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


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

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

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

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

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

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

**Aim and approaches**

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

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

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

The growing body of literature on the Fallist student movement also informed the work of this book.

**Conceptualising student leadership, representation and governance**

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

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


policy. In this notion of student representation, students as a group are a highly invested actor in the decision-making processes.\(^\text{10}\)

On the one hand, student governance includes in its scope the structures, processes and relationships of student government, how it is organised, governs and is governed, and how student representatives relate to the collective student body and to the authorities which they try to influence. On the other hand, it also refers to the system of formal and informal operative rules that govern all domains of student life and thus to the codified student–university relationship.\(^\text{11}\)

Focusing specifically on the agentic capabilities of students is a way to understand ‘the constellations of authority and accountability’ that manifest in the ‘cultures of governance’\(^\text{12}\) and the manner they operate and are experienced in student life ultimately. If governance is about rule-making (which provides the criteria for resource allocation), then ‘the governed’ should have a determining voice in a system underpinned by democratic ideals.

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

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

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precisely in student agitation to this end, and it can vacillate back and forth at any critical point.\textsuperscript{15}

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

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


\textsuperscript{18} The notion of a university pursuing at the same time ‘an academic project’ and ‘a human project’ is taken from the University of the Free State’s transformation plans during Prof. Jonathan Jansen’s term as vice-chancellor.


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

**Context and agency**

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

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


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

Design and method

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

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

26 We are grateful for the comments of the three peer reviewers of the manuscript who pointed out minor inconsistencies and inaccuracies that we cross-checked with the participants and with other records and subsequently corrected.
space to express their experiences and views in their own order, at their own pace, and using their own frames. As can be expected in an oral recall of personal history, participants from the earlier periods of 1994 to 2000 and beyond tend to conflate some events and have different and often more critical estimations of their role than those of the more recent periods, but this does not detract from the authenticity of their experience and their accounts.

**Selection of student leaders**

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

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


Participants’ backgrounds

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

In terms of socioeconomic backgrounds, a range is represented, including former leaders hailing from wealthy suburban communities and metropolitan townships to others from rural farming backgrounds or rural locations. The diverse backgrounds and early political socialisation in the home environment...
of the ex-student leaders may account for some of the changes over time and variation between institutions in student political behaviour.\textsuperscript{29}

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

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

\textbf{Approval process and ethics}

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

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

\textsuperscript{30} We are grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers of the book for pointing out this limitation.
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**Key**
- Grey: Involvement in student politics at university level
- Light grey: Involvement in SRC
- WITS: Institutional SRC, see list of abbreviations and acronyms on page v for the full names of universities
and passages that could possibly be incriminating or lead to stigmatisation were moderated or removed from the draft chapters, typically upon the advice of the editors. Overall, the iterative process involved a varied level of involvement of the former student leaders in the co-production of their chapter. In several cases it involved face-to-face meetings over and above the initial interview meeting, and in all cases it included numerous emails and calls until a final chapter was acceptable and approved. Every reflection chapter published in this book has therefore been approved by the respective former student leader, who is acknowledged as co-author thereof.

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

**How to read this book**

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

**Overview of the reflections' chapters**

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

The reflections in chapter 3 also come from Wits, which is where Dr Prishani Naidoo ended up becoming SRC vice-president in 1995, and eventually president of the South African Universities SRC in 1996, after she had a first experience of university life and student politics at the University of Durban-Westville (now the University of KwaZulu-Natal) in the early 1990s. Naidoo’s chapter is a reminder of how deeply involved student leaders were in transformation initiatives in their institutions and at national level in the mid-1990s. Fast-forwarding 20 years to a time when Naidoo is back at Wits as an academic, her insights into the start of the #EndOutsourcing, #October6 and #FeesMustFall campaigns at Wits in 2015 are equally invaluable.
Jerome September recalls the alienation he experienced when arriving at UCT and settling into his residence in the mid-1990s. During his two SRC terms, student representatives returned to the University Council and Senate in 1998 after the proclamation of the HE Act (after years of having boycotted them as ‘illegitimate structures’). He remembers the hopes that student leaders had for co-operative governance to work and the consternation he felt when his SRC lost the battle about outsourcing with the university management under Vice-Chancellor Dr Mamphela Ramphele. This battle, which would be taken up again and again over the next 20 years by students, eventually led to the #EndOutsourcing campaign of 2015/16. Since his years in student leadership, September has made a career in Student Affairs at UCT, Sol Plaatje University and Wits University. His professional experience adds greatly to the richness of insights he gives into the relationship between student representation and protests.

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

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

Xolani Zuma spent his first year in the SRC in 2005/06 and became SRC president for 2006/07 at UZ. In his chapter, he reflects on partisanship in student politics and particularly the rivalry between ANC- and IFP-aligned student organisations. His chapter further stands out by his reflections on the many lessons he learnt: on personal and political ethics, managing resources and corruption, and on the importance of understanding the distinction between politics and real life.
Zukiswa Mqolomba reflects in chapter 8 on her SRC presidency at UCT in 2006/07, drawing frequent comparison between the issues her SRC dealt with and what was taken up almost a decade later by #RhodesMustFall. In the final part of her chapter, Mqolomba reflects on the huge impact the experience of student leadership at UCT has had on her professional career and others who served with her in the SRC.

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

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

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

An important story running through the first part of chapter 12 is the so-called battle of the two Brians at UWC. Vuyani Sokhaba was deputy secretary-general of the UW SRC then. Sokhaba’s second term as SRC president extended into 2015 and the time when #RhodesMustFall and #OpenStellenbosch activists
sought to inspire a similar decolonisation movement at UWC. Sokhaba critiques #RhodesMustFall from the UWC point of view, explaining why no decolonisation movement ever took off on a campus where students had fought apartheid and colonisation almost since it was founded as part of the extension of apartheid to the higher education sector in 1959.

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

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

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