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CHAPTER 9

STUDENT ACTIONS AGAINST PARADOXICAL POST-APARTHEID HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY IN SOUTH AFRICA: THE CASE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

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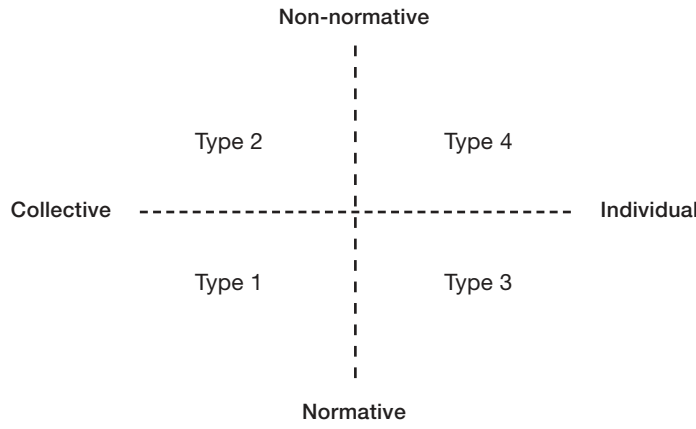
Introduction and theoretical framework

The pursuit of transformation in South African higher education led in the early years of the democratic government to a paradoxical post-apartheid higher education policy involving the simultaneous pursuit of (1) a massive expansion of higher education for black students, which in effect meant creating opportunities of access to higher education for historically disadvantaged students who came mostly from working class and poor backgrounds; and (2) a self-imposed commitment to fiscal 'austerity' reflected in the rejection of free higher education, the continuation of cost-sharing, and only limited provision of financial aid, which required that students, including the working class and poor, were expected to pay a significant share of the costs of study. The implementation of this paradoxical policy further deepened and compounded challenges of financial sustainability and student affordability that already persisted at the University of Western Cape (UWC) in the mid-1990s. The paradox was most severely experienced by poor students whose constrained ability to pay a portion of their cost of study could not be mitigated by institutional resources or funds from family and relatives.

However, students rejected 'abject surrender' (Mamdani 2007b: 18) and sought to challenge the effects of this policy through a range of actions. Inspired by the Wright et al. (1990)

framework for categorising the numerous possible behaviours exhibited by disadvantaged-group members, Cele (2015) proposes that various kinds of student actions can be conceptualised along two continuums, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Matrix of student actions



The horizontal continuum (in Figure 1) relates to the range of forms that student actions take within higher education institutions. We describe the extremes of this continuum as collective student action and individual student action, with the former depending on the cohesive power of the student body as an organised force, the relationship between the student body and the student leadership and common concerns or objectives, while the latter is about individual students pursuing their self-interest individually, rather than collectively with other students.

The vertical continuum in Figure 1 involves an interpretation of the content of student actions in terms of whether or not such actions follow the prescribed norms of the system. The extremes of this continuum are normative and non-normative student actions. Normative student actions occur within prescribed norms. For instance, student participation in higher education governance or 'formal governance' (Luescher 2005: 2) or 'ordinary governance process' (Pabian & Minksová 2011: 262). Non-normative student actions occur outside the prescribed norms of the higher education system. For instance student activism or 'informal governance' (Luescher 2005: 2) or 'extraordinary governance process' (Pabian & Minksová 2011: 262).

The relationships within and between the two continuums are complex and characterised by interrelatedness and interdependency, on the one hand, and diversity of purpose and outcomes, on the other hand. This, however, presents a possibility to construct four ideal types of student actions with both analytical and practical applicability to this study. These ideal types are (Type 1) collective normative student action, (Type 2) collective non-normative student action, (Type 3) individual normative student action and (Type 4) individual non-normative student action. Cele (2015) elaborates on these four idea types in detail.

This chapter focuses on the response of students through different actions at the University of the Western Cape in the conflict that broke out in 1998. It analyses their various actions in opposition to their lived experience of the paradoxical post-apartheid higher education policy in South Africa. The chapter proceeds to explain the different student actions taken during the 1998 UWC conflict through the lens of the basic theoretical framework outlined above. Thus, in the next section, we seek to show how this typology could be used to analyse the manner in which UWC students responded to the effects of the paradox between 1995 and 2005. The main focus is on the 1998 UWC conflict over the possible financial exclusion of about 7 000 students.

Student actions and the 1998 UWC conflict

Student use of collective student normative and non-normative action

UWC students tended to use student activism and formal student participation in higher education in a complementary manner to address effects of the policy paradox. The 1998 UWC conflict investigated here was the most important instance of student activism in the 1995–2005 period. Therefore we consider different aspects of the event, starting by providing a context for understanding the 1998 UWC context. Second, we explore student action of lobbying used to garner support from external stakeholders. Third, we focus on the actual events of student activism, which issues finally in an analysis of the resolution to the conflict.

Collective normative student action (Type 1)

As a matter of due course, the UWC management and SRC held fee negotiations annually in the 1990s. These negotiations tended to commence immediately after the election of a new SRC, which used to be held between September and October each year. These negotiations are a unique form of the kind of formal student participation in university decision-making operative at the time, typical of the consultative and democratic nature of the 'struggle university' and 'intellectual home of the left' that UWC had become in the course of the 1980s struggle against apartheid. The fee negotiations can thus be understood as a normative kind of collective student action in the context of this institution. The intended outcome of the negotiations was a financial agreement for the coming academic year between the student leadership and the university leadership. The negotiations between the UWC management and SRC did not always lead directly to the intended outcome. This was the case in 1998.

The 1998 UWC conflict arose after protracted negotiations between student leadership and university management collapsed, as they could not reconcile their differences about the issue of students with outstanding fees and debts from previous academic years. UWC had indicated that it was 'owed some USD 10 million (ZAR 50 million at the time) by 7 000

students too poor to pay' (*Green Left Weekly* 1998: 1). The UWC SRC was made up of members of the South African Students' Congress – the student organisation affiliated to the ruling African National Congress – and negotiated primarily on behalf of these 7 000 poor students. The manner in which this matter was to be crafted into the financial agreement was clearly going to pose a challenge.

The main contested points of negotiation between the UWC SRC and management related to certain provisions in the draft 1997/1998 financial agreement. The UWC SRC argued that the bone of contention in the draft 1997/1998 financial agreement related to what they described as 'Clause 4 or safety valve' (*UWC SRC Annual Report* 1998: 11). In the past the clause used to read

> *in the event students experiencing difficulty in meeting the required minimum contribution towards their outstanding fees their cases will be assessed individually to determine how further assistance can be extended.* (UWC SRC Annual Report 1998: 11)

However, in the draft1997/1998 financial agreement, the clause read, 'in the event students experiencing difficulty in meeting their outstanding fees their cases will be assessed individually to determine affordability' (*UWC SRC Annual Report* 1998: 11). According to the 1998 SRC,

> *an impression was created that affordability meant how much students can afford only to learn later that affordability meant whether or not the university could manage to register students without the stipulated amounts. Clearly, this was a recipe for exclusion and we consequently declared a dispute and that agreement was subsequently nullified.* (UWC SRC Annual Report 1998: 11)

The source of the dispute between the UWC SRC and management thus centred on how they understood and used the notion of 'affordability'. The UWC SRC approached 'affordability' from students' financial standpoint, arguing whether or not students (or possibly 'all those affected') could afford to pay and if so, how much they could afford. Conversely, the UWC management approached 'affordability' from the institutional financial standpoint by asking whether the university could afford to admit students with outstanding debt and who could not pay. UWC student leaders would possibly be pushing for more students to be admitted without regard to that definition of 'affordability'. The UWC management, on the other hand, was more concerned with ensuring overall financial sustainability, given the vast amount of student debt (R50 million) and the generally precarious financial situation the university found itself in. Therefore we may say that the dispute was a manifestation of the difficult reality of managing the paradox of expanding access in a context of limited funding on the ground; it demonstrated the tension between affordability (for students) and financial sustainability (of the institution).

A frosty relationship between UWC students and university management, especially with the new rector, Prof. Abrahams, exacerbated the situation. Students argued that they met with an administration that was 'resolute on excluding students on financial grounds based on students not having met their financial obligations towards the institution' (*UWC SRC Annual Report* 1998: 11). They acknowledged that UWC management had 'a point' from the legal perspective. However, students' contestation was premised on the view that the

> *escalation of the student debt was a direct consequence of management's mismanagement of the university in general and the financial quagmire it was embroiled in, as it never put any systems in place of ensuring that students meet their financial obligations.* (UWC SRC Annual Report 1998: 11)

The UWC SRC further argued that university management was unable to come up with new ideas and solutions to the on-going institutional financial crisis. It was left to the UWC SRC to come up with proposals, including 'parental involvement' and establishment of a student credit management mechanism (UWC SRC Annual Report 1998).

Lobbying for external student support

The UWC SRC and management fell into a deadlock. UWC students then tried to explore other options in a bid to find solutions. They went outside the university, where they engaged and lobbied the ceremonial Chancellor of the University, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, officials of the national Department of Education and the ANC headquarters, all organisations of the Mass Democratic Movement including the trade union federation and ANC Youth League, and other civil society bodies such as churches and the Red Cross (*UWC SRC Annual Report* 1998: 3).

These efforts, however, were all in vain. They were told that they had 'no justifiable cause' (*UWC SRC Annual Report* 1998: 3). Students were told to pay:

> *We were called names such as; a bunch of fee dodgers, irrational students who want free education, cell phone-toting youth who belabour their poverty in order to lead a posh lifestyle on campuses.* (UWC SRC Annual Report 1998: 3)

This characterisation of students was an opposite to the pre-1994 notion of students as 'shock troops of the revolution' (Wolpe 1994: 7) and 'energy driving force' (Gerwel 1988: 3) for transformation of UWC. According to the SRC, students felt abandoned by their former allies:

> *[We were] literally left on our own. The crucial challenge of the time was to be united. An honest re-examination of our positions and their attendant tactics was needed. This is the challenge that some did not comprehend.* (UWC SRC Annual Report 1998: 3)

Thus, the 1998 UWC conflict began with students employing Type 1 collective normative student action, using negotiations and lobbying in order to address their problem of 'unmet financial need'. Eventually, students decided to shift from Type 1 to Type 2, which is collective non-normative student action, or in this case, student activism. As we shall show, the shift did not imply complete abandonment of Type 1. Rather it was a tactical shift whereby students used Type 2 to put more pressure on the university management to accede to their demands and resolve the impasse. The shift implied ineffectiveness of collective normative student action. In the next section we shall analyse student activism as it happened and its resolution.

The use of collective non-normative student action (Type 2)

Having failed to find sympathy and support or external intervention to unlock the impasse after four months of negotiations, the UWC SRC convened a general student council in which all student organisations were requested to make proposals on how to resolve the impasse (*UWC SRC Annual Report* 1998: 3). By January 1998, it was 'clear that a different approach was required to make a breakthrough' (*UWC SRC Annual Report* 1998: 4). Students opted to protest. According to the *UWC SRC Annual Report*, the student actions sought to protect about 7 000 students (out of a total student body of about 12 000) who were facing financial exclusion. In anticipation of student unrest, the UWC management suspended all academic activities and ordered students to vacate campus premises on 30 January 1998 (*UWC SRC Annual Report* 1998: 4).

However, the following day, on 31 January 1998, the UWC SRC convened a general mass meeting at which students resolved to defy the university management. On 1 February 1998, students staged a five-hour sit-in at the university (*Green Left Weekly* 1998; see also *UWC SRC Annual Report* 1998). They refused to vacate student residences when ordered to do so by the university administration. After students ignored the final notice to leave the campus, the university management called in the police. Heavily armed police came and 'bundled students into armoured cars and police vans' (*Green Left Weekly* 1998: 1). More than 300 students were arrested (*Green Left Weekly* 1998; see also SAPA 1998). The remaining students marched to the UWC front gates, where a vigil of several hundred students and staff continued (*Green Left Weekly* 1998).

Hundreds of students marched to the Bellville magistrate's court when those arrested were due to appear on Tuesday, 03 February. SAPA reported that students toyi-toyied (danced in protest) and sang freedom songs outside the court and held aloft banners proclaiming: 'We are not criminals', and 'We do not have the money, please help' (3 February 1998). The arrested students were released on bail (*Green Left Weekly* 1998).

According to the *UWC SRC Annual Report*, first-year students who were still to register volunteered themselves to the police for arrest. Other students 'encamped on the campus boundary and slept outside the main university gates on Modderdam Road [now Robert Sobukwe Road]' (*UWC SRC Annual Report* 1998: 4). Students showed solidarity and were

prepared to do anything to support one another, especially those who could not pay. Solidarity and willingness to sacrifice were thus critical dimensions of the 1998 UWC conflict.

The police and their dogs guarded the university premises against the students sleeping at the entrance gates. This followed a meeting in which the 'Minister of Education assured vice-chancellors that in case of an emergency, police will be supplied, and indeed, they were supplied' (*UWC SRC Annual Report* 1998: 3).

Students did not wash for two days while sleeping outside and depended on the SRC to 'buy food from the nearby fisheries' (interview with former UWC student leader, 30 August 2006). Sympathetic faculty and staff also assisted some of the stranded students (interview with former UWC student leader, 30 August 2006). Students blockaded vehicles from entering the university. The situation was a 'nightmare to the first-year students who were coming from as far as the Eastern Cape in buses because they also had to disembark at the gates' (interview with former UWC student leader, 30 August 2006). Some parents eventually fetched their children, especially the first-years. These parents arrived from various parts of the country. Some students ended up going to relatives in nearby townships. Others made their way back forcefully to sleep in the residences.

While student activism was continuing, the UWC SRC and the university management re-opened and continued negotiations in a bid to reach an agreement. The fact that students were embarking on both forms of collective action further highlights their complementarity dimension. As student activism was continuing, the student leadership realised that their struggle was 'losing its moral high ground' (*UWC SRC Annual Report* 1998: 3). The UWC SRC acknowledged that the continuation of activism had a negative impact on public support. This was evident: 'If you read papers extensively, you would have realised that our cause was slowly running out of sympathisers' (*UWC SRC Annual Report* 1998: 3). Then South African Deputy President Thabo Mbeki went out to 'say that African students are not as poor as they portray, so they must just pay' (*UWC SRC Annual Report* 1998: 3).

It would seem students could only rely on themselves to 'win' and had to defy the ANC government and especially their 'comrades' or 'leadership'. They had lost political support as key sectors of society and government converged on the view that students should pay. The fact that civil society and the liberation movement disagreed with the students' view in itself lent credence to the strong and harsh words used by the deputy president in dismissing the students' notion of being 'poor' and insisting that they should pay. The attitude, language and tone used in the above extract were unexpected and harsh for a democratic government, which had recently been elected into office. Again, similar trends could be observed on the rest of the African continent, where student activism not only threatened those in power, but those involved were severely punished. Clearly student activism had what Altbach called a 'surprising impact on the authorities' (1998: 162).

According to Jansen, government had taken a 'strong interventionist stance' against those institutions it considered 'completely ungovernable and found its very authority, if not legitimacy, threatened by an unstable, volatile higher education sector' (2004: 304). The message of the

government to students and managements of higher education institutions was clear. Students were expected to pay their fees. Higher education institutional managers were expected to collect such fees. Only 'academically-deserving students from poor backgrounds would receive funding; disruption would not be tolerated' (Jansen 2004: 305).

Government further absolved itself from responsibility over student debts. It shifted such responsibility to higher education institutions. This approach can be characterised as 'neo-liberal' in keeping with the GEAR macro-economic policy framework – invariably described as a self-imposed structural adjustment programme – in that it was no different from the notion that government only creates conditions and markets will grow the economy and bring development to the people. Thus, the 1997 *White Paper on Higher Education* argued that the Ministry of Education 'bears no liability for debts contracted between students and their institutions or funding agencies, but accepts that a study of the scope and dynamic of student debt in relation to institutional debt and liquidity has become necessary' (Department of Education 1997: 45–46). This government stance needs to be understood in relation to the discussion on the National Students Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) and without any doubt had a significant impact on the UWC's experience of the policy paradox of pursuing expansion of access despite limited funding (with cost-sharing being advanced as a solution).

The relationship between the UWC SRC and student body was critical in support of the 1998 Type 2 action, student activism. Students were determined to achieve their objective of averting financial exclusion through peaceful protest. UWC students did not seek permission to protest and were not operating within the 'rules' and directives of the university management, which had demanded that they should vacate the campus. Student actions included defiance, sit-ins, protests, marches and placards.

Resolution of campus conflict and reaching a financial agreement

After two weeks of simultaneous student activism and negotiations, the UWC SRC and university management reached a consensus that resulted in the resumption of classes on 23 February 1998. The UWC management 'regretted measures that had to be taken through the long negotiation period but was confident that efforts to attain the new comprehensive agreements would ensure financial sustainability and a quality academic programme for the university' (SAPA 1998). For its part, the UWC SRC felt that the executive did 'not act in goodwill over the past two weeks, however they were willing to go forward to ensure that the student body was made fully aware of the financial implications of non-payments of 1998 fees and debt' (SAPA 1998).

The UWC SRC signed two agreements with management on 3 December 1997 and 10 February 1998. They required all returning students with outstanding debts to pay a registration deposit of ZAR 2 500 for resident students and ZAR 2 000 for non-resident students, as well as an additional minimum contribution towards unpaid fees (SAPA 1998; *UWC SRC Annual Report 1998*). The UWC SRC insisted that while the February agreement was 'not the best

ever to be signed, we, however, believe that it was the best that could be arrived at in the context of 1998' (*UWC SRC Annual Report* 1998: 12). This position was accepted at a student mass meeting held on 10 February 1998. UWC students then mandated their SRC to sign the agreement (*UWC SRC Annual Report* 1998).

We need to emphasise the significance of the UWC SRC taking the proposed settlement to a mass meeting for the student body to deliberate and decide if such a settlement should be approved. It is also significant that the UWC student body 'mandated' its SRC to sign the agreement. This is evidence of student democracy and accountability of the leadership. Students who were to be affected were involved in decision-making and approved the type of settlement they were going to have to live with, which the SRC had to carry through to its logical conclusion.

Individual student actions

Negotiating funding structures: Individual normative student action (Type 3)

As part of the 1998 agreement, UWC established a student credit management (SCM) office as one of the structures with which registering students had to negotiate funding matters (others included the bursary office and the student enrolment office). It was through student funding structures that the university exercised and implemented its student funding policy. The effect that the implementation of the institutional funding structures had on student politics at UWC are both encouraging and problematic. In addition, after 1998, national financial aid started to be rolled out on a much wider scale. Thus, as students now had to reach individual settlements with the university concerning their finances and seek financial aid from NSFAS, over the years a shift in student action occurred. We will analyse this shift in detail. First, however, it is important to also consider yet another expression of a lack of coordination and alignment between institutional and national level governance.

Over the years it became increasingly obvious that the UWC institutional funding structures lacked coordination, strategic alignment and a shared approach in dealing with students in financial difficulties. In 2004 the UWC SRC noted:

> *We experienced problems during registration. We had seen lack of co-operation and co-ordination between the financial aid office and student credit management. This relates to the exorbitant amounts being needed by SCM regardless of amounts (NSFAS) confirmed by the financial aid office.* (UWC SRC Annual Report 2004: 10)

Similarly, the 2005 UWC SRC noted that the SCM demanded that students pay more money despite the NSFAS policy that students who held loans from it could register without making upfront payment. By 2005, 11 000 UWC students (out of a total of 14 590) received some form of financial assistance to the amount of ZAR 88.2 million, of which ZAR 40.7 million

was allocated by NSFAS. The SCM's argument was that NSFAS money came from the state, and as such, it was not a parental contribution. Given that most UWC students had NSFAS loans (and therefore came from families where no parental contribution was possible), they found themselves caught between two contradictory policies (NSFAS and SCM) in respect of required upfront payments. Nationally, it seemed as if institutions did not know whether they could allow NSFAS students to register without paying registration fees.

Furthermore, the *UWC SRC Annual Report* (2005) indicated that clarity should be sought from management with respect to power relations between the SCM and residence administration. It stated that some students were cleared for registration by the SCM and the SRC, but still encountered accommodation problems, as the residence administration demanded additional money. Similarly, a former UWC SRC president argued that the student administration unit 'should be able to find [those] who can afford and who cannot afford to pay, given that they have a student database. In that case, every year they will be able to ask students if their situation has changed. If the situation has not changed, they give such student NSFAS'. To the extent that there was 'no student administrative relationship between the administrations and the financial aid, which is quite key, the financial aid office does not use the student database housed in the administration. The system is not the most efficient' (interview with former UWC SRC president, 19 September 2007).

The former UWC SRC president made an important point about the need for the university structures to harmonise and enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of their systems and processes for the benefit of students. He was also correct to insist that the student administration should have been able to determine who was poor or not. However, as indicated above, this was one of the original responsibilities assigned to the SCM. The SRC should have demanded more accountability and ensured that the SCM did not abdicate its responsibility.

Individual students had therefore many concerns about the way the university managed the payment of fees. They indicated that it would seem to them that the university structures (especially the SCM) applied different eligibility criteria to different students when considering their cases. Some students had outstanding fee account balances and could not pay full registration fees, but they were allowed to register, while others who owed less money were denied. This is illustrated in the following interview:

> *I was refused to register with R1 000 but other people came with R500 and they still have balances from the previous year and they still are registered.* (interview with third-year UWC BCom student, 28 August 2009)

Despite its weaknesses, the SCM should not have allowed such a practice to develop from the beginning because it was unfair to students and undermined the purpose of the SCM. In this case it could not be described as students 'exploiting' the system, but as an ineffectual system.

Students raised concerns about the nature of the registration and financial clearing process and the attitude of some university officials working in student funding structures. A UWC

BA third-year student could not hide her disappointment and frustration with the manner in which she was treated, as 'if you do not exist, as if you are not even there. You know it is so inhumane.' She felt that the SCM was her last hope and asked if 'they cannot help you in the SCM, where else do you go? If they say, they cannot help you what do you do?' Her main anxiety was facing the prospect of having to go home or 'to call home and what do you say?' (interview with third-year UWC BA student, 29 August 2006). Perhaps the student was more concerned about the negative impact that such a call would have on her parents, given the fact that she was doing her final year and could be expected to take care of them as well as her siblings, or worse, that society might mock the family for having wasted money.

A second-year UWC BAdmin student struggled to determine whether it was the SCM office or its management who 'failed to listen to my situation. We out rightly failed' (interview with second-year UWC BAdmin student, 29 August 2006). He was simply told that he did not meet certain criteria and therefore 'you are out'. This seemed to have confused him, because he had assumed the role of the SCM to be 'to look into students' problems because we all have individual problems, sympathise with students and then play a sort of mediatory role between the students and the management' (interview with third-year UWC BA student, 29 August 2006).

A third-year UWC BSc student said that she arrived back from holidays before the university opened in mid-January. She was aware of her outstanding fees from the previous year and decided to go and seek assistance from the SCM. When she presented her request, staff members said, 'We cannot help you. There is nothing we can do for you. You just have to pay the balance. And I am like, my mother only has this much.' She tried the SRC and failed. She then decided to return to the SCM, hoping that things might be different. She 'kept on going to the SCM for the whole month without any luck' (interview with third-year UWC BSc student, 19 September 2007).

A third-year UWC BPharm student stated that the registration process took a long time and was 'emotionally bad but we managed to perform well'. He continued to attend classes while waiting for his registration to be finalised. However, there were problems. He said:

> *I remember at one time in one of my classes, there were certain practicals that we had to do in the hospital, lecturers said those who had not registered they cannot go to the hospital.* (interview with third-year UWC BPharm student, 29 August 2006)

This was going to have a huge impact on the student, as he explained that 'everything we do as final-year students is hospital-based and they have to group us'. Lecturers told us, 'If you have not registered, they are not going to put you in anything. Imagine, now my whole life has to come to a halt because we have not registered.' The student said he waited for about two months, the whole of February and March, before he could be registered during the last week of March. He had returned to campus on 15 January, and had been battling since then (interview with third-year BPharm student, 29 August 2006). While waiting for his registration

to be finalised, he also ran out of money and food and this affected him. He wanted to 'study but something would tell me that I am hungry and I need to eat. I knew what I needed to do, but my mind was not really on what I should be doing it was concentrating on my other unsolved problems'. He felt that if the registration process had not dragged on for so long he would be 'free'. However, his anguish continued while university officials kept on asking for the registration fees when his situation had not changed, and he 'told them whatever cent they want to squeeze out of me or out of my mother, I just do not have it' (interview with third-year UWC BPharm student, 29 August 2006).

The university and poor students thus both found themselves in a difficult situation. On the one hand, the university remained committed to expanding access to the poor, but to survive it required money, which it hoped somehow these poor students would be able to raise. On the other hand, students had been admitted and their expectations of escaping poverty and underdevelopment had been raised; they rested all their hopes on the financially strapped university to take care of their study costs. In between there were university officials who seemed less interested in the historical and socio-economic deprivation of students and were bent on meeting the 'set targets' of fee collections.

The head of the SCM accepted that the registration and clearance process was tedious, and that the behaviour of his staff members was painful at times. However, he argued that

> *[students should] realise … that we do have the mandate, which is to ensure that all students pay as part of their contribution in order for the university to survive before the state subsidy comes in. Yes, people might see us as being harsh but the reality is that students have been told many times about the portion of their contribution for registration.* (interview with head of student credit management, 30 September 2007)

This highlights the difficulties that UWC encountered even after the institution of NSFAS in implementing the government's policy of expansion of access to the poor and limited financial assistance to individual students as well as to institutions directly. It is evident from the statement of the head of the SCM, that the paradox deepened the existing challenge of financial sustainability of this historically disadvantaged institution, as well as affordability of education to working class and poor students. In trying to deal with this challenge, it would seem the university was hoping that the cost-sharing approach would help. The university tried to get poor students to make a contribution towards the costs of their study. It did so, well aware that the majority of its students were poor and could not afford to pay. As the university was driven by the motive of 'organisational survival', the SCM became a critical instrument.

Another instrument became university merit awards, but many students felt this did not help them either. According to a second-year UWC BSc student, the merit awards or bursaries were 'only for the top achievers which leaves out those who get the [marks of] Cs and the Bs, and for us who are B and C students, then there is no help, therefore the merit awards are not

enough.' This student argued that the financial aid office should be 'realistic because they cannot expect someone who is unable to buy myself a book to suddenly become an A grade student'. His reason for this was that 'half the time there are projects that you must do and you need to go and research in certain books and at times you go into the library, there are only five of those books and when they are booked out there is nothing you can do'. Students without sufficient and necessary study materials would therefore be placed at a 'disadvantage when compared to the top achievers who tend to have all the required materials' (interview with second-year UWC BSc student, 30 August 2006).

Students highlighted negative implications deriving from the registration process. According to the *UWC SRC Annual Report*, the fact that students registered late had a negative impact on their academic progress. Teaching would have commenced by the time students who registered late joined classes. The UWC SRC dealt with the problem of lecturers and tutors refusing admission to students who were still solving their registration problems. The UWC SRC found that it was difficult to de-link academic exclusions from financial exclusions because students spent time in long queues, missed classes and lost valuable time (*UWC SRC Annual Report* 2004: 11).

Thus, students had to be 'cleared' by the SCM, including those who had external bursaries and were NSFAS recipients. The NSFAS recipients were supposed to pay registration fees or upfront payment because NSFAS did not cover it prior to 2003. Without making upfront payment, NSFAS students would not be allowed to register or to be 'cleared' by the SCM. Meanwhile, students applied for NSFAS through the financial aid office, which kept all records and made decisions on loan allocations; yet the two institutional structures seemingly did not communicate with each other. In the next section, we examine student action in respect of the financial aid office.

Student negotiations with the UWC financial aid office

The financial aid office was responsible for administering student bursaries and NSFAS. Therefore it had a huge responsibility and was a critical part of the UWC funding regime. Some students' experiences with the office were not as pleasant as they should have been. For example, a third-year UWC BPharm student indicated that when he was doing his second year, he had posted home the NSFAS application form. His parents received it, but they could not find it when they were supposed to complete and return it to UWC. His parents eventually managed to find it and sent it late. It then transpired that his father had 'signed on the wrong place and those people at financial aid office just did not want to take it'. As a result, the student was 'stressed about where to find money to pay for this semester as well as next year. I have not really been talking about it even to my friends. My academic work really suffered. It has been hectic because now my only worry is getting a job' (interview with third-year UWC BPharm student, 29 August 2006).

Students also complained that the financial aid office did not help them to understand the

NSFAS loan agreement details. A fourth-year UWC BPharm student mentioned that when he submitted the NSFAS loan agreement form 'nobody told me or explained the terms and conditions of NSFAS bursary so we could understand. Somebody must say this will happen when you start working, this is how you are going to pay and this is the amount we are going to deduct from your pay. We know we are going to pay when we work but not what are the rates.' A student would have appreciated more information to be prepared. 'I do not want a situation when I get out of here I have huge debt that I do not understand' (interview with fourth-year UWC BPharm student, 30 August 2006).

Some of the stories of students highlight the frustrations and anguish that they were going through as they were engaging with the SCM and the financial aid office. In an effort to improve their chances of registration and survival on campus, students had to use and rely on their solidarity networks and explore other strategies (such as mutual student support and family support), which we explore in the next section.

Self-initiated support

During interviews students informed us of how the problem of 'unmet financial need' was affecting them and the actions that they undertook to deal with it. Students said that they constantly worried about where to find money to settle debts or pay the next instalment of their fees and that this affected their academic performance negatively. Some ended up participating in extra-curricular activities, which had become their 'only choice'. A second-year UWC LLB student indicated that in 2005, she 'owed ZAR 3 000 or something so I couldn't pay up because I didn't have the money'. The student had been part of the HIV/Aids group that went to a camp where they met a businessman who was sponsoring students who were involved in extracurricular activities with ZAR 5 000. So 'I got that ZAR 5 000 and paid for whatever I was still owing' (interview with second-year UWC LLB student, 29 August 2006).

Other students indicated that they would do anything, including working in dining halls, as long as they could earn something, including food. For instance, a second-year UWC BAdmin student indicated that he was 'very shy to ask for money from home because I understood the situation. I used to eat with my roommate but I found I'm becoming too much of his burden and more particular he is younger than me.' The student then decided that he could no longer be a burden and wanted to free himself, so he 'went to see the Residence Director and I pleaded my poverty'. The residence director understood and gave a letter to the student granting him permission to 'eat once a day up to certain period at Mthonjeni residence dining hall (interview with second-year BAdmin student, 29 August 2006).

Unfortunately, when the agreement lapsed, the student did not know what to do and went back to the residence director who said, '"I will not give you another letter but now you need to work." Then it is when I got the letter and I worked but it was not so much.' The student was working at the residence canteen but the owners did not want him to do much, which could affect 'my academic progress. So I normally used to go when they were about just finished

then I just clean up the floors' (interview with second-year BAdmin student, 29 August 2006).

While doing menial jobs, the student was approached by visiting doctors who asked him a few questions. They discovered that they all came from Mpumalanga province (in the east of South Africa). One day, the doctors called and told the student that they would 'pay my meal fees until I finish and they said that I must concentrate on my studies rather than working for food'. The doctors promised to support the student with everything (including books) that he needed at the university. However, the student had to 'sign a contract with them which was not about repayment but indicating that should I fail my studies, they will stop paying. Therefore, we must not blame them as if they deserted me' (interview with second-year BAdmin student, 30 August 2006). The message was loud and clear that the student should focus on his studies. A similar message had earlier been communicated when he was working at the residence, even though it was rather subtle.

Some students sought university part-time jobs, most of which came through the university's work-study programme. Students worked up to 20 hours per week as tutors, drivers, library assistants, laboratory assistants and administrative assistants on campus. A second-year UWC BCom student received NSFAS but,

> *it did not cover everything. So I have been struggling since my first year. However, to make up for difference, I applied and was employed as tutor for first-year physics students. At the same time, the SRC appointed me as one of the drivers.* (interview with second-year UWC BCom student, 28 August 2006)

The university deducted 60% from the work-study stipends and paid these funds into student fee accounts. For instance, a third-year UWC Library and Information Science student indicated that she was on the university work-study programme, which was 'not enough. The policy is that 60% of what you receive is deducted and paid into your account and so I do not even get to work enough hours of what is required' (interview with third-year UWC Library and Information Science student, 30 September 2004).

Many students viewed part-time jobs as more than providing financial assistance. The part-time jobs helped students in settling debts, developing some sense of independence and gaining work experience. A third-year UWC Library and Information Science student received NSFAS, which was inadequate and hence she needed to find additional funding. She spoke about how her father 'saved money to pay for my studies while he was working' (interview with third-year UWC Library and Information Science student, 30 September 2004). Having her father's savings did not deter her from searching for a temporary job so that she could pay for her studies. She worked at Paarl Library on weekends. She worked as a student assistant at the UWC campus and as a casual worker between October and January.

> *I used my money to pay for my tuition and transport fees. This made me feel independent and I am also gaining experience which will help me after I have*

> *completed my studies.* (interview with third-year UWC Library and Information Science student, 30 September 2004)

This is an interesting story of a student who had a vision and ambition that transcended her immediate concerns to study (which can be so consuming) but which in her case included completing her studies and finding a job thereafter and most importantly, becoming an 'independent person'.

It would seem that almost all cases discussed above show the type of students who knew what they wanted, who were brave, who had a passion for education and their future, and who rejected victimhood and developed a deep sense of hope and optimism. In other words, these students refused to fall into what Mamdani called 'abject surrender' (2007b: 18) and possessed a liberating spirit. In terms of this chapter's conceptual framework, they refused to accept their disadvantaged status and to fall into inaction and exclusion. Their response to the paradoxical post-apartheid higher education policy was action – albeit not the kind of action one would conventionally consider 'political'.

We have identified self-initiated support as one of the forms of individual normative action that students undertook to address their problem of unmet financial need. The individual stories of students describe various forms of self-initiated support. They include participation in extra-curricular activities, being prepared to help clean residence kitchens and doing various other kinds of part-time jobs on and off campus. What seems to be an underlying and commonly shared characteristic is their rejection of the victimhood mentality and willingness to do 'something', 'anything', as long as they could find the money to contribute to the costs of their study. This is despite possibly 'dehumanising' experiences they might encounter in the process of seeking financial assistance, some of which have been related from the students' point of view above.

Student–family networks

At the heart of cost-sharing is the requirement that parents should share the burden of study costs. Some writers argue that parents should pay for the education of their children 'not only because of the personal benefits the parents can expect to enjoy but also because it is their responsibility and their obligation as parents' (Merisotis & Wolanin 2002: 1). Interviews with students showed that their parents understood the need to contribute and tried to do everything possible to pay for the education of their children however trying their own circumstances. Some managed to find the required funding, but others struggled to make financial contributions towards the education of their children at UWC owing to their poor socio-economic situation. Some were single parents looking after more than one child. For instance, a third-year UWC BPharm student said that for two years 'my mother had paid for me and then there was one year when she just could not because she was also paying for my other siblings' (interview with third-year UWC BPharm student, 29 August 2006).

A fourth-year UWC BPharm student spoke highly of his father's support to his studies. This is despite the fact that his father had last worked when the student was doing Standard 2 (i.e. primary school Grade 4). However, his father had 'connections and somehow always managed to find money. My father is my Superman. I always say there are some people that are in worse positions than I am. Complaining really will not help you' (interview with fourth-year UWC BPharm student, 30 August 2006). Given that searching for funding can be emotionally draining, the student said that his mother provided emotional and moral support and she 'will say, you will be fine and all of that' (interview with fourth-year UWC BPharm student, 30 August 2006).

A second-year BAdmin student indicated that her father 'is not working anymore and he borrowed money from my cousin. I will have to pay it back once I have finished my studies' (interview with second-year BAdmin student, 29 August 2006).

While it is important not to generalise uncritically from these observations, one should not miss the determination in the manner in which parents sought assistance for their children. It might seem obvious that parents should support their children, but it is not necessarily possible in poor communities, where parents lack the means of survival and have to support several children. It requires someone to have character and a positive attitude. Thus, one can see from the above cases that parents used different means of securing financial contributions for their children's education. Parents used their savings if they had any, relied on old established networks for assistance and even borrowed from relatives and friends to make financial contributions for their children. We can broadly categorise the student-family networks that students described as falling into the normative dimension. Some parents had to borrow money from relatives and friends. In some instances parents expected their children to repay the borrowed money once they had completed their studies. In other instances parents had to find ways of repaying the money.

Individual student actions (Type 4)

Student solidarity

Needy students also found support from their fellow students. This support took various forms, including the sharing of residence rooms (which is a practice known as 'squatting'), sharing books, study materials and laboratory equipment. For instance, a third-year UWC BPharm student indicated he 'sacrificed a lot' (interview with third-year UWC BPharm student, 29 August 2006). He could not buy the laboratory coat and 'often used my cousin's lab coat who is also studying here' (Interview with third-year UWC BPharm student, 29 August 2006). The third-year UWC BPharm student had to use 'the little money that we receive from home to buy study notes every week. While it's special the money that parents give you, it's like you don't have money for everything' (interview with third-year UWC

BPharm student, 29 August 2006). He said, 'I don't complain like other people when they don't have money to go buy clothes. I just spend ZAR 150 on buying basic food and other essentials that I know that even if I don't have money, I could still eat and go to class. Nobody would know that I am eating such basic food or something' (interview with third-year UWC BPharm student, 29 August 2006). It would seem the primary focus of this student was to learn while ensuring that he survived hardship. He also had a sense of prioritising and separating his 'needs' from his 'wants'. Most importantly, the student understood his family background and did not allow peer pressure to affect him.

Another student had a mother who had worked as a domestic worker for 12 to 13 years. The mother used 'her wages to pay for some of my studies. However, that is not enough' (interview with second-year BAdmin student, 29 August 2006). The mother could only afford to pay for tuition fees. As a result the student could 'not stay in the residence. I am squatting with a friend at Cape Peninsula University of Technology [former Peninsula Technikon]' (interview with first-year UWC BAdmin student, 29 August 2006). The Cape Peninsula University of Technology friend thus risked his or her future by allowing someone to squat who was not even studying at the same university. This indicates a deep sense of solidarity among students. Students had to choose between achieving education and conforming to the rules of the university, and they chose education.

We describe student solidarity as both individual normative and non-normative student action. In some instances students are willing and prepared to risk their studies (and by implication their future) to help those in need. Actions that fall under the normative dimension include the sharing of resources such as text books, laboratory coats, study guides and food. Actions that fall under the non-normative dimension include sharing of accommodation or 'squatting' in so far as they involve the breaking of rules. Students also struggled through great hardship on their own, rationing food and living on the barest necessities. Indirectly students were rebelling against the effects of a paradoxical higher education policy in what Jansen once described as 'unseen pains of transition' (2004: 118).

Conclusion

The above discussion sought to show how Cele's typology of student actions (collective student normative action [Type 1], collective student non-normative action [Type 2], individual student normative action [Type 3] and individual student non-normative action [Type 4]) can be used to analyse and understand student actions against the effects of the paradoxical post-apartheid higher education policy on the expansion of access and provision of financial aid at the UWC. Using the 1998 conflict between the university and students over the possible financial exclusion of about 7 000 students, the analysis highlighted how students can shift from one action to another or even combine different actions to produce outcomes that favoured them. This would suggest that student actions especially Type 1 and Type 2 should

not be seen as opposites but rather as mutually reinforcing and complementary as the 1998 case indicates. The discussion also showed how students could shift from collective to individual actions in order to address their funding problems. It would seem though that a variety of factors might influence the choice of action for students, for instance, the prevailing conditions or organisational challenges. It also confirms the iron law that student politics cannot be abstracted from characteristics of the student body.

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