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CHAPTER 4

THE EVOLVING NATURE OF STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA: AN OVERVIEW OF POLICIES, TRENDS AND EMERGING ISSUES

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Background and introduction

In 2010, the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) commissioned studies in Ghana, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, examining, among other themes, the participation of students in the governance processes of universities, and what the level of participation means for the quality and academic mission of the universities. This chapter summarises the findings of the studies, augmented by findings of other studies in this area.[1]

A discussion on the nature of student representation in African universities has to be approached from two facets, based on historical and contemporary trajectories. The first is to look at how the whole body of students as elite, has constituted itself to be the conscience of society, and the greater social good in their engagement both with the universities and the political system. The second is to examine the organisational spaces provided to students to organise and protect their interests, both welfare and academic, within the institutions. Both these two notions of student representation are replete in the literature and will be explored in this chapter.

1 The author has undertaken research in this area, including *Implications of Privatisation and Private Higher Education on Access and Knowledge Production in Kenya* (CODESRIA 2008); Management and governance reforms in public universities in East Africa and the challenges to nurturing and sustaining academic leadership (on-going research); and Comparing the Nature and Implications of Corporatisation Trends in Public Universities in East Africa (CODESRIA, in press).

Universities in Africa have gone through three phases of transformation that have had implications for the nature and quality of student participation in university governance. The first phase revolves around the time when the institutions were set up during the period of late colonialism as institutions affiliated to universities in Europe. The second phase starts from the 1970s, when after independence most African countries transformed the institutions into national universities. This transformation, actualised through Acts of parliament, entailed a redefinition of the relationship between university governance organs and the state and the role of student representation in such structures. The third phase begins around the 1980s; a period of increased demand and expansion of university education amid economic austerity, the gradual privatisation of public universities and the establishment of private universities. This phase has also entailed a change in the overall governance frameworks that established most of the universities in the 1960s and 1970s as national institutions, to a new regime where universities operate within charters under the overall oversight of higher education councils. Both these trends have changed the terrain of governance cultures in the institutions, especially the place of students and their representatives in influencing governance and management decisions. Of particular interest have been the redefinition of students in universities within an entrepreneurial frame and the renunciation of student politics as activism and framing the same as part of the problems affecting higher education institutions. Hence, for transformation related to the entrenchment of entrepreneurial cultures to succeed, the old political model of university governance that provided much space for student input into the governance process has had to be dismantled.

This chapter analyses trends in the historical evolution of policies and practices for student participation in African universities. An examination of the institutional structures that have been provided to support student participation in university governance, including sources of funding, the influence of students' voice in management decisions and overall implications is conducted. It is important in this regard to reflect on the internal organisation of student councils, especially with regard to participation and representation in student structures and internal procedures. How student representatives are identified and elected and how students politics is regulated within the institutions will form an important component of this section. Lastly, the current state of student representation in Africa, including legal frameworks and other provisions and how they influence the quality of student representation is discussed, especially in the context of the increasing growth and differentiation of higher education institutions.

The chapter is presented in three parts. Part one looks at the historical context within which student participation in university governance in Africa has evolved, tracing this to the establishment of universities in Africa during the period of late colonialism, as overseas colleges of universities in Europe. Part two analyses the dynamics of student participation, from the 1970s with the increasing establishment of universities as national projects. Part three looks at the period from the 1980s, and the economic crisis that faced African states, leading to the imposition of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) and the subsequent introduction of user fees in higher education institutions. It further explores the 1990s period, which saw the

establishment of more public universities, the establishment of private universities and the subsequent segmentation of the student body into public and private students.

Lastly, the current state of student representation in African universities is discussed. These phases and developments have contributed to reshape the nature of student participation in ways that have often brought to fore the question as to the real beneficiaries of the engagements: the state, the universities and their academic missions, or the student population.

Establishment of universities in Africa and the nature of student representation

There is some historical documentation to show that even before the formal establishment of higher education institutions in Africa student politics formed an important component of Africans' agitation for independence and for increased higher education. The earliest known student organisations however seem to have started not in Africa, but in the metropolitan capitals of European countries, among African students who had had the privilege of travelling abroad for higher education. The focus of these earlier forms of student politics was the issue of student welfare. For example, in London, there emerged the Union of African Descent (UAD) founded in 1917, the Gold Coast Students' Union (GCSU) in 1924, the Nigerian Progress Union (NPU) in 1924, and finally the West African Students' Union (WASU), the most important of all, in 1925 (Boahen 1994). WASU's prominence as a student union emanated from the fact that the organisation was able to weave its student activities into the anti-colonial struggles. Most of the leaders of the Union, such as Kwame Nkrumah, later became political leaders of their countries. As WASU spread throughout West Africa, the link between the diaspora and the African continent became essential as an axis of anti-colonial activism, and thus, perhaps, prepared the ground for the involvement of student leaders in politics in Africa.

The quest for representation from these early student movements was mainly focused on pursuing social and cultural rather than political objectives (Boahen 1994) and agitating for better conditions for students and quality education; the kind of welfare issues that have come to be dismissed as parochial by neo-liberal higher education politics. The issues that have come to define student politics, and for which their representation in university governance or management to date is rationalised, still featured then. For example, African students in Europe were concerned with welfare issues such as the acquisition of hostels and accommodation, the organisation of holiday camps, employment, scholarships, and student welfare and, above all, the ending of racial discrimination and the education of Europeans in African history and culture to counteract prevailing racist views about the inferiority of the African (Boahen 1994).

The number of African student movements increased rapidly after the Second World War, owing mostly to the increased number of students who were able to access higher education abroad and the increasing establishment of university colleges in the colonies. In British

colonial Africa, the Phelps-stokes, De La Warr, Channon, Elliot and Asquith commissions recommended and finally resulted in a number of university colleges being established in Africa. The University College of Ghana started in October 1948 with 92 students using the one million pounds sterling from the funds of the Cocoa Marketing Board. The University College of Ibadan opened in January 1948 with 148 students, the Khartoum University College opened in 1947, while the University College of Makerere opened in 1949 for East Africa, complemented by the Royal Technical College, Nairobi (Mngomezulu 2010).

The Asquith Commission had recommended that the elevation to university status in the British colonies, which produced the university colleges of Ghana, Makerere, Ibadan, and Khartoum, should be in a scheme of special relation with the University of London, in order to ensure the quality of the degrees granted, and ascertain that they achieved academic standards equal to those of universities and university colleges in Britain (Montani 1979). This meant that the new university colleges had to have almost the same standards of governance as in Britain and the University of London had the responsibility to oversee that such standards were maintained. To this end, while the University College of London accepted this responsibility, one of the conditions it laid down was that the constitution of the governing bodies of the institutions, their charters and statutes or other instruments of government had to be such that an appropriate and autonomous university capable of controlling the development of its academic policy was envisaged, for example, through encouragement of corporate and social life among students (*Report of the Working Party on Higher Education in East Africa* 1955). The idea was that the qualifications available at the university colleges and nature of student life were to be in no way inferior to the best obtainable abroad. It can then be argued that from their inception in Africa, at least during their nascent stage, universities and colleges provided some space for student activities to keep in tune with the culture of universities in Europe to which they had been linked. Chilver (1957), in commenting on the student conditions at Makerere College Uganda noted that certain features peculiar to English university life had been replicated, such as the allocation of each student to a hall of residence under a resident warden, who was concerned with the students' moral welfare, and to an academic tutor responsible for reporting on their progress. He also noted the existence of an active students' council, the Makerere College Guild, to which numerous student societies and clubs were affiliated, among them political, musical and historical societies, and an Inter-tribal Society which sought to break down tribal prejudices. He observed that the college had several playing fields for football, hockey, cricket and other sports, organised by the students themselves. Boahen (1994) finds that nearly all the British colonies in Africa saw the emergence of one or two student movements or unions by students of the new university colleges that were created at the time, such as the Tanganyika African Welfare Society founded by the students of Makerere College in Uganda and the National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS) formed in 1959.

The issues that student movements engaged with then were both welfare-related and political. Byaruhanga (1996) shows that the first significant protest by students of Makerere

College in 1952 was triggered by food-related complaints. Later, students engaged in political and ideologically inspired protests focusing on broader anti-colonial and pan-African struggles taking place on the continent in the 1960s. It can be generally observed from the literature available that most student organisations in Africa before the 1960s were established and organised around the broader nationalist programme of decolonisation and nation-building; a linkage which gave the organisations especially within the first decade of independence a legacy of strong student unionism, student political activism and idealistic radicalism (Olugbade 1990).

Beyond this engagement with welfare and broader pan-Africanist issues, Boahen (1994) notes that from 1960 to 1970 when most African countries gained independence, student movements in British colonial Africa (Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda and Sierra Leone) were marked by a low degree of politicisation or lack of political activism. Generally during this period, the number of university institutions was comparatively low and colonial relations dominated students' engagements at the pan-African level. At the end of the 1960s student ideology became increasingly inspired by Marxism-Leninism and Maoism as well as leftist politics. For example in 1967, university students at the then University College of Dar es Salaam formed the University Students African Revolutionary Front (USARF), an internationalist group that called for reforms within the university to meet national development goals (Douglas 2007). The USARF criticised the university system, the largely expatriate faculty, and the exclusion of socialist thought in the curriculum. They maintained that as long as neo-colonialist, Western professors dominated the teaching staff and controlled the education of Africa's future leaders, Tanzania would never truly be liberated from Western imperialism. University officials responded by mandating that all political activity in which the youth were involved go through the existing institution of the Tanzania Youth League (TYL), an affiliate of the ruling party which was later renamed CCM Youth League (2007). The group, which engaged in study and activism and held regular meetings on Sundays, featured many students who would go on to become influential politicians. USARF was composed of students from the eastern and central African countries, who articulated their views through a magazine, *Cheche*. As if to signal the strained relations between students and the political establishment that would evolve in the subsequent decades, the government of Tanzania, led by Nyerere, banned both USARF and the magazine in 1970, due to what was seen as the organisation's and magazine's left leanings (Priya & Mhajida 2012).

The 1970s: Era of institutional nationalisation and student radicalisation

The character of student representation and engagement with university governance started to change dramatically from the 1970s. Arguably, there was a departure from the collaboration that had been witnessed between student organisations and political leadership in the struggle for independence in Africa, to increased antagonism from the 1970s, when universities were

established as national institutions. Henceforth, and as Balsvik (1998) documents, relations between the student leadership and university management deteriorated and led to constant closure of institutions. This radicalisation of the student movement and severance of relations with the political leadership mostly emanated from the push from the students to constitute themselves as the vanguard of the dreams of political independence for the new states. Hence the quest for political spaces by students within the institutions was not welcome by university management who saw themselves as representatives of the new political class. When most African countries attained political independence, a decision was made by the new African leaders to use the universities as developmental institutions in pursuit of economic and political progress. Of immediate focus was the use of the universities to catalyse the process of workforce production to aid in the Africanisation of the civil service. Hence from 1970, an increasing number of middle-level institutions were established as national institutions through Acts of parliament. This was the case for example, with the University of East Africa that was de-established to found national universities in Nairobi, Dar es Salaam and Makerere. This institutional nationalisation also involved a severance of the 'special relationship' with the University of London, together with the governance cultures this entailed, including spaces for student representation. This focus on 'development' in most instances altered the relationship between university students and the political elite from what it had previously been.

A common feature of the new institutions throughout Africa was their close relationship with the political establishment, with the countries' presidents being installed as chancellors of the universities, and therefore having a direct role in determining the level of autonomy that the institutions enjoyed. In universities such as Dar es Salaam, the youth league of the ruling party TANU became part of the governance structure of the institution and had a more prominent role than independent student organisations (Ngonyani 2000; Omari & Mihiyo 1991). A review of the Acts of parliament that established the institutions does not reveal any provisions made expressly for student representation. Henceforth, and although the Acts of the new universities allowed for student representation, the close association between the new university management with the political elite constrained students' organisational spaces in what would be interpreted as elite competition to control the spoils of independence, with students seen as a new elite in the making, taking perspectives different from those of the ruling elite.

The University of Dar es Salaam Act 1970, for example, defined a student organisation to mean 'an organisation approved by the Chancellor as being an organisation representative of the students of the University' (University of Dar es Salaam Act 1970: 5). The Act allowed the student organisation to elect five members to represent them in the University council and faculty boards and three student representatives to senate. However, given that the chancellor of the university, who was also the country's president, had to approve how the student organisation was constituted, political considerations in such processes prevailed to the detriment of true student representation and engagement. The same efforts at political containment of student activities have been chronicled with respect to Makerere University in the 1970s,

during the Obote and Amin presidencies (Mills 2006). With such political meddling and limitations, the nascent period of the national universities witnessed constant pressures from students making a case for genuine student representation in the governance of the universities. Three examples of what happened to student representation and organising in Ghana (University of Ghana), Tanzania (University of Dar es Salaam) and Kenya (University of Nairobi) in the period 1970 to 1980 illustrate this position.

Ghana was the first country in Africa to achieve independence and had the University of Ghana established as a national institution in 1961. Boahen asserts that unlike other parts of the British Commonwealth that witnessed a lot of student activism just before and after independence, in Ghana only one movement was formed in the 1960s, the National Association of Socialist Students' Organisations (NASSO). This organisation was the student branch of the ruling Convention People's Party (CPP), in opposition to the National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS). The first confrontation between the students of the university and the government came shortly after independence when NUGS passed resolutions condemning the dismissal of the chief justice and protesting against the deportation of six members of the academic staff of the University of Ghana (Amoa 1979; Boahen 1994). The government of Kwame Nkrumah responded by closing the three universities in Ghana for seventeen days and by forming a rival student association, the Ghana National Students' Organisation (GNSO) to replace NUGS. The swift and harsh reaction from government over student activities led to apathy among students regarding questioning the quality of their representation in university governance. This apathy continued until 1971, when there was a further direct clash between the students and the government caused by NUGS' demand that members of parliament should declare their assets as provided for in the constitution (Boahen 1994), a scenario similar to what happened in Dar es Salaam, when students questioned the higher salaries awarded to ministers, as we shall shortly discuss. Amoa (1979) finds that at no time did the students come out openly to challenge the whole political system due to the failure on the part of Ghanaian students to become actively involved in national politics as a consequence of their low degree of politicisation occasioned by government repression. From 1971 onwards, however, Ghanaian students became increasingly politicised and certainly played a greater role in the overthrow of Busia's civilian government in 1971 and Acheampong's military government in 1978 (Amoa 1979).

In Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and although the Act that established the university provided for student representation, genuine representation had to be negotiated over a long period of time. Following presentations made by students to the presidential commission that had been tasked to explore the possibilities of setting up the university, student participation in the university council, senate and academic boards was incorporated in the 1970 Act (UNESCO 1972). Before then, there was an unwritten 'gentleman's agreement' in the university college that had allowed limited student participation in departmental meetings and faculty boards (UNESCO 1972). However, both UNESCO (1972) and Douglas (2007) aver that student participation in the University of Dar es Salaam as contained in the 1970 Act was not

comprehensive. Students were, for example, not allowed to participate in such bodies as the appointments committee, disciplinary committee, and appeals committee or in processes entailing curricular design and examinations. In terms of actual structure, the 1970 Act created the following offices for students:

- The student council called 'Baraza' which was composed of all students of the university and was the supreme student policy-making body.
- The representative council, which was the student parliament elected directly by students with the halls of residence acting as electoral constituencies. The representative council, once elected, would then elect five members to the university council, senate and other university committees.
- Hall committees elected by their respective hall residents automatically became members of the student representative council. Hall committees were responsible for the welfare issues of students such as room allocation and the organisation of sports and entertainment.
- The president of the Dar es Salaam University Students' Organization (DUSO) was directly elected by all students. Any member of the student community could contest and winning was by simple majority.
- The DUSO cabinet comprised the DUSO president, the vice-president and the ministers, who were picked by the president from among the elected members of the students' representative council.
- Finally, the cabinet operated through committees appointed by ministers from among the student body to advise them on matters related to their ministry.

Despite this detailed structure which was meant to facilitate student representation, it would seem that during most of the 1970s, the university administration which was appointed based on their allegiance to the political structure tried to manipulate and limit students' space for organising. Douglas (2007) finds that although Dar es Salaam University had impressive policies in place to facilitate student representation and give students the opportunity to learn about social issues that were directly related to their lives and interests, the students noticed increasingly oppressive administrative policies. The first manifestation of this was that the first university administrators appointed after the institution was established as a national university were party functionaries. A manifestation of the students' frustration was that the new administration seemed to favour the Tanzania Youth League (TYL), and this caused continued friction on who from DUSO and TYL would serve as the voice of the student body. Many students took issue with this, with most students asserting that TYL could not be considered the voice of the students at all (Douglas 2007; UNESCO 1972). This tension culminated in what is known as the Akivaga crisis. The Akivaga crisis refers to the closure of the University of Dar es Salaam that followed a letter written by students to the university administration expressing reservations over certain proclamations by the vice-chancellor without the input of students. The chairperson of DUSO, Symonds Akivaga, a Kenyan student, and the DUSO

cabinet were summoned by the university disciplinary committee, which expelled Akivaga and repatriated him to Kenya. DUSO reacted to this action with the resignation of the student cabinet and all student representatives on the council, senate and faculty boards, leading to a stalemate as students ceased to be represented in any of the university committees. This eventually led to the closure of the university and the expulsion of more student leaders, leaving the party affiliated to TYL in charge of student representation.

The Akivaga crisis triggered a long period of conflict between students and management at the university. Matters came to a head on 5 March 1978 when students from the University of Dar es Salaam, Ardhi Institute, that is the college for land and survey studies, and the Water Resources Institute, tried to march to the offices of the government newspaper, *Daily News*, to protest an increase in the salaries of ministers and members of parliament that they saw as a departure from the socialist ideals (Douglas 2007; Nyonyani 2000). The government reacted to this protest by banning DUSO, and placing student affairs under the CCM Youth League in an attempt to control students through the centralisation of power in the party (Peter & Sengondo 1985). Subsequently, and in attempt to deconstruct what the government saw as DUSO's subversive politics, the president of the republic as the chancellor of the university, entrusted the youth league of the ruling party to run student affairs and subsequently facilitated through university management the formation of a splinter organisation, *Muungano wa Wanafunzi Tanzania* (MUWATA), meaning Tanzania Students' Union, by the youth wing to oversee all student governments in colleges and universities (Ngonyani 2000). Nominations for leadership positions were conducted by the youth wing which vetted all candidates aspiring to positions in the student body, throwing out those who did not show strong allegiance to the party (Ngonyani 2000). Thus, student representation was placed in the hands of an organisation incapable of solving problems the student community was facing, especially problems related to resources and representation. The ban on DUSO remained until 1990, when MUWATA was abandoned and a new organisation, the Dar es Salaam University Students' Organization (DARUSO) was formed.

In Kenya, student representation followed similar paths of confrontation with the political establishment and university management after the founding of the University of Nairobi in 1970. The initial confrontation stemmed from students' opposition to *Sessional Paper No. 10 of 19*65, for which they expressed contempt, as it supported the capitalist system as a strategy for development (Balsvik 1998). Instead, the students preferred and showed enthusiasm for the Tanzanian brand of socialism and the strategy of self-reliance espoused by Nyerere. This opposition was led by the then student organisation, Nairobi University Student Organisation (NUSO). In 1972, the student newspaper *University Platform* was banned and its editors arrested for criticising the ruling party KANU (Kiai 1992). During most of the 1970s, student opposition featured as an emerging culture of political repression that was extended to university academic staff by limiting the exercise of academic freedom (Kiai 1992). The relationship between the students and the political establishment deteriorated when a new president, Daniel Arap Moi came to power in 1978. The new administration started on a

wrong footing. While the student leadership expected a change in attitude from the political system, the new president demonstrated in word and deed that he expected uncritical support and loyalty from the university. In October 1979, Nairobi University students demonstrated against Moi's one-year-old government which they accused of having barred opposition politicians from taking part in that year's general election and demanded the reinstatement of Ngugi wa Thiong'o as their professor of literature (Kiai 1992). Six university student leaders were expelled and the student representative body, the Nairobi University Student Organisation, was proscribed as the university was closed for a purported 'early Christmas vacation'. The banning of NUSO, as had happened in Dar es Salaam and the University of Ghana, gave rise to the Students Interim Committee, which stepped up the challenge to the Moi dictatorship. Henceforth, public speeches at the university had to be cleared by the Special Branch (i.e. the Kenyan intelligence police) who also attended any lectures held. The banning of NUSO stayed in force until 1982 when a new organisation, the Student Organisation of Nairobi University (SONU) was formed as the central body representing students, with Tito Adungosi as its first chairperson. His reign as the chair of SONU was, however, short-lived. Titus Adungosi, a third-year student in the Faculty of Architecture, Design and Development at the University of Nairobi was arrested and sentenced to ten years of imprisonment for sedition on 24 September 1982, after the failed Kenyan military coup of 1 August 1982 against Moi's regime. He died in prison under mysterious circumstances on 27 December 1988.

The narratives on the fate of student leadership and representation in Ghana, Kenya and Tanzania, could be told of many African universities during the 1960s and 1970s. While, during the 1960s, the nascent universities witnessed student organisations crystallising around greater pan-African issues, shaping the direction of academic and public services, championing decolonisation courses and student welfare issues, the period of 1970 to 1980 saw the growth of radical student movements to resist internal descent into the authoritarianism of the new states. Two forces shaped the nature of student organisation and representation. The first was a move by the political establishment to decolonise, at least in terms of structure, the universities in Africa, by de-establishing the 'Asquith' college system in preference for national universities. The subsequent attempts by the political establishment to manipulate the new universities for political ends and curtail the academic freedom that had blossomed under the University of London tutelage seem to have caused the conflicts between university student leadership and the political establishment in the 1970s. For example, Ajayi et al. (1996) aver that in the 1970s and 1980s four-fifths of the African states had a one-man, a one-party or a military government, with the presidents doubling up as chancellors of the new universities. The academic autonomy which was such an important part of the imported university model was exceedingly vulnerable under these arrangements. One way that the political leadership therefore tried to contain criticism from university students and academics was by limiting organisational space through limiting elected student and academic leadership. Usually, the administration and academic leadership of universities were appointed by the government and imposed on the university community (Ajayi et al. 1996; Cheater 1991). The manifestations of this move in universities

was in the form of government attempts to influence and control student organisations by either manipulating their leadership, banning them outright, infiltrating them, or replacing them with party youth wingers (Omari & Mihiyo 1991).

The 1980s and 1990s: The era of conflict and structural decay

From the 1980s, student leadership and representation in African universities entered a new phase. The radicalisation in student activities that had been witnessed in the 1970s started to ebb, although this did not in any way lead to reduced conflicts with university management. Rather, manipulations from the university management and the political system to control the direction of student activities intensified. Besides, the 1980s saw new developments that sucked student leadership into new zones of conflict both with the wider political establishment and university management. The confrontations between student organisations and state security agents due to the resistance of students to economic reforms that affected their welfare have been variously documented. University closures were more frequent as governments bowed to the dictates of international financial institutions by liberalising their economies and introducing anti-welfare policies as part of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). Accompanying the implementation of SAPs was the emergence of a new narrative that cast the public university as inefficient and that needed to be changed with the promotion of private universities, and the emergence of a private university sector as one that focused on more academic work, compared to the destructive student activism of public universities. Student leadership in many African universities got involved in mass coalitions with civil society and participated in governance as an oppositional force, to protest the dire economic conditions and to press for political liberalisation (Byaruhanga 2006). African students were among the forces that brought about Africa's second liberation in the 1990s (Mazrui 1995).

Most universities that were intellectually vibrant in the 1960s and 1970s became characterised by the collapse of infrastructure, such as libraries, bookstores and research facilities, serious shortages of books, laboratory equipment and research funds, inadequate teaching personnel and poor staff development and motivation. This had an adverse effect on student organising as governments sought to implement reforms that affected students' welfare, while at the same time ensuring that their political legitimacy was not eroded. In what has been described variously as 'student survival politics' (Byaruhanga 2006) or 'student acquiescence' (Mawuko-Yevugah 2013), governments used stick-and-carrot policies to weaken student organisations and minimise their representation in key university organisations in a manner that turned student organisations in most universities into either disenfranchised pressure groups or an integral component of university management. While in the 1960s and 1970s, students portrayed their organisations as the vanguard of the revolution and the common good, in the 1980s, what emerged was a strong focus on narrow welfare issues.

Ghana and Kenya provide examples where there was more use of the carrot than the stick

approach. In Ghana, some students, lecturers and workers supported the regime, which amended the composition of university councils to allow student and worker participation. For one year, universities were closed to allow students to help move cocoa from the countryside to the ports (Sawyer 1994). Tensions between the regime and the universities caused the committee of vice-chancellors to begin to play an increasingly important role in government–university relations, as the heads of public universities developed common positions when negotiating with the government (Sawyer 1994). In Kenya, the then ruling party KANU tried to establish party branches throughout the universities, balkanised national student organisations by creating and strengthening district-based student associations, and addressed the welfare issues of students by increasing their loan allowances while at the same time, gradually privatising university education (Chege 2009; Oanda 2013). Those student leaders who refused to abide by this state-crafted student leadership architecture were expelled from the institutions, arrested, tortured and forced into exile. The persecution of students and particularly student leaders was the order of the day.

In Uganda, besides demands for improved welfare conditions, the student guild leaders were at the forefront in opposing student constitutions that were drafted by the ministry of education to regulate student activities without any input from the student leadership (Byaruhanga 2006). The same situation prevailed in Tanzania where the ban that had been placed on DUSO in 1978 continued for most of the 1980s. Student representation continued to be under TANU Youth League (TYL) which also became the caretaker of the student government (Mwollo-Ntallima 2011). By 1979, another government-created student organisation, MUWATA, replaced TYL, and was in charge of student leadership in the university, colleges, and secondary and primary schools until 1991 when DARUSO was launched (Mkumbo 2002).

As Ajayi et al. (1996) document, the 1980s saw in almost all African countries the dislike for any manifestation of academic freedom by the political class. This resulted in a growing sense of militancy from students, which forced many governments to react violently. The 1980s also witnessed the implementation of SAPs in Africa, which in part reduced funding to higher education institutions, thus seriously affecting the welfare, material and learning conditions of students. Implementation of these policies forced student leadership in most African universities to organise resistance against the dismantling of public education and in defence of academic freedom and the right to study (Federici et al. 2000). Federici et al. (2000) aver that the struggles of African students in the 1980s and early 1990s were particularly intense because students realised that the drastic university budget cuts, which the World Bank's SAPs demanded, signalled the end of the 'social contract' that had shaped their relation to the state in the post-independence period, which had made education the key to social advancement and participatory citizenship. They argue that students' struggles also led to the development of new pan-African student movements (Federici et al. 2000).

Because the political leadership and university management were united in enforcing SAPs, force, manipulation and outright suppression were used to limit student representation and undermine their leadership. In Kenya for example, towards the end of the 1980s, centralised

student leadership organised in SONU was once again undermined in preference for faculty and district-based student representation (Klopp & Orina 2002). A presidential decree issued in 1981 and which required that student organisations wishing to hold meetings on campus apply for permits from the office of the president, was enforced by university management throughout the 1980s, such that apart from representation on faculty boards, there was no independent and democratically elected student body to articulate student interests (*Africa Watch* 1990). The University of Nairobi had also adopted a policy of divide and rule. By 1987, the Student Organisation of Nairobi University was again banned and students remained without any representation until 1992 (Kiai 1992). With the vacuum in student representation and leadership, the government and university management promoted ethnic-based welfare associations in place of a central students' body. The district organisations ostensibly representing students from various districts were characterised by a patronage system stemming from local politicians closely associated with the president, who was still the chancellor of all public universities (Kiai 1992). The student leaders of the district-based associations had direct access to the president and other politicians, and frequently led well-publicised trips to pay homage to the president, who in return rewarded them financially in exchange for declarations of loyalty to the president and the government.

While, in effect, the government took direct control of the university and student autonomy to organise was completely eroded (Savage 1990), the structure of the university was reconstituted into six constituent colleges, i.e. Arts, Business, Health, Agriculture, Science, and Education. This compartmentalisation and regimentation further weakened student representation and made it easy to diffuse opposition. The monitoring and administration of student activities at faculty level made top-down tracking of 'trouble makers' possible. A report by a team that had visited universities in Kenya, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Ghana and Nigeria towards the end of the 1980s observed that during the time of study for the report all these universities were either closed or had recently been closed due to student unrest (Coombe 1991). The University of Nairobi probably had the highest incident of crises, about 25 by 1990 (Omari & Mihyo 1992).

Reflecting on the conditions of student representation in African universities during the 1980s and 1990s, Byaruhanga (2006) notes that one consequence of this had been the de-ideologisation of student activism. The period had been characterised by diminishing state funding for education in the face of rapidly growing enrolment rates, a massive brain drain and overstretching of facilities. This in turn made the university leadership increasingly participate in manipulating student elections and leadership to the extent that most student representatives now appear as an extension of management and not the representative of students.

Increasingly, the gap between student leaders and the general student body in terms of opulence appears to be wide; students leaders are increasingly offered jobs either in the universities or other state apparatuses after graduation; and in the face of increasing youth unemployment, this has become the bait that has undermined student representation and its ideological leaning.

The nature of student representation post-1990: The era of fragmentation

While up to the 1990s, student representation and quality of participation were influenced by the wider political climate outside the universities, the post-1990 period has witnessed developments that have altered this relationship. First, in almost all African universities, the economic crisis of the state and underfunding that was occasioned by the adoption of SAPs led, towards the end of the 1990s, to the introduction of 'a commercial stream' of self-funded, 'private' students. This has meant that in some of the universities, student representation has come to be structured along the lines of the different modes of admission and study – government-funded vs. private students – which has seen student organisation subverted in place of narrow and short-term interests. For example, in Kenya, module two students in full-time and part-time programmes have their own small organisations even within the large student organisation as they perceive their interests to be different from those of the full-time students on government sponsorship. Within the large national student body, the Kenya University Students' Association (KUSA), parallels are often drawn in the media between the activism of student representatives from public universities and the non-confrontational approach of those student representatives from private universities. The net effect has been to balkanise students' organisational spaces and therefore undermine the effectiveness of the structures of representation. The constitution of SONU in Kenya, for example, clarifies the distinction between the two groups of students and their different membership fees. Article 5 on membership groups ordinary members into two groups: the first are government-sponsored students duly admitted by the senate (otherwise known as 'module one') who are required to pay an annual subscription fee of five per cent (5%) of tuition fees or five hundred Kenya shillings (Ksh. 500, USD 6). The second group are the self-sponsored students duly admitted by senate (otherwise known as 'module two') who are required to pay an annual subscription fee of five per cent (5%) of tuition fees or one thousand Kenya shillings (Ksh. 1 000, USD 12). Since tuition fees for the module two students are higher compared to those paid by government-sponsored students, this second group of students ends up paying more as membership fees, yet these differential payments have no implication on the quality of welfare services that either group of students enjoys.

The private student scheme, initially intended to be an opportunity to extend access to students who are able to finance their own university education, was not subjected to any regulatory structures. The management of the admissions system became out of hand as student numbers soon outstripped the available teaching and research facilities and manpower. Admissions were driven by the quest for more and more funds. Central administration and council lost their grip over the money-generating units, which claimed full ownership and authority over resources generated at unit level. Whereas in Kenya, as Sifuna (1998) discloses, the 1990s university planning debacles can be attributed to directives from above, at Makerere University in Uganda they were bred at the decentralised units. The parallel admissions have occasioned students with very different needs, who therefore seek to organise along the lines

of their mode of admission in a manner that subverts useful engagement with the institution for academic or welfare matters. In a majority of these institutions, it is apparent that the era of increased and deepening neo-liberal policies has resulted in the collapse of the student common voice and the deterioration of academic standards and the relationship between the students and society. In Ghana, reforms undertaken between 1990 and 1998 regarding funding higher education to achieve equity and quality never produced the expected outcomes. As Girdwood (1999) argues, part of the reforms in higher education in Ghana targeted reforming the student loan scheme to achieve equity and quality of higher education. This included designing the loan scheme to introduce the principle of cost-sharing, without any costs to students. However, rapid change in the external economic and policy environments which had underpinned the scheme's financial viability (including in particular the numbers of eligible students), and subsequent failure to reassess its sustainability, resulted in a substantial indirect subsidy to tertiary education. The subsidy represented a significant additional contribution to sectoral expenditure which did not contribute in any way to improving the quality of the education available to students. Quality had obviously been compromised by a lack of resources. Girdwood shows that overall, student numbers increased more rapidly than had originally been planned, but participation never broadened, and female enrolment at times decreased.

A student from one of the universities in Kenya, lamenting about the disintegration of student unity and the implications on academic standards noted:

> *We were not able to raise issues with the administration because we lack unity. There are issues to be addressed but many people are just not bothered and prefer to go about their businesses. In the event that they are raised by students, it takes time to be addressed.* (student interview, 13 May 2014)

Besides the dichotomisation of the student body into government-sponsored and self-sponsored students (as discussed above), new legal frameworks have been designed in most of the universities to move the institutions away from the narrowly conceived Acts of parliament by which they were established in the 1970s. Thus, in East Africa, Tanzania started this reform process with the formation of the institutional transformation programme in 1994, which culminated in the enactment of the new Universities Act in 2005, which also established the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU). In Uganda, the University and Other Tertiary Institutions Act of 2001 established the Uganda National Council for Higher Education (UNCHE), and in Kenya the Universities Act of 2012 created the Commission for Universities Education (CUE). The new national councils and commissions were supposed to expand the autonomy of higher education institutions by, for example, removing political influence and meddling in the governance of the institutions. Broad provisions have also been made for the strengthening of student governance through student representation in institutional councils, senates and faculty boards. Generally the Acts provide for at least two members elected by the institutional

student organisation as representatives in council and six students elected by the student organisation of the university to be representatives in senate. The provisions in the Acts have two limitations regarding student representation, however. One is that the Acts provide that representatives of student organisations are not entitled to attend deliberations of the senate on matters which are considered by the chairperson of the senate to be confidential and which relate to the general discipline of students, examination results, the academic performance of students and other related matters. This has left student representation in senate and even council to the discretion of the chairpersons of these organs. The second limitation is that while student elections are provided for, the process of elections and the rules governing who should contest in the elections are decided by university-appointed officers, especially deans in charge of student affairs. Such deans obviously do not carry the mandate of the students and could be used to ensure that students who are not favourable to the university administration are not cleared to contest.

According to the Act of one public university in Kenya, the dean of students shall be appointed by the vice-chancellor from among staff of the rank of senior lecturer and above. The dean of students shall hold office for a period of two years renewable, subject to satisfactory performance. The conditions of appointment of the dean of students shall be set out in the university terms of service. The dean of students reports to the deputy vice-chancellor (academic, research and student affairs) and shall exercise such powers and perform such duties in respect to the students, which shall include welfare organisation, discipline, counselling, accommodation, recreation, sports and job placement. At no point are students' views accommodated in the manner that such an office is constituted. Placing the responsibility to oversee student affairs on someone appointed by the university administration can limit students' space to organise in several respects. A circular to the student community, by one dean of student affairs in one of the universities detailing guidelines for students to invite speakers to attend student activities in the university, illustrates how such officers encroach on student space. The guidelines warn patrons and officials of registered student clubs and associations to observe four conditions. These are:

1. No student or group of students, in whatever capacity, has the authority to invite an outsider or outsiders for functions on the campus before consulting with the director of student affairs;
2. Invitation of outsiders who are public figures will be done by the association/club patron, or dean of school, or director of the relevant centre as may be appropriate in consultation with the director, student affairs;
3. Inviting some of the outsiders who may be a senior government or corporate figure will be done in consultation with the office of the vice-chancellor; and
4. Invitations *will* have to be approved not less than two weeks before the activity/function.

To put it differently, the circular reads that any person invited by the students to address them

or discuss a matter with them on campus has to be vetted by a university official, who therefore can decide what opinions are appropriate for students to listen to, or who is an appropriate public figure to talk to them.

The circular which we quote here does not indicate if these are resolutions that were jointly arrived at between the students and the director of student affairs. It would seem that the director on his own decided that a university organ, which does not have any student representation, would decide for students whom they could invite to their public meetings and what kind of issues are appropriate for the student community to listen to.

Uneasiness with having universities appoint student affairs officers for students is reflected in a detailed report by a visitation committee to the University of Ghana. The report notes in various sections the conflict that a dean of students appointed by the administration faces. The dean is required to act in a disciplinary capacity, a welfare capacity and as an intermediary between the university and the Students' Representative Council (SRC) (University of Ghana 2007). The committee advised against the role of the dean of students in formally representing the interests of students to the university administration; and proposed a situation where students or their representatives represent student interests in discussions with the university authorities, instead of using an official as intermediary. This is because, as the committee noted, students are not well represented on the governance of the university, particularly in areas where academic matters are discussed. They are not satisfied with the constitutional role of the dean of students and wish to represent themselves in discussions with the university authorities. There needs to be a formal channel of communication between the SRC and the central university authorities where information can be exchanged, complaints registered, and commitments to remedial action recorded (University of Ghana 2007). The committee's report recommended that the university should have training programmes to foster and develop student representative skills to aid their integration into corporate and academic structures.

A worrisome trend that affects the quality of student leadership and the extent to which they represent student issues has been the increased penetration of national political cultures and university management interests in the manner in which student leadership is constituted and managed. In Kenyan universities, for example, an emerging trend is one where those vying for student leadership positions present a contest between the interests of politicians who fund their costly campaigns and university management who want a student leadership that can easily be manipulated (*The Star*, 24 October 2014). Student campaigns are usually well funded by one of the national political parties with interests. Some political leaders support students with the genuine intention of helping them start their political careers; others have ulterior motives such as obtaining personal favours from students or seeking an outlet for their criminal intent such as distributing drugs on campus or pushing some tribal agenda depending on the leadership of the institutions. Tribalism is then bred at the universities, especially where it becomes obvious that the leaders are mostly, or only, of a certain tribe. The members of the 'special' tribes then become the university's 'untouchables', and things can only go downhill from there (*The Star*, 24 October 2014). As one student revealed:

> *A politician sent word that he wanted to sponsor a strong candidate's run for the presidency of the student union. I did not want to miss the chance and the only thing that qualified me for the sponsorship was my tribe. Someone organised a meeting with the mheshimiwa and I was slapped with a Sh 500 000 cheque (USD 5 800) to start my campaign. He told me that that he was willing to do everything so long as the college presidency did not go to the 'other tribe'.* (cited in *The Star,* 24 October 2014)

External political interference and manipulation of student elections have had destabilising effects on the quality of student representation and the management of the academic calendar of the affected institutions. In Kenya, at the University of Nairobi, the 2010 student elections were marred by fracas and the elections were aborted after a fiercely contested election; a replication of the 2007 national presidential elections that gave birth to the post-election violence in the country. These elections were characterised by violence that has never been witnessed before with cases of rigging, vote buying, bullying, threats and what was seen as interference by politicians (*News from Africa* May 2011). The institution was paralyzed by the rampage and consequently closed down indefinitely for investigations. SONU was disbanded for a year by the senate of the institution following the chaos. Besides political influence, part of the contest for student leadership emanates from the privileges that university management extends to student leaders to buy their compliance; it is not based on any desire to serve students and promote academic standards. Student leaders earn a salary, are housed in special rooms that are not only larger but have television sets and in some cases satellite television, and are given free meals and attend numerous seminars and conferences where they earn allowances (*News from Africa* May 2011). It is these privileges (as well as political manipulation) attuned to the individualistic neo-liberal cultures that have led to decay in the quality of student representation and alienation of student representatives from fellow students. A report by a Kenyan parliamentary committee that looked into cases of university riots in 2010 confirmed that what was happening in the universities was a reflection of the rot in Kenya's political system, which is torn along tribal lines; it involves a trend of tribal differences and political divisions that threatened to tear the institution apart. The committee observed the deep entrenchment of negative ethnicity and a politicised student fraternity which both threatened the stability of Kenya's universities (Nganga 2010).

A similar situation exists at Makerere University, Uganda, where elections for the student guild are conducted along national political party lines. Student campaigns for guild elections are mounted on the platform of the leading political parties in Uganda and the parties wield a lot of influence because most students at Makerere have just attained the national voting age, above 18 years, and are excited about national political parties (Natamba 2012). Most are left-leaning radicals opposed to incumbency which explains why the ruling NRM party is often a loser in guild elections, despite its heavy investment of influence and money. Besides political party affiliation, campaigns for student leadership are also heavily monetised. Guild campaign

candidates are expected to dress up, drive fancy cars, and be accompanied by a convoy of equally ostentatious-looking vehicles as they move from hall to hall to campaign. They are expected to provide music at the venues, print posters, and provide beverages and alcohol to their supporters. All these cost a lot of money. Consequently, students who have the potential to be good leaders do not offer themselves for election because they lack the kind of money that political parties pump into the campaigns. Political involvement in electing student leadership and the kind of money involved also fuels violence and chaos during rallies. Some candidates pay non-university youths to campaign for them and these hired hands reportedly cause most of the chaos during the rallies. The end result has been a situation where those elected to the student guild connect more with their sponsoring parties than the Makerere University students. Private universities, such as the Uganda Christian University in Mukono, have tried to enforce a strict ban on campaigning in national party colours during their student elections, a situation that Makerere University has not managed to contain despite several attempts (Mugume & Katusiimeh 2016; Natamba 2012).

The last development that has occurred in the post-1990 period has to do with the increased establishment of private universities on the continent. This has had implications on how student representation is conceived and operationalised. One effect that public university students' participation in wider political struggles outside the universities had was the constant closure of universities and the continued lamentation from the political elite that this was a waste of resources by students who were privileged. This was not necessarily the case as the causes of the conflicts revolved around what the students saw as a betrayal of the ideals of independence by the political class. However, given the resources that the political class had, it was easy to manipulate public opinion against students in public universities, and this worked. This explains the favour with which private universities, and private programmes in public universities, were received in the 1990s and the 2000s (e.g. Mwirira 2007). Students in the nascent private universities were portrayed as apolitical, focused on their academic work and able to complete their studies on time and transit to the labour market. These perceptions, however, have meant that student representation in the private universities is highly restricted even when the legal frameworks for the institutions provide for this. This apolitical trend is also slowly creeping into public universities which have private students, and may eventually attenuate the status of student representation as an important organ of governance in both private and public universities.

Data emerging from East Africa by studies commissioned by CODESRIA (Mulinge et al. 2012) indicate that the more the privatisation, the less the engagement of students in governance issues. Statutes exist that legalise and regulate the activities of student governance bodies. But such bodies do not seem to have any overriding power in the decisions taken by university organs such as senate and management. Generally, the data point to the lack of genuine student representation in governing bodies, especially with the increased privatisation of public universities. The reason for this, as the studies indicate, is that the governance reforms were partly a response to an era when student activism was seen as part of the problems affecting

higher education institutions. Hence, for the reforms to succeed, the old political model of university leadership that provided much space for student input into the governance process had to be dismantled.

Conversely, the studies also note positive aspects associated with the reform process such as the strengthening of institutions in charge of student welfare by universities, for example the student deanery and other welfare authorities. The studies point out the following as positive developments regarding the governance of student activities in the universities:

- National and institutional policies and charters establishing private universities and the Acts governing public universities have sections specifically focusing on student involvement in governance. However, a large percentage of the students in private universities are not aware of facilitative institutional policies. There is no evidence showing that student governance issues are mainstreamed into other important university policy documents (such as strategic plans) or into key statements such as the university vision and mission statements. Furthermore, student leadership is not a priority focus of the strategic plans of the public and private universities analysed for the CODESRIA study.
- Data from key informants and focus group discussants suggest that in both public and private universities, support systems have a major bearing on the level and quality of student participation in governance, both among students as a whole and particularly among student leaders. The data reveal differences between public and private universities in terms of support systems for enhancing students' involvement in governance. While facilities such as office space, equipment and leadership training are universal to the public and private universities studied, albeit in varying qualities and proportions, public universities are found to have numerous support systems for student leaders that are not found in private universities.
- A key avenue for student participation in university governance is student self-governance structures such as student councils and/or associations (i.e. the Students Affairs Council at USIU and the Kenyatta University Students Association) and academic and extra-curricular clubs and student societies (e.g. academic discipline-related and sporting clubs, associations or societies). The study finds that other than student governments/councils/associations/unions, a host of other organisations or structures for student self-governance exist in both public and private universities in Kenya.
- National politics and political parties wield tremendous influence on student self-governance structures and processes. This is particularly so for student government councils/associations/unions. A high proportion of respondents affirmed that all of the eleven areas of influence analysed by the study were greatly impacted on by national politics and political parties.

At the broad institutional level, diversity policies exist, designed by the institutions to ensure

that those elected to student governance councils represent the diversity of the student body in terms of age, gender, disability, ethnicity, nationality, study programme and year of study representation during elections. Thus, in principle, universities have diversity policies governing student representation in the governance process. However, the proportion of respondents (58.5 per cent) who agree that the election of student representatives to university governance structures caters for the diversity of the student body suggests that the observance of such a policies may be problematic.

Data from interviews and focus group discussions suggest that the impediments to effective student participation in governance differ from public to private universities. In private universities, the challenges revolve around the following issues:

- Although the charter is specific that students should be involved in governance, the universities do not implement this in practice;
- Student leadership does not have a direct linkage to management structures; proxy representation is widespread;
- Apathy among students is evident in poor student attendance at meetings; and indifference to governance processes makes it difficult for student leaders to gather issues from different students and to give feedback to the students;
- There is a lack of adequate support systems e.g. facilities and incentives for student leaders; and
- There is a fear of victimisation of student leaders who become too vocal.

In public universities, the following were identified as impediments:

- Large student numbers make it impossible to mobilise and represent everyone's needs;
- The diversity of students' views and needs is too large to harmonise and represent effectively;
- There is a tendency for student leaders to be compromised by management; some of the support systems identified earlier are viewed as bribes by other students; and
- Infiltration of leadership by national politics often leads to the balkanisation of the student body by creating partisan camps.

Conclusion

An analysis of trends in the quality of student representation in African universities reveals three phases. The first phase revolves around the period during which universities were set up in Africa as colleges of universities in Europe. During this phase, although representation was restricted, student organisations emerged to be part of the agitation for political independence and increased higher education for Africans. The character of student organisations at this

time tended to be more radical, activist and nationalistic, often espousing broader ideas of nationalism and pan-Africanism. Some of the leaders of these earlier student movements later became political leaders of their countries. The second phase began in the 1970s, when most of the universities in Africa were established as national institutions. With Acts that allowed students limited space to organise, we see student organisations engaging both the national political leadership and university management in wider political and academic issues. The conflict between student organisations and the political elite stemmed from what the student body saw as the relapsing of the political elite from the broader national project. What is most interesting about this period is that student organisations, continuing with their activist legacy, came into direct confrontation with former student leaders who had now taken over the political leadership of their countries. During this period, and well into the 1990s, governance in most African universities was problematic. During the first three decades of independence, university governance became closely linked to the governance (or mal-governance) of the state. The aborted governance project at the institutional level could therefore not midwife the emergence of broad-based systems for student participation. In other words, bad governance both at the institutional and national level subverted the emergence of strong student governance systems. The last phase is what can be seen as the era of fragmentation from the 1990s. This phase has been accompanied by the collapse of the 'national university' project, the deepening of neo-liberal tendencies, the deepening of ethnic cleavages in exercising political power and the lack of ideological leaning in student politics. Unfortunately, the ethnicisation of national politics has permeated universities and student organisations to the extent that representation and organisation of student unions are articulated through the prism of narrow ethnic interests. Students campaign for student leadership, often with the support of ethnically inclined politicians, not to serve the student body, but to join the ranks of those balkanising whatever is remaining of the nationalist project. At the institutional level, student organisations, especially with the rough economic conditions occasioned by the implementation of neo-liberal policies, are often co-opted by university management, based on their ethnic background. University vice-chancellors often manipulate student elections to have those from their ethnic communities elected as student leaders. Both the ethnic inclinations of the national political leadership and that of university management have come to define the character of student organisations and representation, often to the detriment of the quality of student welfare services and academic programmes.

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