undemocratic.

Secondly, if we move to the heart of the educational endeavour and examine governance at the institutional level, again the first question to resolve would be the definition of the membership of the appropriate academic community or 'demos'. As far as governance strictly concerns questions of teaching, learning, and research, a very *narrow* definition of the 'demos' would restrict membership to those directly involved in these activities i.e. teachers, learners and researchers. In this sense, decisions concerning the core functions of the university ought to be resolved in deliberations between academic staff and students as a matter of co-determination *at the level at which they arise*. The classroom and the academic department are likely to emerge as the principal territories where student participation in governance can act as a progressive and transformative force (Wolff, 2003). The extent to which each group is involved in governance is traditionally further determined by "the principle that authority should reside with the more rather than the less expert and learned" (Moodie and Eustace, 1974: 201). This principle would certainly apply to the more technical aspects of teaching and research. However, it should never be used to bar students from the fundamental right to co-determine the conditions of learning on campus.

Lastly, what would democracy in higher education entail at the state or national level of higher education policy-making? We have already applied implicitly the principle of self- or co-determination in tandem with the principle of subsidiarity in governance. In brief, the principle of subsidiarity holds that decisions should be taken by the community that is directly affected by it (e.g. the academic community) and that a higher-order community (e.g. the nation) should facilitate the co-ordination of the activities of lower-order communities rather than seek to determine their activities. In a context of multi-level governance, subsidiarity is therefore an argument for decentralised decision-making. In practical terms, it means that (state or national) government must exercise restraint in policy-making and grant a high degree of institutional autonomy to universities. Government should help to provide optimal conditions for the pursuit of academic freedom, have oversight over certain aspects of higher education (e.g. qualifications structure, degree transferability), and facilitate cooperation within the sector and between the higher education sector and other sectors. Student governance at that regulatory level concerns primarily the participation of students in the policy-making process by making presentations and submissions on policy proposals to various role-players in the policy-making process and exercising the rights and duties afforded to citizens.

Apparently, the outcome of this thought experiment is a quite radical and in parts controversial proposal for student participation in higher education governance. Yet in their defence, students can justify their claim to participation in higher education governance in the same manner as historically senior academic staff (in particular the professoriate) has justified its claim to academic self-rule, namely with reference to the principle of academic freedom. And this is our last concern. In Graeme Moodie's terms, to understand what academic freedom means, one must have a firm grasp of the meaning of 'academic' and the notion of 'freedom'. Moodie argues that 'academic' in academic freedom does not refer to the 'academic' as a member of the faculty. Rather it refers to a particular kind of activities performed by members of an

academic community. Academic freedom therefore provides the protection for members of an academic community to perform academic activities (Moodie, 1996: 132-134). Freedom implies, as noted above, a measure of protection from outside interference and the absence of serious constraints that would disable the performance of an activity. In its positive sense, freedom also implies the ability of a community to actually define its own conditions; in other words, it means self-rule (Moodie, 1996: 134). As long as students, as members of the academic community, are engaged in such academic activities as learning and researching, the protection afforded by the principle of academic freedom applies to students also; in turn, a positive expression of that freedom is precisely the justification for student participation in higher education governance.

I have noted above that I will only outline some elements of a debate that may lead to a defensible argument for student governance. The specific task for both student leaders and scholars is to identify within their particular national, higher educational, and institutional contexts the specific contradictions that give rise to problems of governance and whether a governance perspective involving 'democracy', 'academic freedom' or any of its constitutive principles and senses outlined above may serve to dissolve the problem. Moreover, thinking about what precisely academic freedom as the freedom to study means and practically involves for students in Africa, over and above participation in higher education governance, may produce an appropriate student response to those who say that education is not a right but a privilege.

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