



# PAX ACADEMICA

**African Journal of Academic Freedom  
Revue Africaine de Liberté Académique**

**Nos 1&2, 2015**

**Student and Scholar Protests in Africa  
Protestations estudiantines et universitaires en Afrique**

**Guest Editor / Rédacteur invité  
Francis B. Nyamnjuh**

**CONSEIL POUR LE DÉVELOPPEMENT  
DE LA RECHERCHE EN SCIENCES  
SOCIALES EN AFRIQUE**



**CODESRIA**

**COUNCIL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT  
OF SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH  
IN AFRICA**

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## Éditorial

# L'arrogance des imposteurs

Parfait D. Akana\*

Une question lancinante est au cœur de notre actualité intellectuelle : que faire avec le chaos du temps présent ? Comment libérer les énergies créatives et faire 'émerger' (le mot est lancé !) une société politique où l'involution n'est plus le devenir-être, l'expérience la plus banale et la plus courante du plus grand nombre ? Comment faire face à tout cela qui, au quotidien, intensifie ce que Engelbert Mveng appelait il y a plus de vingt ans 'la paupérisation anthropologique' pour stigmatiser cela-même qui affecte la condition humaine ? Il affirmait alors : « La pauvreté africaine n'affecte (...) pas seulement la vie matérielle, sociale, voire politique de l'homme. Elle affecte la condition humaine dans ses racines les plus profondes et dans ses droits fondamentaux. L'homme vit dans un état de paupérisation anthropologique. » (Mveng 1992 :119) Il est possible de trouver un certain écho de cette paupérisation anthropologique dans ce que Amartya Sen appelle dans sa théorie des capacités, la crise des fonctionnements complexes, c'est-à-dire la condition de l'homme réduit à des manques et à des déficits qui l'empêchent d'être pleinement humain avec les autres et de participer à la vie de sa communauté, d'exprimer librement ses idées et ses opinions, d'éprouver de la dignité et de l'estime pour soi-même...

Que de rapports et d'études sur les violations des droits humains en Afrique, sur les privations exercées à l'encontre des universitaires, intellectuels et artistes ! En dépit du contexte d'une apparente libéralisation, il continue de peser une chape de plomb au-dessus de la tête de tous ceux qui s'engagent à penser différemment, c'est-à-dire dans les marges de l'idéologie et du système dominants. De toutes parts, sous les apparences de l'ouverture, du 'large consensus', l'ajustement et la conversion des idées sont requis, des alliances improbables et scélérates se nouent, le tout dans un joyeux unanimité, sous la bannière de la persécution. Ainsi, en Ouganda, au Cameroun et au Sénégal, religieux et hommes d'État s'allient aux sociologues et philosophes,

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« bedonnants de diplômés », selon le mot de Senghor, pour la sainte et docte (sic !) fustigation de l'homosexualité au nom de la défense d'une supposée exceptionnalité culturelle et religieuse. Au Maroc, les autorités réveillent, comme dans le cas de l'universitaire Maati Monjib, des lois dormantes pour persécuter, sous les oripeaux de la légalité, des intellectuels 'encombrants'. Au Niger, ce sont les journalistes Ali Soumana et Moussa Dodo qui sont mis aux arrêts pour « divulgation de documents »... Le point culminant de ces exactions dans des pays tels que l'Ouganda est le blocage et le refus de l'accès à Internet !

La clef de voûte de l'intensification de ces manœuvres répressives est, de toute évidence, une sorte d'emprise frénétique pour le secret. Elle débouche, extensivement, sur le blocage de la volonté de savoir de plus en plus importante dans nos sociétés ; ainsi que sur le souci de la transparence qui inscrit la redevabilité au cœur de l'action publique. Au fond, c'est de cela dont il est question. Le refus de rendre compte et la hantise de la justification, ainsi que la violence réactionnaire qui les accompagne, sont les principales ressources de ceux et de celles qui occupent indûment des positions et qui ont subverti, pour des visées autres, le cœur de leur mission. Ainsi, des responsables politiques peuvent-ils s'abriter sous une légalité d'opérette pour donner aux décisions iniques un air de conformité. Ils détournent par là même, l'attention sur le désastre de leur gestion face à la souffrance sociale endémique. Les religieux ne sont pas en reste. Nombre d'entre eux habitent un apostolat qui n'est que pharisaïsme. Ironie des temps, c'est à une époque où leurs frasques sexuelles défraient de plus en plus la chronique, ailleurs comme en Afrique, que l'on voit apparaître chez eux une morale rance qui veut s'arroger le droit de dire et de prescrire les normes sexuelles et éternelles de la société, au nom de la défense de l'authenticité de la civilisation africaine ! Une stratégie de la scotomisation qui dispense bien de parler, entre autres, de la détresse sociale et de la misère rampante. Quid des intellectuels ? Ils sont les alliés objectifs de cette diversion pernicieuse et sont nombreux à avoir déserté leur fonction qui est :

d'amener la communauté et la cité à trouver un fondement au-delà des luttes qui déchirent les individus et les collectivités, au-delà de l'ignorance qui les ballote au gré des opinions et des apparences, d'une incompréhensible multiplicité d'êtres, d'événements, de pensées, de langages. (Eboussi Boulaga 1999 : 32)

D'une certaine manière, c'est en renonçant au lyrisme victorieux de nos engagements, à ce que j'appelle l'arrogance des imposteurs, que l'on parvient à penser effectivement notre condition et à habiter la fonction d'intellectuel, *en se dépêtrant des liens qui tiennent captifs*... C'est également, me semble-t-il, la voie de toute 'éthique minimale' (Ogien 1992) :

- Neutralité à l'égard des conceptions substantielles du bien ;
- Principe négatif de non-nuisance à autrui ;

- Principe positif selon lequel il faut attribuer la même valeur aux voix et aux intérêts de chacun.

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- Ogien, Albert, 2007, L'éthique aujourd'hui. Maximalistes et minimalistes, Paris, Gallimard, 'Folio Essais', 252 p.
- Sen, Amartya, 2012, L'idée de justice, Paris, Flammarion, 'Champs Essais', 560 p.







## Editorial

# The Arrogance of Impostors

Parfait D. Akana\*

Anagging question at the heart of our intellectual agenda is about what to do with the chaos of the present time? How do we release latent creative energies and let “emerge”, so to say, a political society where involution is no longer the future-being, the most banal and most common experience of the majority? Dealing with all this on a daily basis intensifies what Engelbert Mveng referred to, over twenty years ago, as “anthropological impoverishment” to stigmatize what affects human condition? He then said: “African poverty does not affect (...) the material, social, or even political man. It affects the human condition in its deepest roots and its fundamental rights. Man lives in a state of anthropological impoverishment.” (Mveng 1992 :119) It is possible to find some echo of this anthropological impoverishment in what Amartya Sen called, in his capability approach, the crisis of complex functions, that is to say, the condition of man reduced to failings and deficits that prevent him from being fully human with others and from participating in the life of his community in order to freely express his ideas and opinions, to feel a sense of dignity and self-esteem.

Despite the context of an apparent liberalization, a leaden shroud still weighs on all those who are committed to thinking differently, i.e. on the margins of ideology and of the dominant system. From all sides, under the guide of openness, ‘large consensus’, adjustment and conversion of ideas are required, improbable and rogue alliances are formed, all in some joyful unanimism, under the banner of persecution. In Uganda, Cameroon and Senegal, clerics and statesmen get allied with sociologists and philosophers, “with a string of academic titles“, to use Senghor’s terms, for the holy and learned (sic!) castigation of homosexuality in the name of the defense of a so-called cultural and religious exceptionality. In Morocco, authorities revived dormant laws, as in the Maati Monjib University’s case, to persecute ‘burdensome’ intellectuals under the guise of legality. In Niger, journalists Ali Soumana and Moussa Dodo were arrested for “divulging documents”. The culmination of these abuses in countries such as Uganda was the blocking and denial of access to the internet!

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The keystone of the intensification of these repressive maneuvers is obviously a kind of frenzied grip for secrecy. It leads extensively to the impediment of the will to know which is more significant in our societies; as well as to the concern for transparency which puts accountability in the heart of public action. Basically, this is what it is all about. The refusal to remain accountable and the fear of justification, as well as the reactionary violence accompanying them, are the main resources of those who unnecessarily hold positions and have subverted the core of their mission for other purposes.

Thus, can policymakers hide behind the cloak of legality to take unfair decisions and dispense injustice in the guise of compliance? They should rather seek to remedy the effects of their disastrous (mis)management in the face of endemic social suffering. The same for clerics; many of whom embody an apostolical piety that is merely pretentious. Ironically, at a time when their sexual escapades and other misdemeanor are increasingly making headlines, both elsewhere and in Africa, they arrogantly pontificate about morality and prescribe sexual and other moral standards of behavior for society, in the name of defense of the authenticity of African civilization! This is a strategy of scotomization which refrains from addressing, among others, social distress and rampant poverty.

What about intellectuals? They are the objective allies of this pernicious diversion and many of them have deserted their function which is:

“To lead community and city to find grounds beyond the struggles tearing individuals and communities, beyond the ignorance tossing them about according to opinions and appearances, an incomprehensible multiplicity of beings, events, thoughts, languages.” (Eboussi Boulaga 1999: 32)

In a way, it is by renouncing the victorious lyricism of our commitments, what I call the arrogance of impostors, that we can actually reflect on our condition and embody the intellectual function, *by freeing ourselves from the ties holding us captive...* To me, it is also the way to any minimum ethics’:

- Neutrality with substantial conceptions of good;
- Negative principle of non-nuisance to others;
- Positive principle that assigns the same value to the voices and interests of everybody.

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- Sen, Amartya, 2012, *L'idée de justice*, Paris, Flammarion, ‘Champs Essais’, 560 p.



## **Introduction: Academic Freedom in African Universities**

Francis B. Nyamnjoh\*

For the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), academic freedom<sup>1</sup> entails full autonomy of thought and practice at the service of knowledge production on the African condition and of relevance to African predicaments. It is also about facilitating unlimited access to the knowledge thus produced. CODESRIA thus relates to universities as autonomous institutions: free from the logic and practice of those who expect to call the tune merely because they finance research, publication and teaching. CODESRIA sources and makes available research funding to its members in universities across the continent with minimum strings attached, especially when this comes in the form of core funding that allows the autonomy to define and prioritise research questions and objectives in tune with CODESRIA's Africa-centred vision and mission.

Scholars imbued with this CODESRIA tradition of academic freedom are quick to tell every donor or sponsor, regardless of political, economic or cultural orientation: 'Pay and support research and scholarship as much as you want, as long as you do not expect to influence my thoughts and research or my desire and freedom to teach, write and publish as I deem appropriate or necessary.' The research sponsorship and funding CODESRIA is least enthusiastic about is that tied to research agenda defined or determined by donors and funding bodies whose priorities are established with scant consultation or regard to CODESRIA's own research agenda and strategic plan. In defence of its core values of academic freedom, CODESRIA publications such as *Pax Academica* and the *Journal of Higher Education in Africa* have promoted the production and consumption of knowledge informed by African perspectives and epistemologies. Both publications play a crucial role in re-enlivening and revalorizing dismembered and disenchanting beliefs and systems of thought in Africa. Put differently, these journals are instrumental in reactivating traditions of knowledge production and of knowing shackled or deactivated by the violence of unequal colonial and neo-colonial encounters.

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It is commonplace in university circles to talk, debate and write on academic freedom in a manner suggestive of a shared understanding of the subject matter. Regardless of the ownership, age, size and breadth of disciplines offered, universities are placed squarely in the domain of 'civil society' hence the emphasis on protection of academic freedom. What exactly is academic freedom? When is it freedom *from*, freedom *for*, freedom *to*, or freedom *with*? Is it achievable progressively by degree or possible only through dichotomous absolutes – something either fully present or totally absent but not admissible as a continual work in progress? Who qualifies to claim academic freedom? How? When? Why? Does context matter in the nature, form, shape and voice of academic freedom? What are the empirical indicators of academic freedom irrespective of whether or not a country professes to be a democracy and a market economy? Put differently, to what extent is academic freedom possible or worth contemplating at all, in a context, defined *a priori*, as 'not a democracy' and therefore as incapable of freedoms normally associated with 'a democracy'? Still in other words, is there something to be gained by looking for academic freedom in unlikely places with which it is not normally associated? How similar or different from other freedoms is academic freedom? What is the likelihood, however remote, of academic freedom being mobilised to front for interests and privileges other than *academic*? Granted such a possibility, what alliances, strategic or not, are soldiers of academic freedom amenable to contemplate? And which are anathema?

To CODESRIA and its membership, freedom does not amount to much if it falls short of freedom from every foreseeable constraint to critical knowledge production relevant to Africa and the rights and dignity of Africans. The CODESRIA community is unequivocally committed to defending and valorising the intellectual rights to creativity and innovation in thought and practice of African academics and students both from the corrupting influences of the market and big business as well as of states and governments. The mainstream tendency in CODESRIA circles is to frown on fellow scholars in Africa and beyond who seem to imply that the market is unquestionably and invariably the answer to those seeking academic freedom, simply because of the market's liberal pretensions and abstract commitment to promoting autonomy and choice to consumers.

Since the political liberation struggles of the 1990s, CODESRIA scholars are equally critical of colleagues who readily give the benefit of the doubt to those who insist that social fulfilment through higher education is best guaranteed by public universities with a mission to cater for all and sundry in equal measure, even when such universities are clearly misappropriated

by the political, economic and cultural elite of the states that fund and control them. In place of *a priori* subscription or rejection of abstract options, CODESRIA and its community of scholars believe in paying ever closer attention to actual and ongoing practices, possibilities and challenges of students and staff of universities on the continent, regardless of who owns and controls these universities in principle. Of interest are universities as democratic, accountable and socially responsible crucibles of knowledge and ideas relevant to Africans and their aspirations. To CODESRIA, the test of the academic freedom pudding should be in the practical eating. The research it has funded and supported and the books CODESRIA has published over the past four decades attest to the fact that academic freedom can be jeopardised by political and commercial interests, pursued independently or in complicity and connivance. This calls for prudence, where beyond a strategic commitment to Africa and the challenges facing Africans taken collectively, seekers of academic freedom on the continent are safest without permanent friends or permanent enemies vis-à-vis the political, economic and cultural forces that shape and are shaped by what they do.

Academic freedom is indeed jeopardised when its proponents prioritise profit over the dignity and autonomy of the very same students and academics they purport to cultivate and protect. When is consumer sovereignty and higher education as a commodity worth embracing as healthy for academic freedom? And when is it illusory to rigidly adhere to a model of universities as secular institutions, free of political interference and responsive solely to proponents of liberalism, market forces and rational choice? The situation of African universities in the twenty first century (Zezeza & Olukoshi, 2004a, 2004b) is testimony to the perils to academic freedom posed both by persistent neoliberal obligation to have scholars in the marketplace (Mamdani 2007; Zezeza 2003; Makosso *et al.* 2009; Higgins 2013; Sifuna 2014) and unyielding political pressure by states and governments to turn critical minded scholars into hapless pro-establishment noise machines (Diouf & Mamdani 1994; Mkandawire 1997, 2005; Nyamnjoh & Jua 2002; Nyamnjoh *et al.* 2012; Sall & Oanda 2014).

Much debate and activism for academic freedom in Africa has foregrounded this reality of African scholars caught betwixt and between the rhetoric of market forces and of nation-building. There are, however, many more challenges to academic freedom, as evidenced by the essays in this volume. Other factors that impinge upon academic freedom include the racial, ethnic, class, gender, generational or religious backgrounds of those seeking, denying or being ambivalent about academic freedom. In light of

these factors, it is important to establish to what extent the privileges of a world configured in accordance with the diktats of ideologies of racial and/or ethnic superiority, or of patriarchy and gerontocracy, blunts the sensitivities and sensibilities of those claiming or denying academic freedom.

In South Africa and Zimbabwe – countries with complex histories of unequal racial and ethnic encounters – the upsurge in protests by university students and staff seeking institutional transformation and decolonisation highlights the operations or workings of inherited racialized power and privilege. The protests call into question the narrow individual and collective interests embedded in educational systems and defended in the name of modernity and civilisation. In both countries, the students' protests reveal a fascinating diagnostic of continued overt and covert oppression and exploitation by a modernity narrowly configured around whiteness and whitening up – a modernity experienced as deeply frustrating by the so-called born-frees, who, at face value should be an epitome of a deracialised and seamlessly inclusive postcolonial and post-apartheid dispensation.

In parts of Africa where race is less a major consideration than is ethnicity, as the examples of Burundi and Cameroon in this volume illustrate, academic freedom is challenged by a collusion of interconnecting factors such as an overbearing state captured by the corrupt and corrupting elite of a dominant ethno-regional governing party. A predicament common to universities across the continent is that of female students and female academics silenced by the patriarchal order of male-dominated universities and yearning for more gender sensitive institutional cultures and practices (Imam *et al.* 1997; Sall 2000; Mama 2003; Nnaemeka 2005; Gquola 2016). The situation is compounded by the scant regard accorded student youth and their opinions, who are often underrecognised and underrepresented in debates on curricula transformation and intellectual life in universities by the older generation of scholars who presume to know best by virtue of being older (Chimanikire 2009). How ready are we, academics and students – elderly and youthful alike – to contemplate the classroom not in terms of a “safe space”, but rather, to quote Paul Gilroy, as a “dangerous space” that fits a “sense of the university as a unique environment where special rules apply with regard to disagreements and where we acquire a special kind of discipline with regard to the foolish or loathsome opinions of others”<sup>22</sup>.

Another key constraint to academic freedom are the generally poor salaries that tend to push academics to seek additional incomes through non-academic activities. A growing consultancy syndrome has tended to triumph over academic values such as excellence in teaching, research and publication. The temptation to relocate elsewhere (especially in the West)

through greener-pasture seeking migration remains great. Many a university professor on the continent is often derailed from the pursuit of academic excellence by myriad parallel non-academic calls on their time and effort usually in a bid to complement their salaries. Almost without exception, even the most inspiring of academics work under extremely difficult conditions for relevant creativity in teaching and research (Zezeza & Olukoshi 2004a, 2004b).

Academics are thus forced to prioritise standardisation, routinisation and predictability at the margins of global scholarship, and either completely ignore or reduce to lip service the need to struggle for critical revision and transformation and the necessary epistemological breaks envisioned in calls for decolonisation of the mind and Africanisation of curricula and the languages of instruction (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 1986, 2005). This is the case even when such scholarship is about the lived experiences of Africa and Africans. The recurrent nature of transformation, decolonisation and financial difficulties as a theme in student movements and activism right into the 21st century (with the #RhodesMustFall, #FeesMustFall and #EndOutsourcing in South African universities in 2015 and 2016 being the latest examples), is ample demonstration of how little has changed for the better in Africa's higher education institutions to make them truly accessible and relevant to Africa and its peoples.

The contributions to this issue of *Pax Academica* – informed by contextual experiences and accounts from Zimbabwe, South Africa, Burundi, Cameroon and Gambia – agree that it is a lot easier to claim academic freedom in nebulous abstraction than to achieve it in context. Academic freedom in Africa, like everywhere else the world over, is a never ending aspiration and struggle. The more interconnected the world of global and local hierarchies that students, academics and universities inhabit, the greater and more insidious the entanglements of factors and forces that threaten academic freedom. Eternal vigilance is in order for something as elusive and as vulnerable as academic freedom. To keep pace with its changing contours and complexities, academics need to invest in active empirical research on how academic freedom is actively cultivated, embodied, enacted, contested and reimagined in a dynamic African higher education landscape. Within this landscape academic freedom anchors pursuit of excellence, which is also a vision of many African universities in the global market for higher education. Universities are expected to educate, certify, demonstrate respect for learning and above all uphold professional norms of integrity and honesty. How ready are we – as various stakeholders in the idea of the university as an institution for the cultivation of genuine intellectuals imbued with a



profound and dynamic sense of social responsibilities (Fonlon 2009[1969]) – to, as Gilroy puts it, “hold out for education, not as a credentialising process, but as encouragement for the revolutionary force of individual curiosity – pursued without limit”<sup>3</sup>?

## Notes

1. See “The Kampala Declaration on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility, 29 November 1990, Kampala, Uganda”, <http://www.codesria.org/spip.php?article350>, accessed 30 May 2016. The Kampala declaration was preceded in April the same year by “The Dar Es Salaam Declaration on Academic Freedom and Social Responsibility of Academics, 19 April 1990, Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania”, <http://www.codesria.org/spip.php?article351&lang=en>, accessed 30 May 2016. Subsequent to these declarations, CODESRIA has regularly intervened through issuance of statements condemning perceived infringement of academic freedom in various African states. Such statements include:
  - Declaration of intellectuals and scholars about the destruction of manuscripts of Timbuktu, Symposium Afrika Nko, 29 janvier, 2013 (CODESRIA et Point Sud), <http://www.codesria.org/spip.php?article1731&lang=en>, accessed 30 May 2016;
  - Violations and abuses of Academic Freedom in Malawi : CODESRIA Postpones Holding of International Colloquium in Honour of Professor Thandika Mkandawire, 8 April 2011, <http://www.codesria.org/spip.php?article1303&lang=en>, accessed 30 May 2016;
  - Kampala Declaration on African History, 27-29 October 2008, <http://www.codesria.org/spip.php?article435&lang=en>, accessed 30 May 2016;
  - Safeguarding Academic Freedom in the University of Kinshasa!, 15th May 2008, <http://www.codesria.org/spip.php?article408&lang=en>, accessed 30 May 2016;
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2. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/paul-gilroy-rosemary-bechler/paul-gilroy-in-search-of-not-very-safe-starting-point>, accessed 31 May 2016.
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## **Les universitaires burundais face à la crise politique de 2015 : vers la confiscation de la parole autorisée ?**

Gérard Birantamije\*

### **Abstract**

Burundi is facing an unprecedented political crisis linked to the 2015 electoral process that was challenged by some actors and accepted by others. It was an ongoing process that was revealing many dangers that required on behalf of Burundian scholars, a mobilization of their symbolic capital to inform the national and international opinion. Thus, in this political imbroglio, Burundian scholars have been conspicuously contrasting and controversial in their positions while analyzing the same political facts, as in the case of the problematic candidacy of President Nkurunziza for a third term. Currently, politicians and the international community remain divided on the legitimacy of institutions from the electoral process. Between appropriation and contestation, scholarly thought has been progressively challenged by secular thought, overshadowing academicians in understanding and seeking ways to deal with the political crisis and spare political violence drifts to the population.

Basing my analysis on analytical and policy positions taken by the Burundian scholars during different main episodes of the political crisis, I show firstly how positions taken have played an important role in structuring entrenched views heralding in each of camp the shift to violence. Secondly, I try to analyze how these positions have gradually worked to the loss of the monopoly of the scientifically authorized discourse, and with it, the freedom of thought that academicians are struggling to regain.

**Key words:** Burundi, political crisis, Burundian scholars, authorized discourse, third term

### **Résumé**

Le Burundi traverse une crise politique sans précédent liée au processus électoral de 2015 qui a été contesté par les uns et accepté par les autres. Il s'est agi d'un processus qui a fait poindre de multiples dangers pour exiger la mobilisation,

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de la part de tous les universitaires burundais, de leur capitale symbolique afin d'éclairer l'opinion nationale et internationale. Ainsi, dans cet imbroglio politique, les universitaires burundais ont brillé par des positions contrastées et controversées dans l'analyse des mêmes faits politiques, en l'occurrence la question problématique de la candidature pour un troisième mandat du Président Nkurunziza. Actuellement, la classe politique et la communauté internationale restent divisées sur la légitimité des institutions issues de ce processus électoral. Entre appropriation et contestation, la pensée savante s'est vue progressivement concurrencée par la pensée profane, reléguant de fait au second plan la place des universitaires dans la compréhension et la recherche des possibles pour faire face à la crise politique et épargner les populations des dérives de la violence politique.

Fondant mon analyse sur les positions analytiques et politiques prises par les universitaires burundais durant les moments forts de cette crise, je montre dans un premier temps comment les-dites positions ont joué un rôle important dans la structuration des opinions partagées augurant dans chacun des camps le passage à la violence. Dans un second temps, j'essaie d'analyser comment ces positions ont progressivement œuvré à la perte du monopole de la parole scientifiquement autorisée, et avec elle, la liberté de pensée dont les universitaires s'évertuent à reconquérir.

**Mots clés :** Burundi, crise politique, universitaires burundais, parole autorisée, troisième mandat

Le Burundi traverse une crise politique sans précédent liée au processus électoral de 2015. Au fond de cette crise se trouve la volonté du président Pierre Nkurunziza et de son parti au pouvoir, le Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie-Force de Défense de la Démocratie (CNDD-FDD) de briguer un troisième mandat à la tête de l'État burundais. Or les autres acteurs politiques, les organisations de la société civile, les organisations des médias, voire certains États et organisations internationales ont contesté de vive voix dès l'apparition des signes avant-coureurs au début de l'année 2013 (RFI 2013) et de manière ostentatoire à partir de 2014 (Madirisha/Iwacu 2014 ; Kaburahe/Iwacu 2014). En effet, à ce moment, le parti au pouvoir avait annoncé que rien ne pouvait empêcher le président en exercice de le représenter aux échéances électorales projetées pour 2015 (Madirisha *et al.* /Iwacu 2015). En avril 2014, le parti au pouvoir a essayé de changer la Constitution mais sans succès, le quorum exigé à l'Assemblée nationale n'ayant pas été atteint (RFI 2014). Cet échec a renforcé le camp des acteurs opposés à ce troisième mandat, l'objectif étant de gommer toute référence et à l'accord d'Arusha et aux dispositifs constitutionnels relatifs à la limitation des mandats dont certains universitaires européens avaient déjà souligné les tendances lourdes dans le contexte burundais (Vandeginste 2014). Beaucoup de voix, internes au parti, du camp de l'opposition et de la communauté internationale, se sont élevées pour rappeler l'importance du

respect de l'accord d'Arusha et de l'ordre constitutionnel sans succès (RFI 2014 ; Service national des renseignements 2015 ; Naudé/*Jeune Afrique* 2015). Devant l'obstination du parti au pouvoir et du président Nkurunziza lui-même, matérialisé par le congrès du CNDD FDD du 25 avril 2015 désignant l'actuel président pour une candidature à sa propre succession (Ngabire *et al.* 2015), des manifestations ont été organisées par les partis politiques et la société civile durant presque deux mois. Cependant, elles se sont vite transformées en batailles rangées augurant une dérive vers la guerre civile (Muhorakeye /*Jeune Afrique* 2015).

Bref, ce processus a fait poindre de multiples dangers au point d'exiger la mobilisation des universitaires burundais pour leur capitale symbolique afin d'éclairer l'opinion nationale et internationale, proposer des pistes de solution et étayer les dangers épiant le processus électoral et la stabilité de l'État. Mais, dans cet imbroglio politique, les universitaires burundais ont brillé par des positions contrastées et controversées dans l'analyse des mêmes faits politiques, en l'occurrence sur l'épineuse question de la candidature pour un troisième mandat du président Nkurunziza. Actuellement, la classe politique burundaise, la société civile, la diaspora burundaise ainsi que la communauté internationale restent divisées sur la légitimité des institutions issues de ce processus électoral. Entre appropriation et contestation, la pensée savante s'est vue progressivement délaissée. La place des universitaires dans la compréhension et la recherche des meilleurs possibles pour faire face à la crise politique a été progressivement reléguée au second plan. Pourtant, de plus en plus, le besoin d'une pensée critique basée sur la connaissance des faits se fait sentir.

Cette analyse porte sur les positions analytiques prises par les universitaires burundais durant les moments forts de cette crise. Je montre dans un premier temps comment les-dites positions ont joué un rôle important dans la structuration des opinions partagées ayant conduit, dans chacun des camps, le passage à la violence. Dans un second temps, j'essaie d'analyser comment ces positions ont progressivement œuvré à la perte du monopole de la parole « scientifiquement » autorisée et, avec elle, la liberté de pensée que les universitaires s'évertuent à reconquérir. Sur le plan méthodologique, l'analyse porte sur la revue documentaire, surtout les productions de la presse locale et internationale.

Les universitaires burundais et la marche vers la crise politique de 2015 : des artisans dans la structuration du champ de la violence ?

Depuis les années des Indépendances, le rôle des élites universitaires a été sans conteste déterminant, que ce soit dans les entreprises de conquête et de conservation du pouvoir ou en tant que machine à produire la critique constructive de nature à permettre des changements dans la conception

et la gestion du pouvoir. Beaucoup de travaux de chercheurs ont insisté sur l'importance du capital culturel – dont disposent les universitaires – dans la conception de la domination et dans la production de l'idéologie dominante (Bourdieu 1976), ou encore d'un pouvoir technique fondé sur le savoir et qui permet de dominer par prévision (Weber 1919, 1963 : 23). Sur le continent africain, les positions des uns ont entretenu les dictatures les plus atroces tandis que celles des autres ont permis d'amorcer un débat suscitant l'espoir de s'en sortir. A titre d'exemple, au cours des années 1988, certains universitaires burundais (avec certains étudiants) ont écrit une lettre ouverte au président de la République pour demander l'ouverture démocratique (Manirakiza 2002). A l'époque du monopartisme, les idées dissonantes quoique constructives n'étaient pas les mieux accueillies. Tous les signataires ont été poursuivis par le régime en place mais leurs idées ont eu des échos au-delà de ce que peut produire une lettre ouverte. Au cours des négociations d'Arusha, les universitaires burundais ont enrichi certains débats, permettant de faire avancer le processus de paix. Bref, l'on a assisté à plus d'indépendance d'esprit pour faire face à la crise du moment, même s'il était quasiment impossible d'échapper à l'étiquetage. La position prise pouvait être facilement qualifiée de « *tutsisan* » ou de « *butisan* ». Certes, de prime abord on est tenté de remarquer une expertise individuelle foisonnante avec des analyses et parfois des positions politiques tranchées qui échappent rarement à la récupération politique.

### **Une expertise individuelle foisonnante politiquement récupérée**

Depuis la fin de l'année 2013, les événements politiques nécessitant une analyse pointue de la part des universitaires burundais se sont accumulés. On peut noter le débat sur la révision de la Constitution, la mobilisation de la jeunesse sur le terrain de l'intolérance politique, la question du troisième mandat du président en exercice, les problèmes de la justice considérée comme inféodée au parti au pouvoir, le rétrécissement de l'espace public ainsi que la mise en place de lois liberticides, etc. Faute de statuer sur tous ces aspects, nous allons nous concentrer sur trois aspects importants de l'expertise fournie liés au processus électoral qui s'annonçait pour 2015.

### ***L'émiettement de l'espace d'expression démocratique : un apport des universitaires qui renforce les certitudes des camps opposés***

La crise politique de 2015 peut être considérée comme le couronnement d'un processus d'émiettement de l'espace démocratique légèrement entamé avant les élections de 2010 (Human Rights Watch 2010). Ce processus, longtemps décrié par la classe politique exclue des arènes du pouvoir, est fondamentalement basé sur la création des partis et des organisations de la

société civile dite « *Nyakuri* », littéralement « *véritables* ». Mais, au fond, le terme désigne la manipulation de certains politiciens par le pouvoir afin de provoquer des dissensions au sein du parti. Autrement dit, des dissidents d'un parti sont dirigés par le camp au pouvoir par le truchement du ministère de l'Intérieur pour créer une formation politique « bis », avec les mêmes idéaux et les mêmes symboles. Ce genre de mouvement vient jouer la carte du pouvoir en s'attaquant beaucoup plus aux positions de leurs anciens alliés qu'à celles du parti au pouvoir (ICG 2012 :12). Leurs leaders sont généralement des opportunistes de première heure qui peuvent naviguer de l'extrême droite à l'extrême gauche. Ce phénomène, qui par néologisme a été baptisé « *Nyakurisation* » depuis la création du parti Front pour la Démocratie au Burundi (FRODEBU) – Nyakuri en 2008 –, fait coexister au même plan des formations politiques reconnues par le ministère de l'Intérieur mais sans adhérents, et des partis avec assises politiques mais sans reconnaissance du ministère de l'Intérieur, autorité en charge des partis politiques.

Ce même processus a été observé au niveau des organisations de la société civile qui, aux yeux du pouvoir, étaient devenues plus dangereuses. Il a été créé des organisations de sociétés civiles chargées de défendre les positions du gouvernement. Ces GONGOS, comme la littérature scientifique pourrait les appeler (Steinberg 2001), ont entamé une lutte acharnée contre toutes les organisations de la société civile jusqu'alors engagées dans un débat critique et constructif comme l'Observatoire de l'action gouvernementale (OAG), le Forum pour le renforcement de la société civile (FORSC), le Collectif des associations et ONG féminines du Burundi (CAFOB) ou encore l'Association pour la promotion des droits humains et des prisonniers (APRODH). Autant dire que le mandat principal de ces organisations satellites du CNDD-FDD était de torpiller l'action d'une société civile qui avait manifestement pu occuper et entretenir le champ politique déserté par les partis politiques depuis la contestation des élections de 2010 et la répression qui s'en est suivie (HRW 2012).

L'apport des universitaires burundais, soit en tant que consultant d'une organisation nationale ou internationale voulant aborder cet aspect dans ces interventions, soit comme invité des médias écrits et audio-visuels, a été observé dans les analyses qui ont été faites sur ce rétrécissement de l'espace politique. Au niveau des consultances, on peut citer les rapports d'observation de la gouvernance dressés par l'OAG par l'entremise des universitaires (Voir OAG/Barumwete 2013 ; OAG/Nimubona 2013, OAG/Birantamije 2015, etc.), les communications pour donner le ton lors des débats organisés entre autres par l'ONG Initiative et Changement Burundi



(Ngabire/Iwacu 2014) ou encore lors des fora organisés à l'intention des jeunes leaders des partis politiques par la Coalition de la Société civile pour le Monitoring des Élections (COSOME 2014). Il y a lieu de constater à travers ces travaux une volonté d'aider toutes les catégories de la population à comprendre les contours des différentes questions de l'heure, et à fustiger les manquements observés. En guise d'exemple, analysant les textes législatifs et réglementaires régissant les élections, Julien Nimubona montre qu'il y a une tendance lourde dans le travail législatif consistant à ne point faire des lois électorales les instruments de la stabilisation et de la démocratie participative. Une telle remarque cinglante est de nature à faire un clin d'œil aux décideurs publics.

A leur tour, les interventions dans les médias ont touché un grand nombre de personnes. Réagissant au dernier parti dans le collimateur de la Nyakurisation – le Parti Union pour le Progrès National (UPRONA) –, Siméon Barumwete, professeur à l'Université du Burundi, a souligné dans les colonnes du journal Iwacu une situation de nature à faire cheminer le pays vers le monopartisme de fait avec l'absence d'une opposition forte et, par conséquent, l'absence d'alternance au sommet de l'État (Ngabire/Iwacu 2014). De son côté, dans un café sur les contentieux électoraux, le professeur Julien Nimubona a mis en exergue les incertitudes politiques observées dans l'environnement politique et sécuritaire et qui, en fait, justifiaient la nervosité du parti au pouvoir, lequel suspecte les opposants de lui arracher le pouvoir par les urnes et, partant renforce la surveillance et la punition en mobilisant les jeunes. Cette nervosité se manifeste aussi chez les opposants qui voient leur horizon bouché par les divisions orchestrées par le parti au pouvoir (Ngabire/Iwacu 2014).

En somme, la voix des universitaires, par ailleurs très critique, a été entendue. Elle a permis de faire le point sur les problèmes majeurs. Si ces études et analyses n'ont pas empêché la situation politique de dégénérer dans une crise électorale très sérieuse, les enjeux et défis du rétrécissement de l'espace démocratique au Burundi, soulignés avec brio par ces universitaires, ont renforcé les positions de l'intolérance politique avec d'un côté le gouvernement qui a bien pris le soin d'instaurer des lois liberticides (loi sur les manifestations, loi sur les partis politiques, loi sur la presse, loi sur la société civile, etc.), dont certaines ont été jugées anticonstitutionnelles. Cet arsenal juridique restreignant l'espace d'expression des libertés politiques a généré chez les acteurs qui en sont exclus un sentiment de contestation de l'ordre établi à travers des appels à manifestation, des campagnes de désobéissance civile, des mobilisations tout azimut contre le pouvoir en place, etc. (France 24/Les Observateurs 2014).

### ***Des positions qui renforcent les oppositions : le débat sur l'importance de l'accord d'Arusha***

L'accord d'Arusha est considéré comme un texte fondateur de la renaissance du Burundi après 15 ans de guerre civile. C'est un texte qui pose les jalons d'un vouloir vivre ensemble fondé sur la théorie consociative de partage du pouvoir entre les élites segmentaires (Vandeginste 2010). Cet accord, arraché au forceps par le médiateur Nelson Mandela en 2000 (ICG 2000), se heurtait à la menace des mouvements armés qui n'avaient ni négocié, ni signé le texte de l'accord, l'exposant de toute évidence à la volte-face des camps des durs. Depuis 2005, avec la victoire du CNDD-FDD, un ancien mouvement rebelle transformé, par la force des accords de paix, en parti politique (Nindorera 2012), il a été couramment observé des velléités de remise en cause de cet accord, le considérant comme un texte qui a connu ses succès certes, mais qui n'est pas incontournable dans la conduite des affaires de l'État. Si le président Pierre Buyoya, principal signataire, souligne dans son ouvrage qu'Arusha est un socle perfectible (Buyoya 2011), le pouvoir, en niant l'importance d'en faire référence au moment de la tentative de révision de la Constitution de mars 2014, s'est mis une corde au cou et s'est attiré tous les opposants, des plus sérieux aux plus opportunistes. Ladite révision allait permettre au président en exercice de se représenter encore deux fois (Vandeginste 2014).

Cependant, s'il y a un texte qui a été analysé et commenté par les universitaires burundais dans leurs travaux de recherche, et ce dans une perspective interdisciplinaire, c'est l'accord d'Arusha. Au-delà des diatribes habituelles entre les intellectuels défendant le pouvoir en place, il s'en est dressé d'autres pour défendre l'importance de l'esprit des accords et qui ont vu dans le projet du CNDD FDD le refus du consensus et le retour de l'unilatéralisme en politique (OAG 2014).

Etant donné que le jeu démocratique se joue dans l'adversité, c'est la paix sociale générée par cet accord qu'il fallait protéger. Dans différents débats organisés, deux positions diamétralement opposées ont émergé. La première insiste sur le statut supra-constitutionnel de l'accord d'Arusha. A ce titre, dans un débat organisé par une ONG locale, Forum pour la Conscience et le Développement (FOCODE), le professeur Gervais Gatunange, en sa qualité d'ancien membre de la commission chargée d'élaborer l'actuelle constitution, estime qu'on ne peut pas faire de parallèle entre les deux textes qui posaient polémiques chez les acteurs politiques. L'accord d'Arusha a inspiré la rédaction de l'actuelle Constitution. Il en rappelle l'exposé des motifs, soulignant que « L'apport de l'Accord d'Arusha pour la Paix et la Réconciliation au Burundi a été prédominant. Les dispositions du présent

projet de Constitution sont l'émanation dudit Accord qui est lui-même une sorte de référence supra-constitutionnelle ». Cette démarche a été confirmée par la Cour constitutionnelle, dans son arrêt sur l'Affaire RCB 303, qui fait remarquer dans son exposé des motifs que « Pour comprendre l'esprit de la Constitution, il est tout d'abord judicieux de comprendre le texte qui a le plus inspiré le constituant de 2005 » (Cour constitutionnelle, Arrêt RCB303).

D'autres universitaires burundais ont en revanche nié ce statut supra-constitutionnel. C'est notamment le cas du professeur Pascal Rwankara, connu dans les médias comme constitutionnaliste. Il a exprimé la suprématie de la Constitution sur l'accord d'Arusha. Pour ce professeur de droit à l'Université du Burundi, rien ne pouvait empêcher le président Nkurunziza de se représenter. Son argumentation, qui lui a valu moult critiques dans les médias comme défenseur de la pensée unique (Rugero/Iwacu 2015), mettait une focale notamment sur le mode de vote, c'est-à-dire le suffrage indirect pour le premier mandat de 2005-2010. Ce mode de scrutin, il le balaie au regard de ce qu'il appelle le régime présidentiel. Ce dernier en sortait affaibli eu égard au fait que le Parlement pouvait le destituer sans que, à son tour, il lui eût été possible de le dissoudre. Pour lui, le jeu de contrepois prévu dans les articles 104, 115, 116, et 163 de la Constitution heurtait de plein fouet l'esprit du modèle présidentiel burundais. Le Président semblait donc limité dans ses pouvoirs d'agir contre le Parlement. Donc pour lui, ce mandat n'en était pas un, du moins pas un véritable mandat et rien ne pouvait empêcher Nkurunziza de se représenter à nouveau (Nyamitwe 2015). Cette position a vite été saluée par les membres de la majorité présidentielle décidés à en découdre avec un accord qu'ils n'avaient signé que comme simple exutoire vers la conquête du pouvoir en 2004.

La troisième catégorie est constituée d'universitaires pour qui il est important de croire encore en cet accord. En insistant sur l'ingénierie de cet accord, ils sont vus comme les détracteurs de la démocratie du nombre qui fait jubiler le parti au pouvoir. Mais force est de constater que la position prise reste juste une position médiane en insistant sur la nécessité de procéder à une évaluation rigoureuse des différents protocoles pour bien se rendre compte de ce qui a réussi et ce qui a échoué<sup>1</sup>. Cette voie médiane ne pouvait pas satisfaire les radicaux, qui ont vu dans la position de ces universitaires une démarche politique visant la recherche du compromis alors qu'il y avait moyen de privilégier une approche institutionnelle, c'est-à-dire interroger les institutions chargées de « dire le vrai » dans les arènes de l'État (le Parlement, la Cour constitutionnelle, etc.) par ailleurs dominées par le parti au pouvoir. Or cette voie, comme certains universitaires l'ont vite souligné, était une marche forcée vers l'acceptation d'un compris sans débat,

lequel aura constitué le soubassement de l'esprit de l'accord d'Arusha (Lafont & Hirschy/CETRI 2015). L'analyse qu'a faite Julien Nimubona sur les débats parlementaires de décembre 2013 en vue de l'amendement de la Constitution pour éviter toute référence à l'accord d'Arusha, montre qu'en privilégiant le débat face à des acteurs remontés contre l'idée même de remettre au placard un accord qui a fait son histoire, on le subit au lieu de le conduire (Nkurunziza/Iwacu 2013).

### ***Les articles 96 et 302 de la Constitution : un débat qui n'a pas rassuré***

Ce débat sur l'amendement de la Constitution que les universitaires burundais ont accompagné par médias interposés, a porté sur deux articles considérés de nos jours comme les plus lus et commentés, aussi bien par les profanes que par les savants. Pour cause, ils ont été au centre des débats sur la légalité de la candidature du président Nkurunziza à un troisième mandat. Il s'agit de l'article 96 qui dispose que « le Président de la République est élu au suffrage universel pour un mandat de 5 ans renouvelable une seule fois » et de l'article 302 qui annonce une exception pour l'élection du premier président post-transition en ces termes : « A titre exceptionnel, le premier président de la période post-transition est élu par l'Assemblée nationale et le Sénat réunis en congrès, à la majorité des deux tiers des membres. Si cette majorité n'est pas obtenue aux deux premiers tours, il est procédé immédiatement à d'autres tours jusqu'à ce qu'un candidat obtienne le suffrage égal aux deux tiers des membres du Parlement » (Constitution du Burundi 2005).

Finalement, il a été demandé à la Cour constitutionnelle de statuer sur les deux articles, mais les positions des universitaires avaient déjà envenimé l'atmosphère électorale. Deux camps diamétralement opposés et engagés à en découdre par tous les moyens étaient déjà structurés. D'un côté, le parti au pouvoir CNDD-FDD, ses partis satellites et les organisations de la société civile inféodées au parti au pouvoir. Fondant leurs arguments sur les positions prises par les intellectuels organiques, ils ont appelé à lutter contre ceux qui veulent ôter au citoyen Nkurunziza un droit qui lui est constitutionnellement reconnu (RFI 2015). D'un autre côté, les partis d'opposition organisés dans le mouvement Arusha et les organisations de la société civile rassemblées dans la campagne « Halte au troisième mandat » ont mobilisé à leur tour l'argumentaire proche de celui développé par les universitaires opposés au troisième mandat pour faire entendre qu'ils ne pourront en aucun cas accepter un coup d'État constitutionnel (Vox Africa News 2015). Mais, faut-il remarquer, une approche médiane défendue par les universitaires en tant que communauté d'experts aurait peut-être décrispé l'atmosphère morose des élections.

## **Le manque d'approche commune en tant que communauté d'experts : l'autre ingrédient de la crise**

Dans cette descente aux enfers (Oakford 2015), si les universitaires burundais se sont fait entendre, il manque une approche cohérente en tant que communauté d'experts. Si devant le rouleau compresseur des oppositions engagées progressivement sur la voie de la violence, la peur devient un réflexe naturel pour tout humain, il y a lieu de fustiger le fait que les organisations des universitaires ont brillé par l'absence de prise de position pacifiste de nature à appeler toutes les parties en conflit à faire preuve de retenue et de sagesse. Les positions prises individuellement ont servi de strapontin aux entrepreneurs politiques, mais n'ont convaincu ni les partis au pouvoir ni les opposants. Chaque groupe est resté figé sur sa position. Deux organisations auraient pu jouer un rôle important notamment dans la démobilisation de la jeunesse à ne pas emprunter la voie de la violence. Il y a d'un côté l'Association des professeurs de l'Université du Burundi (APUB) et de l'autre l'Association des universités privées (AUP). Ces associations, qui prennent généralement position sur les questions relatives aux politiques de l'enseignement supérieur et sur la gouvernance dans les universités, auraient constitué un centre d'alerte par rapport à la crise dont l'épicentre se trouvait au sein de la jeunesse universitaire (Birantamije 2016). Pourtant, dès le début des manifestations, des cours ont été arrêtés, des campus fermés et des étudiants chassés (Shaka/Iwacu 2015). D'un autre côté, dans les médias, les positions exprimées par les universitaires ont divisé l'opinion et structuré, comme nous venons de le souligner, les terreaux de la violence. Les universités, au lieu d'être des temples du savoir et du débat, ont été transformées en bastions politiques.

Ces deux organisations, les plus représentatives, n'ont pas pu organiser des débats au sein de (et par) la communauté des experts. Ce qui n'a pas permis à la parole experte de galvaniser les esprits des acteurs politiques et de la jeunesse sur l'importance de débattre sur le fond du problème du troisième mandat du président en exercice et les défis que cela pouvait générer sur les plans institutionnel, politique et sociétal. En guise d'exemple, la tendance actuelle d'ethniciser le conflit est un défi que les analyses et les débats auraient permis de relever dès les premiers moments de la crise (Tilouine/Le Monde 2015). Même si individuellement les opinions peuvent être partagées, l'absence d'une approche commune a fragilisé le monde universitaire jusqu'à menacer le monopole de la parole scientifiquement autorisée.

## **La fin du monopole de la parole scientifiquement autorisée ?**

Devant l'ampleur de la crise, la parole d'un universitaire relève de ce que Bourdieu appelle le langage autorisé du fait des conditions institutionnalisées de sa production et de sa réception (Bourdieu 1975 :187). Les mots utilisés disposent d'une certaine dose de pouvoir parce que fondés sur un savoir adapté au contexte. La perte du monopole de la parole autorisée peut se comprendre en analysant la position d'intellectuels soumis aux politiciens entrepreneurs qui s'est progressivement affirmée surtout à l'Université du Burundi, laquelle se voulait pourtant le modèle d'une pensée éclairante comme son nom de « Rumuri » l'indique<sup>2</sup>. Somme toute, il y a lieu de déplorer l'absence d'un véritable travail de sapes des positions des entrepreneurs politiques et de désorganisation des cadres de diffusion des « vérités » imposées. Cela a ouvert la voie à la contestation de la domination intellectuelle des universitaires.

## **Des universitaires soumis aux politiciens entrepreneurs**

Plusieurs circonstances ont montré une marche vers la crise avec la mise en place des cadres sociaux de la violence. Le parti au pouvoir a remorqué la jeunesse dans une forme de milice dite « Imbonerakure » (Mbazumutima & Manirakiza/Iwacu 2014). En réaction, les partis de l'opposition dans plusieurs discours ont galvanisé leur jeunesse à la résistance. Face à ces positions, les universitaires ont brillé par leur absence dans la construction d'un espace de débat politique sur le devenir de l'État et des institutions face à la montée de la violence. C'est comme s'il fallait plaire aux différents camps. A titre d'exemple, aucun colloque ni journée d'études n'a été organisé dans la moindre université sur la question de « miliciorisation » des jeunes. Pourtant, la presse rapportait tous les jours les cas de jeunes de plus en plus décidés à supplanter les forces de l'ordre au nom du slogan « Sécurité, affaire de tous », matérialisé par une ordonnance conjointe des ministres de l'Intérieur et de la Sécurité sur la mise en place des comités mixtes de sécurité (Ngabire/Iwacu 2014). Il en est de même de cet esprit de résistance souligné dans les arènes des autres partis politiques de l'opposition comme la coalition Alliance démocratique pour le changement (ADC-Ikibiri). Sans que l'on puisse dire que les universitaires, en tant que membres de la communauté étaient eux-aussi soumis aux tra- casseries du régime – si bien que prendre une position contraire aurait été boudier le sauveur attendu –, l'absence de débat critique vis-à-vis de l'appel à la rébellion contre l'État laisse entrevoir une forme de soumission à la cause des opposants ou du régime. Or leur rôle aurait été de s'appuyer sur la pensée savante pour saper les positions des entrepreneurs politiques en montrant les conséquences

politiques, économiques et sociaux d'embarquer tout un peuple sur la voie de la violence. La situation de la veille des manifestations contre le troisième mandat, montre plutôt des universitaires qui ont progressivement déserté leur terrain. En 2012, un colloque international sur les 50 ans de l'indépendance du Burundi a été annulé en catimini par le recteur de l'Université du Burundi pour la simple raison que certains thèmes insinuaient la critique du régime en place ou portaient sur des objets politiquement sensibles et protégés, comme la question du génocide, les crimes économiques, la vérité et la réconciliation, etc. Deux ans plus tard, la même université a organisé la célébration de ces 50 ans d'existence. Les manifestations scientifiques de la semaine dédiée au cinquantenaire ont vu non seulement un manque criant de contribution des enseignants, mais aussi une participation désintéressée aux dites manifestations. C'est comme si les langues s'étaient de plus en plus liées et, avec elles, les esprits. Or le Burundi avait besoin d'une troisième voix. Les circonstances s'y prêtaient étant donné que l'Université célébrait 50 ans d'esprit libre, éclairé et constructif. Le débat sur le troisième mandat aurait dû permettre un rapprochement des positions et éventuellement empêcher la situation politique, volatile depuis les élections de 2010, de dégénérer en affrontement et en guerre civile.

### **Des universitaires qui ne s'attaquent pas aux « vérités » imposées**

Les manifestations contre le troisième mandat ont aussi eu pour conséquence de révéler que les universitaires burundais maîtrisent la stratégie d'évitement face aux « vérités » imposées. Celle-ci consiste à jouer les abonnés absents alors que la parole autorisée s'impose dans le dessein d'éviter toute forme de labellisation (opposant c. mouvance présidentielle). Dans un premier temps, si les interventions sur les manifestations projetées par les partis au conflit ont scientifiquement justifié l'exercice des droits et libertés pour tous, dès le début, les manifestants et contre-manifestants ont imprimé une nouvelle marque à l'exercice de ce droit. Toutes les activités ont été arrêtées par les manifestants, la violence a été le seul mode opératoire privilégié, aussi bien par les défenseurs du régime que par les militants pour le changement. Face à cette situation à laquelle ils avaient contribué indirectement, les universitaires n'ont pas agi au moyen d'analyses et d'interventions afin de structurer un débat sur ces nouvelles pratiques. Dans les quartiers ayant manifesté, tout le monde n'était pas acquis à cette idée, pourtant chacun était sommé de ne pas quitter le domicile. Parfois les manifestants s'en prenaient à eux, parfois la police leur tirait dessus. Les intellectuels n'ont pas été à l'avant-garde pour rappeler les principes fondamentaux des manifestations qui ne se voulaient pas révolutionnaires (Favre 1990). Si le Gouvernement accuse

les manifestants d'être des insurgés, cette appellation atypique aurait pu être esquivée si les universitaires avaient pris les choses en main pour rappeler que la manifestation répond à des normes pour ne pas offrir au pouvoir l'occasion de les réprimer. Mais force nous est de constater qu'ils ont vite cédé aux entrepreneurs politiques qui ont imprimé à la masse solitaire ce qu'il était « légitime » de faire sans nécessairement interroger les contours de la question.

La crise actuelle a aussi montré que les universitaires, faute d'avoir élevé la voix sur les implications de la crise, surtout sur le fonctionnement des universités alors que la rue s'embrasait au rythme de « *Nkurunziza dégage* », les responsables des universités et institutions d'enseignement public ont appelé les étudiants à regagner les auditoriums. Plus grave, beaucoup d'étudiants campaient encore devant l'ambassade des États-Unis (Shaka/Iwacu 2015), les campus ayant été fermés sur ordre du ministre de l'Enseignement supérieur. Les enseignants ont été sommés de faire cours, même pour un seul étudiant présent. Si, sur le plan pédagogique et déontologique, cela était à contester avec des arguments scientifiques, les enseignants dans ces universités ont accepté cette mesure sans autre forme de procès, manifestant encore une fois qu'ils n'avaient aucune liberté de penser, encore moins d'action. En évitant d'être considérés comme des opposants au système en place, ils ont érigé un cadre de mésaventure scientifique qui a lénifié leur capital symbolique et dont ils peinent actuellement à retrouver toute la quintessence.

### **Du secours de l'Église catholique à la lettre de soutien des collègues universitaires : à la recherche du paradis perdu ?**

La crise du troisième mandat n'a pas uniquement touché les acteurs politiques et les organisations de la société civile opposées au pouvoir. Elle a mis dans le collimateur les universitaires, en les étiquetant implicitement de pro ou d'anti-troisième mandat. Certains ont pris la route de l'exil, d'autres se cachent à l'instar de biens des citoyens burundais. Ceux qui se présentent au service ont développé la stratégie d'évitement des dossiers sensibles, ce qui ne crée pas moins une sorte d'enferment. Actuellement, les universitaires évitent de dire le vrai et de critiquer le mal. Ceux qui osent parler ne peuvent plus le faire à visage découvert pour ne pas constituer la proie chétive de ceux qui veulent asseoir la pensée unique. Dans la presse, il est fréquent d'entendre ou de lire : « Selon un analyste couvert d'anonymat... ; Selon un expert qui n'a pas voulu décliner son identité... ; Un professeur de l'université contacté mais qui a exigé de ne pas être cité... ». Or, ce qui fait un scientifique, c'est d'affirmer son point de vue, de signer son article, bref, d'affirmer son monopole de la parole autorisée. Seuls ceux qui se trouvent



à l'étranger analysent ou commentent les événements du Burundi mais sont critiqués à leur tour dans les cafés par leurs collègues. C'est tout un boulevard vers une pensée unique qui se structure dans la nostalgie d'un paradis perdu.

Cependant comme le disait le philosophe grec Aristote, la nature a horreur du vide. Des voix se lèvent pour amener les universitaires burundais à ne pas céder une partie d'eux-mêmes ; cette pensée critique, cette parole autorisée parce que savante et appelée à être libre. Ces voix sont constituées par l'Église catholique et les universitaires des autres pays. Les deux ont en commun d'œuvrer à ce que la place des universitaires puisse être recouvrée.

### **« L'École de la foi », une initiative de l'Église catholique pour rallumer la flamme**

L'Église catholique du Burundi a pris des positions claires contre le troisième mandat conformément à sa logique pastorale. Bien d'homélies dominicales ont par ailleurs souligné l'importance de sauvegarder la paix sociale générée par le compromis d'Arusha, si bien que le parti au pouvoir s'en est violemment pris à elle (Balzaac/La Croix/RFI 2016).

« L'École de la foi », initiée par le Sanctuaire marial de Gikungu à Bujumbura, est l'un des espaces où l'on peut exprimer son ras-le-bol de voir le pays sombrer dans l'ingouvernabilité (Bastin 2015). Mais au-delà, c'est un espace pour renouer avec un débat critique et constructif. Les thèmes exploités montrent que l'Église a la nostalgie de voir les intellectuels et les universitaires quitter les giron de la pensée unique qui émerge des situations conflictuelles. Ainsi, au lendemain du processus électoral contesté et controversé, les Pères Schoenstatt ont initié une série de conférences-débats sur la fraternité et réconciliation et sur les attentes des populations envers les dirigeants (Ngabire 2015). Ce genre de débats dans des espaces réservés à d'autres liturgies n'en rappellent pas moins la place de l'universitaire dans une société déchirée par les divergences et les conflits politiques.

### **Une lettre ouverte pour la liberté de pensée**

L'inspiration d'écrire une lettre ouverte en soutien aux universitaires burundais est venue d'un symposium sur le Burundi contemporain organisé en octobre 2015 à Gand, en Belgique<sup>3</sup>. Centrée sur la situation générale au Burundi, cette lettre est très critique envers les acteurs burundais de tous les horizons (les acteurs au pouvoir, l'opposition intérieure, l'opposition en exil, radicaux de tout acabit, etc.). Cette lettre ouverte insiste dans un premier temps sur la place de l'université comme rempart face à la violence

et aux manipulations idéologiques. Cette considération est liée au fait que l'université reste le lieu privilégié de production de citoyens critiques et de décideurs capables de s'appuyer sur une analyse nuancée de la situation. Dans un second temps, les universitaires signataires rappellent les faits et les événements ayant continuellement structuré le territoire de la pensée unique (répression, massacres, torture, destruction des médias indépendants, exil, etc.) et fustigent la propagande et la rhétorique belliqueuses entretenues par les parties au conflit.

Dans un style savant, ils soulignent la place du dialogue qui peine à être initié nonobstant les multiples médiations régionales et internationales :

« Les mots sont nos principaux outils de travail, ils peuvent sembler dérisoires dans un contexte où les armes dominent, mais ce sont des mots et non des armes que viendront des solutions ».

Dans un troisième temps, la lettre souligne l'appui que ces universitaires veulent apporter aux collègues burundais :

« Nous souhaitons manifester à nos collègues burundais notre soutien et nous faire le relais d'une parole à la fois libre et nuancée qui est plus que jamais nécessaire au retour de la paix, de la sécurité et de la confiance. Nous savons combien leur voix est précieuse pour éclairer le contexte actuel et faire entendre une pensée critique et constructive, qui puisse non pas détruire, mais éclairer au bénéfice de tous. Nous exhortons le gouvernement burundais à garantir, sur le territoire national, un espace de débat et de réflexion. En effet, les universitaires burundais peuvent contribuer à la compréhension des ressorts de la crise et dès lors à l'identification de pistes de solution. »

En somme, cette lettre n'est pas qu'une pétition adressée aux protagonistes du conflit burundais comme d'aucuns pourraient le croire, c'est plus un rappel aux universitaires burundais pris dans l'engrenage des événements et dominés par l'instinct de survie, qu'ils doivent recouvrer leur place de scientifiques pour proposer cette troisième voie qui manque toujours dans la compréhension et la résolution de la crise.

Dans cette contribution, mon objectif n'est pas de fustiger mes collègues, loin s'en faut. C'est une prise de position sur un gâchis que nous aurions dû éviter en jouant notre rôle et en assumant notre place dans la diffusion d'un savoir savant devant des situations conflictogènes afin d'éviter, autant que faire se peut, une descente aux enfers. La situation qu'a traversée le Burundi depuis pratiquement le 25 avril 2016 n'a pas manqué de clouer au pilori les universitaires burundais déjà coincés par les événements entre l'enclume des attentes de la société en tant qu'acteurs disposant du monopole de la parole scientifiquement autorisée et le marteau des fossoyeurs de la pensée libre qui

espèrent tirer des dividendes dans la monotonie. Espérons que la résilience qui se met en mouvement avec l'appui de multiples acteurs permettra à la lumière de vaincre les ténèbres, sinon un paradis est déjà perdu.

## Notes

1. L'Université du Lac Tanganyika prévoit d'évaluer l'accord d'Arusha après les 15 ans d'implémentation. Elle a déjà lancé l'appel à contribution pour animer une série de journées d'étude organisées par la Faculté des sciences sociales et politiques sous le thème central de « L'accord d'Arusha, 15 ans après ».
2. Le mot « Rumuri », signifie « flambeau » pour éclairer tout le pays. L'Université du Burundi porte jusqu'à ce jour ce nom d'une symbolique impeccable dans un pays où plus de 66 pour cent de la population ignore l'écriture et 90 % habite le monde rural.
3. Voir la lettre en cours de signature sur [https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1fEEvm4QNk3hIk-WqMMKzaC3la\\_c2PoSSK7Qkl\\_qynKIE/edit?pref=2&pli=1#gid=354482654](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1fEEvm4QNk3hIk-WqMMKzaC3la_c2PoSSK7Qkl_qynKIE/edit?pref=2&pli=1#gid=354482654), consulté le 27 mars 2016.

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# **Hermeneutic of Liberation Theology and Student Protests at the University of Rhodesia 1965-1980: Lessons for Academic Freedom in Contemporary Zimbabwe**

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## **Résumé**

Cette étude est une réflexion théologique sur la dynamique de l'activisme étudiant dans la recherche de la liberté académique dans le cadre de la deuxième guerre de libération (Chimurenga) au Zimbabwe. L'article examine notamment les protestations des étudiants noirs de l'Université de Rhodésie (aujourd'hui l'Université du Zimbabwe) entre 1965 et 1980. Dans la période étudiée, les étudiants ont connu des fortunes diverses dans ce qui était, à l'époque, l'unique campus universitaire. Dans une large mesure, les étudiants noirs vivaient, à l'apogée du colonialisme sous le régime de Ian Smith, comme dans une immense prison. La liberté académique et les droits de l'homme étaient littéralement entravés. L'étude essaye de montrer qu'il existe une matrice globale entre l'herméneutique d'une théologie politique de la libération qui fait un bond dans les années suivantes jusqu'en 1980 et l'essence de la liberté académique (protestations universitaires...) dont les leçons pourraient être utilement utilisées pour inspirer les politiques qui administrent des établissements d'enseignement supérieur d'enseignement supérieur au Zimbabwe contemporain.

**Mots-clés :** Théologie politique, Zimbabwe, liberté académique, herméneutique

## **Abstract**

This study is a theological reflection on the dynamics of student activism in the search of academic freedom in the context of the second Chimurenga (war of liberation) in Zimbabwe. The article particularly examines black students'

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protests at the University of Rhodesia (now the University of Zimbabwe) between 1965 and 1980. In the period under review, the students experienced mixed fortunes at the then sole university campus. To a large extent, black students were treated as though they were inside a huge prison cubicle at the peak of colonialism under Ian Smith's regime. Within the terrain of academic freedom, human rights were literally 'sacrificed at the altar'. The study shows that there is an inclusive matrix between the hermeneutic of a political theology of liberation that surged in the years running up to 1980 and the essence of academic freedom (academic protests...) whose lessons could be meaningfully decoded to inspire policies that administer tertiary institutions of higher learning in contemporary Zimbabwe.

**Keywords:** Political theology, Zimbabwe, academic freedom, hermeneutics.

This study examines the praxis behind the spirituality of black student activism against the backdrop of the broader African issue of freedom that was anchored on the movements for national liberation in colonial Zimbabwe. The objective is to estimate the extent to which academic freedom or lack of it was exercised at the University of Rhodesia (now the University of Zimbabwe) between 1965 and 1980. Originally, the University of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was a Federal institution established in 1952 to serve the people of Zimbabwe (then Southern Rhodesia), Zambia (then Northern Rhodesia) and Malawi (then Nyasaland). With the dissolution of the Federation in 1963, the establishment of other national colleges in Zambia and Malawi was made possible and the University of Rhodesia evolved thereto. We consistently use the name, University of Rhodesia, as much as possible to be conceptually closer to the key historical events themselves which are highlighted in this study.

Worldwide, the principle and practice of academic freedom is a definitive ingredient in the governance of universities. This study notes that students in tertiary institutions of higher learning constitute a key social group of people who are conscious enough to articulate issues that affect people in every aspect of society. From the onset, it should be noted that the kind of repression and de-humanization of black students, both as activists and freedom fighters, alludes to the particular national issues that the second *Chimurenga* (war of liberation) was fighting against. It is impossible to understand the students' struggle for academic freedom inside the university campus separately from the broader struggle for the nationalist liberation of Zimbabwe during the same historical period after 1965. This insight is vital considering that black students at the University of Rhodesia represented the sons and daughters of the generality of Africans who were exploited and marginalized under white settler colonial rule in Rhodesia. Ordinarily

speaking, students express their views on critical issues that affect the lives of people or a country by taking advantage of the vitality of 'academic freedom' which encompasses, among other facets, the dignity of freedom of expression and freedom of association. These two features of academic freedom were encoded in the Ordinances and Statutes that administered the University of Rhodesia. When academic freedom was threatened, or perceived to be so, students resorted to the spirituality of 'protest' as a way of communicating what was generally known as a grievance (injustice) done unto them. For most of the time, it must be noted that black students had suffered grievances on campus since the establishment of the University of Rhodesia in 1955. Some of the grievances were that black students were denied rights to receive equal financial grants and recruitment based on equity. These grievances, among others, represented wider racial discrimination that Africans were subjected to under colonial rule. Thus, the internal campus disturbances at the University of Rhodesia mirrored colonial melancholy in a critical way. In view of the foregoing, the thrust of the study is to analyse the manifestations of some black students' demonstrations that cropped up at the University of Rhodesia as expression of academic protest induced by a number of acute injustices during the high point of colonialism in Zimbabwe between 1965 and 1980. Notwithstanding, such demonstrations are vital to inspire, shape and enhance university governance policies and guidelines in view of the fact that there are about sixteen more emerging universities (EUs), including public, state-related and private, church-related institutions of higher learning in contemporary Zimbabwe.

In most cases, black students protested against white settler authorities under the banner of expressing 'the voice of the voiceless' in as far as they were articulating critical issues which affected them as a peculiar class. In addition, it must also be pointed out that the university campus provided a fertile space where students articulated national grievances which affected the generality of African people in the whole country. This meant that the black students on campus represented marginalized Africans who suffered various injustices under colonial rule such as lack of proper medical facilities, lack of educational opportunities, forced labour, lack of participation in government and politics and low wages (Sithole 1968). In their attempt to articulate these grievances, students engaged in far-reaching activism which inevitably metamorphosed into confrontation with Ian Smith's colonial regime. This is why Smith's regime was compelled to put into place certain legislative instruments designed to restrain and suppress student protest at the University of Rhodesia.

## Theoretical Framework

A triangulation of three basic concepts concerning academic freedom, the inviolability of human rights and sanctity of liberation theology influence the direction of this study. Below, we briefly explain these interlinking concepts in order to mainstream the contours of student protests. First, although the concept of academic freedom has a long implicit history, advocates uphold that the freedom of enquiry, association and expression is essential to the mission of the academy. Academic freedom is the ability to engage in the exploration or articulation of any topic or subscribe to any belief system without being held up. In governance terms, universities exist as 'islands of democracy'. This means that universities are communities unto themselves with rules and regulations of their own, and when conflicts or perceived threats arise, the most common and compelling arguments that follow involve academic freedom. In general, it should also be noted that universities are renowned for blazing new trails of freedom and are also expected to confront their own concepts of freedom in the process. Yet, it must also be stated that universities are repeatedly targeted for repression due to their ability to shape and control the flow of information and ideas within the campus in particular, and public society in general. When scholars and students attempt to teach or communicate ideas or facts that are perceived to be inconvenient to external authorities, they may find themselves targeted for public vilification via losing their jobs, expulsion or imprisonment. It is this kind of scenario which usually makes academic protest germane in universities. In other words, to threaten academic freedom is to provoke or invite academic protest. In the case of the University of Rhodesia, the scenario was strange in view of the fact that the country was facing a mounting war of African liberation which was increasingly supported by the ordinary black civilian population, and also from the ranks of the black elite, especially some university students and their lecturers. Evidently, this is how student activism, done under the veneer of the search for academic freedom, was intrinsically linked to the aims, aspirations and activities of the nationalist war of liberation (the second *Chimurenga*). Put differently, the study argues that black student protests at the University of Rhodesia represented both a struggle for academic freedom and also a struggle against totalitarianism enshrined in white supremacy.

Second, human rights as a concept is universally acclaimed today. They cannot be swept under the carpet due to the fact that the violation of human rights is the most worrying challenges of our times. Human rights may be defined as the things a person is allowed to be or to do or to have. Every person is entitled to inalienable rights by the exclusive *raison d'être* of being

a person (Maposa 2014). Human rights exist for every one's protection against people who might want to dehumanize other people. Accordingly, human rights exist to help people get along with each other peacefully in society or within an institution. One notable person who saw that human rights are universally endowed for everyone was Eleanor Roosevelt, the wife of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who was President of the United States of America from 1933 to 1945. As cited in Hubbard (2001:2), Roosevelt queried: 'Where, after all, do universal rights begin?' She went on to posit that human rights must begin 'in small places, close to home, so close that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet, they are the world of the individual person...unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerned citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world'.

In addition, the United Nations has had a Convention on the Rights of the Child since 1989. This binds member countries to protect the rights of children (people) in areas such as access to information, freedom of expression and the general advocacy for children's rights. Zimbabwe is a signatory to this convention. Accordingly, the Constitution of Zimbabwe guarantees freedom of worship and non-discrimination against individuals on the basis of religious affiliation. Chapter Three of the Declaration of Rights, Article 11 of the Constitution, spells out the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual. It states: 'Whereas every person in Zimbabwe is entitled to the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual, that is to say, the right whatever his race, tribe, place of origin, political opinions, colour, creed or sex, but subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others and for the public interest.' There are various freedoms and rights that are guaranteed for individuals. A consideration of these freedoms and rights shows that there is a need to strike a balance between enjoying those rights and ensuring that the rights of others are not violated. It is against this background that the right to academic freedom against the backdrop of student's protests at the University of Rhodesia is evaluated. As this study demonstrates, black students at the University of Rhodesia during colonial rule, particularly between 1965 and 1980, do not need any explanations about human rights violation. The black students, unlike their white counterparts, were denied an enjoyment of several rights. Black students experienced the deliberate abuse of enjoying rights. They were restricted from staying in campus accommodation, were given much lower financial grants and denied to drink clear beer in campus facilities. As pointed out elsewhere and above, the denial or restriction of their rights represented the general racial discrimination under which Africans suffered in colonial

Zimbabwe. It is why, for instance, a critique of human rights provides a useful framework for the present study whose thrust is anchored in the inherent spirituality of student protests in the context of academic freedom at the University of Rhodesia. Liberation theology is a crucial concept that informs the study. Briefly stated, liberation theology is a (radical) style of reflecting on society in the light of the Word of God. In a way, liberation theology essentially uses insights from social analysis which encompass the hermeneutical process of *seeing*, *judging* and *acting*. This spirituality of liberation theology is intended to emancipate humanity from the roots of all that dehumanizes, whether political, social or economic (Ferm 1988). The study befittingly engages the sanctity of liberation theology in order to evaluate the essence of student activism that was repeatedly manifested at the University of Rhodesia for much of the period after the promulgation of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (hereafter, UDI) on 11 November 1965. UDI and its shocking impact kindled a transmutation of a theology of liberation which can be traced in student activism.

### **Trajectory of Student Activism after UDI**

In November 1965, Ian Smith promulgated UDI (Martin and Johnson 1981:30). Although Smith's wrath was not directly centred on students, it demonstrated the extent to which the colonial regime could go especially if its existence and security were endangered. Although the national reaction to UDI was fragmented, the only organized group that managed to attract attention was the black student movement at the University of Rhodesia. In November 1965, black students' reaction to the announced UDI was swift as they struggled to address and redress this UDI ogre. For instance, students demanded that university officials make a public statement to condemn UDI in no uncertain terms. Nevertheless, the students' demand fell on deaf ears and the impasse was followed by demonstrations on campus. The colonial government decided to take drastic measures in order to quell student demonstrations. Smith's regime unequivocally prohibited any form of public gathering. In this context, the Smith regime relied heavily upon the colonial machinery comprising the police, army and Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) (Shamuyarira 1965). If ever there were students who wanted to hold a meeting, permission was to be sought from the police first. The police and army were frequently used to quell any form of disturbances on campus. These agents used teargas and trained dogs, especially imported vicious Alsatian dogs to attack riotous people. In our case, violent black students on campus interpreted UDI as a monster that threatened the freedoms and liberties of Africans by virtue of colonial incarceration in Zimbabwe. Thus, UDI (1965)

sparked off a series of campus disturbances which, in the end, became part and parcel of the national call towards decolonization that took place for much of the late 1960s and 1970s. The University of Rhodesia was viewed by the colonial regime as a central point which fuelled the voice of dissent and so was to be brought under central administrative control especially. For that reason, the campus became a target of repression and suppression. This is why, then, the concept of human rights is vital in view of the fact the sole university campus, by its nature, provided an ideological space to be hardest-hit or targeted to quell the spread of radical ideas of human freedom, liberty and fraternity that were springing from it. On account of this, many black students who were seen to disseminate revolutionary ideas were subjected to incarceration. For example, a student leader like Josiah Terry Maluleke, a Bachelor of Economics student at the University of Rhodesia, was restricted for six years and heavily punished at Gonakudzingwa Prison. His active involvement in campus activism was perceived as unbecoming behaviour of an ungracious student at tertiary level. Other revolutionary black students were locked up at Sikombela Prison, deliberately established by the colonial regime to imprison black political activists. The major reason for restricting university students was that they were actively involved in radical activism and through that platform were furthering the goals and the interests of the nationalist freedom fighters whom the colonial regime regarded as sellouts or rebels (Chung 2000: 43). Due to such heavy involvement in politics, the University of Rhodesia was thus regarded as an institution that mirrored the black restlessness that was happening in the whole country due to colonial exploitation and repression.

It must be noted that from 1966 onwards the relationship between the colonial state and black university students was one characterized by perpetual conflict. The relationship continued to deteriorate as the second *Chimurenga* intensified. In fact, university students increasingly constituted the bulk of cadres who crossed the Rhodesian borders to join the liberation movements in Zambia, Botswana, Tanzania and Mozambique where nationalists were re-grouping to launch the window of the armed struggle in the 1970s. The colonial regime felt threatened by the campus disturbances. Against this background, it displayed an uncompromising degree of Machiavellian tactics to eradicate students' dissenting voices on campus. As a result, several black students were detained, imprisoned or restricted in rural areas in order to paralyse student coordination and solidarity. The students showed great bitterness at the ubiquitous presence of the police on campus as the situation threatened academic freedom which was systematically replaced by totalitarianism. This totalitarianism was manifested through an enactment

of, for example, the Law and Order Maintenance Act (hereafter LOMA) in 1967, whose provisions barred students from embarking upon any form of publication or posting sensitive fliers on campus. Following its enactment, LOMA provided for a death sentence penalty on any black person caught with arms of war (Martin and Johnson 1981). This development emanated from the fact that the colonial regime felt itself in extreme danger as the black nationalists inside the country opened direct links with other external black nationalists based in Mozambique, Botswana and Zambia. This gave the liberation struggle a new dimension which put the future of the colonial regime in a very precarious position. Thus, LOMA gave Smith's regime full control of the activities at the university campus. The Smith regime was further given space to tighten its grip on the University of Rhodesia by stifling the academic freedom of students. In 1969 a number of demonstrations were undertaken by black students against some white apologists like Florence Chisholm. Chisholm was one of the rigid white supporters of the Smith regime who had acclaimed that black students did not need tertiary education but simple technical education because of their misunderstood low level of intelligence. In addition, students demonstrated against the 1969 Referendum Bill which they regarded as obnoxious (Schoffeleers 2000). Under such circumstances, students like Felix Muchemwa who was also a key member of the Student Representative Council were heavily victimized and forced to apologize for castigating a number of demonstrations designed to repeal pieces of legislations which worked to reduce students' democratic space.

In 1970 many students including Terry Maluleke, Timy Mathew and Kishore Desai, among others, were arrested for being actively involved in student politics as ring leaders. As a result, these students and many others were expelled from the university. The ubiquity of police on the university campus became a thorn in the flesh of students. As a result, it must be pointed out that the University of Rhodesia failed to meaningfully represent a democratic institution or multi-racial island of higher learning (Gelfand 1978). It must also be noted that the white regime's heavy handedness in confronting the students did not spare the university lecturers either. The major reason being that some of the lecturers like Terence Ranger, John Reed, John Conrad and a host of others had constantly shown firm solidarity with African nationalists by attending political meetings together with their black students where they vehemently spoke against the racism and discrimination that were pervasive in society (Gelfand 1978). As a result, a number of African lecturers were forced to flee the country for supporting the black nationalists who by then were regarded as enemies of the colonial

state. It is important to note that university lecturers and their students were a special class of people in society as due to their academic background they could critically articulate national issues. As a result, they became very influential on national issues as the voice of the voiceless. This is how the lecturers and students alike came to be perceived as dangerous Marxists who were responsible for fomenting radical activism on the campus. By the mid-1970s, almost half of the lecturers were imprisoned and expelled (Gelfand 1978). It was a general trend that had begun with the inception of UDI in 1965. All these actions serve to show how far the colonial government could go to advance domino theory at the expense of the sanity required to sustain academic freedom on campus.

The ruthless use of colonial state machinery was also witnessed during the *Chimukwembe* student demonstration in 1973. The *Chimukwembe* demonstration split the university community into two opposing camps, namely a small group of academics which deplored the administration's skewed handling of the students' grievances, while the majority of the white population, academic and administration staff insisted that the students had got what they deserved. Students and lecturers were expelled and some were deported and fled to Britain. The treatment of student activists and lecturers continued to highlight the bigotry and unfairness of the white Rhodesian regime in general and the University of Rhodesia in particular (Mlambo et al. 1995). As noted above, such illtreatment and structural abuse actually forced many of them to join the second *Chimurenga*. This is why student activism at the University of Rhodesia in general, and *Chimurengain* particular, should be perceived as inclusively related in terms of aims and ethos. Evidently, both may be regarded as kindred souls involved in the spirituality of struggle against tyranny in order to regain freedom. This is why, to some extent, the *Chimurenga* war could be regarded as sacrosanct because it constituted the African people's aspirations and determination to be free as a black people in colonial Zimbabwe.

But perhaps the most outstanding case where the colonial government used its oppressive pieces of legislation and state machinery to quell student activism took place in August 1979 (Mlambo *et al.* 1995). The principal reasons for protest ranged from internal politics to external attacks by Rhodesian Front politicians. As the armed struggle intensified Smith's regime became less and less tolerant of any dissenting voices both on campus and in the country as a whole. Black students responded to this totalitarianism by mounting strikes and demonstrations in view of the fact that their academic freedom as intellectuals, and the country, were at stake and being sacrificed. So, the demonstrations erupted due to the need to oppose the



country's racist politicians epitomized by Ian Smith who had avowed to rule Rhodesia and stop black majority rule 'in a 1,000 years' (Mlambo et al. 1995:490). Furthermore, specific grievances arose due to the manner in which the colonial authorities handled the situation in which black freedom fighters had managed to mobilize, attack and injure one white commercial farmer, Maz de Barchgrave at his Altena Farm in December 1979 (Mpofu, Muponda and Tavuyanago, 2009). These signs, together with many others, indicated pretty much that the war of liberation struggle had taken on a new dimension. In other words, such developments marked a more intense phase of the armed struggle which was to reach ceasefire as a result of the protracted Lancaster House Conference negotiations in 1979. At the same time, sanctions that had been declared on the Ian Smith regime by Britain and the United Nations due to UDI were continuing to play havoc with the colonial economic fabric. Furthermore, Africans were mounting serious pressure against the regime as evidenced by their overwhelming rejection of the Peace Proposal (1971) which was meant to end the Rhodesian crisis and also rejection of the Internal Settlement charade of 1978. Thus, against this background it should be noted that the Smith regime was facing mounting serious political, economic and military threats from all sides as it continued to remain insensitive and would not tolerate any opposition, either on campus or anywhere in the country. Evidently, this is why the black students and nationalists worked closely in their quest for democracy and independence for much of the period between 1965 and 1980.

## Conclusion

This study has shown that student activism played an important contribution in the struggle for democracy in response to the way academic freedom on campus was infringed by the colonial state. The dialectic between the suppression of academic freedom on the university campus and the ways in which the black students responded to repression has been evaluated in the wider national context which was literally 'burning' due to the *Chi murenga* war of liberation after 1965. By nature of its policies enacted to govern the Africans, the colonial regime appeared as a school of violence as it instituted draconian pieces of legislation to stifle academic freedom and human rights. The colonial police, CIO and the army became instruments of terror which were used to curtail and castrate student activism. We have shown that the inhumane colonial laws that were enacted allowed the police to use violence, arrests, restrictions, torture, beatings, expulsions and other state machinery to comprehensively quell student activism, whether on or off campus. Such a plethora of repressive and oppressive terror which curtailed academic

freedom serves to indicate that the colonial regime had become diabolic in its particular relationship with the black students at the University of Rhodesia, in as much as it also related to them in the same way as the rest of the African people. This status quo was perpetuated until 1980 in spite of the obduracy exhibited by African students and nationalists.

It is instructive to provide three concluding remarks that are pertinent to appreciate modern governance of institutions of higher learning. Firstly, we can decode from the student activism under the colonial era that in a thriving democracy students should be part of the nation-building processes. Accordingly, authorities should listen to the students' views and engage with them to check their deep concerns at the vital moments in the life of the country. Instead of adopting a policy of exclusion that sidelines citizens (Sachikonye 2011), the government should attempt to embrace a stance of dialogue and mediation in order to persuade students to see things from the same perspective. This insight is pragmatic in processes of weaving transformation in society. Thus, whereas student activism potentially strains human relations, it also should be viewed as a positive aspect to national development if handled proactively in the spirit of managing enduring national unity, healing and reconciliation, especially in the context of the current programme of the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (ZIM-ASSET) that needs every patriotic Zimbabwean to move the country forward. Secondly, students should not be viewed as an alternative assemblage of pretenders to the incumbent government or political systems but as a conscious social class in civil society responsible for pricking the state and its organs to do that which is deemed right for the people. Therefore, student activism should be regarded as part and parcel of legitimate academic protest undertaken within the parameters of academic freedom. Thirdly and lastly, this study proffers a caution that student activism is not a call to be involved in wanton destruction of property and human life. Instead, drawn from the liberative-theological standpoint, it should provide a critical voice of the voiceless in society which is underscored by the injunctions ingrained in the key notions that triangulate the vitality of academic freedom, human rights and liberation theology issues. These notions inculcate responsible citizenship and moral virtue to knit the fabric of society together.

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# Black Pain Matters: Down with Rhodes<sup>1</sup>

Francis B. Nyamnjoh\*

## Résumé

Cet article, extrait de l'ouvrage *#RhodesMustFall.Nibbling at Resilient Colonialism in South Africa*, fournit une description dense des mobilisations étudiantes de l'Université de Cape Town pour le déplacement ou le retrait de la statue de Cecil John Rhodes du campus en 2015. Perçue comme le symbole de la continuité de la racialisation de l'ère coloniale et de l'apartheid, ainsi que des inégalités persistantes depuis 22 ans dans une Afrique du Sud prétendument démocratique et non raciste, la statue de Rhodes a été une cible lors des manifestations étudiantes, principalement conduites par les étudiants noirs sud-africains, dans le cadre d'un mouvement étudiant à l'échelle nationale qui a vu renaître un intérêt croissant pour la décolonisation et la transformation de l'enseignement universitaire. Le présent travail, sur la base de nombreuses données, procède à une analyse minutieuse des contours de ce mouvement qui pose, non seulement en Afrique du Sud, mais aussi dans les espaces diasporiques de l'Occident et du reste du monde, le problème de la condition des Noirs.

**Mots-clés :** Enseignement supérieur, décolonisation, transformations, Afrique du Sud, inégalités

## Abstract

This paper, excerpted from the book *#RhodesMustFall.Nibbling at Resilient Colonialism in South Africa*, provides a thick description of demands by students of the University of Cape Town for the statue of Cecil John Rhodes to be moved or removed from campus in 2015. Perceived as a symbol of the continuities of colonial and apartheid era racialisation and inequalities 22 years into a purportedly democratic and non-racist South Africa post 1994, the Rhodes's statue was targeted by student protests spearheaded by black South African students in the main, as part of a resurgent nationwide student movement in the interest of decolonisation and transformation of university education. The paper provides the details and contours of the unfolding movement articulated around the rallying cry of 'black lives matter' – a cry shared with blacks elsewhere in diasporic spaces across the West and in the rest of the world.

**Keywords:** Higher education, decolonisation and transformation, South Africa, *#RhodesMust-Fall*, *#BlackLivesMatter*, Inequality

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The Demand for Rhodes's statue to be moved or removed from the University of Cape Town campus may have taken many by surprise, but the statue's inconvenience as a blot on the intellectual landscape of UCT had been noted and expressed in the past, since the years of the Archie Mafeje affair, even if its removal was never formally requested before. The Rhodes Must Fall (RMF) protest started on Monday 9 March 2015 on the Upper Campus of UCT,<sup>2</sup> while the Vice-chancellor (VC), Dr Max Price, was away in Dakar, Senegal, attending the African Higher Education Summit.<sup>3</sup> In her capacity as the acting VC, Deputy Vice-chancellor (DVC) Sandra Klopper issued a statement confirming the protest action.

She condemned in the strongest terms as 'unacceptable' and 'reprehensible' the actions of 'An individual among the protesters [who] threw excrement at the statue of Cecil John Rhodes'. She concluded her statement with the reiteration: 'UCT endorses freedom of expression. We encourage open debate, as all universities should do, and urge our students and staff to participate in discussions that contribute to responsible action.'<sup>4</sup>

The 'individual' who threw a bucket of human excrement at Cecil John Rhodes' statue was not quite acting as an individual. Some students reportedly followed his example by throwing urine and pig manure at the statue, while others covered it with a white cloth, 'as if to hide the imperial stain'.<sup>5</sup> Chumani Maxwele, the 'individual' referred to by the acting VC, saw himself as acting on behalf of a group of students who saw themselves as products of a history and a sociology of collective debasement, violation and victimization by outsiders – powerful, 'influential people ... to be feared – who came flying aeroplanes and claiming the status of superior beings and bearers of superior values'.<sup>6</sup> He argued that black students would not want to study in a university suffocating with relics of colonial plunder, including having to graduate in a hall named after the imperialist, Leander Jameson, over twenty years into a democratization process that should already have proven itself by darkening some of the landscape with images and representations (of ideas and ideals, heroes and heroines – dead or alive, individual or collective) that black students could relate to.<sup>7</sup> The students had had enough of repeated claims that transformation cannot happen overnight, as if the institution were some sort of science fiction where a night is longer than twenty-one years. Maxwele was that 'individual' who refused to be treated simply as *an individual*. There was little provision in his upbringing for frivolous claims of individuality. As the son of a poor miner from the Eastern Cape, he was a stranger to power, 'something Maxwele had only glimpsed at a distance, wielded by South Africa's apartheid state'. It did not come naturally for someone who could neither find employment in Delft nor in next door Khayelitsha as a young man reduced

to sharing intimacies with excrement, to see himself as self-made, and as schooled in rational choices with predictable outcomes. To smear Rhodes with excrement was a sort of balancing of equations, and invitation to experience, however momentarily, how those in Khayelitsha lived in communion with excrement and often reduced to excrement themselves – the Khayelitsha that supplied maids and cleaners to Rhodes's descendants who proliferate the suburbs of Rondebosch and Claremont, the neighbourhood of UCT.<sup>8</sup> In a context where and to people for whom excrement is a permanent blot on the landscape, it becomes pretentious to cultivate a sense of decency that ignores the ubiquity of excrement as part and parcel of what it means to live the life of a devalued and debased humanity.

As Eve Fairbanks notes, in Khayelitsha, 'a black-only settlement, built on sand', Maxwele

... discovered that people loitered on the streets because there was hardly room to stand up in their dark, claustrophobic shacks. Families defecated in plastic boxes collected once a week. In the winter, a bluster of whipping wind and sideways-slanting rain, Khayelitsha flooded, and sometimes the makeshift shacks dissolved wholesale, their tarp roofs and cardboard-box sidings disintegrating like sandcastles in a heavy wave.<sup>9</sup>

The precarious sanitation of Khayelitsha is by no means unique over twenty years into post-apartheid South Africa. Indeed, some would argue that Khayelitsha is much better off with its boxes. The continued existence of informal settlements without basic facilities, such as running water or decent public toilets, electricity, or decent sanitation, and with mass unemployment and millions still living below the R422 per month poverty line, mean the majority of South Africans are yet to experience in real terms the comforts of freedom, human rights, democracy, citizenship and dignity promised by their unique constitution. Basic facilities, such as running water and decent toilets, complementary to the comforts of freedom, for example, are luxuries that some informal settlement residents rarely experience. Many of these residents find alternative means of 'comfort' in this regard, using buckets to both harness water from (functional) communal taps and to relieve themselves. Crystal Powell, who did fieldwork for her doctoral research in Langa township from 2011 to 2014, describes her experience of using a bucket in this way for the first time:

While standing in the middle of the shack I realized that I had to use the bathroom... There was no bathroom. This was not a house. It was a shack. The bed, kitchen and sitting room were all one in the same. Where did I expect a bathroom to be? There were several women in the house and one of them motioned to another to get the bucket... There was a light yellow

liquid already in the bucket. It did not look like urine though. My guess was that it was a cleaning detergent diluted with water. She placed the bucket on the floor in the middle of the shack. There was too short a window between the time the bucket was placed on the floor and when the other women began turning their backs to give me privacy before I could object. I was uncomfortable... It seemed to be a natural experience for them and I did not want to draw any more attention to myself. The women talked as I urinated. The sound of my urine entering the bucket seemed excruciatingly loud amongst the talking voices and I was embarrassed though no one else seemed to be. When I was done I asked ... can I have some toilet paper? At this question, the same girl who got the bucket frowned. I could not tell if it was a 'now I have to go find some toilet paper' frown or an 'oh no, we don't have any toilet paper' frown. Regardless of what she was thinking I was huddled over the bucket with my pants down and my knees bent and I wanted someone to give me something to clean myself so I could get out of the situation. She left the shack and came back quickly enough ... I cleaned myself and happily pulled my pants up.<sup>10</sup>

Experiences like this are commonplace in post-apartheid South Africa, arguably the most unequal society in the world (Pillay et al. 2013). Writing in the *Cape Times* in 2011, anthropologist Steve Robins argues that toilets were used as 'political dynamite' during election campaigns in townships such as Khayelitsha, where residents who 'had to relieve themselves in buckets and plastic bags, and threw these bags, "flying toilets", into the wetlands where it was not possible to build houses', were determined to 'render Cape Town ungovernable until service delivery needs in informal settlements were satisfied'.<sup>11</sup>

To Maxwele, 'Freedom', Fairbanks writes, 'was an illusion, a promise heard but not truly experienced – fresh new clothes that concealed the dogged persistence of humiliations from the past'.<sup>12</sup> A black South African politics student at UCT who was no stranger to protests, Maxwele, regarded as a most inconvenient youth in many a conservative circle, saw himself as a spokesperson for an intellectually and emotionally wounded black community of students, and by extension the rest of black South Africans who were yet to feel and feed on the purported fruits of liberation. Whether or not the anger and frustration and demand for which he served as vehicle was 'the result of an inculcated sense of entitlement born of expectation',<sup>13</sup> Maxwele and his fellow student protesters were determined to make their long silence heard.

As Kuseni Dlamini captures it, the 'protests reflect South Africa's unfinished business', reminding South Africans of 'the burden of our history that could not be wished away with the ushering in of the new constitution which guarantees everyone freedom and equality', and 'tell us that fundamental freedoms

without inclusion and benefit from the economy and society are insufficient to guarantee all citizens a feeling of belonging and empowerment'.<sup>14</sup> Maxwele was acting on behalf of the black majority described by Greg Nicolson as still having a most raw deal over twenty years into the new South Africa when he writes that statues such as Rhodes and Paul Kruger are only 'a symbol of all that remains to be done, of real transformation':

We still operate on the unequal and bigoted socio-economic conditions generally talked about in the past tense. In schools, universities and workplaces black people still face hurdles that white people don't and many whites refuse to adjust their perceptions of race to put themselves on an equal footing. Despite hundreds of years of oppression against blacks, whites often see affirmative action initiatives as an injustice, even though the large majority of black people still face systemic challenges just trying to work towards a sustainable and dignified life.

Over 20 years into democracy, after hundreds of years of brutality, things haven't changed fast enough. The [African National Congress] ANC could have done better, clearly, but spaces described as the avenues to opportunity, universities and professional workplaces, remain white, exclusive, often only tolerating a rainbow-nation-trickle of blacks who face extra hurdles. If they fail, their performance reflects a race. If they succeed, well, what an exception!

While almost everyone seems to want change, they want it without fuss, without shaking the status quo. They want to open a conversation (maybe an inquiry?) within the current system while their symbols of being remain untouched. But that leads to stasis, as it has, with the idea of transformation dropped into white noise.

Maxwele and his fellow protesters recognized the importance of symbols as 'vessels of identity and knowledge of the collective and its power', and as a thing that 'emotionally ties us to who we think we are, where we've come from, and what we represent'.

That pouring excrement on the statue honouring Sir Cecil John Rhodes, the British colonial mining magnate and segregationist who died 113 years ago, was intended as a metaphor 'to explain our collective black pain', and express 'our collective disgust'<sup>15</sup> at the resilience of colonial education and symbols and institutional racism at UCT and in the country at large. He had acted for those perplexed by the fact that, more than twenty years after the alleged end of apartheid, so little transformation had taken place in a university that claimed post-apartheid credentials and loved to portray itself as Africa's premier university.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the situation had remained the same<sup>17</sup> – some would say it had worsened – since Mahmood Mamdani's experience (1996–1999) of the institution's lack of an Africa-focused intelligentsia and hostility to Africa-



focused thought (Mamdani 1998a; 1998b), captured in the following words:

At the University of Cape Town, I witnessed a university administration that paid lip service to ‘transformation’ but was so terrified of losing control of the process of change that it came to see any innovative idea as a threat to its position and power (Mamdani 2007: xiii).

Siona O’Connell, a lecturer at the Michaelis School of Fine Art at UCT, expects management to take transformation beyond ‘renaming campus roads and commissioning memorials of slave burial sites on UCT property’.<sup>18</sup> Writing in September 2014, O’Connell argues that as a campus at odds with itself, UCT is:

...trying to make sense of a multicoloured landscape with a dogged determination using the tools, frames and languages of the past. It is a university that has been home to many messy affairs of particularly darker shades, including the Mafeje affair of 1968, the Mamdani affair of 1998 and the Centre for African Studies affair of 2011. One can’t help but see a pattern that draws attention to the inability of this university to transform itself as an institution that values all its various publics in a contemporary South African moment that demands a radically new way of thinking if we are to escape a repeat of the likes of Marikana.<sup>19</sup>

According to Martin Hall – who was with the Department of Archaeology when Mamdani was at UCT and who responded in defence of the institution to one of Mamdani’s critiques of UCT turning African Studies into a new home for Bantu Education (Hall 1998) – ‘Mr Maxwele’s protest has electrified longstanding resentments about the ways in which the past is remembered and celebrated. .... Wearing a brightly coloured safety helmet and two placards – “Exhibit White Arrogance UCT” and “Exhibit Black Assimilation UCT” – Mr Maxwele emptied his bucket in front of the press, who had been tipped off to attend.’ Quoting Nelson Mandela, Hall observes that it is hardly surprising, that South African museums and national monuments should be seen as alien spaces when they have excluded and marginalized most of South Africans. It was Mandela’s hope that democracy would afford South Africans ‘the opportunity to ensure that our institutions reflect history in a way that respects the heritage of all our citizens’.

If one insists that Maxwele was an individual in his action, he was no ordinary individual. His individuality had been crushed by a history of repressive encounters with the violence of dominance which Rhodes and UCT had come to incarnate. The violence of colonialism and apartheid had denied him the luxury of fulfilling his ambitions as an individual. He belonged to that amorphous, homogenous and voiceless darkness whose purportedly primitive savagery offered a perfect license for others to penetrate

and enlighten their circumstance with the benevolence of civilized savagery. Such ambitions of dominance did not allow him or any other black man or woman to aspire to be an individual – at least, not on their own terms. How then could he be anything but a collective? If the term individual had to be applied in his regard at all costs, he was more of a composite individual, whose agency, whatever it was, could not rise and shine because others insisted he did not deserve the status of a human being, regardless of what he thought of himself or what he looked like. Whatever he was or wasn't, is or isn't, is aptly captured by the title of Bloke Modisane's book: *Blame Me on History* (Modisane 1986 [1963]).

It is thus hardly surprising that Maxwele's views were shared by a 'collective of students and staff working to purge the oppressive remnants of apartheid in pursuit of a truly African university'.<sup>20</sup> Reference to *collective black pain* and *collective disgust* was not to deny individual agency and diversity among black South Africans. Rather, it was intended as a strategic essentialism (in the struggle for equality, restitution or reparation) in the same spirit that essentialisms were strategically deployed in the colonial and apartheid pasts by the imperial and settler white minority as a technology of exploitation, dispossession, debasement and domination. In many regards, for black South Africans to recognize their own pain is to have come of age. Under apartheid, survival depended precisely on not dwelling on such pain that fed the repressive machinery of the violent regime and those it benefitted. In the following passage, Modisane gives an insight into how many a black South African coped with such mass produced and zealously disseminated pain under apartheid:

I have no use for human feelings, I stripped myself of them that day I looked upon the battered remains of the man who was my father; I pushed down the pain, forced it down, refused to cry and never cried since; every pain, every hurt, every insult I pushed down and held down like vomit; I have graduated bloody well, I cannot feel anything, I have no emotional responses, I am incapable of being humiliated, I have long ceased to experience the sensation of feeling a hurt. I am a corpse. (Modisane 1986 [1963]: 77)

For blacks to actually own up to pain on bodies as monuments of centuries of torture,<sup>21</sup> the way Maxwele speaks about it, can only be explained by the likelihood that they must have invested much hope and aspiration in the declaration that apartheid had come to an end and that its victims could now dream about reactivating their humanity. To feel pain is to have hope, and to believe that human agency can result in creative innovations. Yet, if such hope is repeatedly frustrated even as freedom is celebrated, one is entitled to pinch oneself every now and again with the question: 'Are you free or

are you dumb?', in the manner of the Vodacom advert, Nightshift.<sup>22</sup> This is how Achille Mbembe understands the current urgency and impatience in clamours for decolonization by the RMF and related movements, spearheaded by the eruption of rights-claiming and rights-denying wounded bodies, piling up, swearing and cursing, speaking with excrements and in allegories and analogies, asking to be heard. Thus to Mbembe, what we are hearing from the protesting students 'is that there have not been enough meaningful, decisive, radical change, not only in terms of the life chances of the black poor, but – and this is the novelty – in terms of the future prospects of the black middle class'. The students are impatient that over twenty years into the so-called free and new dispensation, South Africans are yet to disrupt 'enough the structures that maintain and re-produce "white power and supremacy",' and that ensure that the majority of mostly black South Africans continue to be 'trapped in a "bad life" that keeps wearing them out and down'. They are revolting against the terms of engagement dictated to them, terms that have only compounded their predicament. The students are screaming in no uncertain terms their dissatisfaction with the lacklustre manner in which those in charge have gone about the business of transforming a skewed, racialized South Africa into an inclusive, egalitarian country.<sup>23</sup> To Mbembe, the anger and impatience of South African youth should be read as an accusation that those charged with transformation:

... have not radically overturned the particular sets of interests that are produced and re-produced through white privilege in institutions of public and private life – in law firms, in financial institutions such as banking and insurance, in advertising and industry, in terms of land redistribution, in media, universities, languages and culture in general.

'Whiteness', 'white power', 'white supremacy', 'white monopoly capital' is firmly back on the political and cultural agenda and to be white in South Africa now is to face a new-old kind of trial although with new judges – the so-called 'born-free'.<sup>24</sup>

Sir Cecil John Rhodes' statue was attacked as a symbol of Eurocentric, narrow-minded racism, and as a way of drawing attention to the unfinished and sometimes un-started business of transformation beyond symbols.<sup>25</sup> Jonathan Jansen, VC of the University of the Free State, recognized this when he acknowledged in a newspaper column that the protests are about a deeper transformation of universities – including the complexion of the professoriate – that remains largely unchanged, twenty-one years after the alleged end of apartheid.<sup>26</sup> Singling out the English speaking universities, Jansen elaborates:

The three English universities in upheaval – Rhodes, UCT and Wits – struggle with second-order challenges of transformation. Having enabled access to

black students over the years – also not without a struggle, despite their liberal pretences – the students now rightly demand greater recognition through who teaches them, what is taught, how the past is re-remembered (symbols such as statues, for example) and how they are made to feel (institutional culture) at universities where they still roam around campus like visitors. This is the heart of transformation, and these universities are only now beginning to realise what anger simmered below the epidermis of the superficial politeness of English culture, and boiled over with #RhodesMustFall.<sup>27</sup>

Adam Habib, VC of the University of Witwatersrand agrees:

The Rhodes statue was simply a trigger point for a broader unhappiness about race, racism, and marginalisation at the University. The universities, particularly the historically white ones, have been immersed in a bubble. They assumed that their intellectual atmosphere and their middle class constituencies protected them from a social explosion around race. But this was not to be because there is legitimacy to the criticisms of the students. How can there not be when there are universities 20 years after our democracy that still have more than two thirds of their students white? How can there not be unhappiness when there are universities that are organised around racialised federal principles, which when an incoming vice-chancellor tries to change, he becomes subject to attack by external right wing organisations including AfriForum and Solidarity? How can these students not feel offended when even in the more liberal and historically English speaking universities like UCT and Wits, the curriculum is not sufficiently reflective of our history or speaks to our historical circumstances?

In an open letter on the website of UCT, posted 19 March 2015, several students wrote that removing the statue would ‘end the unreflective public glorification of Rhodes at the expense of the legitimate feelings of those the statue offends on a daily basis’. Gillian Schutte<sup>28</sup> criticizes the tendency by the privileged class to react with ‘shock and outrage’, ‘decry the animalistic behaviour of the filthy-bodied, filthy-mouthed, uneducated poor’, and criminalize the desperation of the protesting black majority, instead of opening up to understand and address the very conditions of hardship and inequality that have caused the protests, however outrageous. It is all too common, she argues, for the elite of this privileged class to ‘use elitist theory to delegitimise the intellectual premise for black protest in supercilious articles brimming with white supremacy masquerading as academic thought’. She labels as ‘top-down’ and ‘infantile’ reactions that seek ‘to criminalise black struggle and to silence black rage’, and condemns the deft insistence by the privileged class on their own meanings and values when black people, suffocated by excessive repression resort to poo protests.<sup>29</sup> On the use of

human faeces by historically repressed blacks to make their point to the economically and politically powerful, Gillian Schutte writes:

At a time in our history where the collective is brutally suppressed and black anger is presented on mainstream media as the ultimate violence, the marginalised masses find new and inventive ways to make their grievances heard.

If this means spewing the human waste which they are forced to live in into the sanitised public spaces of the well-heeled, then we should applaud their bravery and inventiveness.

In a neo-colonial world order where democracy and human rights for the rich means 'shoot to kill' for the poor, it stands to reason that protest becomes a desperate cry for the recognition of the collective and individual humanity of the disenfranchised.

Like it or not, defecation is the most visceral and inevitable aspect of being human no matter what your class, race or gender.

By importing the unfettered faeces of the poor collective, who live with dismally inadequate sanitation, into the deodorised spaces of those who are able to flush their own faeces away in toilets, they are successfully exposing the extreme and dehumanising cruelty of a capitalist system which privileges some and entirely deprives others.<sup>30</sup>

Xolela Mangcu, an Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at UCT, has been at the forefront of the call for the injection of a significant number of black South African academics into UCT and other universities in post-apartheid South Africa.<sup>31</sup> At the University Assembly to discuss the Rhodes Statue and Transformation at UCT he told the VC: 'Max, I find it racially offensive that whenever the issue of black professors comes up and you are asked about it, the issue of standards must come in'.<sup>32</sup> Nhlapo<sup>33</sup> and many others have subsequently based their arguments on statistics provided by Mangcu. At UCT, where by 2013 there were only forty-eight black South African academics out of a total of 1,405 – that is 3 per cent, and not a single black South African woman full professor – black students and staff are expected to bear institutional racism with a stiff upper lip, and to be subservient to the call of an intellectual tradition and logic of practice steeped in colonial symbolism and the celebration of primitive savagery as an essence of being black and African. In a country where only 4 per cent – 194 out of 4,000 – of the professors by 20 July 2014 were black South Africans,<sup>34</sup> it is hardly surprising that 'One hundred and fifty years of Black intellectual thought remains outside the social theory curriculum in South Africa'.<sup>35</sup> Mimicry and hypocrisy are central to the game of keeping up appearances in order to be remotely visible as a black member of staff or as a black student. White privilege and arrogance reward with token inclusion those who are

able to discipline their true feelings and embrace what they are fed without question. As Amina Mama, former Head of the Africa Gender Institute at UCT, argued during a meeting with the ‘RMF writing and education sub-committees’, given that most vehicles for scholarly communication in South Africa and globally continue to be owned and controlled by whites, it becomes very difficult for writing that challenges colonial thinking and models to be tolerated and made visible. This predicament was reiterated by fifteen RMF students when the Johannesburg Workshop in Theory and Criticism organized by the Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER) at the University of Witwatersrand made the pages of its Salon available to them.<sup>36</sup> Gamedze and Gamedze titled their introduction to Volume 9 of the publication ‘Salon for what?’ and in it argue that ‘to be a radical African intellectual is to challenge, on fundamentally personal, institutional and societal levels’, the ‘form of alienation that colonial education encourages’, and that it is somehow ironic for the RMF students to have to resort to a publication named ‘Salon’ to express themselves. That notwithstanding, it is important that they are able to write what they want to write, the way they want:

We write to assert our humanity as Black people, and to assert that, while the imagination that stems from this unrecognised, in-between condition is indeed flashy, exciting, ‘avantaware that we are writing in ways that these knowledge structures have not prescribed.’<sup>37</sup>

We just have a feeling that there is something about writing that allows us to subvert the structures that have oppressed us and continue to do so, and while this space of writing is contested, we are armed to enter this contest in ways that cannot and do not occur to our oppressors. We write different, and so we feel that writing is important. It is important to write ourselves, to write our own story. We know that many, who are not us, have BEEN writing about us and have painted us in many different ways, of which none are creative nor imaginative enough. We are here to represent ourselves and share our thoughts on our situation and on what we are up against. We are thinking about how we might create something new: how we might pursue writing in a way that represents and humanises us as energetic and hurt bodies.<sup>38</sup>

Transformation can only happen, Shose Kessi argues, if black academics and students can unapologetically foreground black pain as a legitimate concern:

The idea of logical reasoned argument outside of affect is nonsensical and serves to legitimise the idea that intellectual projects and academic freedom exist outside of historical structural analyses. It serves as a smokescreen that invisibilises whiteness or white feelings. I cannot count the number of times

I have been in classrooms, meetings, and committees where the feelings of white students and staff dominate the space in suffocating ways that exclude and silence – under the guise of ‘logical reasoned argument’. The burden of black academics in these spaces is often one of appeasing and negotiation for fear of being dismissed and labelled as irrational, at best, or, at worst, for fear of the white backlash that typically spirals out of control. Black pain and anger is pathologised and condemned whereas white people’s anger is cajoled, understood, and considered rational.<sup>39</sup>

Black pain and white privilege are two sides of the same coin, in that both are the result of particular encounters in a hierarchized world shaped by ideologies around factors such as race, place, class, gender, education, cultivation and civilization. In such a world, the pain, poverty and discomforts of the one are actively produced or co-produced by the privilege, pleasure and power of the other (Nyamnjoh 2012a; 2012b; 2013). It is in this sense that while appreciating the spotlight on black pain occasioned by RMF and related protests, anthropologist Sakhumzi Mfecane observes that in South Africa, black pain must not be discussed in isolation from the white privilege that makes it possible:

Black pain is a direct product of white privilege; which makes me wonder why those whites who are supporting black struggle are not speaking out openly about their privilege and its effects on blacks. I just worry that if our analysis focuses simply on black pain, it may reproduce the same problem of rendering blacks as easy anthropological objects of analysis and render whiteness – again – invisible to the anthropological or sociological gaze.<sup>40</sup>

According to Panashe Chigumadzi, the founder and editor of Vanguard Magazine, being what is generally referred to in South Africa as a coconut is no reason for one to be blind to, ignore or dismiss the reality of racism and the protection it affords white privilege to the detriment of blacks seeking redemption for their humanity. Drawing on her personal experience, she explains:

At the age of six I had already begun the dance that many black people in South Africa know too well, with our names just one of the many important sites of struggle as we manoeuvre in spaces that do not truly accommodate our blackness. I had already taken my first steps on the road to becoming a fully-fledged coconut, that particular category of ‘born free’ black youth hailed as torchbearers for Nelson Mandela’s ‘rainbow nation’ after the fall of apartheid; the same category of black youth that are now part of the forefront of new student movements calling for statues of coloniser Cecil John Rhodes to fall, and for the de-colonisation of the post-apartheid socio-economic order.

We all know what a coconut is, don’t we? It’s a person who is ‘black on

the outside' but 'white on the inside'. This term came into popular South African usage in apartheid's dying days as black children entered formerly white schools. At best, coconuts can be seen as 'non-white'. At worst, they're 'Uncle Toms' or 'agents of whiteness'.

I've chosen to appropriate the term and self-identify as a coconut because I believe it offers an opportunity for refusal. It's an act of problematising myself – and others – within the landscape of South Africa as part of the black middle class that is supposed to be the buffer against more 'radical elements'.

Instead of becoming the trusted mediators between black and white, we are now turning to conceptions of blackness and mobilising anger at the very concept of the rainbow nation. The fantasy of a colour-blind, post-racial South Africa has been projected onto us coconuts, but our lived experiences are far from free of racism.<sup>41</sup>

Regardless of the blackness one targets, global or local, national or pan-African, to quibble about the reference to black pain is to want to erase a history in which blacks were defined and confined through particular encounters as a collectivity and not simply as individuals by their colonizers armed with ambitions of dominance that were sometimes veiled or disguised by claims of *mission civilisatrice* and continue to be rationalized by the nebulosity of claims to modernization, development and globalization. However loud the silence of some in their apathy to black pain may be, to proclaim this in public is to deny that universalisms, if not arbitrarily imposed, are always negotiated and navigated through the encounters of particularisms. Common denominators come not from hiding the personal but from taking personal experiences to the emotive public distilleries of contextually relevant forms of rationality. In the case of South Africa, to quibble about black pain is also to force black South Africans to live a post-apartheid lie that the playing field has been levelled and race and the benefits it accords and denies are no longer important, even as no concerted effort has been made, in real terms, to right past wrongs.<sup>42</sup>

As a numerical majority, black South Africans are miffed by their incapacity to assert themselves in the age of freedom.<sup>43</sup> They are impatient and flabbergasted that whiteness continues to be such a powerful force and to impose its vocabulary of provocation and little more than the pain of political disenfranchisement. It has reawakened material desires and aspirations that had been numbed *à la* Bloke Modisane who is cited above describing numbing as a survival strategy in the days when freedom was an extravagant illusion. Little wonder that the language of black pain now proliferates, especially among those who feel they have invested effort enough in schooling themselves in the values enshrined by the whiteness



that has dominated them body, mind and soul for so long. What use is it to be termed middle class in post-apartheid South Africa only to be differentiated as 'black' in that middle-classness because one, however corrupt in one's capacity to accumulate in a hurry, can hardly measure up to the traditional middle class (white remains firmly white) because of decades (if not centuries) of accumulation and the passing down of wealth through successive generations of the family? And how can a black South African born post-1994 celebrate the generic category of a born-free – those 'raised with almost no direct memory of apartheid's terrors'<sup>44</sup> – when he or she cannot freely compete with their white counterpart because of persistent material and structural inequalities?<sup>45</sup> To speak of collective black pain and collective black disgust is to demonstrate that one is not duped by hollow claims of a common humanity and equality for all and sundry in a world structured by and around interconnecting global and local hierarchies informed by considerations or categories such as race, place, class, culture, gender and generation.

Bearing this in mind, one can understand how and why Rhodes's statue, along with an untransformed UCT, was seen by the protesting students as a chilling reminder of a history steeped in blood and ruthless indifference to the humanity of black South Africans. To Maxwele, his generation of black South African students is ready to succeed where its parents failed in tackling white power and privilege until satisfactory concessions are made.<sup>46</sup> If a letter addressed to the Chairperson of UCT Council, Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane, by another student Rekgotsofetse 'Kgotsi' Chikane,<sup>47</sup> who describes himself as 'A student who wants transformation he can see', is anything to go by, Maxwele's dramatic 'poo' intervention was meant as shock treatment for an institution that has systematically resisted transformation. The letter begins with a series of what the author terms plugging questions, amongst which are the following:

Why must it be that a student at the University of Cape Town (UCT) is pushed to the point of having to throw faecal matter over the statue of Cecil John Rhodes in order to have a conversation about transformation at UCT? How is it that we are now at this point?

Chikane is frustrated by:

... the fact that there is no plan for real transformation on campus. Transformation that I can see. Honest transformation. Transformation that means something.

Chikane is worried by the ‘disconcerting’ silence of the chair of the UCT Council, a black South African like himself and a man of God, over the ‘institutionalised racism’ that continues to stand in the way of transformation at UCT. To the author neither the VC nor the UCT Senate can be trusted to lead the process of ‘meaningful transformation’ in the institution. To him, the discussion around the transformation of curricula and race relations ‘is largely ignored or recklessly diluted by those in decision-making positions’. Policies purportedly aimed at bringing about racial transformation are yet to yield tangible outputs and to have a meaningful impact. UCT has not only failed to transform, it has achieved little in opening itself up to represent black South African aspirations in any significant way. Chikane describes as ‘weak’ the VC’s repeated defence that the university cannot attract quality black South African academics because it cannot afford to offer competitive salaries to entice young black graduates to continue studying. The university is seriously in need of the injection of black academics and African perspectives to disabuse itself of the reputation among students of ‘being a European university stuck at the bottom of Africa’. The ‘systemic’ and ‘subliminal’ form of institutionalised racism at UCT is, in his estimation, worse than that in any other university in South Africa. Chikane elaborates:

It is the form of racism that makes you ignorant about your subjugation because you are never challenged to seriously engage on critical matters. It’s the form of racism that allows those who enter UCT from a position of privilege to never have to question their privilege. The privilege of being able to walk past a statue of Saartjie Baartman in the library and have no idea that simply placing her on display, with no justification, is an insult to her legacy and painfully offensive to many students.

Like his fellow students, Chikane was totally frustrated with the excesses of the conquering *amakwerekwere* represented by Cecil John Rhodes, a statue of whom was implanted in mocking imperial defiance high on the campus of the university, enjoying a magnificent view of the city and contemplating outer space. By smearing Rhodes’ statue with excrement and covering it with garbage bags and signs of protest, the students were screaming their revulsion with the callous indifference that the university authorities had repeatedly displayed *vis-à-vis* their plight in an institution in which they felt like perfect strangers or *amakwerekwere*. The statue of Rhodes, erected to celebrate an oppressor and imperialist who was able to buy his way to prominence with land and wealth he acquired through dispossession of their forefathers and foremothers, was a symbol of oppression and white privilege – an impediment to real transformation. It was neither here-nor-there that some of the students protesting had benefited from funding by the Rhodes

estate, or that the university was built upon land that was bequeathed to it in Rhodes' will. They were sick and tired of the arrogance of *amakwerekwere* like Rhodes who had turned the bona fide sons and daughters of South Africa and earlier generations of migrants into beggars and strangers, maids and gardeners, miners, garbage collectors and jobless in their own land. Instead of opening up to the idea of a truly inclusive and reconciled post-apartheid South Africa in the spirit of the 'rainbow nation' propagated by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the white establishment, in the estimation of the protesting black students, had clung to their privileges in come has been, as Trevor Noah puts it in one of his comedy sketches, 'We [in South Africa] used to be the "rainbow nation"; now the colours are going their own way'.<sup>49</sup>

Anthony Butler<sup>50</sup> believes that by 'speaking out frankly about the shortcomings of UCT's transformation strategy', black students were demonstrating 'why they are better placed than their lecturers to understand their own experiences of being black'. They were also offering their fellow undergraduate white students the opportunity to introspect and contemplate on their often taken for granted privileges. Not just their 'affluent suburban backgrounds, well-resourced schools, and the societal dominance of their home languages', but also, and perhaps more importantly, the:

... less obvious aspects of their advantage: an expectation that when they underperform it will not be attributed to their race; a capacity to succeed that is not attributed by others to affirmative action; a happy expectation that potential employers will assume they are competent because of their skin colour; and an ease in negotiating the legacies of colonialism and white domination.<sup>51</sup>

The protest spread as more and more students joined, and politicians, the media (both conventional and social) became part of the fray. In a statement issued by Gwede Mantashe, ANC Secretary General, the ANC National Executive Committee (NEC) 'unequivocally' expressed support for the protesting 'students in their determined demands for transformation at universities across the country'. NEC declared: 'We appreciate that statues are mere symbols of our racist history and believe that the transformation needed must be concerned with entrenching fundamental and far-reaching structural, systematic and cultural change; reflective of the aspirations and realities of our democratic and non-racial order.' Twenty years into democracy have made transformation a non-negotiable matter of urgency.<sup>52</sup> Higher Education and Training Minister Blade Nzimande, for example, vowed to turn 2015 into a year in which he would 'uncompromisingly' push for the transformation of the country's

universities, adding ‘There remains an urgent need to radically change the demographics of our professoriate; transform the curriculums and research agendas; cultivate greater awareness of Africa; eliminate racism, sexism and all other forms of unjust discrimination; improve academic success rates and expand student support’.<sup>53</sup> Speaking in her capacity as shadow Minister of Higher Education for the Democratic Alliance, as well as former Deputy VC for University of Witwatersrand, Belinda Bozzoli admits that South Africa still has a long way to go in eradicating racism, and that ‘Proper reconciliation hasn’t been truly achieved yet’. To her, ‘Reconciliatory ideas vanished from politics with Nelson Mandela’s death’, and the purported lack of no money for new academic posts in South Africa would make it difficult for universities to open up any time soon to the inclusion of more black South African academic staff. Mbuyiseni Ndlozi, spokesperson for the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), called for the reconstruction of public monuments in non-oppressive ways, adding that the party would continue to ‘agitate’ and provide ‘ideological perspective’ on the removal of colonial and apartheid era statues and monuments. Inspired by the RMF protest, a statue of Paul Kruger was allegedly defaced by members of the EFF in Tshwane, and a memorial statue in Uitenhage Market Square in the Eastern Cape was reportedly set alight by members of the EFF. The student protests had given the party’s campaign to remove colonial and apartheid statues and monuments added impetus. It was only logical, Ndlozi argued, that with the end of apartheid, public spaces configured in the image of the repressive forces of the apartheid era be reconfigured to reflect the dreams and aspirations of the new South Africa.<sup>54</sup> Anglican Archbishop Thabo Makgoba of Cape Town was of the opinion that ‘The campaign against symbols of the injustice of our past, along with service delivery protests and public outrage over corruption, reflect the anger of South Africans at the inequalities that continue to plague us’. He called on all and sundry to ‘harness the energy being poured into protest into rigorous self-examination and action to expand the current campaigns into a creative, society-wide drive for real transformation’.<sup>55</sup>

The demonstrators mounted a ‘Rhodes Must Fall’ campaign on Facebook and related social media, along with a Twitter account #RhodesMustFall.<sup>56</sup> The Rhodes Must Fall Facebook page – which described itself as ‘a collective student, staff and worker movement mobilising for direct action against the institutional racism of UCT’<sup>57</sup> – attracted sympathy posts from far and wide including from student movements in universities across the world.<sup>58</sup> It must be added though, as some of the students at the University Assembly made evident from some of the derogatory posts they read out – posts

referring to blacks as monkeys, pigs, primitive savages and morons because 'you can take them out of the bush but you can't take the bush out of them' – and filled with a catalogue of other negativities – that not all the Facebook posts were supportive.<sup>59</sup> Transformation became the catch-word, catch-all and catch-on about the unfinished business of recalibration of the hierarchies of humanity that had informed relations, privilege and poverty in apartheid South Africa. In this way, the Rhodes statue was merely an entry point for a series of demands seeking recognition and representation for those who felt hard done by the privileges of the white *amakwerekwere* that presided over their destinies, diminishing the self-esteem and sense of identity of black students and academics especially who felt they deserved better within a new and purportedly free South Africa. It is thus significant that many white students initially drawn to the protest, persuaded by the general outcry in favour of mental decolonization and transformation of curricula and relations within the institution, and the removal of the stature of Rhodes as a symbolic gesture, soon found themselves being made to feel that they were weeping more than the owner of the corpse. For those of them who sought to become more involved, they were made to understand that their role was strictly limited to one of solidarity and support in a struggle that was clearly black. In other words, they questioned or were made to question, how it is possible for a *makwerekwere* in the image of Rhodes – a white, born-free or not, local or foreign – to seek to convince anyone that he or she could feel the pain of the oppressed black other, or claim to be in the same boat? To some black students, whites who joined the protest were merely keeping up appearances, making out that Cecil Rhodes and his excesses were all that is to blame for the predicaments of black South Africans and black Africans on campus in general. Did they really think that all that was needed was to name and shame Sir Cecil John Rhodes (as an individual as if he had lived his life entirely as an island with neither ancestry, kin, progeny or relationships with others) – the white *makwerekwere* who debased, humiliated and undermined Africans with impunity so as to appropriate their resources? If Rhodes, however iconic, was the only problem, why did his excesses and material superabundance or wealth appear to have trickled down through the ranks and generations, as if flowing in the blood of his white brethren to contaminate even the post-apartheid generation of so-called born-frees? Why did his legacy of a highly concentrated monopolistic economy persist? Why is the economy still firmly under white control? Could the fact – as evidenced by the 'Fees Must Fall' and 'End Outsourcing' student protests which subsequently rocked universities countrywide<sup>60</sup> – be blamed entirely on the incompetence and corruption of the new ANC mostly black elite in power as some have tended to insinuate?

## Notes

1. Excerpted from my book titled: *#RhodesMustFall. Nibbling at Resilient Colonialism in South Africa*, Bamenda: Langaa (2016) University of Cape Town, Email: nyamnjoh@gmail.com
2. See <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/UCT-students-in-poo-protest-against-white-imperial-ism-20150310-2>, accessed 1 October 2015.
3. Upon his return, he issued a statement on 18 March, detailing the measures and programme of action on Rhodes statue protests and transformation. See <http://www.uct.ac.za/dailynews/?id=9034>, accessed 5 October 2015. This is an excerpt of his statement:
 

Last week's student protests have resulted in a massive outpouring of anger and frustration – much about the issue of the statue, much more about experiences of institutional racism, aggravated by students' perceptions that they are not being heard, or that their demands are not achieving the response they seek. There are also similar frustrations experienced by a number of our members of staff. There have also been many voices critical of both the mode of the student protest, and the view that the statue should be removed. Given this recent escalation of debate and protest, I think it appropriate to replace our original programme with a more accelerated process to facilitate a more rapid decision about the statue.
4. See <http://www.iol.co.za/news/uct-rhodes-statue-protest-both-sides-1.1831688#.VfWLGpce4TZ>, accessed 17 September 2015.
5. See Adekeye Adebajo, <http://www.bdlive.co.za/opinion/columnists/2015/03/23/debate-over-rhodes-is-one-of-transformation>.
6. See Eve Fairbanks's article with excerpts of an interview with Chumani Maxwele, <http://www.theguardian.com/news/2015/nov/18/why-south-african-students-have-turned-on-their-parents-generation>, accessed 23 November 2015.
7. Adekeye Adebajo <http://www.bdlive.co.za/opinion/columnists/2015/03/23/debate-over-rhodes-is-one-of-transformation>.
8. See Eve Fairbanks, <http://www.theguardian.com/news/2015/nov/18/why-south-african-students-have-turned-on-their-parents-generation>, accessed 23 November 2015.
9. See Eve Fairbanks, <http://www.theguardian.com/news/2015/nov/18/why-south-african-students-have-turned-on-their-parents-generation>, accessed 23 November 2015.
10. Dr Crystal Powell obtained her PhD in Social Anthropology from the University of Cape Town in 2014. This description is excerpted from her field notes, 'Visiting the Shacks. Notes from the field, Langa township, 15 August 2011'.
11. See Steven Robins, <http://www.iol.co.za/capetimes/toilets-that-became-political-dynamite-1.1089289#.VlaTLL-3ud8>, accessed 26 November 2015.
12. See Eve Fairbanks, <http://www.theguardian.com/news/2015/nov/18/why-south-african-students-have-turned-on-their-parents-generation>, accessed 23 November 2015.
13. Simon Lincoln Reader, <http://www.bdlive.co.za/opinion/columnists/2015/03/27/one-monument-can-not-capture-all-countrys-ills>, accessed 3 October 2015.

14. See <http://www.iol.co.za/sundayindependent/rhodes-scholars-play-a-vital-role-in-sa-1.1843802#.VfWk-SJce4TZ>, accessed 3 October 2015.
15. Greg Nicolson <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2015-04-09-op-ed-statues-of-thought-and-symbols-of-resistance/#.VfWKb5ce4TZ>, accessed 3 October 2015.
16. *ibid.*
17. <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/4/6/anti-racism-protesters-in-south-africa-take-aim-at-a-statue-with-poop.html>, accessed 17 September 2015.
18. After the protests to bring down the statue, UCT retained its position as the highest ranked university in Africa, giving it the status of the Harvard or Cambridge of Africa, both universities globally ranked first and third, as well as being first ranked universities in the USA and UK respectively. See <http://www.destinyconnect.com/2015/05/27/uct-still-africas-top-ranked-university/>, accessed 3 October 2015.
19. See Siona O'Connell, 'UCT: a campus at odds with itself', <http://mg.co.za/article/2014-09-08-uct-a-campus-at-odds-with-itself>, accessed 17 October 2015.
20. Siona O'Connell, <http://www.iol.co.za/capeargus/what-uct-s-not-telling-their-first-years-1.1806441#.ViKF1ise4TZ>, accessed 17 October 2015.
21. See Siona O'Connell, 'UCT: a campus at odds with itself', <http://mg.co.za/article/2014-09-08-uct-a-campus-at-odds-with-itself>, accessed 17 October 2015.
22. See Martin Hall, <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-31945680>, accessed 1 October 2015.
23. See <http://mg.co.za/article/2015-05-14-this-is-the-year-varsities-will-transform-blade>, accessed 30 September 2015. See also Eve Fairbanks, <http://www.theguardian.com/news/2015/nov/18/why-south-african-students-have-turned-on-their-parents-generation>, accessed 23 November 2015.
24. This is how a female student at the UCT University Assembly: The Rhodes Statue and Transformation described it in a poem when she took the stage to express her frustration at being repeatedly told and expected to forgive and forget her white exploiters and debasers. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=εWVJnBVnyPc>, accessed 7 October 2015.
25. The Vocadom advertisement entitled 'Night Shift', which ends with the words: 'Recharge and get 60 minutes free between 12 am and 5 am all week', has an announcer beating an armpit or talking drum, who asks those on a night shift whether they are 'free' or 'dumb'.
26. See <http://africasacountry.com/2015/09/achille-mbembe-on-the-state-of-south-african-politics/>, accessed 1 October 2015. 27 *ibid.*
28. See Eve Fairbanks, <http://www.theguardian.com/news/2015/nov/18/why-south-african-students-have-turned-on-their-parents-generation>.
29. <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/UCT-students-to-protest-over-racial-transformation-20150319>, accessed 1 October 2015.
30. See <http://www.timeslive.co.za/thetimes/2015/09/04/The-Big-Read-The-storm-rages-unabated>, accessed 3 October 2015.
31. Adam Habib, [http://www.wits.ac.za/newsroom/newsitems/201504/26107/news\\_item\\_26107.html](http://www.wits.ac.za/newsroom/newsitems/201504/26107/news_item_26107.html), accessed 5 October 2015.
32. See Open Letter from former SRC presidents: 'Rhodes must fall', <http://www.uct.ac.za/dailynews/?id=9037>, accessed 6 October 2015. See also <http://allafrica.com/stories/201503230163.html>, accessed 1 October 2015.

33. A founding member of Media for Justice, a social justice and media activist as well as a documentary film-maker.
34. See Gillian Schutte, <http://www.iol.co.za/sundayindependent/becoming-a-master-of-subterfuge-1.1907710#.VfWmypce4TZ>, accessed 1 October 2015.
35. See Gillian Schutte, <http://www.iol.co.za/sundayindependent/becoming-a-master-of-subterfuge-1.1907710#.VfWmypce4TZ>, accessed 1 October 2015.
36. See Xolela Mangcu's Ripping the veil off UCT's whiter shades of pale University's move to 'down- grade' race fails to hide the truth about inequality, 6 July 2014, *Sunday Times*, p. 18. See also: <http://www.bdlive.co.za/opinion/2014/11/03/sas-black-academics-are-getting-raw-deal>, accessed 6 October 2015; and Xolela Mangcu, '10 steps to develop black professors', *City Press*, 20 July 2014.
37. See University Assembly: The Rhodes Statue and Transformation, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eWVJnBVnyPc>, accessed 7 October 2015. On this point Mangcu was echoing a point made emphatically by Jonathan Jansen at the 21 October 2014 Public debate: Transformation in higher education at the Baxter Concert Hall, that the idea of standards is often mobilized to exclude those not wanted, as very few universities in South Africa, UCT included, can demonstrate the standards they often claim when challenged to be more inclusive. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=thiiUDelySw>, accessed 8 October 2015.
38. Tokelo Nhlapo, <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2015-03-11-ucts-poo-protest-violence-is-a-perfect-reaction/#.VfXL4Jce4TZ>, accessed 4 October 2015.
39. See Xolela Mangcu, '10 steps to develop black professors', *City Press*, 20 July 2014; Max Price, 'Ad- dressing the shortage of black and women professors', <http://www.uct.ac.za/dailynews/?id=8891>, accessed 6 October 2015.
40. See Xolela Mangcu, 'What a less Eurocentric reading list would look like', <http://www.uct.ac.za/dailynews/?id=9275>, accessed 6 October 2015.
41. See [http://www.jwtc.org.za/the\\_salon/volume\\_9.htm](http://www.jwtc.org.za/the_salon/volume_9.htm), accessed 12 October 2015.
42. *ibid.*
43. *ibid.*
44. Shose Kessi, <http://thoughtleader.co.za/blackacademiccaucus/2015/09/25/of-black-pain-animal-rights-and-the-politics-of-the-belly/>, accessed 1 October 2015.
45. Excerpt of an email reaction by Sakhumzi Mfecane to an earlier version of this paper.
46. Panashe Chigumadzi, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/24/south-africa-race-panashe-chigumadzi-ruth-first-lecture>, accessed 3 October 2015.
47. How can one quibble about black pain in what Mbembe describes as the only country in which a revolution took place which resulted in not one single oppressor losing anything? See <http://africasacountry.com/2015/09/achille-mbembe-on-the-state-of-south-african-politics/>, accessed 1 October 2015.
48. See <https://medium.com/@tomolefe/a-long-comment-on-mbembe-s-state-of-south-african-politics-5cd1030a1990>, accessed 1 October 2015.
49. See Eve Fairbanks, <http://www.theguardian.com/news/2015/nov/18/why-south-african-students-have-turned-on-their-parents-generation>, accessed 23 November 2015.



50. According to a survey of born-frees conducted in the course of the Rhodes Must Fall campaign, many born-frees declared they were likely to resort to violent protests because of the persistence of inequalities in the country. According to the report, 'unemployment rates are higher among younger people, women and Africans'. On the expanded definition of unemployment, the rate among African males aged fifteen to twenty-four years is 67 per cent compared with 75 per cent of African females. Violent protests in South Africa have almost doubled in the last three years and it is suspected that the economically disenfranchised youth may play a huge part in it. Born-frees are also receiving poor quality education, said the report, with literacy and numeracy scores in Grade 3 in this group barely above 50 per cent. This has a major ripple effect later on as only 51 per cent of matric candidates pass their final school-leaving exam. The report found that 'people aged 14 to 25 years old account for 29% of the country's prison population'. See 'Born free but still in chains: South Africa's first post-apartheid generation', <http://www.biznews.com/briefs/2015/04/29/sas-born-frees-likely-to-drift-into-violent-protests-says-report/>, accessed 3 October 2015.
51. See Eve Fairbanks, <http://www.theguardian.com/news/2015/nov/18/why-south-african-students-have-turned-on-their-parents-generation>, accessed 23 November 2015.
52. See <http://www.iol.co.za/news/uct-rhodes-statue-protest-both-sides-1.1831688#.VfWLGpce4TZ>, accessed 17 September 2015. For a similarly critical open letter on the Rhodes Must Fall Movement addressed to the President of UCT Convocation Barney Pityana, by Leigh-Ann Naidoo, a PhD student in Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, see <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2015-04-14-open-letter-to-barney-pityana-on-the-rhodes-must-fall-movement/#.VfWV15ce4TZ>, accessed 17 September 2015. Naidoo concluded her letter with this call to action: 'Don't stand by and watch these students and their message and action be criminalised. They are speaking truth to power as you once did. And you know what it feels like to be served with legal papers, bannings, trials, and police harassment. Perhaps Max Price will go to sleep at night feeling accomplished to have contained and shut down the possibility for real change driven by brave black staff, students, workers and alumni. But will you?' In his defence, Professor Barney Pityana reportedly said, 'amid a chorus of boos and jeers: It is untrue that I said the statue must stay ... I said it is important to raise this issue at all levels and to think about how to handle history ... the only reason why I am here is to facilitate debate ... if my presence is not helpful I am more than happy to step down.' See <http://www.bdlive.co.za/national/2015/03/26/pityana-replaced-as-co-chair-of-rhodes-debate>. See also University Assembly: The Rhodes Statue and Transformation, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eWVJnBVnyPc>, accessed 7 October 2015.
53. See <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/4/6/anti-racism-protesters-in-south-africa-take-aim-at-a-statue-with-poop.html>, accessed 17 September 2015. See also Eve Fairbanks, <http://www.theguardian.com/news/2015/nov/18/why-south-african-students-have-turned-on-their-parents-generation>, accessed 23 November 2015.
54. See Trevor Noah, 'Its my culture full show', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBYgnTlaG4c>, accessed 6 October 2015.

55. See <http://www.bdlive.co.za/opinion/columnists/2015/03/27/uproar-at-uct-has-only-been-good-for-it>, accessed 17 September 2015. 56 *ibid.*
57. See <http://www.politicsweb.co.za/party/anc-nec-backs-rhodes-statue-protests-at-uct>, accessed 2 October 2015.
58. See <http://mg.co.za/article/2015-05-14-this-is-the-year-varsities-will-transform-blade>, accessed 30 September 2015.
59. See <http://allafrica.com/stories/201503230163.html>, accessed 1 October 2015.
60. See <http://www.bdlive.co.za/national/politics/2015/04/07/eff-calls-for-public-spaces-to-be-reconstructed>, accessed 2 October 2015.
61. See <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/UCT-protesters-vow-to-continue-occupation-of-building-20150410>, accessed 2 October 2015.
62. See <http://allafrica.com/stories/201503230163.html>, accessed 1 October 2015.
63. See <https://www.enca.com/south-africa/cecil-rhodes-statue-should-be-moved-uct-vice-chancellor>, accessed 5 October 2015.
64. See for example, <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/American-students-support-RhodesMust-Fall-Campaign-20150326>, accessed 17 September 2015. In a message of solidarity posted on The Rhodes Must Fall Facebook page, members of the Black Student Union at the University of California, Berkeley, USA wrote: ‘We write to express to you our strongest solidarity as you embark on the courageous struggle to take down one of Africa’s biggest enemies, and colonizer, Cecil John Rhodes.’ ‘We believe that, when we as Black students and youth organize ourselves in a disciplined manner, the decolonization of our education and the total liberation of our people is inevitable.’ Other displays of support came from universities within South Africa, and also from universities outside of South Africa such as University of Oxford and the University of the West Indies. See <http://mg.co.za/article/2015-03-26-rhodesmustfall-protest-spreads-to-other-campuses>, accessed 5 October 2015.
65. See University Assembly: The Rhodes Statue and Transformation, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eWVJnBVnyPc>, accessed 7 October 2015. The students who read out these posts requested management to disengage itself through positive action to demonstrate that they were not complicit in perpetuating such racist innuendos.
66. For short critical analyses of the protests’ achievements and shortcomings, see Vito Laterza and Ayanda Manqoyi, <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2015-11-06-looking-for-leaders-student-protests-and-the-future-of-south-african-democracy/#.VkiN67-3ud8>, accessed 15 November 2015; and David Dickinson, <http://theconversation.com/fee-protests-point-to-a-much-deeper-problem-at-south-african-universities-49456>, accessed 16 November 2015. Both articles insist that the much deeper structural inequalities and challenges at South African universities and in wider society need urgent attention. On his part, Paul Kaseke makes a case for student leaders to ‘be elected on merit, not party affiliation’, arguing that the momentum and solidarity generated by the student protests were soon dissipated once the party political considerations of the various student leaders were prioritized over and above the broader interests and concerns of the student body. See <http://theconversation.com/why-student-leaders-should-be-elected-on-merit-not-party-affiliation-49549>, accessed 17 November 2015. Kaseke’s point is buttressed by the situation at the

University of the Western Cape, where students continued the protests despite the announcement on a zero fee increment by President Zuma, calling on the university to write-off student debts worth more than R270-million, and resorting to violence and physical confrontation to make their case. In an article titled 'UWC caught between a rock and a hard place', Thulani Gqirana bemoans the 'demands that lack legitimacy' as well as 'a student leadership not elected through a democratic process', and 'who lack negotiation experience'. See <http://mg.co.za/article/2015-11-17-uwc-caught-between-a-rock-and-a-hard-place>, accessed 17 October 2015. As Giovanni Poggi puts it, 'compromise and conciliation are not on the agenda', and the distrust of established authority, however legitimate, cannot serve to suggest that a future where South Africans are permanently caught between and betwixt reform and violent revolution is a *sina qua non*. See <http://theconversation.com/student-protests-in-south-africa-have-pitted-reform-against-revolution-50604>, accessed 19 November 2015.

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# Deciphering the Meanings and Explaining the South African Higher Education Student Protests of 2015–16<sup>1</sup>

Saleem Badat\*

## Résumé

Cet article explique un certain nombre de concepts et pose de diverses questions visant à constituer un cadre solide pour l'analyse des manifestations étudiantes de 2015 et 2016 en Afrique du Sud. La visée, en première instance, de ce travail est de questionner les manifestations étudiantes plutôt que de formuler des réponses sur leur trajectoire, leur dynamique, leur caractère et leur signification. Il veut surtout être une invitation à l'engagement et à la critique.

**Mots-clés :** Enseignement supérieur, protestations étudiantes, Afrique du Sud, crise, critique, engagement.

## Abstract

This article explicates a number of concepts and poses various questions that it is hoped, when supplemented with additional concepts and questions, can constitute a robust framework for analysis of the 2015–16 student protests. The article, in the first instance, is concerned with questions about the protests, rather than a rush for answers about their trajectory, dynamics, character and significance. Above all, the article is an invitation to engagement and critique.

**Keywords:** Higher education, student protests, South Africa, crisis, critics, engagement.

In 2015–16 we witnessed the re-entry in very visible ways of South African university students on to the higher education terrain. This is not to say that students have not been part of steering and shaping higher education through institutional governance mechanisms, or that there have not been

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student protests post-1994, especially at the historically black universities and at institutions that were merged as part of the restructuring of the higher education landscape after 2000. However, it is suggested that there was something especially dramatic and distinctive about the 2015–16 protests. So wherein lay the drama and distinctiveness of the protests? Did they have to do with the breadth and depth of mobilization, the targets of opposition, and the nature of the demands? Or in serving as a salutary reminder of the tardy pace and limited degree of transformation in higher education and, given the connections between higher education and society, of unfinished business in the wider economic, political, and social domains?

How are the 2015–16 protests to be theorized and explained, and their character and significance for universities, higher education, and the wider polity and society to be understood? Could the 2015–16 protests be one manifestation of the ‘organic crisis’ of South African higher education, which necessitates major ‘formative action’ on the part of the state and other key actors?

This article explicates a number of concepts and poses various questions that it is hoped, when supplemented with additional concepts and questions, can constitute a robust framework for analysis of the 2015–16 student protests. The article, in the first instance, is concerned with questions about the protests, rather than a rush for answers about their trajectory, dynamics, character and significance. Above all, the article is an invitation to engagement and critique.

In his introduction to Marx’s *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, O’Malley writes that ‘if one is to revolutionize human society in the interest of its perfection and welfare one must understand its nature, workings and failures, one must impart this understanding to others, and one must somehow effect the translation of this understanding into organized political action which will transform society in the interest of the common good. The unity of theory and praxis (means) the inseparability of these three efforts in genuine social criticism’ (O’Malley 1970: xiv).

### ‘Organic Crisis’

Writing about the period after the Soweto student uprising of 1976, Saul and Gelb characterized the apartheid state as being mired in an ‘organic crisis’ because of the existence of ‘incurable structural contradictions’ of an ideological, political and economic nature (1986: 11, 57). The idea of ‘organic crisis’ comes from Antonio Gramsci who, as Stuart Hall notes, ‘warns us in the *Notebooks* that a crisis is not an immediate event but a process: it can last for a long time, and can be very differently resolved:

by restoration, by reconstruction or by passive transformism' (Hall 1988). Moreover, 'organic crises... erupt, not only in the political domain and the traditional areas of industrial and economic life, not simply in the class struggle, in the old sense; but in a wide series of polemics, debates about fundamental sexual, moral and intellectual questions, in a crisis in the relations of political representation and the parties – on a whole range of issues which do not necessarily, in the first instance, appear to be articulated with politics, in the narrow sense, at all. That is what Gramsci calls the crisis of authority, which is nothing but the crisis of hegemony or general crisis of the state' (Hall 1988).

In South Africa in the late 1970s, there were, on the one hand, deep-seated economic problems, including sluggish economic growth, massive unemployment, balance of payments problems, and increasing state debt. On the other hand, the economic malaise was exacerbated politically by the racial structure of South African capitalism and the political challenge of dominated social classes and groups that were becoming organized and growing in assertiveness. Ideologically, the state was no longer able to secure the consent of the black oppressed and democratic whites, and despite the militarization of the state and severe repression it was unable to rule in the old way. Saul argued that an 'organic crisis' was normally resolved either through social revolution from below or 'formative action' on the part of the ruling class (1986: 211). Purely defensive initiatives were ineffectual for preserving the hegemony of the ruling class. 'Formative action' necessitated significant reforms and restructuring of an economic, political and ideological nature. Through the efforts of a ruling class to resolve an organic crisis, their 'incessant and persistent efforts form the terrain of the conjunctural' (Saul and Gelb 1986: 57). Conjuncture is the immediate terrain of struggle, and is shaped by both structural conditions as well as the various programmes and actions of the state and other social forces, and 'it is upon this terrain that the forces of opposition organise' (*ibid.*: 57). The distinction between historical structural conditions (features that are relatively long-term, enduring and permanent) and conjunctural conditions (more short-term and temporary, yet inextricably associated with the long-term features) is important. It alerts one to be sensitive to continuities and discontinuities in conditions in higher education and society, and 'allows one to separate the analysis of the [long-term] pre-conditions of action from the [short-term] factors activating specific forms of collective mobilization' (Melucci 1989: 49–50).

Might the concept of 'organic crisis' be put to work to analyse fruitfully the state of South African higher education in 2015–16, or even the

contemporary South African political economy? Or is the idea of 'organic crisis' massively overstating the problems that afflict higher education and the South African state? Indeed, do the problems even constitute a crisis; are they not just temporary and relatively minor difficulties that can be easily overcome? Could the notion of an 'organic crisis', the idea that 'formative action' is required, in conjunction with other concepts yield a fertile 'problematic' for understanding the 2015–16 student protests; that is to say, 'a rudimentary organisation of a field of phenomena which yields problems for investigation'? (Abrams 1982: xv). As has been noted, 'the organisation occurs on the basis of some more or less explicitly theoretical presuppositions – it is an application of assumptions and principles to phenomena in order to constitute a range of enquiry. One's problematic is the sense of significance and coherence one brings to the world in general in order to make sense of it in particular' (*ibid.*).

### **The Economic Dimension of the Crisis**

It is clear enough that the crisis of higher education has a number of dimensions. The 'economic' dimension is all too evident. First, and most importantly, South African higher education is inadequately funded by the state. One way of measuring the state's contribution is to consider the percentage of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) that is allocated to higher education. The percentage increased between years 2004/05 and 2015/16, from 0.68 to 0.72 per cent, and from some R9.8 billion to R30.3 billion.<sup>2</sup> However, this level of funding is low in comparison with a number of other countries. In 2012, Brazil allocated 0.95 per cent of GDP to higher education, and 'Senegal and Ghana 1.4 per cent, Norway and Finland over 2 per cent and Cuba 4.5 per cent. If the state was to spend 1 per cent of GDP on higher education, this would amount to R41 billion – an additional R11 billion' (Cloete 2015). Second, the proportion of the budgets of universities that is funded by the state has declined considerably since 1994. Universities have generally made up the shortfall in state funding through significantly increasing tuition fees, seeking third-stream income (alumni and donor contributions, and income from consultancies, research contracts, short courses and hiring out of facilities) and reducing costs through mechanisms such as outsourcing. While more equitable access has been achieved post-1994, student numbers have doubled and black students comprise the vast majority of the student body, the block grant to universities has declined in real terms as has, therefore, the per capita contribution per student.

Third, the level of state funding for financial aid for students who are academically eligible for admission to universities and meet the criteria of

the largely state-funded National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) is inadequate to support all deserving students at appropriate levels for undergraduate and postgraduate study. This is notwithstanding that the funds voted to NSFAS have increased substantially over the years, from R578.2 million in 2004/05 to R4.095 billion in 2015/16.<sup>3</sup> The 2013 White Paper for Post-School Education and Training of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) observed that ‘a recent study commissioned by the Minister has found that “fee-free university education for the poor in South Africa is feasible, but will require significant additional funding of both NSFAS and the university system.” Every- thing possible must be done to progressively introduce free education for the poor in South African universities as resources become available’ (DHET 2013: 39). Concern was expressed ‘about students whose family incomes fall above the NSFAS threshold for support, but below the necessary threshold to obtain commercial loans’ – a category that has come to be referred to as the ‘missing middle’ (*ibid.*). The DHET’s Green Paper recognized that ‘an important challenge ... is finding the resources to address those students who do not qualify for NSFAS loans because their families’ incomes exceed the threshold of R122,000 per annum but who do not earn enough to qualify for commercial loans. This group includes the children of many teachers and civil servants – precisely the groups from whose children future professionals and academics come from in most countries. The government must find ways to meet this challenge’ (DHET 2012: 49). The DHET suggested that ‘partnerships will be essential to the success of student funding initiatives. These will include intra-governmental partnerships, such as cost-recovery support from the South African Revenue Service (SARS), scholarship support from other government departments in scarce skills areas, and government partnerships with the private sector and international partners’ (2013: 39). Was the idea of partnerships with the ‘private sector and international partners’ wishful thinking, and what efforts were made by the DHET to pursue its own proposals and with what results?

Fourth, insufficient resources are devoted to academic development programmes in light of the support many students require to ensure that there is meaningful equity of opportunity and outcomes, and that they can graduate successfully; the resources that have been devoted to such programmes have been often used ineffectively by universities, which have lacked the necessary academic capacities to mount high quality programmes. Fifth, since 2007, the state has provided considerable funding for ‘infrastructure and efficiency’ to address backlogs and increase institutional capacities related to teaching, research and student accommodation at all



universities, and especially the historically black universities. Despite this, given the severity of the backlogs at historically black universities as a legacy of apartheid era inequalities, infrastructure funding has been inadequate to eliminate the range of conditions that impact on the quality of higher education provision. This compromises equity of opportunity and outcomes for the students at the historically black universities, who are largely from working class and rural poor families.

It is not necessary to emphasize further the range of areas in higher education that are insufficiently supported by state funding. It is not that the state is unaware of the challenges or the measures that are required to ensure that higher education effectively addresses equity, quality and development problems, or that the higher education budget has not increased, or that funds have not been provided to address important issues and areas. The simple reality is that state funding has been inadequate to support universities to discharge their critical purposes of producing knowledge, cultivating high quality graduates, and engaging meaningfully with diverse communities, to play the diverse roles they must to help realize environmentally sustainable economic development, equity, social justice and a vibrant democracy, and do all this in a way that ensures that the necessary transformations related to equity, the nature and quality of learning and teaching, research, and institutional culture also occur simultaneously within higher education. As Adam Habib, Vice-chancellor of Wits University, has put it 'while enrollment at South African universities has climbed dramatically, the per-student subsidy from government has declined. We've known this for a while now and there have been some concerns about this. The universities in a desire to maintain the quality of the programs have effectively compensated for this by raising student fees. We've been saying for a number of years now this is unsustainable and is going to blow' (Redden 2015).

The consequences of the 'economics' of the 'organic crisis' in and of higher education are pervasive, disturbing, and destructive. Starved of adequate funding, large (not all) parts of the higher education system evince high levels of inefficiency and a lack of effectiveness with respect to the quality of academic provision, the quality and numbers of graduates produced, and the volume of knowledge production. As an aside, not all the problems of higher education and universities can be reduced to insufficient funding; they are also connected to the effectiveness of leadership, the social composition and quality of academic staff, the lack of willingness of some academic staff to embrace changes, especially in learning and teaching. The lack of funding imposes greater demands on academics as a result of the increasing student-teacher ratios, and diminishes the

overall student experience, especially for indigent students. Access to and success in higher education continue to be conditioned by social class and 'race'. A combination of inadequate preparedness on the part of students and universities means that very few students graduate in the minimum designated time for an academic programme. Fifty per cent of students at universities and a higher proportion at universities of technology dropout and never graduate, an incredible waste of talent that impacts negatively on a large numbers of students, results in student indebtedness, and wastage of scarce resources.

The 'economic' dimension of the 'organic crisis' of higher education is all too real. Spending, say, of 1 per cent of GDP – an extra R11 billion – on higher education may be a good target to realize immediately, but this figure may remain inadequate for the considerable and diverse demands made on higher education by the South African Constitution and the 1997 and 2013 White Papers on higher education. According to the Minister of Higher Education and Training, 'an appropriately funded higher education sector would require an additional R19.7 billion per annum in the baseline for university subsidies', excluding contributions to NSFAS (*ibid.*). Of course, it could be difficult to argue that higher education must be allocated resources at levels that are disproportionate to other social sectors, and in a manner that is oblivious of other serious challenges that confront the state, such as creating decent jobs, eroding unemployment, eliminating poverty and providing adequate social and welfare services. The reality also is that the post-1994

African National Congress (ANC) government's economic policies, powerfully shaped by neoliberal prescripts, have not generated the kind or level of economic growth and development that is required, and that could provide the state with more resources to invest in higher education. Whether this is a consequence of the embrace of neoliberal ideology, or the lack of commitment or courage to make progressive political choices, or the inability to forge creative policies, strategies, and the effective development state that is required to address substantively the inequalities of income and wealth that have ensured that South Africa is one of the most unequal societies on earth are moot points.

Writing in 1991, the late Harold Wolpe observed that the 'core structural conditions of apartheid' would 'over a long period continue to place severe constraints on the pace and possibilities of any programme pursued by a new regime' to reduce inequalities and realize social justice (1991: 3–4). He argued that 'the economic and other resources which would be required to redress the effects of the apartheid system in all spheres of education

and training are not immediately available and are extremely unlikely to be available, except in the very long term' (1991: 7). In the light of this, Wolpe posited that great care and creativity would need to be exercised in how policies were framed and forged 'if they are to contribute to the construction of a new South Africa' (1991: 1). He warned that unless this happened, higher education policies could 'reproduce powerfully entrenched structures generated by apartheid' instead of 'serving as instruments of social transformation' (1991: 16). Similarly, in a seminal 1978 article analysing the relationship between education and development, and subtitled 'From the age of innocence to the age of scepticism', Weiler advanced a similar argument: 'There is little evidence to suggest that education, even with a tremendous effort at reducing its own internal disparities, is likely to have an appreciable impact on the achievement of greater distributive justice in the society at large, as long as that society is under the influence of a relatively intact alliance of economic wealth, social status and political power which is interested in preserving the status quo' (1978: 182). Bobbio reminds progressive social forces that there continues to exist 'two great blocks of descending and hierarchical power in every complex society, big business and public administration. As long as these two blocks hold out against the pressures from below, the democratic transformation of society cannot be said to be complete' (1987: 57).

It has been argued that 'ostensibly consensual and unifying radical visionary policy frameworks', such as the 1997 White Paper on higher education, which promise social equity, redress, and social justice 'often obfuscate the reality of power and historically entrenched privilege' (Motala 2003: 7). And that 'in reality, many of the articles relating to equity are not achievable without purposeful [even aggressive] and directed strategies, which set out deliberately to dismantle the core of historical privilege, disparities in wealth, incomes and capital stock, critical to unlock the possibilities for social justice and fairness' (*ibid.*: 7). There is ample evidence that is the case. The questions that arise are: is the ANC-government and the South African state willing to be 'directive and interventionist', to take 'positive discriminatory measures in favour of the poor', display 'political courage in the face of administrative challenges' and do they possess 'the will to defy public discontent from highly articulate and organized interests' (*ibid.*: 7).

### **The Ideological Dimension of the Crisis**

The ideological (the concept 'ideology' is used capaciously) aspects of the 'organic crisis' are evident in a number of features of contemporary

South African higher education. Institutional change in post-1994 South African higher education has occurred in an epoch of globalization and in a conjuncture of the dominance of the ideology of neoliberalism. The 'origins, rise, and implications' of the doctrine of neoliberalism are well covered by Harvey (2005). Neo-liberalism is 'a theory of political economic practices that propose that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade' (Harvey 2005: 2). In terms of this doctrine, the role of the state is to 'create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices', including the legal and repressive mechanisms 'to secure private property rights' and ensure 'the proper functioning of markets' (*ibid.*). Neoliberalism holds that 'the social good will be maximized by maximizing the reach and frequency of market transactions, and it seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market' (Harvey 2005: 3). Importantly, 'if markets do not exist (in areas such as land, water, education, health care, social security, or environmental pollution) then they must be created, by state action if necessary' (*ibid.*: 2).

Neoliberal ideas, whether embraced voluntarily or as a result of the coercive or disciplinary power of financial institutions, have in differing ways and to varying degrees impacted on economic and social policies, institutions and practices. First, the conception of development has become essentially economic and reduced to economic growth and enhanced economic performance as measured by various indicators. This is to be contrasted with development as 'a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy' (Sen 1999: 3). Development reduced to economic growth has given rise to goals, policies, institutional arrangements and actions that focus primarily on promoting growth and reducing obstacles to growth. Not surprisingly, 'the logic of the market has ... defined the purposes of universities largely in terms of their role in economic development' (Berdahl 2008: 48). Public investment in higher education has come to be largely justified in terms of economic growth and preparing students for the labour market. The notion of higher education as a tradable service and a private good that primarily benefits students has influenced public financing, which in turn has impacted on the structure and nature of higher education. As public universities have sought out 'third stream income' to supplement resources, this has often resulted in, as Nayyar writes, 'at one end, the commercialization of universities [which] means business in education. At the other end, the entry of private players in higher education means education as business' (2008: 9). Concomitantly, driven by market forces

and the technological revolution, globalization is 'exercising an influence on the nature of institutions that impact higher education', and on the 'ways and means of providing higher education', is 'shaping education both in terms of what is taught and what is researched, and is shifting both student interests and university offerings away from broader academic studies and towards narrower vocational programmes' (*ibid.* :7; Duderstadt, Taggart and Weber 2008: 275).

We must be cautious not to glibly and simply read-off developments and conditions in South African universities and higher education from this general portrayal of higher education in an epoch of globalization and the hegemony of neoliberalism. The thrust of policy in the White Paper of 1997, 'A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education', runs counter to neoliberal precepts (DHET 1997). However, as Ahmed observes on 'law and policy as performatives', they cannot be read 'as if they do what they say, as if they bring something into existence. If what they do depends on how they get taken up, then the action of policy (as law or letter) is unfinished' (2012: 11). Higher education is conditioned by wider economic and social policies, and these have been major constraints on the pursuit of ambitious transformation goals. Even though 'transformation' has continued to be a popular motif, it is useful to pose 'what recedes when (transformation) becomes a view', and 'what (transformation) does by focusing on what (transformation) obscures' (Ahmed 2012: 14). The idea of 'transformation' and equity have in many cases been hollowed out to a concern largely with numbers and demographics. Instead of keeping constantly in play the simultaneous pursuit of equity, quality, and development within and beyond higher education, with all their paradoxes and attendant social and political dilemmas, 'equity' of a diluted and limited kind has often triumphed at the expense of meaningful opportunity and outcomes and substantive transformation.

The tendency to reduce 'transformation' to numbers has had its corollary in the lack of significant engagement with critical issues such as the decolonization, de-racialization, de-gendering and de-masculinization of the academic and institutional structures and cultures of universities. Du Toit has noted 'that the enemy' in the forms of colonial and racial discourses 'has been within the gates all the time', and argued that they were significant threats to the flowering of ideas, discourse, discovery and scholarship (2000: 103). At the historically white universities, a deeply embedded culture of whiteness, that has yet to yield to substantive respect for and affirmation of difference and the creation of inclusive cultures, has been a major further impediment to change. To 'talk about whiteness as an institutional problem',

to 'describe institutions as being white' is 'to point to how institutional spaces are shaped by the proximity of some bodies and not others' (Ahmed 2012: 36).

In such spaces, 'white bodies become somatic norms' (*ibid.*: 38). 'Whiteness is invisible and unmarked ... the absent center against which others appear as points of deviation'; a 'habit insofar as it tends to go unnoticed', and 'is only invisible to those who inhabit it or those who get so used to its inhabitation that they learn not to see it' (*ibid.*). It is arguable whether there has been any significant opening up of spaces for the flowering of epistemologies, ontologies, theories, methodologies, objects and questions other than those that have long been hegemonic, and have exercised dominance over (perhaps have even suffocated) intellectual and scholarly thought and writing.

Critical epistemological and ontological questions related to curriculum and pedagogy have received little attention, either because of a refusal on the part of academics to do so (sometimes in the name of 'academic freedom'), or because of a lack of the capabilities and /or support to do so. Deep-seated conventional 'wisdoms' that consider quality and standards as universalistic, invariant, immutable and largely technical matters rather than historical and social constructs have been a major impediment to serious critical engagement with the 'educational process in higher education – including curriculum frame-works, the assumptions on which these are based, course design, and approaches to delivery and assessment' (Scott, Yeld and Hendry 2007: 73). At a number of universities, teaching and learning, which are critical to student success, tend to be neglected and overshadowed by research, perhaps because the former are considered as innate abilities or commonsense activities. Drawing on Antonio Gramsci, Wilfred Carr points out that 'the distinctive feature of common sense is not that its beliefs and assumptions are true but that it is a style of thinking in which the truth of these beliefs and assumptions is regarded as self-evident and taken for granted. What is commonsensical is ipso facto unquestionable and does not need to be justified' (Carr 1995: 53–54).

It may well be that the so-called 'Mamdani affair' at the University of Cape Town (UCT), which saw Mamdani sharply contesting the curriculum in African studies and the humanities more generally, and which was subjugated administratively, set back curriculum transformation in the humanities almost two decades. More recently, Mamdani has written that 'the central question facing higher education in Africa today is what it means to teach the humanities and social sciences in the current historical context and, in particular, in the post-colonial African context' (2011).

Moreover, Mamdani (2011) asks what does it mean to teach ‘in a location where the dominant intellectual paradigms are products not of Africa’s own experience but of a particular Western experience’? It is not that prior to the student protests there had not been critical voices that had raised issues of epistemology, curriculum and the like, but that they have gained little traction at universities and in higher education and have remained largely marginal concerns. It is also not the case that there have been either a uniform unwillingness or no efforts to tackle colonial, racist, patriarchal discourses and the culture of whiteness. The reality is that for reasons that are important to understand, initiatives to date have yet to succeed in uprooting inherited cultures and practices, and bringing about the far-reaching transformations that are necessary and long overdue.

### **The Political Dimension**

One of the most profound and moving placards displayed during the student protests had to be ‘Our parents were SOLD dreams in 1994. We are just here for the REFUND.’ Higher education holds the promise of contributing to social justice, economic and social development, and democratic citizenship. Yet, this promise often remains unrealized and higher education instead becomes a powerful mechanism of social exclusion and injustice. The reason is that education, of course, is not an autonomous social force. It is a necessary condition of positive social transformation, but not a sufficient condition. For education to become more equitable and contribute effectively to social justice in South Africa, there have to be bold and purposeful social justice-oriented policies and initiatives in other arenas of society. As noted, the ANC government’s post-1994 economic policies have not been oriented towards, nor have they laid the basis for, fundamentally addressing inequality even if there have been some pro-poor social policies geared towards addressing certain dimensions of poverty.

Politically, and in terms of social policy, a developmental and democratic state committed to ‘a better life for all’ and that extends and deepens popular participation in economic, political and social domains has failed to materialize. Thus, ‘South Africa faces significant challenges’ that in the words of the ex-Governor of the Reserve Bank and an ANC stalwart ‘require a co-ordinated and coherent range of policy responses’ – ‘the government [needs] to be decisive, act coherently’, demonstrate ‘a coordinated plan of action to address them’ and ‘exhibit strong and focused leadership from the top’ (Isa 2013). Doing so ‘will go a long way to restoring confidence, credibility, and trust’ (*ibid.*). However, South Africa’s failings are neither entirely technocratic nor managerial. They are political, associated with a government that is

increasingly mired in short-term electoral politics, fails to distinguish between party and the state, is incapable of acting decisively against corruption, and lacks the will to act courageously and decisively to address problems at the levels of policy, personnel and performance in a context in which the apartheid legacy remains intractably entrenched in various arenas.

What happens when you assemble those among the most talented of your society within universities? One answer to this question is provided by the case of the newly created universities for black South Africans in the 1960s. Given the repression of the period following the 1960 Sharpeville massacre when the key liberation movements were also outlawed, it was difficult to see how any serious political challenge to white minority domination could be mounted and from where it could come. Any organization faced the prospect not only of immediate repression but also the unenviable task of breaking through the extensive and vigorous social controls, demoralization, fear, and enforced and sullen acquiescence that were major impediments to mobilization and organization building. Yet, as is well known, the South African Students' Organisation (SASO), formed in 1968, was able to escape immediate repression, establish itself, and develop a mass following at the black universities. It was surprising that this challenge came from where it did. The black racial and ethnic higher educational institutions were not designed to produce dissidents. They had been charged with the responsibility of winning students intellectually and politically to the separate development programme of apartheid, and generating the administrative corps for the separate development bureaucracies. That, after all, was the purpose of the strict ideological control of the black institutions, their domination by Afrikaner nationalists, and the repressive controls on students.

That the revival of mass political opposition to apartheid emerged from within and spread outwards from the black higher education institutions is also understandable though. For one thing, the institutions gathered together students who had survived the rigours and hurdles of black schooling but who, upon graduating from higher education, would still be condemned to a future of limited socio-economic opportunities, indignity and inequality. Secondly, a comment on an earlier time was still true of the black institutions of the 1960s: 'Most students had common experiences in White South Africa, and there were few who had not encountered directly the humiliation of White superiority attitudes, while all suffered in some degree the effects of legal discrimination. The very fact of their common positions of inferiority in South African society, unameliorated by contact with white students, created a bond which formed a basis for their political mobilization' (Beard 1972: 158). These academic centres thus provided an



ideal environment for developing shared grievances and aspirations. The fact that a large number of students lived in residences made communication, mobilization and organization easier. The great irony was that 'the concentration of increasing numbers of students in the recently established black universities provided a site, perhaps the only one in the repressive conditions of the time, in which a radical ideology (black consciousness) could develop. One reason for this was the relatively protected position of the educational institutions' (Wolpe 1988: 72).

Fast forward to 2015–16: what happens when you congregate the brightest of your society within universities that are characterized by a tardy pace and degree of transformation and various shortcomings, including inadequate funding to undertake effectively their responsibilities? When you also subject considerable numbers of these students to varying degrees of precarious existences because of inadequate financial aid? Hall observes about the University of Western Cape and the Cape Peninsula University of Technology that 'these two universities serve Cape Town's low and middle income families, as well as substantial numbers from the City's townships. For these students, and their families, debt is raw, visceral and lived out through compromises; minimal living standards, not enough to eat, no chance of buying books. Universities are a promise of opportunity and the inspiration for dreams; debt crushes both' (Hall 2015). As #FeesMustFallCPUT put it 'We, your children at CPUT, are faced with a tremendous difficulty in terms of completion of our studies and consequently obtaining our qualifications. We are frustrated, vulnerable, emotional and injured – please intervene as CPUT is a public university' (*ibid.*). Students on financial aid are known to remit part of their scholarship and bursary funds to support immediate and extended families, so that scholarships and bursaries take on a social welfare function.

On top of the insecurity associated with available funds for tuition, accommodation, academic materials and subsistence, can be added the prospect of large debt, high dropout rates, poor throughput rates, inadequate facilities and accommodation, largely unreconstructed epistemologies and ontologies, questionable quality of learning and teaching to ensure meaningful opportunities and success, and alienating and disempowering academic and institutional cultures that are suffused by 'whiteness', and are products of the historical 'legacies of intellectual colonisation and racialization' (Du Toit 2000). At the historically white universities, those who are white and from privileged backgrounds experience those environments and cultures as natural, feel very much at home, don't see or feel any problems, and generally blossom. These social groups are largely oblivious to the association of the current cultures with power, privilege and advantage, and how they especially

disadvantage black students from working class backgrounds and women students (and academics) in myriad ways, affront their dignity, and generate bitterness, anger, pain, hurt, worries and anxieties. Those who are black and come from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to experience the environments and cultures of the historically white universities as discomforting, alienating, disempowering and exclusionary. These cultures exact a significant personal, psychological, emotional and academic toll on black students and staff, compromise equality of opportunity and outcomes, and diminish the idea of higher education as an enriching and liberating adventure. They also impede the forging of tolerance, more fluid and new identities, reconciliation, non-racialism, non-sexism and social connectedness.

It is painfully clear that the greater presence of black students and staff has not automatically translated into genuine respect for difference, appreciation of diversity, and meaningful social and educational inclusion, whether social, linguistic, cultural, or academic. Instead of dismantling and displacing previous institutional arrangements, norms and practices, and paving the way for genuine inclusion and meaningful participation the practice, if not the policy, has been one of *assimilation*. Blacks, women, gays and lesbians, and other historically disadvantaged or marginalized groups have been expected to accept, integrate and assimilate into the discomforting institutional cultures of universities. Steve Biko had voiced his strong opposition to assimilation and integration:

‘if by integration you understand a breakthrough into white society by blacks, an assimilation and acceptance of blacks into an already established set of norms and code of behavior set up by and maintained by whites’ (1978: 24). If there has been inclusion of black students, there has been a simultaneous exclusion of them so that the inclusion has been of a subordinate nature. Consistent, concerted, comprehensive, diligent and sustained efforts to change what exists, to forge new inclusive cultures, and build universities that genuinely include all have been either lacking for one reason or another, or have failed to yield results. Some social groups and individuals have been content with the existing institutional cultures, and unwilling or slow to appreciate how what they are comfortable with and consider to be natural could be discomforting for others, and to embrace necessary and long overdue changes. The responses to the student protest movements at UCT and Rhodes are all too familiar and for that no less disturbing: the spewing of racist invective, patronizing comments about the benefits of colonialism, and general avoidance of the real issues. Telling black students and staff at UCT and Rhodes to ‘stop living in the past’, that ‘apartheid is over’, and to ‘forget the past’ when racism, sexism, prejudice and intolerance continue to rear their ugly heads and undermine their dignity is not helpful.

To imagine that South Africa is a 'rainbow nation' is to seriously confuse aspirations with realities. 'Rhodes Must Fall', 'Rhodes So White', and the demand for changing the name of Rhodes University are metaphors for much larger and deeper issues. They are a reminder that there is unfinished business, that there can be no reconciliation or peace without social justice at universities and in the economy and society more widely. Pretending that there are not major problems at the historically white universities won't make them go away. Not addressing the problems diligently means that they will fester and undoubtedly explode in the future. The fact is that higher education is a killing field of ambitions, aspirations and dreams, in a context where it is well known that those who graduate from higher education have the prospects of much more decent jobs, higher earnings and standards of living than those without university qualifications.

The key political dimension of the 'organic crisis' of higher education, however, is the offensive mounted during 2015–16 by black students and supported by some white students, black and white academics, and support staff. One higher education specialist describes it as 'the largest and most effective student campaign in post-1994 South Africa' (Cloete 2015). On the one hand, it is surprising that the largest higher education student protests post-1994 took as long to erupt as they did, given the continuities between apartheid and 'post-apartheid' higher education and South Africa. On the other hand, having occurred, analysis has to now distinguish between structural and conjunctural conditions, and separate out the 'pre-conditions of action from the factors activating specific forms of collective mobilization'. The trigger in early 2015 at UCT was disenchantment with the continuing presence on the campus of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes. 'Rhodes must fall' was, however, a metaphor for dissatisfaction with a much wider set of issues, expressed in demands related to the 'decolonization of the university', the highly skewed social composition of the academic work force and especially the professoriate (the dearth of black South African scholars), and institutional culture. Also a target of the student protests was the UCT policy of outsourcing that was instituted under Mamphele Ramphele in the late 1990s. At Rhodes University, the 'Rhodes So White' movement raised a similar set of issues. There, 'we can't breathe' was an allusion to a supposedly suffocating institutional culture. The 'Open Stellenbosch' movement added the question of racism more directly, and together with the protesters at the University of Pretoria that of language policy.

By late 2015/early 2016, the issues raised at UCT, Rhodes and Stellenbosch were overtaken by the demands of students at the University of Witwatersrand (Wits) and elsewhere related to proposed tuition fee increases, student debt, financial aid and the idea of 'free higher education'. The immediate trigger

appeared to be the announcement by Wits of a 10.5 per cent fee increase for 2016, which evoked the response '#Fees must fall'. Whether in late 2015/early 2016 the important matters related to decolonization of the university, curriculum, staff demographics and institutional culture were displaced or relegated to the backburner for the time being for strategic, tactical or other reasons is a matter for investigation.

The key intervention from the side of the Ministry of Higher Education and Training was the convening of a 'transformation' summit in mid-October 2015 attended by key stakeholders. The summit communication on 17 October noted that the 'summit on transformation takes place at a critical time for South African public universities.... 2015 is a watershed year for the sector, marked by deepening student and staff activism on many university campuses. Students and staff are fundamentally interrogating the nature and pace of transformation at our universities' (DHET 2015). The summit statement pronounced that 'gains' had 'been made in achieving transformation goals', and that this was 'as a result of the successful steering of the system to achieve policy goals' (*ibid.*) It was claimed that 'the deeper engagement about transformation goals that is now taking place is partly a result of these achievements, as we reflect on where we have been unsuccessful and what a new vision for the university system might be' (*ibid.*).

The summit statement said there was agreement on a number of issues such as the character and role of higher education, that 'the term transformation must continue to be interrogated and discussed at deeper levels', and that 'curriculum change is at the core of university transformation initiatives'. It was also agreed that there were 'increasing levels of frustration at the slow pace of transformation in the university sector, with respect to ... insufficient levels of student funding; inadequate levels of funding to match the growth in the system and concerns about sustainability; institutional environments that continue to reflect the broader inequalities in society and result in experiences of alienation by many staff and students, including persistence of racism, patriarchy, homophobia, ableism, and classism; university curricula and forms of knowledge production that are not sufficiently situated within African and the global South contexts, and are dominated by western worldviews; language practices at universities, which create barriers to effective teaching and learning' and, significantly, 'the need for further interrogation of the balance between institutional autonomy and public accountability' (*ibid.*).

The summit participants claimed to recognize 'the urgency of addressing the big and enduring questions of transformation'. They resolved 'in the immediate term' to 'actively support current initiatives to urgently address student funding and debt problems' in the interests of 'poor students' who

qualify for university; ensure 'greater transparency and engagement around fee structures and increments'; strengthen NSFAS; and 'make university environments less alienating for many staff and students'. Resolutions related to the 'medium term' included increasing funding for universities; establishing 'more supportive and expanded student funding models' in order to 'progressively introduce free quality education for the poor'; conducting 'research and dialogue on curriculum transformation', and providing resources for 'curriculum development initiatives'; the enhanced 'representation and improved retention of blacks and women in the academic workforce, professoriate, and university management and governance structures' through development programmes, and greater support for the development needs of historically disadvantaged universities (*ibid.*). The key actors were asked 'to report annually on progress made with respect to each resolution that forms part of their scope of responsibility' (*ibid.*).

The summit's critical analysis of higher education is much the same as that undertaken in the DHET's 2012 Green Paper and 2013 White Paper. Similarly, while there may be a greater sense of urgency, the summit's statement of goals and objectives is not very different from what is expounded in existing policy documents. As with many policy documents, the summit declaration is expansive on goals and objectives, but largely silent on how precisely problems and challenges will be addressed and overcome, over what periods, and what are the specific responsibilities of different actors, such as the state and universities. As usual, there was a silence on how higher education would be adequately funded to address various needs, including student demands related to fees and financial aid.

A few days after the summit, there were large student protests at a number of universities with the demand for a zero per cent fee increase in 2016. In some instances, student demonstrations that took to the streets, or where protestors attempted to march to key public building, as with the case of the University of Western Cape students, were treated with an especially heavy-hand by the police. In Cape Town, students marched to the National Parliament and there were clashes with police. On 23 October 2015, following a meeting with university and student leaders, President Zuma announced that there would be a zero per cent fee increase in 2016. The president's authority to take such a decision and its profound implications will be addressed later. If the summit was an attempt to defuse the 'Fees must fall' movement and steer the student protests into more institutionalized channels, it was a failure. It is also clear that no durable social compact, in any event not one that the student leadership were prepared to accept, or could sell to the students, emerged from the summit.

A key question is which ‘student leaders’ attended the summit, and how representative they were of the configuration of social forces that appear to constitute the student protest movement. During the student protests at some universities, protestors questioned the positions adopted by the formally elected student representative councils and how adequately they represented student interests. There have also been references to the student protestors being ‘leaderless’ or having a highly distributed leadership. An argument that Friedman has made in a different context might be pertinent: ‘there is little point in negotiating a compromise (or compacts) unless the parties are able to secure consent from it from those who will have to live with it. The fact that “leaders” have accepted a compromise is unimportant unless this means that their “followers” accept it too. This implies that the parties must be able to ensure support for the contract from a constituency’ (Friedman 1992: 610). The dynamics of the student protests suggest that negotiating change, forging a social compact, and securing the support of students are likely to be no easy matters. To return to the question of student participation in the summit, it will be interesting to establish, in light of the protests that erupted days later, whether the summit was used by student leaders to meet, jointly strategize and plan the next steps of the protests.

### **The Character of the Student Protests**

How are we to understand the character of the 2015–16 student protests? This requires insight into the ideologies, and political affiliations and orientations of the organizations, groups and individuals that have constituted the student protest movement, their goals and targets and how these came to be defined, how they have conceived the relationship between student-centred issues and demands and the struggles of other social forces, their attitudes towards forms of mobilization and collective action, including their views on the use of violence, and a host of other issues. Cloete suggests that the student protest movement’s ‘strategy of a non-party-aligned, no-formal-leadership mobilisation through social media is remarkably similar to how Manuel Castells, in *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*, describes the new forms of social movements – from the “Arab spring” to the Indignadas movement in Spain and the Occupy Wall Street movement in the USA’ (Cloete 2015). Perhaps the key student protest movement intellectuals and other protestors have been reading Castells, but there is evidence that they have also been reading Biko and Fanon. We can ask whether the South African students have taken notice of student protests in Chile and elsewhere. However, we should be cautious in making claims about where the student protest movement has drawn its

inspiration from, what literature has been circulating within the movement, and how this has shaped ideologies, politics, strategies and tactics. These are all questions for detailed empirical investigation. We should also be careful not to pigeon-hole and explain the student protest movement in terms of existing frameworks and theorizations, or to view them as simply replicas and mimicry of protest movements elsewhere. The use of social media for mobilization does not make the 2015–16 student protest movement the same as other movements. Even if it has borrowed, critically, deliberately or uncritically from struggles elsewhere, the 2015–16 student protest movement could be largely home-grown in nature. It is vital to analyse the student protest movement in all its empirical richness and to generate thick descriptions as part of establishing a fertile interplay between data and theory.

Burawoy has defined politics as ‘struggles over or within relations of structured domination, struggles that take as their *objective* the quantitative or qualitative change of those relations’, with the rider that ‘we must choose between politics defined as struggles regulated by *specific apparatuses*, politics defined as struggles over *certain relations*, and the combination of the two’ (Burawoy 1985: 253). He notes that ‘in the first, politics would have no fixed objective, and in the second it would have no fixed institutional locus. I have therefore opted for the more restricted third definition, according to which politics refers to struggles within a specific arena aimed at specific sets of relations’ (*ibid.*: 253–4). Could this be a fruitful way of approaching the student protests of 2015–16: to consider them as an instance of student politics, which occurs within the arena of universities and higher education and has as its goal and targets certain ‘sets of relations’? However, depending on the issues and social relations being contested, the arena may not be restricted entirely to higher education but could include the wider political economy, in so far as the changes that may be demanded cannot be addressed by the DHET on its own.

Beyond understanding the 2015–16 protest movement as an example of student politics (which is to treat it seriously, as opposed to as an episode of mindless hooliganism or vandalism, as some claim), what fertile avenues of analysis may be opened up by conceiving the student protests as a social movement, as ‘a form of collective action (a) based on solidarity, (b) carrying on a conflict, and (c) breaking the limits of the system in which action occurs (Melucci 1985: 795). The sense of solidarity comes from people’s ‘mutual recognition that they are part of a single unit’, while that of ‘conflict presupposes adversaries who struggle for something which they recognise as lying between them’ (Melucci 1989: 29). To say that a social movement breaks ‘the limits

of compatibility of a system' means that 'its actions violate the boundaries or tolerance limits of a system, thereby pushing the system beyond the range of variations that it can tolerate without altering its structure' (*ibid.*). In April 2016, I wrote that that the developments at UCT and Rhodes marked 'the beginnings of a social movement', and that 'this social movement is likely to extend to other universities, expand, and strengthen over time' (Badat 2015: 1). I argued that 'those who constitute the movement are exasperated and angry at the slow pace of change in the institutional cultures, in the academic staff body, and in important aspects of the academic programs of the historically white universities. Invoking the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and higher education policies, they are demanding greater social justice in higher education' (*ibid.*). or as an expression of values and beliefs. Collective action is rather the product of purposeful orientations developed within a field of opportunities and constraints' (Melucci 1989: 25). That is to say, social movements are 'at once conditioned by the historical contexts in which they emerge, their particular time and place, and, in turn, affect that context through their cognitive and political praxis' (Eyerman and Jamison 1991: 62). 'Cognitive praxis', however, is not just aspects of thought but also forms of social activity. The 'cognitive identity' and 'cognitive praxis' of the student protest movement are important issues to investigate, as they illuminate their active roles in formulating their ideas and views and disseminating ideas and information among people. Key ideas and viewpoints do 'not come ready-made to a social movement' (*ibid.*: 55). How did the ideas articulated by the student protestors come into being, and how did they evolve over the course of 2015 and 2016?

Notwithstanding suggestions that the student protests were 'leaderless' or had 'no- formal leadership', were there in fact 'movement intellectuals who articulate(d) the collective identity that is fundamental to the making of a social movement', who were central to the production and dissemination of ideology, to the theoretical and empirical definition of the opposition, and to the education of new members? (Eyerman and Jamison 1991: 114–18). A second dimension of 'cognitive praxis' concerns the issues that the student protest movement identified for criticism and protest and that were the targets of opposition; why and how were a particular set of themes and issues identified by the student protestors and accorded priority in early 2015, in what ways and to what extent did they change over time in 2016, and why? The third aspect of 'cognitive praxis' concerns how things happen in a movement – how information is disseminated, how calls to action are made, styles of planning, the vehicles and instruments that are used, internal practices related to agenda-setting, discussion, decision-making,



participation, and so on. All these issues need to be investigated in order to acquire a rich understanding of the 2015–16 student protest movement.

Despite their seeming ubiquity, visibility and strength, social movements should be seen as ‘fragile and heterogeneous social constructions. Collective action is always “built” by social actors, and thus what needs to be explained in concrete terms is how movements form, that is, how they manage to mobilise individuals and groups within the framework of possibilities and constraints presented them by the institutions of our complex societies’ (Keane and Mier 1989: 4). Moreover, ‘collective action must be understood in terms of the processes through which individuals communicate, negotiate, produce meanings, and make decisions within a particular social field or environment. They establish relations with other actors within an already structured context, and through these interactions they produce meanings, express their needs and constantly transform their relationships’ (*ibid.*). The advantage of approaching the student protest movement in this way is that it opens up fruitful lines of inquiry on questions such as the recruitment networks and processes that drew students into the protests; the basis of appeals for involvement, and how the movement created its collective actions. The idea of ‘social construction’ also obliges one to think about how a collective identity is formed within a movement. Identity is not something that a movement begins with; it is the outcome of various processes and activities. This means that doctrines, political orientations, objectives, strategies and tactics, sites of struggle, movement processes and forms and repertoires of collective action cannot be regarded as ready to hand or static. How they are socially and collectively formed and developed, and what their social and political determinants are, must be objects of enquiry.

There is often a tendency to treat social movements as a ‘personage with a “unitary character”’, and to reify collective action ‘into an incontrovertible fact, a *given* that does not merit further investigation’ (Melucci 1989: 18). Rather than viewing the student protest movement as homogenous, it is necessary to examine it in all its likely variety and diversity across time and space. What were the levels of involvement, and similarities and differences of the student movements at institutional, local, regional and national levels, and at different kinds of universities (‘research’, comprehensive, universities of technology, historically white universities, historically black universities, urban universities and rural universities)? What was the class, ‘race’ and gender composition of the movements? What were the different social forces that were involved, and what were their ideologies and political orientations? Questions have to be asked about their collective actions, such as how did groups and individuals coalesce and unite; what alliances,

and of what kinds (principled, strategic, tactical), were forged, and so forth (Melucci 1985: 793).

It is important to avoid seeing the student protest movement in purely political and instrumental terms, for this could miss possible cultural, expressive and symbolic aspects of the movement. Although the collective actions of social movements may have visible effects – helping bring about institutional changes, serving as recruitment grounds for new elites, cultural innovation – much of their activities may take place on a symbolic plane (Melucci 1989). The symbolic challenge of social movements can take three main forms. One is *prophesy*, the proposition that alternative frameworks of meaning, in contrast to the dominant ones, are possible. Another is *paradox*, where by taking an extreme case of something that dominant groups would call irrational, movements can show that it is actually very true. A third is *representation*, when visual forms like theatre are used to show contradictions in the social system. Recourse to all these elements helps to render ‘power visible’ (Melucci 1989: 76). In this sense, the student protest movement may not only be a challenge to dominant cultural codes, but also a possible laboratory of cultural innovation. Social movements can operate as a sign or message for the rest of society in that they may not just be a means to an end; sometimes ‘the organisational forms of movements are not just “instrumental” for their goals, they are a goal in themselves. Since collective action focuses on cultural codes, the *form* of the movement is itself a message, a symbolic challenge to the dominant codes’ (*ibid.*: 60). Thus, the ostensible lack of visible leadership, the idea of a leaderless movement, and certain forms of participation and collective actions may have deeper significance than imagined.

It is also critical to grasp the relationship between the visible and latent aspects of the student protest movement and collective action. In a latent phase, ‘the potential for resistance or opposition is sewn into the very fabric of daily life. It is located in the molecular experience of the individuals or groups who practice the alternative meanings of everyday life. Within this context, resistance is not expressed in collective forms of conflictual mobilisations. Specific circumstances are necessary for opposition and therefore of mobilising and making visible this latent potential’ (*ibid.*: 70–1). Phases of latency, far from being periods of inaction, can be crucial in creating and growing the capacities for mobilization and struggle. They deserve as much attention and analysis as phases of visible mobilization. It is necessary to ascertain what happened within the ranks and milieu of the student protest movement during the autumn, winter, and spring vacations during the 2015 protests, and what happened during the summer vacation in light of the protests in early 2016.

As noted, the student protest movement overall, and at each university, was very unlikely to be homogenous; movements hardly ever are. Unlike organizations where the basis of affiliation is ideological, political, cultural, and so forth, and which tend to have a more unitary character, movements tend to be constituted by a variety and diversity of ideologies, political affiliations and concerns. A student movement has been defined as ‘the sum total of action and intentions of students individually, collectively and organisationally that are directed for change in the students’ own circumstances and for educational and wider social change’ (Jacks 1975: 13). Not all student organizations may be part of the student movement at any point in time. And the student movement is not reducible to a single organization, nor is it an extension of one or even many student organizations. It is a broad and dynamic entity, which includes individual students who are not formally attached to organizations, and whose size and boundaries are likely to vary depending on economic circumstances, political and academic conditions, time of the academic year, and the issues being confronted. Moreover, individual students may stand in different relationships to the student movement and student protests. Some may be defined as ‘militants’, who are actively involved in student and national politics; others as ‘sympathizers’, who, while not consistently active, may or may not support demonstrations and other activities; and yet others as ‘nonparticipants’, who for a variety of reasons stand aloof from student politics (Hamilton 1968: 351–2).

Another way of conceiving of the student body in relation to the student protest movement is in terms of at least four kinds of students and groupings. One kind is affiliated to, and represents, particular political positions. A second kind of student grouping is ‘indifferents’ – those who are unresponsive and detached from the student protest movement. A third kind, ‘reactionaries’, are opposed to the protest movement. A fourth kind, ‘academics’, believe that student movements should be concerned solely with academic issues (Lenin 1961d: 44–5). What groupings made up the student body overall, and at different South African institutions? What were their relative sizes? How did they stand in relation to the students that were actively involved in protests? Was the protest movement a majority or minority phenomenon? How did participation differ by ‘race’, gender, class and geography, and along other social axes? How were students mobilized and educated? An astute analyst of higher education suggests that ‘there has been very little attempt to unpack the social class issues – this was largely driven by middle class students from Wits and UCT with support from the middle classes and media as if this was a new issue – ignoring the perennial

student protest on fees' at the historically black universities (Anonymous 2015). Is it true that the media paid much attention to the student protests at UCT and Wits, and has not always done so with respect to protests at historically black universities?

An important object of investigation is the relationships that the student protest movement developed with other non-student class, popular, and professional groups, organizations, and movements. Such relations have a bearing on judgements about its character and significance, and could also condition its activities and role. Did the student protest movement reach out to and draw in other social forces, and with what results? What was the involvement of academics, different categories of support staff, and other constituencies, and what views and positions were adopted by these social groups? Student movements often need to achieve a confluence with other social forces, otherwise they can become characterized by immediatism, populism and adventurism, 'brief brush fires and relapses into passivity by the majority', and 'frenzied ultra-left gestures' (Hobsbawm 1973: 265). Whether, in what ways, and to what extent a confluence was achieved between the student protest movement and other popular formations requires analysis.

The role of the leaderships of universities, of Universities South Africa, the Ministry of Higher Education and Training, and DHET in addressing the student protest movement and their demands needs investigation. Did the views, positions, and responses of these key actors calm and mediate the protests principally and effectively, or did they fuel and exacerbate the protests? Were the grievances and demands of students seen as a criticism of the leadership of the universities, or the Ministry, or both, and how did this shape the responses of the different actors? Were there genuine attempts to meet and communicate with protestors and to keep channels open at all times? Or was there too quick, as has been alleged by some students and academics, a recourse to summoning the police and hiring private security companies? The responses of non-student and university actors, including political parties and organizations, cultural formations, and religious bodies and the like are, of course, important in shaping the terrain on which students move and operate, and in creating conditions that either facilitate or constrain the student protest movement and the extent to which their demands are met or not.

It is alleged that at some institutions the student protests were associated with intimidation and violence on the part of some students or/and security companies and/or the police. Some observers, generally sympathetic to the student protest movements, contend that a few students rationalized the

use of violence to achieve demands. If this was so, what accounts for the willingness to engage in violent actions? What justifications were advanced for the use of violence? What conditions and specific triggers gave rise to violence on the part of students?

### **The Significance of the Protests**

What has been the significance of the 2015–16 student protests and the movement associated with it, both with respect to individual universities and higher education, and the wider political terrain?

First, the protests were a dramatic reminder of unfinished business in higher education, and forcefully placed on the agenda some key issues: the ‘decolonization of the university’, the social composition of academic staff, institutional culture, the inadequacy of state funding of higher education, the level and escalation of tuition fees, student debt, and the question of free higher education. It is not necessary to set out here the views, and demands of the protestors on these issues. Any thorough investigation of the student protest movement will need to describe and analyse their utterances, statements, and discourses, the presences, absences, and silences in their discourses, shifts that may have occurred over time, and the like. It should be noted that it may well be the case that the student protest movement exaggerated certain conditions, made assertions that are perhaps incorrect, or presented as facts data, statistics, and statements that can be disputed. These are not of huge importance; what matters is how conditions are perceived and experienced by students.

Second, the Wits Student Representative Council (SRC) represented the protests as ‘the biggest student protest and instance of student rallying under one banner since the dawn of democracy. It is us the youth of 2015 that has revised student activism in the broader discourse of society. We have made history as students in 2015 though this movement’ (Wits SRC 2015). These are large claims. Are they indeed true?

Third, have the protests announced the possible re-entry of a potentially powerful constituency on the higher education and political terrain, which could have considerable impact at the level of institutions, policy, and practice? According to the Wits SRC, it ‘has taken on the revolutionary burden’ of a number of conditions that give rise to student anger (*ibid.*). The SRC goes on to note that the ‘zero percent fee increment is a short-term victory that we applied a short-term strategy to achieve. We remain steadfast in our call for free education in our lifetime and we acknowledge that this zero percent increment is not just a step in the right direction but is also a turning point to attaining free education’ (*ibid.*). There is already talk among

student leaders that the zero per cent fee increase will also be a demand for 2017 and future years. This has massive implications for universities, unless there is a considerable increase in the funds voted to higher education and universities.

David Dickinson of Wits is reported in late 2015 as saying ‘that things are returning to normal – but it’s a new normal. Everything is different and there are flash points that have potential for putting us back into protest mode’ (Redden 2015). A potential flash point is ‘when the new academic year begins and students will have to pay up-front fees. If some students can’t afford to register ... that could spark new protests’ (*ibid.*).

A student leader is quoted as saying that if student demands are not accommodated ‘a strike of even greater magnitude is inevitable’ and that ‘it will not be registration as normal in 2016’ (Cele 2015). Another student leader contended that ‘discussions are now a futile exercise. We keep having the same conversation with no results. They know there are demands. We are tired of talk with no action’ (*ibid.*). One commentator worries that ‘demands backed by protests (some violent), that are so rashly and ignorantly acceded to, produce the understandable notion that the next round of demands will also result in acquiescence’ (Butler-Adam 2015: 1). However, in what could portend to be a different approach to future protests, the DHET has been reported to be working with the police to prepare for new student actions. It has warned that it will ‘not tolerate acts of hooliganism, where students go outside structures like the SRC and decide to start a strike’ (*ibid.*). The depiction of actions taken outside the channels of the SRCs, whose credibility has been called into question in instances, as ‘hooliganism’ is unfortunate, as is the seemingly hostile attitude to student strikes, even if they are mobilized by groups other than the SRC.

Fourth, is it the case that students have discovered that through mobilization and collective action they can wield power, and that through this power they can achieve results? Have they learned the lessons of the anti-apartheid movement of the 1970s and

1980s, or perhaps of the Arab Spring and other recent movements – the power of mass action? Equally, have they learned the limits of social media, and the distinction between mass mobilization and mass organization? Given the diverse and loose nature of the protest movement it is hard to know, to paraphrase Bobbio, ‘how it will develop and how far it will go’, whether ‘it is destined to continue or to come to a halt, to progress slowly or in bursts’ (Bobbio 1987: 56). Hobsbawm has drawn attention to the danger of student movements evincing ‘brief brush fires and relapses into passivity by the majority’. Jacks’s definition of a student movement included the idea

that it is directed at 'wider social change' (Jacks 1975: 13). Whether the protests will be a catalyst for far-reaching transformation in and beyond universities and higher education remains to be seen.

The transitory status of students means that institutional memory and organizational continuity and sustainability are major challenges. Mobilization (and the use of social media) have their place in the armory of struggle but, as those involved in the 'Arab Spring' have learnt, it is not a substitute for robust and durable organization.

Fifth, at some institutions, such as UCT, Stellenbosch and Wits, which comprise larger cohorts of wealthy and middle class students, the protestors returned to class and wrote final exams. Other universities such as UWC and CPUT, which have a largely lower middle and working class student body, experienced arson and damage to buildings running into the millions, were closed early, and had final examinations postponed until early 2016. What may this mean for student unity in 2016? Moreover, how will relations between university leadership and management, and students, be repaired in light of student complaints about curbs on the right to protest, the securitization of some campuses, and allegations of violence against students?

Sixth, while they have given universities, the ANC and the state, much to think about with regard to the current funding of higher education, tuition fees and increases of fees, recalibrating the dimensions of equity, quality and costs, the pace of transformation, and a host of other issues, how much of a challenge does the student protest movement represent on the political terrain and in the wider social arena? Some scholars note that youth born after 1994 are 'considered by some to be politically apathetic, more interested in social media than in social engagement. The student protest have highlighted how superficial these observations are' (Hornsby, Arvanitakis and Moore 2015). They contend that the student protest movement was more than about affordable fees and access; 'they also represent a bigger issue. This relates to how active and engaged the country's university students are in seeking to better society. Not quite the slackers that many were lamenting, then' (*ibid.*). However, the scholars provide little argument for this judgement, and their claim about student action towards a 'better society' has to be interrogated critically (*ibid.*).

Mckenna writes that 'it's no surprise that student movements are shutting down university campuses all over South Africa. More than two decades have passed since the advent of democracy and change in higher education appears to be stuttering. Students and many academics are fed up with high fees, a teaching body that remains stubbornly white and male,

and a curriculum that needs more relevance in an African country' (2015). She goes on to argue that 'it is a mistake to reduce this to a single story. This student movement is not just a call for change at institutional level. It is a reaction to the failure of the human capital model of education. We must look at how demands for free education and more black professors are part of a larger critique of crass capitalism in society' (Mckenna 2015). Mckenna's explanation for the student protests is unobjectionable. However, it may be quite a leap to claim that the student protest movement is also an implicit or explicit critique of the 'human capital model' (which deserves to be strongly critiqued, and discarded) and of capitalism, crass or otherwise, and an offensive against one or other form of capitalism. Again, the ideological and political orientations of the student protest movement, and therefore its character, have to be the object of careful analysis. As she observes, it is unlikely that there is 'a single story'.

An astute and experienced observer of higher education argues that there is 'a lot of hyperbole about the impact of the student protests - beginning of a revolution; shift in power away from the ANC, etc.' (Anonymous 2015). He notes that 'the students, aside from linking with campus workers on the issue of outsourcing, have singularly failed to raise any broader social and economic issues, let alone broader educational issues such as poor throughput and drop-out rates, etc.' (*ibid.*). He goes on to say that nor has the student protest movement created 'an organisational form that could link with other social grouping going forward' (*ibid.*). These are pertinent observations and useful cautions. Still, the significance of the movement cannot be judged purely by its size, doctrines, demands, alliances and so forth, it must also include how it has affected the higher education and political terrain on which it operated. Ultimately, 'what was won must be judged by what was possible' (Piven and Cloward 1979: xiii). The questions to ask are whether the student protest movement contributed to reproducing, undermining or transforming social relations in higher education, institutions and practices; whether it on the whole 'made gains or lost ground', and whether it 'advanced the interests' of the economically and socially marginalized classes and social groups or set them back (*ibid.*). The relationship between the student protest movement and the prevailing social structures and conjuncture

'has its real existence in the immediate world of history, of sequences of action and reaction in time' (Abrams 1982: 7–8). The relationship between action and structure needs to be 'understood as a matter of process in time' (*ibid.*: xv). Thus, even if the activities of the 2015–16 student protest movement did not constitute an immediate and serious threat to ANC



political hegemony and the overall system of class relations, its struggles might nonetheless weaken the pillars of that system so that the ANC is compelled to restructure the institutional mechanisms that maintain the current system and its own hegemony. In this process, new conditions and a significantly altered terrain of struggle could be established which may be more favourable to the efforts of class and popular movements that seek a different political and policy trajectory and a different kind of society than the one over which the ANC appears content to preside.

While the student protest movement has set forth a number of demands, these have not always been uniform nor clear, making the political nature of its demands difficult to judge. At the same time, the demands cannot be expected to be well-defined and comprehensive, given the complexity of the issues that are involved, the diversity of the student protest movement, and the different ideologies and political forces that appear to comprise the movement. Take the issue of 'decolonization of the university'. To 'decolonize' is to uproot, displace, substitute and replace what? And more formatively, to undertake and achieve precisely what at the levels of the purposes, roles and functions of the South African university, epistemology, theory, methodology, knowledge production, scholarship, curriculum, institutional structure, culture, conventions and practices? What are the capacities of universities and capabilities of academics to undertake far-reaching and thorough-going decolonization? Or take the issue free higher education that came to the fore in late 2015 and early 2016. The Wits SRC statement cited earlier expressed a commitment to 'free education in our lifetime'. How is this statement to be interpreted? As a demand for free education immediately? Or as a very astute formulation based on the understanding that free education may not be immediately possible but is worthwhile having as an ideal? But a demand, nonetheless, for free higher education, as opposed to free higher education for the poor?

There should be no blanket objection to the ideal of free higher education or, for that matter, free health care for all, even though these ideals may be a great anathema to neoliberal economic and social orthodoxies, which laud the 'free market' and minimal state, and advocate the privatization of all aspects of economic and social life. Neoliberalism scorns any notion of the public or social good, or collective well-being. Yet, the aspiration to live in a South Africa that puts human development and well-being first and that prizes a highly educated, informed and critical citizenry is entirely consistent with South African constitutional ideals. Free higher education exists in a number of countries, as one of the markers of a just society. It can be possible in South Africa, and is a question of making reasoned public choices, and of

understanding the consequences of public policies of free for all, free for the poor, and non-free higher education. A policy of free higher education requires fundamental re-thinking of and changes in social goals, priorities and policies. In addition, the state would have to provide universities with their full running costs, part of which they currently derive from tuition and residence fees from students. This would total tens of billions of Rand. Absent this, without fees universities would collapse. South Africa is one of the most unequal societies on earth, in which there are huge inequalities based on wealth and income. Free higher education would be a great boon for wealthy and middle-class parents who can afford to pay university tuition/residence fees and associated costs; in effect, it would be a public subsidy to the very rich and well-off middle classes, and further entrench inequalities. An alternative approach could be to strive to progressively realize free higher education, beginning with those most in financial need, alongside a parallel process of a wider reformulation of social goals, priorities and policies. Outside of such an approach, the call for immediate free higher education will reproduce inequalities. Under current social structures and in the current conjuncture, it is hardly a radical, let alone revolutionary, call.

Without doubt, the achievement of a zero per cent fee increase in 2016 was a major victory for the student protest movement. Yet the sheer rapidity of the victory is somewhat astounding. Butler-Adam claims that Zuma's response was a 'clearly panicked response' (2015: 1). A seasoned observer states that it was 'largely an attempt by VCs and government for different reasons to buy the peace. I understand it was the VCs who proposed the 0 per-cent increase, which is mind-boggling given the long-term implications' (Anonymous 2015). According to Universities South Africa chairperson Adam Habib, 'university leaders did not initially support the zero percent fee increase demand but swung their support to the students during the height of the October protests. What the students did in seven days was what we've been trying to do for 10 years, which was get the state to rethink its subsidy' (Redden 2015). Was this an audacious gamble on the part of university leaders, especially if the state does not make up the shortfall fully for 2016, and does not significantly 'rethink the subsidy'? The Minister of Higher Education and Training stated that 'to resolve the immediate shortfall of an estimated R2.6 billion required to cover the 0 percent fee increase, we are working out exactly what different sectors will contribute. From our side we have identified sources of funds that can be reprioritized, obviously at a cost to our other planned programmes. The wealthier universities have committed to make a contribution'.<sup>5</sup>

Butler-Adam suggests that the president's fee decision was an 'inopportune and alarmist response without (it would seem) any consideration of the

short- and long-term consequences of his announcement' (2015: 1). Hall argues that 'the decision by universities, negotiated with government, that will see no fee increases in 2016 may be good politics; it's terrible economics. Because the government has agreed to recompense universities proportional to their loss of anticipated revenue, the universities with the highest fees and the largest proposed fee increases will receive the most cash. In order to find the funds – which are unbudgeted against tax revenues – the Department of Education and Training will probably have to abandon projects that were intended to enable universities like UWC and CPUT improve their facilities and support for the least well off students. The overall consequences will be economically regressive, both at the institutional level and at the individual level. The worse resourced universities will receive little to help them catch up. And students from well-off families, who had anticipated a 10% fee increase in 2016, will be better off' (Hall 2015). There is speculation that even before the zero fee increase decision, at least eight universities were experiencing severe financial difficulties. The University of Fort Hare, which celebrates its hundredth anniversary in 2016 had to be granted permission to use R35 million of its earmarked allocation for infrastructure funding for operational expenses (Bozzoli 2015).

An issue that has received little attention concerns the implications of the manner in which the decision of a zero per cent fee increase was taken for the future autonomous governance of the universities. By what authority did the President and the Vice-chancellors and Chairs of Councils agree that there would be a zero per cent fee increase in 2016? It is understood that universities and the state were under severe pressure, but such a decision is the sole prerogative of the University Council. In any event, why was the ANC government so ready to settle with students so quickly, when it has not done so in the case of large and lengthy strikes and community protests? Were Vice-chancellors and Chairs of Councils mandated by University Councils to take such a momentous decision on fees given their huge implications especially for universities without significant reserves or weak balance sheets? The ramifications for governance in and of higher education in the future could be significant if the agreement on fees struck between the state and universities becomes a trend.

## **Conclusion**

The foregoing, which draws on political economy and social movement theory, is an attempt to carve out a possible framework for a dispassionate analysis of the student protest movement. The term 'movement' has been used in this paper; in reality it is perhaps a multiplicity of *movements* that

need to be the objects of analysis. How, in what ways, and to what extent they constituted an overall movement, are questions for investigation. The framework that has been elaborated is not intended as a blueprint for analysis; it is an invitation to critique, and to help develop a more robust framework or to forge alternative approaches that can provide understanding of the 2015–16 protests. It is vital that there is imaginative theorization, extensive description, and rigorous analysis of the 2015–16 student protests, and that the trajectory, dynamics, character and significance of the student protest movement that emerged and grew during the course of 2015 and continued during 2016 are documented.

Scholarship on the 2015–16 student protests must avoid both spectacular claims about their meaning, as well as fanciful predictions about their future trajectory and significance. Above all, it is critical to avoid seeking to find and see in the student protest movement the political hopes of socially committed scholars and activists for South African universities and higher education and society. The purpose of scholarship has to be to illuminate and convey understanding of the protests in all their richness and complexity.

## Notes

1. The first version of this paper has been presented in a public seminar 17th March 2016 at Humanities Graduate Center in Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (University of the Witwatersand).
2. Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande: Speaking notes for debate on higher education transformation in Parliament, Cape Town, 27 October 2015.
3. *ibid.*
4. *ibid.*

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# Les grèves estudiantines comme ripostes aux violations des libertés académiques

Une sociologie des « mouvements sociaux » dans le champ universitaire au Cameroun

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## Abstract

In recent years, the State universities in Cameroon have been the scene of several movements of student protests. These, sound as strike, are in reactions to multiple violations of “academic freedom.” Since the university reform of 1993 in Cameroon, we always attends some missing regarding shortcomings the basic academic freedoms, such as respect for free thought in college, absolute respect for meritocracy, etc. All these violations, often perpetrated by institutions which one core responsibility is to protect academic freedom, emphasized frustrations within students. Not having a platform from which they can express their claims, students are hiding in associative groups, like the Association for the Defense of the Rights of Cameroon Student (ADDEC). Strike strategy in its non-violent form rises in these groupings. A study of the management of these strikes by government and university authorities raises a major stake: that of university governance in a context where political struggles to separate itself from academy. This study allows us to understanding that the principles of academic freedom are a challenge for the promotion of the intelligentsia on the Continent.

**Keywords:** Students, frustrations, crisis management, strikes, academic freedom

## Résumé

Ces dernières années, les universités d'État du Cameroun ont été le théâtre de plusieurs mouvements de contestations estudiantines. Celles-ci, sur fond de grève, sont des réactions à de multiples violations des « libertés

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académiques ». Depuis la réforme universitaire de 1993 au Cameroun, on assiste toujours à des manquements quant au respect des libertés académiques les plus élémentaires, tels que le respect de la pensée libre à l'université, le respect absolu de la méritocratie, etc. Toutes ces violations, souvent commises par des institutions censées protéger les libertés académiques, accentuent les frustrations dans les milieux estudiantins. Sans tribune pour exprimer leurs revendications, les étudiants se retranchent dans des regroupements associatifs comme l'Association pour la Défense des Droits de l'Étudiant du Cameroun (ADDEC). La stratégie de grève sous sa forme non-violente prend sa source dans ces regroupements. Une étude de la gestion de ces grèves par les autorités gouvernementales et universitaires soulève un enjeu principal : celui de la gouvernance universitaire dans un contexte où le politique a du mal à se démêler de l'académique. Cette étude permet de comprendre que le respect des libertés académiques est un défi à relever pour la promotion de l'intelligentsia sur le Continent.

**Mots clés :** Étudiants, frustrations, gestion de la crise, grèves, libertés académiques.

D'un point de vue sociologique, il est constant que l'espace universitaire est un champ dans lequel les systèmes de position mettent en rapport des individus appartenant principalement à deux générations<sup>1</sup> différentes : la génération des dirigeants ou des « adultes », et celle des étudiants ou des « jeunes », ou mieux encore celle des « dirigés ». En effet, « la notion de génération fait l'objet de multiples usages, elle intervient dans les discours sur les jeunes, sur les vieux, sur les échanges familiaux (...) » (Attias-Donfut 1988:09). De ce fait, elle ne saurait échapper à la présente recherche. Les réalités dans l'enseignement supérieur camerounais ont fortement varié d'une génération à l'autre. Les jeunes étudiants d'aujourd'hui, qui n'ont pas connu certaines facilités dont ont bénéficié leurs dirigeants par le passé (bourses d'études mensuelles, effectifs moins pléthoriques, etc.), prennent progressivement conscience de leur personnalité sociale et veulent scander à leur manière le rythme de progression de la société universitaire. Dans le système universitaire, le « malaise » qui pousse beaucoup de jeunes étudiants à explorer des opportunités alternatives comme les grèves pour réagir aux violations des libertés académiques, atteste davantage de la nécessité de reconsidérer ou de repenser la notion de « liberté académique » dans le contexte africain. Au Cameroun, depuis 1993, année de la « réforme universitaire », l'on a assisté à une reconfiguration du système d'enseignement supérieur, un système dans lequel la gestion des libertés académiques reste digne d'un intérêt scientifique. L'intérêt est d'autant plus grand que les mouvements de contestations estudiantines de ces dernières années constituent des

« ripostes » à la gestion des libertés académiques. L'élucidation scientifique de cette problématique a nécessité l'observance de quelques précautions méthodologiques en sociologie.

## **Des itinéraires méthodologiques**

La connaissance des phénomènes sociaux dépend des instruments méthodologiques utilisés pour leur étude. C'est sans doute ce que voulait signifier R. Descartes, repris par Chindji-Koulevu (2003:75) : « La méthode est nécessaire pour la recherche de la vérité ; il est préférable de ne jamais chercher la vérité sur aucune chose, que de le faire sans méthode ». Dans le présent travail, des astuces méthodologiques sont repérables d'un bout à l'autre, plus précisément au niveau de la définition des données pertinentes, de la sélection des unités d'observation, de la définition des techniques de collecte et d'analyse des données de terrain.

### ***La définition des données pertinentes pour l'étude***

La première opération a consisté à définir quelles seraient les données pertinentes à collecter sur le terrain. En effet, avant l'investigation du terrain d'étude, un « travail de la boratoire » a été mené. Il s'agissait de déterminer clairement quels types d'informations nous seraient nécessaires pour la saisie objective du phénomène de gestion des libertés académiques dans l'université camerounaise. Une fois cette tâche accomplie, nous étions en mesure de répondre à une première question méthodologique : « Observer quoi ? ». En outre, cet exercice a été fondamental dans l'élaboration de notre guide d'entretien.

### ***La sélection des unités d'observation***

La deuxième question de méthode était la suivante : « Observer sur qui ? ». Il s'agissait ici de déterminer scientifiquement quel serait le type d'acteur social à approcher, et qui serait pour nous un informateur compétent. C'est dans ce sillage que nous avons théoriquement, sans a priori en fixer la taille, construit un échantillon de plusieurs catégories d'acteurs : les étudiants « ordinaires »<sup>2</sup>, les étudiants membres de l'ADDEC<sup>3</sup>, les autorités universitaires, les enseignants (assistants et professeurs titulaires).

### ***Elaboration des outils, échantillonnage et collecte des données***

Nous avons également répondu à la troisième question d'ordre méthodologique qui était : « Observer comment ? ». Il s'agissait pour nous

d'élaborer le principal outil de collecte des données, qui était un guide d'entretien dont la structuration interne permettait de glaner un maximum d'informations indispensables pour l'analyse. Sur le terrain, une question-filtre<sup>4</sup> nous permettait d'identifier les éléments de notre échantillon. La sélection des unités d'observation a reposé sur la technique d'échantillonnage aléatoire simple. Au total, la taille de l'échantillon était de 77 unités (60 étudiants, 4 membres de l'ADDEC, 10 enseignants d'universités, 3 membres des autorités universitaires). La collecte des données s'est faite à travers des entretiens semi-directifs, auprès des catégories d'acteurs susmentionnés, dans deux universités sur les sept que compte le Cameroun<sup>5</sup>.

### *L'analyse des données de terrain*

L'analyse des informations a été essentiellement qualitative. Nous avons fait appel à l'analyse qualitative du contenu manifeste et latent des discours de nos informateurs. Il s'est agi pour le chercheur de « secouer les évidences », d'aller au-delà de « la socialité ordinaire » (Ruano-Borbalan, 2000) pour découvrir les méandres de la société estudiantine souterraine. C'est en réalité une étude socio-anthropologique<sup>6</sup> qui privilégie les données du terrain, la « parole des acteurs ».

Quelques théories sociologiques nous ont permis de consolider l'assise scientifique du présent travail au niveau de l'analyse. De prime abord, les grèves estudiantines sont analysées dans ce travail sous le prisme des « mouvements sociaux » tels que pensés par Touraine (1973, 1984, 1992). Selon cet auteur, la société peut être considérée comme un « drame ». Il explique comment la société se produit elle-même par le biais de multiples actions sociales et rapports sociaux. Dans l'analyse de cette « production de la société », l'auteur accorde une importance fondamentale au concept d'« historicité » qui désigne « la capacité d'une société de construire ses pratiques à partir de modèles culturels et à travers des conflits et des mouvements sociaux » (Touraine, 1984:15). Dans ce que Touraine appelle le « système d'action historique », les acteurs principaux sont des mouvements sociaux qui luttent pour le contrôle de cette historicité. Le mouvement social est donc perçu comme un acteur historique, autrement dit comme le défenseur du sujet personnel et colles grèves estudiantines s'inscrivent fortement dans cette logique.

A titre complémentaire et dans le même ordre d'idées, ce travail s'inscrit aussi dans le champ de la Sociologie critique (Ziegler 1981). Parlant de la sociologie critique, il est pertinent de souligner qu'« aucune science n'engage des enjeux sociaux aussi évidemment que la sociologie » (Bourdieu 1984:07). Celle-ci étant au cœur des grands enjeux de ce monde, la neutralité scientifique du sociologue ne saurait être absolue. Il est appelé à la fois à énoncer et à dénoncer certaines logiques des jeux sociaux. Comme

tout homme, il est tenu de « choisir son camp », car son rôle fondamental est de « rechercher, de découvrir les lois qui gouvernent la naissance, le développement, le dépérissement des structures (...). Sa tâche est de révéler la société derrière les écrans déformateurs des re- présentations que les idéologies au pouvoir imposent aux hommes » (Ziegler 1981:14).

Voilà sommairement quelques itinéraires méthodologiques qui ont été empruntés pour étudier la gestion des libertés académiques au Cameroun. Nous remercions tous nos informateurs<sup>7</sup> rencontrés dans les universités de Dschang et de Yaoundé I. L'étude des ripostes estudiantines (par des grèves) aux différentes violations de ces libertés prend sens dans l'effort préalable d'une compréhension de la réforme universitaire de 1993 au Cameroun.

## **De la réforme de 1993 au nouveau paysage universitaire au Cameroun**

### ***Pourquoi la réforme de 1993 ?***

La notion de « grève » est consubstantielle à l'histoire de la « réforme universitaire » au Cameroun. Juste après 1990 avec le retour du pluralisme politique au Cameroun, la seule université du pays, celle de Yaoundé, a connu de véritables périodes de troubles. Les grèves estudiantines devenaient très récurrentes et posaient ainsi de sérieux problèmes de gestion chez les autorités politiques du pays. C'est ainsi qu'en 1992, la décision fût prise par le régime en place de « décongestionner » l'université de Yaoundé. En effet, le pouvoir politique avait remarqué que la concentration des étudiants dans la ville de Yaoundé était devenue très « gênante » et même « regrettable ». Les étudiants se révoltaient souvent et il était très difficile de contrôler ou de gérer les soulèvements. Aux yeux des dirigeants, il était nécessaire d'éloigner l'université du centre urbain ; et c'est dans ce sillage que deux facultés de l'université de Yaoundé<sup>8</sup> ont été transférées dans la banlieue de Soa, qui se situe à la péri- phérie de la ville. L'université-mère de Yaoundé devenait ainsi l'université de Yaoundé I, et celle de Soa, l'université de Yaoundé II. Selon ce professeur titulaire à la retraite,

« L'idée était d'éloigner les étudiants du centre-ville de Yaoundé. C'était d'abord une décision politique prise par les autorités gouvernementales pour pouvoir étouffer une éventuelle grève qui pouvait encore éclater. Si une grève en venait à éclater à Soa, il devenait aisé de la gérer dans la périphérie, sans qu'elle ne menace les institutions de la République. Si elle éclatait même à Yaoundé, la population estudiantine diminuée devenait facilement contrôlable. »

Aussi, le transfert des étudiants de la faculté de Droit à la périphérie de la ville était très stratégique pour les autorités gouvernementales. En effet, faisant des études de droit, les étudiants de cette faculté étaient plus attentifs

à ces questions de libertés académiques que leurs camarades de la faculté des Sciences ou des Lettres. Ce sont les juristes qui se sont souciés les premiers de ces questions de revendications des droits de l'étudiant.

C'est ainsi qu'en 1993, cette logique de dispersion des étudiants s'est étendue sur l'ensemble du territoire national. Les universités sont nées dans les régions, et contribuaient ainsi à bloquer le flux de nouveaux bacheliers qui convergeaient auparavant vers la capitale. Il apparaît clairement que la « réforme » en question était « brusque ». Il ne s'agissait pas d'un projet de société longuement mûri et préparé. La preuve en est que dans les nouvelles universités d'État, de véritables problèmes d'infrastructures se sont posés, et continuent d'ailleurs de se poser de nos jours, plus de vingt ans après. Ce qu'on a appelé « décentralisation » en 1993 dans l'enseignement supérieur camerounais, était en réalité une stratégie déployée par les pouvoirs politiques pour résoudre les problèmes de grèves estudiantines qui devenaient permanentes et menaçaient « l'ordre établi ». L'on a assisté, dès cette année, à une reconfiguration du paysage universitaire au Cameroun.

### ***La reconfiguration du paysage universitaire et ses conséquences***

A la suite de ce qui précède, il ressort que l'idée de « décentralisation » n'était que la conséquence de la stratégie gouvernementale de gestion des mouvements estudiantins. Cette « décentralisation » n'a pas été sans conséquence sur le paysage universitaire camerounais. D'un point de vue numérique, le nombre d'universités d'État du Cameroun est passé d'une à six. De cette décision sont nées progressivement celles de Yaoundé II (déjà citée), de Douala dans le littoral, de Buéa dans le sud-ouest, de Dschang à l'ouest, de Ngaoundéré dans l'Adamaoua. A cette liste s'ajoute la toute jeune université de Maroua dans l'extrême-nord du pays.

La conséquence directe de cette reconfiguration du paysage universitaire camerounais est évidemment l'augmentation de la population estudiantine. En effet, avec la présence des universités dans l'arrière-pays, beaucoup de bacheliers qui, auparavant, ne pouvaient pas se prendre en charge à Yaoundé, avaient désormais la possibilité de prendre une inscription dans l'université de leur région d'origine. Il s'agit là d'une conséquence que beaucoup de nos informateurs ont qualifié de « positive », car d'après eux, « avec la suppression de la bourse à l'université, il devenait très difficile pour les parents de prendre en charge le loyer et la nutrition du jeune bachelier dans la ville de Yaoundé. C'était un soulagement de pouvoir étudier dans les provinces »<sup>9</sup>. Un « soulagement » partagé par les dirigeants du pays qui pouvaient se réjouir d'avoir atteint leur objectif de disperser les étudiants sur toute l'étendue du territoire national.

Il est important de noter que cette réforme de l'enseignement supérieur camerounais a eu cours parallèlement au retour du pluralisme politique au Cameroun et faisait suite à la jeune « démocratie » naissante. Au Cameroun comme dans les autres pays africains, ce qu'on a appelé et que l'on continue d'appeler « démocratie », a été un système poli- tique « instauré » à un moment donné par les puissances néo-colonisatrices. Alors que la démocratie véritable doit être la résultante d'une lutte nationaliste, d'une culture démocratique progressivement acquise, elle a été, dans le contexte africain, un « décret », une décision prise en dehors de tout processus d'émulation interne. L'avènement de la « démocratie », tout comme celle de la « réforme universitaire », n'a pas été un projet de société, préparé et mûri d'avance. L'euphorie de cette jeune « démocratie » était assimilable à celle des « indépendances » de 1960. C'est dans cette euphorie que l'espace social a connu l'émergence des slogans de « liberté d'expression », de « liberté d'association », etc. L'appropriation de ces idéaux de démocratie par une population estudiantine toujours plus grande n'a pas été sans répercussions sur la nouvelle vision des choses. Evoluant désormais dans un contexte de « démocratie » qui faisait penser à la notion de liberté, les étudiants camerounais, dans leur vécu quotidien, n'ont pas expérimenté ces idéaux de liberté tant prônés par les défenseurs de la « jeune démocratie » naissante qui, quelques années après, a arboré le qualificatif de « démocratie avancée »<sup>10</sup>.

En créant plusieurs universités, l'État camerounais n'a pas déployé les moyens nécessaires à leur entretien. Les infrastructures universitaires (salles de classes, amphithéâtres, équipe- ments des laboratoires, logements universitaires, etc.), mais aussi le personnel enseignant, font cruellement défaut dans les universités camerounaises. Sur les campus, le vécu quotidien des étudiants ne correspond pas à leurs attentes. Dans le passé, nous révèle cet informateur, « les jeunes partis d'opposition critiquaient beaucoup le régime en disant que le gouvernement abandonnait les enfants »<sup>11</sup>. Cet « abandon » était prévisible, compte tenu de la « logique » qui a sous-tendu la création de ces universités périphériques. Comme mentionné plus haut, il s'agissait avant tout d'une action politique ponctuelle, et non d'un projet de société conçu et préparé à l'avance. Tout porte à croire que dans les pays africains, les régimes en place ont du mal à encourager la recherche. N'est-ce pas là un problème d'idéologie qui renforce l'idée absurde selon laquelle la recherche ne serait pas l'apanage de l'africain ? C'est dans un tel contexte de psychose dans la société universitaire que la gestion des libertés académiques soulève des « questions sociologiques » dignes d'un intérêt scientifique.

## Les libertés académiques en question et leur gestion au Cameroun

Le présent travail n'a pas la prétention de fournir un listing exhaustif des libertés académiques. La présentation de quelques-unes permettra de dresser un compte-rendu scientifique de leur gestion dans le système d'enseignement supérieur camerounais. Il sera question ici d'étudier la gestion des libertés les plus élémentaires, comme : *le respect de la pensée libre au sein de l'université, le respect des droits des étudiants à recevoir tous les enseignements, le respect du mérite académique*<sup>12</sup>.

*Le droit pour les étudiants de faire grève* fait également partie des libertés académiques. La gestion de cette franchise académique dans le contexte camerounais, au regard des expériences de 2005 dans les universités du Cameroun, méritera dans la présente analyse une attention toute particulière.

### La pensée libre au sein de l'université

Siège de l'intelligentsia, l'université est en principe le lieu de la neutralité absolue dans laquelle peut se développer l'exercice d'une pensée libre et prometteuse pour le futur. Il s'agit principalement d'une impartialité vis-à-vis du politique, lequel relève de l'idéologie et donc ne tolère pas la critique. C'est dans l'université que se bâtit une société nouvelle ; pour cela, le droit à la pensée libre doit être absolu et doit passer par une prise de distance vis-à-vis du politique. Une politisation du campus universitaire conduirait à coup sûr à l'embrigadement de l'intelligentsia. En effet, « les enseignants du supérieur devraient avoir un statut leur permettant de ne pas trop dépendre du pouvoir politique. Ce dernier n'est en rien objectif » (Chindji-Kouleu 2008:211).

Dans le contexte camerounais ou africain au sud du Sahara en général, des observations empiriques à propos de la gestion de ce principe académique soulèvent des questions de nature à ne laisser aucun sociologue indifférent. En effet, des professeurs continuent d'abandonner les amphithéâtres pour se rendre aux campagnes électorales, afin de se maintenir ou conquérir des postes de nomination dans les ministères. Il apparaît en effet que le régime « démocratique » en place n'admet sous aucun prétexte que la « paix sociale » soit menacée. Une telle ambition reste louable. En revanche, une lecture objectivante de cette notion de « paix sociale » largement utilisée par les dirigeants permet de constater que le slogan de « paix » brandi dans des discours politiques, constitue en réalité une guerre qui s'attaque aux ressources de l'esprit d'émulation, de l'esprit critique des étudiants appelés à exercer la pensée libre. Les contestations estudiantines, bien que légitimes et fondées, ont (toujours) été violemment réprimandées au nom

de la sauvegarde de la « paix » et de « l'ordre public ». Mais cette « paix » et cet « ordre » dont il est question ici, passés au crible d'une objectivation sociologique, ne sont en réalité que de l'immobilisme, chantre de la pensée unique, du « totalitarisme institutionnalisé » qui tolère difficilement la faculté de la pensée libre universitaire. « Jusque dans les universités, l'esprit critique et la pluralité de vision sont persécutés ; tout conflit est étouffé et les protestataires sont traités en véritables ennemis de « l'ordre » (Mintoogue 2007:01). Cet auteur poursuit : « A l'étudiant qui se plaint et proteste, l'on croit ne pouvoir répondre qu'en lâchant des meutes de policiers à qui l'on donne licence absolue. Ces derniers peu-vent alors abattre le pauvre étudiant d'un ou de deux balles dans la tête, en plein campus, et ceci sans conséquence » (op. cit.).

Toutes ces observations permettent au sociologue de débusquer les logiques contradictoires qui structurent la gestion de l'intelligentsia dans un contexte où le politique étend ses tentacules dans toutes les sphères de la société.

### ***Le droit des étudiants de recevoir tous les enseignements***

Selon les textes officiels dans le système d'enseignement supérieur camerounais, « seules les unités de valeur ayant fait l'objet d'au moins 80 pour cent de couverture d'activités d'enseignement doivent faire l'objet d'une évaluation semestrielle ». Ces textes sont très clairs, et écrits noir sur blanc dans les annales. Or, pendant l'année 2007- 2008 dans les universités d'État du Cameroun, à l'approche des examens de fin du premier semestre, plusieurs enseignements n'étaient pas encore dispensés. Ces retards sont dus en partie aux activités parallèles que mènent les enseignants. En effet, dans le système d'enseignement supérieur camerounais, un nombre considérable d'enseignants cumulent leurs fonctions universitaires avec des postes à responsabilité dans les ministères. Ils y passent la majorité de leur temps, dans de grands bureaux climatisés et équipés de chaises roulantes, loin de la craie et de la poussière des amphithéâtres. Ils relèguent ainsi au second plan les activités de recherche et d'enseignement à l'université. Chindji-Kouleu (2008:211) à ce sujet remarque :

« Il est impossible de travailler dans un ministère, d'enseigner en même temps à l'université et de faire de la recherche. Voilà pourquoi, lorsque les professeurs d'Université qui travaillent en même temps dans un ministère changent de grade, on ne tient pas compte de leurs recherches. Si oui, ils ne pourront jamais avancer. Parfois ils délèguent des gens sur le terrain pour faire des recherches à leur place, mais on les dépiste toujours. Certains font quelques publications, mais on ne sait comment. »



Non seulement des enseignants sont aussi en poste dans des ministères, mais d'autres travaillent de façon permanente avec des organismes internationaux dits de « développement », dont on n'ignore pas la contrainte des agendas qu'ils imposent à leur personnel. Il s'agit là de la « consultance », beaucoup plus valorisée que les enseignements dans les amphithéâtres. Cet état de chose soulève encore l'épineuse question de la conscience professionnelle qui se pose dans les sociétés africaines.

Parfois, même lorsque le cours normal des enseignements a été perturbé soit par des mouvements de contestations estudiantines, soit pour des raisons qui n'engagent en rien les étudiants<sup>13</sup>, l'on est étonné que le programme des examens soit maintenu<sup>14</sup>. C'est à cause de tous ces manquements que l'on assiste à une sorte de « malaise académique et culturel » marqué par une forte prévalence de l'échec académique et d'un important taux de redoublement et d'abandon. Dans un tel contexte, le mérite académique s'en trouve profondément ébranlé.

### *Le mérite académique bafoué*

La pauvreté qui affecte les milieux des enseignants, surtout ceux de nouveaux ATER<sup>15</sup> et enseignants vacataires, a pour corollaire l'adoption par ces derniers de comportements déviants allant de la « vente pure et simple » des notes à la pratique des « notes sexuellement transmissibles ». Cet état de chose est de nature à sacrifier la méritocratie, qui est une violation flagrante de cette liberté académique.

Pour ce qui est de la « vente des notes » aux étudiants, la présente recherche sur le terrain à l'université de Yaoundé I révèle des cas où de jeunes enseignants ont été purement et simplement renvoyés pour avoir sacrifié le mérite académique en attribuant des notes à certains étudiants contre de l'argent. A ce sujet, les propos de cet étudiant de l'université de Yaoundé I sont assez révélateurs :

« Ce qui est vraiment énervant, c'est qu'il y a des étudiants qui ne sont jamais présents aux cours, mais je suis toujours très étonné de les voir valider les matières avec de très bonnes notes. Nous autres qui passons notre temps à fronter (étudier), le babillard nous déçoit toujours, alors que les étudiants-fonctionnaires avancent. Mais ce qui est sûr, ils ne méritent pas. »<sup>16</sup>

Ces propos traduisent la réalité d'une société universitaire en déliquescence, verrouillée, corrompue, où le mérite académique est relégué à l'oubli. Si d'un côté certains enseignants se prêtent à ce jeu absurde d'étudiants peu consciencieux, à l'inverse, d'autres enseignants sont eux-mêmes les initiateurs de ces déviations. La notion de « notes sexuellement transmissibles »

intervient à ce niveau. Des enseignants font malheureusement preuve d'une carence très poussée en matière d'éthique et de conscience professionnelle, en procédant parfois au harcèlement sexuel d'étudiantes<sup>17</sup>. Les plaintes de cette étudiante de l'université de Douala renseignent amplement sur ce phénomène. La jeune fille de 16 ans a décidé de porter plainte contre son professeur, et les journaux de la ville se sont saisis de l'affaire. Djonou (2010:06) reprend les propos de l'étudiante dans sa plainte :

« J'ai l'honneur de venir très respectueusement auprès de votre haute bienveillance dénoncer les abus sexuels du Professeur X<sup>18</sup> sur les étudiants de moins de 18 ans. Agée de 16 ans, j'en ai été victime plusieurs fois sous menace des points de son épreuve. Le professeur X a eu des rapports sexuels plusieurs fois dans son bureau et sa Mercedes (...). Dès qu'il couche avec toi, il t'ignore et cherche une autre, ne t'appelle plus, car lui seul détient nos numéros. Aujourd'hui, le professeur X a déjà couché avec au moins cent jeunes étudiantes de moins de 18 ans en contrepartie des notes (...). »

La plainte de cette jeune fille est révélatrice à plus d'un titre. Elle fait apparaître en effet une société universitaire dans laquelle le mérite n'a plus de valeur et dont les membres rusent avec leurs propres principes d'honnêteté intellectuelle et de conscience professionnelle. C'est un véritable déficit d'éthique qui appelle une intervention de la société universitaire sur elle-même. En scrutant les pratiques « odieuses » de cet enseignant, le sociologue a tendance à inscrire ces déviations dans une sphère qui dépasse l'entendement des hommes ordinaires. Il y a en effet lieu de s'interroger sur la « logique » d'une telle pratique. A-t-il conscience que de tels agissements vont à l'encontre des principes de respect des libertés académiques les plus évidentes ? En répondant par la négative à cette question, il y a lieu de s'interroger sur le devenir du système d'enseignement supérieur camerounais et africain. En privilégiant le sexe au détriment du mérite des étudiants, une partie importante de diplômés de l'enseignement supérieur brilleront sans doute par des lacunes de nature à discréditer l'image de tout un pays sur la scène internationale. Face à toutes ces violations flagrantes, l'étudiant qui est rarement invité à la table des négociations n'a que la « grève » comme ultime recours.

## **Le déploiement des grèves en question sur le terrain**

### ***Les méthodes d'actions estudiantines***

A la lumière des informations glanées sur le terrain, il ressort que l'histoire des grèves estudiantines au Cameroun a été une histoire de violents mouvements de contestations marqués par des comportements parfois antisociaux de la part des « grévistes »<sup>19</sup>. Incendie des véhicules administratifs, destruction du matériel de travail, barrage des routes avec pneus brûlés, etc., en sont quelques

exemples. Le souvenir des « moments chauds » en 1991 à l'université de Yaoundé reste vivace à l'esprit. La grève des étudiants à cette période a poussé les autorités gouvernementales à réfléchir sur ce qui deviendra un an après, de façon tout à fait « accidentelle », la réforme universitaire du Cameroun.

Ces méthodes violentes sont aujourd'hui dépassées. Appelés à donner leurs définitions de la notion de « grève », les étudiants rencontrés sur les campus au Cameroun émettent des perceptions qui assimilent la grève à « *une revendication sage des droits* ». Ils déclarent, à l'instar de cet étudiant, que :

« Faire grève de nos jours, c'est d'abord réfléchir sur la méthode à adopter. La grève pour réussir, je ne pense pas qu'elle doit être nécessairement violente. On peut bel et bien réclamer ou défendre une cause dans le calme, et se faire entendre. C'est d'ailleurs ce que fait l'ADDEC depuis sa création, et je pense que c'est une très bonne chose (...). »<sup>20</sup>

En effet, comme le souligne cet étudiant, l'Association pour la Défense des Droits des Étudiants du Cameroun prône plutôt la « non-violence » aujourd'hui et forme tout un système, c'est-à-dire un « ensemble de relations qui se nouent entre les membres plus ou moins interdépendants d'une organisation » (Lazega 1994:294). Cette organisation regroupe en effet des membres dispersés dans toutes les universités d'État du Cameroun. S'inspirant de la méthode de Gandhi, de Martin Luther King et autres, les fondateurs de l'ADDEC étaient animés par la volonté entre autres, « *d'œuvrer à l'accomplissement des libertés académiques* »<sup>21</sup>. L'enjeu principal ici était d'engager le gouvernement du Cameroun à constater et à reconnaître l'échec de la réforme de 1993 et de poser les jalons d'une université nouvelle sur une base concertée.

Cette option de la non-violence a valu à l'ADDEC le soutien des puissances étrangères, comme les États-Unis d'Amérique et la France. En effet, les États-Unis d'Amérique se sont ralliés à la cause des étudiants camerounais à travers l'ADDEC à la suite des mouvements de contestation qui ont secoué les universités du Cameroun en 2005. Le 26 novembre 2007, dans les locaux de la chancellerie de l'ambassade des États-Unis d'Amérique à Yaoundé, a eu lieu une cérémonie au cours de laquelle l'ambassadeur des USA remettait à l'ADDEC une convention de financement. Ce soutien des Américains vise à encourager les étudiants à privilégier la non-violence comme méthode de revendication de leurs droits. Il s'agit de faire grandir la « culture démocratique » en milieux estudiantins, ce qui leur permettra de s'approprier les méthodes modernes de revendication et de plaider dignes de toute société de droit. C'est ainsi que du 1er au 7 février 2007, sur financement de l'ambassade des États-Unis d'Amérique, s'est tenu à Yaoundé un séminaire de formation de 50 leaders estudiantins au « *plaidoyer, au lobbying, et aux méthodes de revendication non-violentes* ».

Un autre séminaire de formation s'est tenu peu de temps après le premier, cette fois-ci avec le soutien apporté par le gouvernement français. Cette formation a été consacrée au « *renforcement des capacités des étudiants en matière de contrôle et de suivi de la gestion des budgets des universités publiques* ». Une telle initiative renseigne sur l'incapacité des mécanismes étatiques quant à la gestion rigoureuse et rationnelle des fonds alloués pour les universités. Avec l'appui du gouvernement français, cette gestion ne sera plus seulement l'apanage des seules institutions étatiques, mais elle va intégrer la société civile universitaire.

Bien que ces initiatives des puissances étrangères en faveur des étudiants soient de nature à inquiéter ou à ébranler la sérénité des pouvoirs administratifs camerounais, il reste constant, d'un point de vue réaliste, qu'elles s'inscrivent indubitablement dans la reconnaissance et la valorisation de la méthode de la « Non-violence » adoptée par les étudiants. La non-violence chez les étudiants se manifeste depuis ces dernières années par des grèves de la faim, des marches de protestation sur les campus avec pancartes et arborant des vêtements noirs (Voir document photographique ci-dessous).

Les étudiants lors de la grève de 2005 à l'université de Yaoundé I (Cameroun)



Source : Enquête de terrain, Yaoundé.

Une analyse de contenu du document iconographique ci-dessus permet d'accéder à sa « *dimension invisible* » (Nga Ndong 1993:08). Elle est assez révélatrice d'une contestation pacifique. L'image présente des étudiants,

tous de noirs vêtus en signe de deuil, de tristesse. Bravant la pluie, ils se serrent les coudes, se tiennent fortement par les mains et expriment leurs revendications<sup>22</sup> sur le campus. Cette image traduit la solidarité qui habite ces jeunes étudiants en quête d'une société universitaire nouvelle ; une société dans laquelle les libertés les plus élémentaires devront être respectées.

### **La gestion des grèves par les responsables académiques et gouvernementaux**

Face à la méthode non-violente des étudiants, les autorités n'hésitent pas à envoyer sur les campus des policiers ayant pour mission de « *disperser les attroupements* ». La présence des policiers sur le campus n'est pas sans effet sur les masses. En réalité, elle est stratégique. Une telle stratégie de l'acteur (Crozier et Friedberg 1977) gouvernemental se lit sous le propos de cet étudiant : « *La police veut nous provoquer pour pouvoir frapper après. Comme cela on pourra dire que nous sommes violents et faire oublier nos revendications* » (Ketchateng 2005:04). Il s'agit là d'un recours à l'intimidation qui, dans certains cas, débouche sur une véritable répression policière très violente. Nkonlak (2005:04) livre ici le témoignage d'un étudiant de la Faculté des Sciences de l'université de Yaoundé I, pendant la grève : « *J'ai vu une fille tomber devant moi, parce qu'elle a reçu des gaz lacrymogènes* ». Les étudiants ont une fois été pourchassés jusque dans leurs chambres dans les quartiers, hors du campus de Yaoundé I. A l'université de Buéa, ce sont tous les étudiants du campus de Molyko qui se souviennent de la date du 25 avril 2005. Ce jour, trois des leurs sont tombés sous les balles des policiers, « *forces de maintien de l'ordre et de la paix* ». Ils participaient à une manifestation pacifique au sein de leur campus, pour revendiquer l'amélioration de leurs conditions d'études. Cette tragédie a été à l'origine de ce poème, conçu et écrit par un étudiant de la Faculté des Arts, Lettres et Sciences Humaines de l'université de Yaoundé I, dont voici in extenso le contenu :

Honneur aux martyrs ! A Aloysius EMBWAM

A Gilbert FORLEM et les Autres !

Qui ont payé de leur sang le dialogue républicain, Qui ont prêté leur vie à la vie du combat estudiantin.

A tous ceux qui à Molyko ont brutalement trouvé l'éternel repos,

A tous, nous disons Merci, Merci et leur tirons un coup de chapeau.

C'était en terme de temps, il n'y a pas une éternité ! Seulement un quinté, un quinté de tirs criblant des génies révoltés, C'était à Molyko, d'où nous parvient encore le pire écho,

L'écho de leurs cris innocents cintrés très tôt à l'échafaud. Faut-il encore que les armes de nos trésors nous assassinent ? Si tel est le cas, que la bravoure de nos faims, S'enracine ! Merci à Aloysius EMBWAM

Merci à Gilbert FORLEM et les Autres !  
Merci à la douleur millénaire de leurs frères mamans, Ces mères qui sur le chemin du savoir ont perdu leur sang.  
Ces mamans dont les enfants viennent d'être avortés, Pleurent leurs fleurs-fils de la maternité à l'université.  
Je pleure de cinquante mille pleurs dans le campus des larmes de famille, Pour signifier aux lousp-vêtus que les révoltés ne sont pas des chenilles.  
De l'exil prématuré de leurs âmes,  
Je retiens sans faille l'éternel verset de leur commune soutane :  
« Vaincre sans haine », telle est désormais la molécule de nos tisanes. Merci à la générosité de ces cop's qui meurent pour revivre dans l'immortalité. Dans l'obscurité, comme la luciole, j'éclaire leurs pas innocents,  
Sans dire la vérité de ma haine à leurs assassins frères de sang.  
Hourrah aux héros qui s'en vont !  
Dans l'atroce regret vespéral de leur fatale abolition,  
Je vide l'encre pour semer l'ancre de ma totale détermination. Pour ces fils de misère qui n'ont connu que des heures sévères, Disons aux cimetières de leur juste guerre,  
Que la terre du berceau de nos ancêtres, Pour l'éternité, leur soit légère.  
Richard DJIMELI

Au cœur de ce poème se lit le désespoir d'une jeunesse « chosifiée » et méprisée. Il s'agit d'une jeunesse dont « *l'entrée dans la vie* » (Galland 1991) est tumultueuse, chaotique, si elle n'est pas brutalement stoppée par certaines volontés de puissance. Il y a lieu de s'interroger sur le devenir de cette jeunesse universitaire, « *fer de lance de la nation* »<sup>23</sup>, dont les ripostes ont toujours été celles du « monde d'en-bas » (Ela 1998), celles des individus marginaux.

La crise qui a secoué les universités d'État du Cameroun en 2005 a connu des modes d'approche spécifiques de la part des autorités du pays. Les formes privilégiées d'approche de cette crise, tant au niveau universitaire que gouvernemental, ont été « *la stigmatisation des grévistes de la faim, la manipulation de l'opinion, le recours à l'intimidation, à la ré-pression, au dilatoire et à la corruption* » (ADDEC 2005:02). Si à la fin de la crise, un dialogue s'est instauré, il reste pertinent de constater qu'il s'est agi d'un dialogue biaisé. En effet, il demeure constant d'un point de vue de la sociologie critique, que la gestion de cette crise, surtout par les autorités gouvernementales et universitaires, a traduit un réel « malaise dans la gouvernance », qui met les différents acteurs au défi.

## **La récurrence des grèves estudiantines : un défi pour la gouvernance universitaire et étatique**

Au regard de l'instabilité qui caractérise les campus des universités d'État, instabilité marquée par la récurrence des mouvements de contestations estudiantines, il n'est ni superflu, ni exagéré de dire que « *l'université va très mal* » (ADDEC 2005). Ce malaise se ressent non seulement dans le nombre de grèves qui ont eu cours dans les universités d'État du Cameroun, mais aussi dans les causes de ces grèves et les stratégies de gestion mises sur pied par les dirigeants du pays. En effet, dans un contexte où le politique est omniprésent dans toutes les sphères de la société, plusieurs défis interpellent la gouvernance universitaire qui doit se tenir à l'écart de toute idéologie partisane.

Le tout premier défi est celui de la valorisation et de l'application des idéaux de la pensée libre au sein des universités. La crise de la pensée caractérise nombre d'universités africaines. Il s'agit en réalité d'une crise qui est à redouter plus que la crise économique. Refuser de penser, persécuter la pensée libre, prôner une pensée unique, penser à la place de l'intelligentsia, ou encore reporter la pensée à plus tard, tels sont les symptômes d'une société « atteinte », d'une société « moribonde », d'une « société bloquée ». En effet, dans toute société moderne, l'université apparaît toujours comme le cadre par excellence où se forge une société nouvelle. C'est le cadre indiqué dans lequel la pluralité des opinions impulse les moteurs historiques du progrès et du changement. Le véritable défi qui interpelle l'élite dirigeante, c'est d'asseoir un modèle de gestion des universités qui intègre la notion de « conflit social » dans toute sa pesanteur sociologique, et celle de la pluralité d'opinions. Les autorités politiques, en voulant à tout prix afficher l'image d'une « société totalement pacifiée » où tout désaccord estudiantin serait synonyme de « menace à la paix », seraient en train d'obstruer toute perspective d'avenir pour le pays tout entier. Les étudiants qui contesteraient « l'ordre », devraient être compris et écoutés. Ils ne devraient plus être considérés comme des « partisans du chaos », des « ennemis de la nation », des « anti-citoyens », ou encore des « détracteurs de l'unité nationale ». En réalité, « nulle part on ne peut décrire des sociétés stables. Partout les sociétés sont en mutation » (Georges 1980:06). Or, le « dissensus », la contradiction, bref le conflit, sont consubstantiels au processus normal de mutation sociale. L'historicité de la société universitaire, dans la gestion des libertés académiques, met aux prises des acteurs aux logiques contradictoires. Le mouvement de grève, impulsé par les étudiants en situation d'inconforts multiples, se heurte au « mouvement » contraire de conservation de l'idéologie dominante.

Il est difficile, d'un point de vue pratique, d'ignorer que, dans le contexte africain comme partout ailleurs, l'université, tout en étant le siège de

l'intelligentsia, n'échappe pas aux filets de l'idéologie dominante. En effet, « l'université est une usine de la stratification sociale globale, des rapports de productions existants et du discours normé (...). Les classes dominantes y recrutent leurs intellectuels organiques, leurs cadres opérationnels » (Ziegler 1981:78-79). Ce recrutement des cadres opérationnels, n'étant pas l'apanage de tous les jeunes étudiants, favorise dès lors une « lutte des stratégies », à l'issue de laquelle le jeune doit se positionner. De tels positionnements se sont souvent faits sur fond de trahison des anciens camarades de lutte. L'illustration la plus évidente est celle des « briseurs de grèves », qui, en obéissant au régime, sont à la recherche de

« positionnements », ou tout simplement de moyens ponctuels de survie. Pour quelques milliers de francs, le jeune pourtant si engagé pour la cause noble, devient très rapidement « l'intellectuel organique » du régime. C'est la violation des libertés académiques par l'instrumentalisation de la misère matérielle des étudiants. Il s'agit là des contradictions à surmonter à la fois par la conscience estudiantine et par les autorités gouvernementales qui ont fait de la lutte contre la « corruption », leur cheval de bataille.

D'autres défis interpellent également les acteurs de la « crise ». Au niveau du campus universitaire, la nécessité pour les autorités d'assurer de bonnes conditions de travail aux enseignants et aux étudiants se pose. Dans les amphithéâtres en effet, ce n'est pas dans la sérénité que les cours sont dispensés, en raison du manque criant d'enseignants et à la vétusté prononcée des équipements et des infrastructures. Des efforts sont actuellement déployés dans le sens du renouvellement des infrastructures ; mais ils restent à intensifier. Très rapidement après la réforme de 1993, l'assistance aux étudiants sous forme de bourses d'études a été suspendue et les étudiants devraient désormais payer cinquante mille francs CFA de droits universitaires. Toutes ces frustrations s'accroissent dans un contexte où l'étudiant est en face de la « toute puissance » des dirigeants qui ne lui accordent guère un espace ou une tribune où il peut s'exprimer librement et faire valoir ses revendications. De toute évidence, les dirigeants d'universités, au plus haut niveau, sont en réalité des acteurs politiques qui occupent des fonctions au sein de l'institution universitaire. En exerçant la fonction de recteur d'université par exemple, il est difficile de développer une même conception des libertés académiques que les étudiants ou les enseignants. En effet, dans sa posture, il exerce également une fonction « politique » qui lui procure des avantages auxquels il tient absolument.

L'une des récentes innovations dans l'enseignement supérieur africain, est l'adoption du système « LMD » (Licence- Master- Doctorat). Cette idée, essentiellement occidentale, a été adoptée à Bologne en 1999 (« Le



processus de Bologne »), puis confirmée à Prague par trente-deux États en mai 2001. Depuis, elle a fait l'objet de plusieurs publications, au regard des turpitudes et des embûches qui jalonnent son chemin sur le sol africain. Dans la Revue trimestrielle du ministère camerounais de l'Enseignement supérieur (2007), tout un dossier a été consacré à la question. Il s'agissait entre autres, de montrer les mérites du système LMD à travers sa devise : « Un étudiant, un emploi ». Dans la même Revue, l'un des responsables de l'université de Yaoundé II considère le système LMD comme une « chance » pour les étudiants. Selon le ministre camerounais de l'Enseignement supérieur, « le LMD apparaît comme une nouvelle donne éducative par laquelle l'Université, à travers ses missions et ses activités d'enseignement, de recherche et de formation professionnelle initiale et continue, retrouve sa vocation originelle » (Fame Ndong 2007:07).

Une telle euphorie de la nouveauté risque de cacher les entorses souterraines à l'application immédiate de ce système dans le contexte africain. L'université africaine quant à elle, est « à la croisée des chemins » (Lamoure Rontopoulou 1994). C'est une institution universitaire « en crise ». Le ratio enseignants-étudiants n'est pas très réconfortant. Le manque d'infrastructures est alarmant. Bref, l'université africaine se déploie dans un environnement assez précaire. C'est dans ce contexte de crise que l'université africaine procède à une « adoption brusque du système LMD » (Pefedieu Doulie 2008). Or ce système se caractérise par un certain nombre de contraintes liées à la qualité des enseignements et des enseignants, aux conditions de travail au quotidien, etc. En effet,

« Un diagnostic sociologique des universités du Cameroun montre que malgré la volonté politique et l'engouement des responsables académiques, l'adoption du modèle LMD apparaît bien "prématurée". L'environnement universitaire camerounais reste "éclaté" et précaire, dominé par un embrigadement des libertés académiques. » (Djouda Feudjio 2009:141).

Tous ces manquements, à l'heure de la réforme LMD, sont de nature à occasionner des mouvements de contestation dans les milieux estudiantins, et posent ainsi un nouveau défi à relever par les pouvoirs en place. D'ailleurs, face à une telle nouveauté tant appréciée théoriquement par les dirigeants, des « questions sociologiques » se font jour. Pourquoi des régimes politiques qui ont du mal à tolérer des libertés académiques sont-ils si pressés d'appliquer la réforme LMD ? Quels intérêts y trouvent-ils ? Quel étudiant, digne du système LMD, peut-on produire dans une précarité palpable ? Sans dénier les mérites de la réforme LMD, il reste que toutes ces contradictions produisent une victime : le jeune étudiant, qui doit en même temps avoir la liberté de se plaindre. Les autorités universitaires et

étatiques, en concertation permanente avec les étudiants, ont à n'en point douter, matière à défricher.

Les développements qui précèdent permettent de comprendre amplement que, dans le contexte africain, l'enseignement supérieur se présente comme un système dans lequel les « constructions auto-conservatrices » (Roig 1970:50) ne favorisent pas l'émergence d'une pluralité d'opinions, d'une pensée critique de l'intelligentsia. Celle-ci viendrait compromettre les mécanismes de « reproduction » (Bourdieu 1971) sociale construits par le régime. Il y a de fortes raisons de croire que les dirigeants de la société universitaire agissent en « conservateurs des idéologies périmées, voire en critiques méprisants des idées nouvelles » (Touraine 1984:33). Faire œuvre d'intellectuel authentique dans ces conditions devient progressivement « un risque réel » (Djouda Feudjio 2009:141). On ne peut pas nier les efforts qui sont faits aujourd'hui dans la société africaine au niveau des différentes libertés<sup>24</sup> dans l'espace public. Ces libertés gagneraient à intégrer le milieu universitaire, qui est d'ailleurs le cadre par excellence de leur déploiement. Les nouvelles générations sont appelées à innover. En principe, « pour qu'il se produise des nouveautés dans la vie sociale, il ne suffit pas que des générations nouvelles arrivent à la lumière, il faut encore qu'elles ne soient pas trop fortement entraînées à suivre les errements de leurs devanciers » (Attias-Donfut 1988:23). Le jeune universitaire qui, à 25 ans, découvre par l'exercice de sa pensée critique que l'histoire de son pays telle qu'elle lui a été enseignée à l'école primaire et au lycée, était en réalité une histoire falsifiée et tronquée, ne peut rien faire d'autre que de s'interroger, se plaindre, car il a désormais pleine conscience d'évoluer dans « une société aux repères ambigus » (Zambo Belinga 2003). Dans ces conditions de tensions palpables, en cessant de criminaliser la différence, en renonçant à la marginalisation de la pensée critique et libre, l'on assisterait indubitablement à une refondation des bases idéologiques de la société africaine.

## Notes

1. Le concept de génération n'est pas à prendre ici dans sa seule composante « âge », car on retrouve bel et bien des personnes d'âge avancé dans le statut d'étudiant, et des personnes moins âgées dans le statut de dirigeant. La notion de « *génération* » devient ainsi une « *construction* » (Corcuff, 1995) du chercheur qui inscrit ces acteurs dans une dynamique de force précise au sein du système d'enseignement supérieur camerounais. Il s'est agi de conceptualiser la notion de génération en la liant à la notion du changement social.
2. Nous spécifions cette catégorie d'étudiants pour les distinguer des étudiants membres de l'ADDEC, qui ont décidé de poursuivre certains objectifs spécifiques dans la défense des droits des étudiants. Les étudiants dits « ordinaires » sont ceux rencontrés de façon aléatoire sur les campus universitaires.

3. Association pour la Défense des Droits des Étudiants, créée le 31 mars 2004 à l'issue d'une concertation populaire ayant regroupé près d'un millier d'étudiants à l'amphi 502 de l'université de Yaoundé I (Cameroun). De par son statut juridique, cette association a été enregistrée à la préfecture du Mfoundi (Yaoundé) sous le numéro 2438 le 05/08/04. Elle est donc, conformément à la loi n° 90/053 du 19 décembre 1990 portant sur la liberté d'association, légale depuis le 4 octobre 2004. (Données obtenues au siège de l'association à Yaoundé).
4. Un exemple de question-filtre : « *Êtes-vous étudiant dans cette université ?* ».
5. Les données ont été collectées à l'université de Yaoundé I et à l'université de Dschang (Ouest-Cameroun).
6. C'est de la socio-anthropologie fondamentale telle que préconisée par les travaux de Jean-Pierre Olivier De Sardan. En effet, cet auteur pense que « *les pratiques populaires ont un sens qu'il convient de chercher* ». Autrement dit, c'est le contact réel avec le terrain qui « *révèle* », au sens de Georges Balandier, la « *dynamique* » réelle du système social. Lire justement à ce sujet Jean-Pierre Olivier De Sardan : *Anthropologie et développement. Essai en socio-anthropologie du changement social*, Paris, Karthala, 1995, p. 10.
7. Nous remercions particulièrement Monsieur Richard DJIMELI, étudiant à la faculté des Arts, Lettres et Sciences Humaines de l'université de Yaoundé I, qui a gracieusement mis à notre disposition un poème rédigé par lui-même, ainsi qu'une photo prise pendant la grève de 2005 à l'université de Yaoundé I.
8. A savoir la faculté de Droit et la faculté des Sciences économiques et de gestion.
9. Propos d'un enseignant de l'université de Dschang, rencontré dans la ville de Dschang.
10. Il s'agit ici d'une expression qui a alimenté les discours politiques de façon prépondérante dans les années 1993 et 1997 au Cameroun.
11. Propos d'un enseignant de l'université de Yaoundé II, rencontré à Yaoundé.
12. Il convient de préciser que cette liste est loin d'être exhaustive.
13. Il peut s'agir ici par exemple d'une grève du corps enseignant. Le Syndicat National des Enseignants du Supérieur (SYNES) a été créé pour coordonner les mouvements de contestation des enseignants des universités du Cameroun.
14. C'est ce qu'on a observé dans les universités de Buéa et de Douala en 2007. Le programme des examens dans ces universités y a été maintenu après des perturbations considérables sur fond de grève, qui ont coûté la vie à six étudiants camerounais.
15. Ces Attachés d'Enseignements et de Recherche (ATER) et ces enseignants vacataires ne jouissent pas d'une situation financière consistante.
16. Entretien de terrain à Yaoundé.
17. Un cas récent a retenu l'attention de la communauté universitaire au Cameroun. Une étudiante a enregistré, grâce à son portable, une conversation avec l'un de ses enseignants de l'École Normale Supérieure qui exigeait d'accéder à l'intimité de cette jeune fille, avant de la « *laisser soutenir* » son mémoire. La réaction des autorités universitaires, très louable, a été sans appel : l'enseignant en question a été radié du corps enseignant des universités.

18. Le chercheur a préféré taire le nom du professeur en question. Nous précisons néanmoins que l'intéressé est vice-doyen et chef de département dans une université du pays.
19. Au nombre de ceux-ci à cette époque, relèvent nos informateurs, on pouvait trouver des « sauveteurs » (vendeurs à la sauvette) qui venaient se mêler aux étudiants pour donner une envergure plus grande au mouvement à travers des comportements très violents.
20. Propos d'un étudiant de l'université de Yaoundé I. Entretien de terrain à Yaoundé.
21. Propos d'un des vice-présidents de l'ADDEC. Entretien de terrain à Yaoundé.
22. Les pancartes sur lesquelles on pouvait lire les revendications des étudiants auraient été placées à l'abri de la pluie, au moment où cette photo était prise.
23. Cette expression est largement utilisée par les autorités politiques du Cameroun, pour désigner la jeunesse. Il s'agit bien entendu ici d'une jeunesse conformiste, qui ne se prête pas à la contestation, même en cas de nécessité.
24. Notamment la liberté de la presse. Celle-ci a joué un rôle de premier plan lors des grèves qui ont paralysé les universités d'État du Cameroun en 2005, en réaction à la manipulation orchestrée par les médias d'État.

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## **Repression of Academic Freedom in Gambia : An Interview with the Student Union**

Zeynabou Kane\*

### **Résumé**

En Décembre 2014, le CODESRIA, fidèle à sa tradition de défense de la liberté académique sur le continent africain, et à l'esprit de la Déclaration de Kampala sur la liberté intellectuelle et la responsabilité sociale, a rencontré des étudiants gambiens qui sont aussi des syndicalistes. Nous avons pris l'occasion d'avoir un long entretien avec eux, traçant leurs batailles et d'aventures, l'environnement de la liberté académique et des droits humains en Gambie.

**Mots-clés :** Gambie, Syndicalisme, Liberté académique, Violence

### **Abstract**

In December 2014, CODESRIA, true to its tradition of defence of academic freedom on the African continent, and in the spirit of the Kampala Declaration on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility met with some Gambian Students Union leaders and took the opportunity to have a long interview with them, tracing their battles and adventures, while exploring the environment of academic freedom and human rights in the Gambia.

**Keywords:** Gambia, unionism, academic freedom, violence

*Pax Academica (P. A.): What is NAPSA and who can become a member of NAPSA?*

*Gambian Students (G. S.): NAPSA is the National Patriotic Students Association of Gambia. G. S.: Many have doubts about NAPSA and always ask who can become a member of NAPSA. It is a body that is put in place to address the welfare of students ranging from Grade 1 to grade 12. Anyone who is within the cohort of basic and secondary education is a*

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member of NAPSA, either as an active or passive member of NAPSA. Those who attend NAPSA activities and meetings constantly are the ones we call the active members and those who do not attend the activities of NAPSA at school level are the passive members. Those who are passive members directly benefit from the activities of NAPSA at the school level.

P. A.: *What made you decide to adhere to NAPSA?*

G. S.: As a student and a citizen of the Gambia, I went to a lot of activities that NAPSA organized and that inspired me to become a member of NAPSA. I became an active member for three years, before becoming a top executive.

I attended a lot of activities and gained a lot of opportunities to showcase my talent; that motivated me to work harder and harder until I became an executive member.

P. A.: *How did you get promoted from a member to a top executive of NAPSA?*

G. S.: To become an executive member, one has to go through congress. Students from various states are invited where they gather for three days and are placed under scrutiny. Students who want to stand for any portfolio come out and showcase to the students what they can do, by convincing them to vote you in as an executive.

I won't say it's because of the good work I have been doing, perhaps they have seen something different from the work I can do. I was the Public Relations Officer for the entire country from lower basic to senior secondary school. In the beginning, I served as a corporate executive member for six months. Later I was promoted to be the Assistant Public Relations Officer for a year, after which I became the Public Relations Officer of NAPSA. It's all about your relationship with the Gambian students. As a Public Relations Officer, I think that I was in a better position to filter the message to the grassroots level, as well as being able to convince students to go for what is in the interest of students and in the interest of us all as young people in taking the mantle of leadership in the country.

P. A.: *On what issues does NAPSA work?*

G. S.: NAPSA works on various issues starting from capacity building programmes. Every year we have what we call capacity building programmes whereby we talk to students

and we are able to train them on leadership. We also have what we call career development: one of our main targets is how to inculcate a high level of discipline within and among students. We believe that in whatever we do, discipline must be something that we put ahead. We equally give scholarships to needy students, most especially the disabled, and we have what we call *Nationwide Talk* where we talk to students about issues of sexual harassment. We also talk to them about use of drugs as students, and teacher–student intimate relationships which were becoming very rampant. We also talk to them about examination malpractice and organize debates and competitions in both senior and open basic schools. We organize as well competitions where we see how students showcase their talents because we have a programme that is called *Every Student Has a Talent*. These are the areas we embark on; there are other areas that my friend will also elaborate on.

P. A.: *Does NAPSA improve the studying conditions of the students of Gambia?*

G. S.: There was a time when the issue of idling was rampant, and students were not taking their studies seriously. We have covered all those areas. We have worked the length and breadth of the country. We have talked to students and made them love their books. We have made them feel that education is the most paramount thing for each and every young person. We talked to the Ministry about reform areas that students would benefit from like the area of their studies and need for even libraries. There are libraries in some schools that are not being utilized. We made sure that the Ministry of Education developed all those areas.

P. A.: *What influence does NAPSA have among the students of the Gambia?*

G. S.: We made sure we were there for them where nobody would address their issues. We made sure we promoted them. We made sure that they had a face of leadership and understood the importance of education.

P. A.: *Did you have the freedom to do your job before [President Yahya] Jammeh sought your help for re-election?*

G. S.: There are lots of challenges in our work. In some regions students are poor and mobility is a problem – they were walking miles to get to school, and meals were also a problem at school.



The studying conditions in Banjul and other regions are totally different and the Ministry of Education had programmes in Banjul only. We also had the Africa integration campaign with some countries of the sub-region such as Guinea Bissau and the Ministry of Education thought that we were campaigning against Jammeh.

These problems limit the level of concentration of students in class. We did that study and afterwards we had to confront the Ministry to explain the issues to them. After confronting the Ministry we were campaigning on what we call decentralization because it musn't be like we work only in Banjul. We must also look to those who are in the provinces where the majority of poor people live. After confronting the Ministry, they provided donkey carts for transport to school. The problem the students had was that taking a bus was risky because the road condition wasn't good. Moreover, paying the transportation fares was expensive for them. The challenges we were facing regarding students' needs were huge and not easy to handle. We once had a programme that we called *Integration* to bring together students from Banjul and other provinces along with representatives of all political parties. We wanted people to know and be aware of the development agenda of those who are leading us; we wanted to have an open discussion about anything dealing with the development of the country. In the latter part, all that we received from the Office of the President was to limit our movements to the four corners of the class. That was a great challenge and at some point when we wanted to get to certain places, mobility was a problem and at our own level, we had to limit our size to the 'corn' we had in our own hand. We did not know what kind of information was given to other institutions, but whenever we requested for help from the Ministry of Education, they would tell us they are waiting for X or Y to be able to do this. It was difficult but still we were moving on and trying to deal with it. Later we had to change from using government money in our programmes and we wrote to institutions, and Kanifing Municipal County that supported us and other regional offices to seek support whenever we wanted to embark on programmes in their regions.

P. A.: *What kind of help did Jammeh want from you?*

G. S.: Initially in 2011, he wanted us to campaign for him for his re-election. He didn't want to help us but wanted support from us. We wrote to him before he asked for our support and gave him our budget which was 300,000 plus Gambian Dalasi (about 7,000 US\$). It was the first year we were supposed to have our congress. Jammeh asked Fatumata Jahumpa Ceesay to confront us. She once worked at the general assembly and now works for the party of Jammeh, the APRC (Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction). When she confronted us, we refused to campaign for him because it's not in our mandate to work for any political party. Furthermore, students belong to different political parties (there are about four political parties in the Gambia) and if we supported him, students would not come on board. We decided that we must be neutral in what we are doing. After that, he invited us and we had to send our credentials to his office. We dealt with the Gambian secret service, the NIA (National Intelligence Agency). In the Gambia anybody, even the housemaids, can be working for the NIA, so one has to be very careful about whom they are talking to. When the papers were sent to his office, they were transferred to the director of the NIA, who acknowledged receipt. We told them that in whatever we do, we sit and discuss it; there is no interest on our part to serve as NIA officers. We sought advice from different people and we went forward and rejected it.

Secondly, he wanted us to provide names of 500 students that would support his campaign to be a king. Although he is a dictator and wins election, there is international pressure and a lot of doubt about how he wins his elections. He wanted us there for him to prove his credibility. He wanted to use people on the ground to speak for him.

P. A.: *Why did you refuse to assist him?*

G. S.: You can't trust anyone, not even your own relatives. We dared to challenge him because we had the support of the young people and we have proved why we cannot do this. Our association doesn't belong to Yahya Jammeh or his party, APRC, but rather, is serving the interests of students. The association was labelled before our tenure as an association of Yahya Jammeh because previous NAPSA executives had

worked as NIA officers and he gave them scholarships and other international appointments to go and spy on embassies. We don't want to be victims of this and we don't want to work for Jammeh or APRC. That is the answer that was given to him, which did not please him.

P. A.: *What did Jammeh do when you refused to assist him?*

G. S.: What he did was to accuse us of embezzlement in 2011 and claim that we had sent false documents to his office. For that, we got arrested.

P. A.: *On what account were you charged when you got arrested?*

G. S.: The charges were submission of false documents and conspiracy to commit a felony against the President's office. At that point in time, our congress budget was in his office. He sent that congress budget to the office of the Inspector General of Police (IGP) for investigation and dealt with anybody who had something to do with it. All the ten men executives of NAPSA were arrested. They accused us of conspiracy, knowing this is an association and there's no executive director to make decisions – we discuss together and make decisions unanimously and send documents to wherever we have to send them to. We drafted the budget together and sent it to the Office of the President.

G. S.: Eventually, we were allowed to pay a bail fee of 10,000 Gambian Dalasi (about 225 US\$) for each charge, after which the case was adjourned before being dismissed.

P. A.: *Was NAPSA a legally registered organization?*

G. S.: NAPSA was registered on 5 August 2003, although we as executive members never knew that NAPSA was registered. We were only verbally told that NAPSA was registered. The government was planning to do something behind our backs after we came into power and committed to change. When we requested our certificate from our predecessors, they said that they had lost it. Some of the former NAPSA executives were working for the president and the others were on a scholarship package to Taiwan and other countries, and when they saw us taking another way, they refused to give us the certificate. When we asked, they said it was with the Public Relations Officer, who said it was with the President, and so we couldn't have it. When we went to the Attorney General's Chambers to ask for our registration certificate, they said that they couldn't

find our registration certificate. We had to pay for them to look it up, after which they still said that they couldn't find it. We did not see the certificate. It was only when the association was being dissolved that we learnt that the association was registered on 5 August 2003. They gave us the letter saying that the association has been dissolved. But it is strange to dissolve something that hasn't been legally registered. It was on 1st September 2014 when the association was being dissolved that we laid our hands on our registration certificate.

P. A.: *What did you do to be released of your charges?*

G. S.: The same police that had manipulated the issue called us again to ask us to write an apology letter which they send to the Office of the President. We had to accept all the charges that were laid upon us. Looking back at it, 2011 was the year of the elections in the Gambia and we had a grip and things have gone beyond the level the President was thinking [about]. We sent the letter. The President doesn't want to lose and wants students to vote for him. When we asked our lawyer Assane Mati if we should do what the police advised, he said that was the only option we have because whenever the President was involved, they manipulate. The President was personally involved in asking the IDP to investigate and deal accordingly with anybody who was involved. We wrote the letter and some of the heads signed and we sent it to the Office of the President. We were supposed to be in court before the reply from the President, but when we appeared in court, the case was adjourned again after receiving orders from the Office of the President.

P. A.: *Why did you get back to your work after being threatened by the Jammeh regime?*

G. S.: Teranga radio in the Gambia reported our case, which allowed our family members to know why we were facing charges. We couldn't accept to leave our job because NAPSA doesn't belong to them.

We decided to remain strong and not say that just because I was in jail, and an NIA officer tried to break me once, that I had to leave. Since we were already in power, President Jammeh isn't the one that voted us in and we had a lot ahead of us. We didn't want to give in just because we were not given the opportunity to have [our] congress or didn't get funding and those issues. There was a vision that we must be able to address the issues we work on beforehand.

After being arrested and getting to court, people were afraid to become members. We were the ones who had the problems, we should be the ones to clear them before having other executive members, so we had to continue to work.

P. A.: *How many times were you arrested again after the first time between 2011 and 2014, and on what charges?*

G. S.: We were arrested 4 times – once in 2011, twice in 2012 (in January and November), and once in 2014.

Whenever we had programmes, it was reported in the social media and even on Gambia Public Radio and Television so they said these people are very powerful. We have interviews in the country with the national media; they write our programmes and our coverage was very well launched and was on every social media. The Jammeh regime started saying that these people are powerful, and they are dealing with other institutions out there. We were friends with most of the journalists that were in the country, but we never gave them information about the government. When they arrest you they check your phone in and we were kept there for about two days.

P. A.: *How were you treated in detention ?*

G. S.: I can say the treatment was not okay, but it wasn't that they were using so much threats to force the information out us, but rather the place was not convenient for some- one to be in. When they realized that there was no threat to the Jammeh regime they re- alized that they had to let us go. If they allow you to go as well, they don't want you to filter the information to someone else.

In November 2012, we continued to push the issue of our registration certificate and there were a lot of activities in the pipeline that had to do with us having other interna- tional links because we were trying to have links with the student body in Senegal and Guinea Bissau that is called NAGIP. Our target was to have a regional students' summit in 2015. We started receiving threats because we wrote to Ghana, to Nigeria and Sierra Leone. It was like more of pressure on President Yahya Jammeh.

In November 2012, information was leaked and we didn't know who leaked it. There was a U-turn on how the association should be towards President Jammeh and his regime. We were

working independently and not many people were doing that towards his office, so perhaps that is why he thought it was only NAPSA that are in position of leaking information, but not those that were very much close to his regime. We know people that are very close to him and we're working with them regarding our activities.

They had to call us and asked whether we are the ones that had leaked the information to other social media outside to give them the information. We were held for about four days. In December 2012 information leaked that the government was trying to have a vigilante group in one of the regions. They had to investigate and arrest us, asking whether we had a hand in that, but we did not.

G. S.: I want to add about the arrest in November 2012 was really hard because of the issue of the vigilante team. Yahya Jammeh thought he asked us to work as NIA and we refused. Instead of understanding he thought that we were spying on him for others. According to him we refused to work for him because we're working for others like the international media and Gambians in the diaspora. That is why we got arrested again. A lot of Gambians have fled the country. Some left to find greener pasture because of the hardship in the country and the reason why they fled is because the government doesn't support the citizens of the country.

In 2014, from the whole country, all the youth groups went to Kanilai, Jammeh's native village to help him work on his farms. Every July and August is normally when he takes his leave and goes to Kanilai for his farming activities, and every year people go to help him. But our intention wasn't to go work for Jammeh. We said, we need to have our own farm for the students, harvest our farm, anything we have will go back to students; we got a farm in Yundum which was given to us secretly by the former Chief of Staff of Gambia Armed Forces (CDS), Lanto Bantamba. NAPSA had its farming activities there before we became executives. We were able to farm, thanks to the help of the office of the CDS, who gave us a mentor and soldiers to help us and we also mobilized students to help us to farm. When the CDS was arrested and there were problems, the soldiers took the farm from us again because there was new leadership in the military. We talked to

authorities in the place where we had the farm and told them we were going to work for Jammeh in 2014. There was a time when he asked us to mobilize students to work for him in Kanilai, but they were suffering. Most of them went through difficulties in the areas of accommodation and feeding, so we decided not go there anymore and put people through difficulties.

In 2014, we decided to register our association again since we could not lay our hands on our certificate to get a new registration certificate and use that to be able to work with NGOs. Many NGOs fled the country because Jammeh chased them out. But there are still some NGOs and we also write to embassies like the US embassy and they help young people. If you want them to fund your project, you have to show that your association is legally registered. We need this so that we can have the support that others are having. When we wrote to the Attorney General's office to register us again, they said with regards to the name 'national', that there was a law passed in 2013 stating that any association that wants to use the name 'national' should get authorization from the Office of the President. NAPSA had been in existence since 2001, but they still asked us to write to the Office of the President, which we did. Instead of saying use it or don't use it, the Office of the President ordered the Ministry of Justice to dissolve NAPSA with immediate effect.

The arrests in 2014 came through the issue of the dissolving of the association. We were arrested on the 10th of September and released on the 12<sup>th</sup> of September.

P. A.: *Were you well treated in jail?*

G. S.: The second time we were given an appointment by the police, we were beaten and forbidden to contact anyone to assist us. It was very crazy because I personally sustained injuries during that arrest. We were physically tortured because they wanted to prove us wrong. Jammeh is not the only problem, Gambians are their own worst enemy; they are the very people that kill and torture their brothers and sisters. I sustained injuries that lasted three months in my right leg and made me stay at home because I was beaten up. I know the person that tortured me and saw him several times, but they have no moral sense.

During the 2014 arrest, I wasn't well treated. I faced threats and verbal violence. We also had an information site that we

wanted to use to tell the students why the association has been dissolved because there was no reason highlighted in the letter from the Ministry of Justice and the Office of the President. They were trying to threaten us not to use students to question the Office of the President as to why the association was dissolved. The arrest was not lawful.

G. S.: To them we had a pending agenda, we wanted to do something. For four years we have been pushing the issue of the registration certificate. After our August 10 anniversary, we agreed to establish what we call regional funds, and because funding was not available, we decided to use the human resources available in that region. There is a region called Mansa Konko, which is where we had our anniversary. We have a farm in that region in Quina and we decided to visit that farm after the anniversary to at least flower the farm. The issue, however, was how to be able to sustain that farm without funding and we were able to get part of the money from the support we received from the Ministry of Justice during the anniversary.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of August after the anniversary, we decided to work on the registration certificate. That is when we received information from the Attorney General's chambers that the association had been dissolved with immediate effect and the assets (vehicle, office, computers) should be handed over within seventy-two hours. We were instructed to take all the assets to the office, close it and come over to the ministry. They were questioning all the members of NAPSA on the suspicion that they were planning to have a strike. It is not even possible because if you write to them asking for authorization, they wouldn't approve it and if you go against them you sign your own death warrant. After being arrested and released, there was a lot of pressure as well. Some of us had to leave the country because of this.

P. A.: *Why did you escape this time, and not the other times?*

G. S.: We had received direct threats about how our life will be if we stayed in the country. Someone who had direct information told us that our names were on the black list (meaning we had been listed for elimination by the NIA); something that the President directly approves. We were advised to leave. Jammeh was on leave in Kanilai and when he came back they would start their operation. We learnt this from someone directly in the system; that is why we had to leave. No matter how much



we love our country, we cannot put our lives at risk at this age (twenty-two and twenty-three years-old).

I was always explaining to my mum about what was going on, and my friend did the same. She knew what was happening every time an issue occurred and when I told her that I had to leave and gave the reasons, she said okay. I asked whether she had relatives in Senegal. She said no, but that I couldn't let something bad happen to me.

G. S.: Initially, it was the central executive members. With this friend who called us and said that we had to leave and when we asked why, she said she had seen my name in the President's Office and what he asked the NIA officers in the State House. The president was supposed to be in office at the State House on Monday. The call came to us on Wednesday early morning. We left up to Bara, just before the border between Gambia and Senegal.

P. A.: *What happened to the person who helped you escape?*

G. S.: The person who helped us escape is one of the closest protection officers of the President, a young person like us and a good friend indeed. After we went from Banjul to Bara, we crossed using the ferry. Even there at the ferry checkpoint in Bara, there were NIA officers, but we had only one opportunity to leave the country because it wasn't in the news, on air, or radio that we were wanted. They didn't want anybody to know that X and Y were wanted. When we went to the ferry checkpoint, we were called from an unknown number by somebody who identified himself as an NIA officer. He told us to come and report at the NIA on the 18<sup>th</sup> of September 2014, but we left the country on the 16<sup>th</sup> September 2014. We used our office card to deceive the police in the checkpoints, because we had to show our IDs. They didn't suspect us because taking the ferry doesn't mean that we're leaving the country as we can go to other parts of the country. We went straight to Karang, the border between Gambia and Senegal. We arrived at 6pm. We were trying to play smart with security because in the morning there was a high possibility of getting caught by the security.

P. A.: *Were your respective families threatened by the NIA after you fled from the Gambia?*

G. S.: When I called my family on the 18<sup>th</sup> of September, my grandma told me that some people came to ask for me, but

they didn't identify themselves, and neither did they give reasons why they were looking for us. They asked where is Omar Savage and my family said 'he hasn't been here since the day before yesterday. We even wanted to re- port to the police because we didn't know where he is.' So they had to take some time to check whether we were still in the country or not. The way they described these people to me, they were NIA officers.

We haven't heard from her since coming to Dakar. We have avoided talking to her and from what we've heard she is safe. She is also very famous and if she's arrested, the media will report it within seventy-two hours. Nothing has happened to her for now and they don't have any proof. The day that we left was the day that it was announced on GRTS that the association has been dissolved and these very people are wanted. We are grateful to her. If it wasn't for her something else could have happened to us by now.

Now that we have left the country, they are monitoring the situation. They didn't talk to my family directly, the only thing they did was monitoring, asking people whether they have seen this person. My family wasn't threatened because they didn't even know that we left.

P. A.: *What can Gambians do now to fight for democracy and human rights?*

G. S.: I hope that Gambians will start loving their country and know the difference between a politician and the people. It is only them that can make the change and say what they want or don't want. They should start feeling that they are part of the country. Without that the Gambia can never be free and will remain in the hands of one person.

About people living the same way in other countries of Africa, it's high time Africa, especially young people were given time to manage our own affairs. It's high time; the motivation that we needed is not there but we take up and fight our best and know that we are the leaders of today, we are not waiting for tomorrow. If not now, it will never happen. It's high time young people of Africa started knowing and championing what they have.

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