Student Movements and Autocracies in Africa

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Introduction

This chapter offers a historical mapping of student movements and youth-led protests against autocracies in African countries. It focuses on student movements in Senegal, Tanzania and Sudan from the period before independence to the present day to consider the intersections of youth-hood, power, higher education institutions and the state in each of these cases. It highlights the continuities and disjunctures in the ways that university student movements have challenged autocracy to consider how "successful" student protests can be in shifting political bases of power.

The concept of autocracy is sometimes used interchangeably with concepts like "dictatorship", "authoritarian regime" and "non-democracy" (Frantz 2016). The working definition for autocracy is "government by a single person or a small group that has unlimited power or authority, or a

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country or society that has this type of government" (Cambridge Dictionary 2019). Additional characteristics of autocracy are the restriction of political pluralism, the repression of mass mobilisation and the absence of an electoral process (Frantz 2016). Different forms of autocracy exist on a scale of severity; thus, totalitarianism can be distinguished from authoritarianism as two differently severe forms of autocracy. Authoritarianism specifically refers to "arbitrary governmental authority" (Toth 2017).

A distinction is made between students and youth as social identities. While the categories are bound by a shared youth-hood, youth is a broader category under which students exist. It is also suggested that students and youth more broadly have not been equally prominent in challenging autocracy at all times. This is because university students have the ability to leverage a distinct "student power". This power exists because of the ways that relationships between students, universities and the state enables students to exert influence in society. Student power is not at the disposal of youth more broadly. However, in many instances, it has been the shared youthfulness and resulting mutual interests between students and other young people that have enabled them to collectively mobilise against an identified target or towards the attainment of a shared goal. This chapter, therefore, covers both student and youth protests/movements, highlighting instances in which they have been mutually reinforcing and instances in which either of these two categories has played a more prominent role.

This chapter is structured in four main parts. The first part locates the university in post-independence African countries to highlight the factors that have defined the relationships between universities and the state. The second part considers contributing factors to the emergence and decline of student movements, and the continually changing relationship between students and the state since independence. Part 3 considers the evolution of student/youth protests/movements in three country cases, namely Senegal, Tanzania and Sudan. It examines the peculiarities of their role in challenging autocracy. The fourth part considers whether a decline in the "elite" status of students and the evolving relationship between students and the state has made youth, as a broader category, better positioned to use protests and movements as tools to challenge autocracy. The conclusion highlights trends, similarities and disjunctures in the role of student movements in challenging autocracy in the respective countries.

Higher Education in Post-independence Africa

In Ancient Egypt, premodern Ethiopia and precolonial Islamic Africa, ancient traditions of scholarship and institutions for advanced education existed before the "deflection of the African historical trajectory by European imperialism" (Lulat 2005, p. 42). Nevertheless, the early emergence of modern universities in African countries is directly tied to colonialism, and many contemporary African universities are adaptations of colonial projects (Hanna 1975, p. 11). The end of World War II (WWII) brought with it a proliferation of higher education institutions in many African countries. Nearly 15 years later, the decolonisation and independence movements that swept the continent starting in the late 1950s ushered in an important transition period for these universities. Africa states were tasked with defining what an *African* university was and what its relationship with society would be (Hanna 1975, p. 11). At independence, the new leaders of independent African states adopted statist "development models … that emphasised state control of economic activities, while minimising market processes" (Mbaku and Ihonvbere 2003, p. 3). In terms of an ideal political system, African leaders including Tanzania's Julius Nyerere, Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah and Mali's Modibo Keita considered the single-party political system as the structure of government most fit to promote "peaceful coexistence of groups and sustainable economic growth and development" (Mbaku and Ihonvbere 2003, p. 4). The combination of statism and one-party political systems enhanced the ability of ruling elites to establish and entrench authoritarian and autocratic rule (Mbaku and Ihonvbere 2003). Autocratic state governance had direct implications for academic freedom and the ways that universities were administered. In Kenya, for example, after independence, the university system was quickly embedded within the wider system of the repressive rule of the state and the government deeply permeated the running of the five public universities and colleges that were established in the country from 1970 (Klopp and Orina 2002, p. 72). One way this happened was through a decree establishing that the Kenyan president would be appointed chancellor of all public universities and colleges in the country. This gave whoever occupied that seat, and the government more broadly, the ability to appoint and dismiss vice-chancellors, to nominate members of the university council and, in some cases, to influence administrative matters or student admissions/affairs (Sifuna 1998, p. 178).

By the late 1980s, many African countries were heavily indebted to external donors including the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB) and other bilateral and multilateral creditors, and many were experiencing economic stagnation (Schraeder 1995, p. 1160). During the subsequent period of structural adjustment that started in the mid-1980s, African countries made significant disinvestments from social spending. Implemented by at least 30 African governments (Caffentzis 2000, p. 4), the WB and IMF's Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) imposed conditionalities on states that included the "removal of subsidies to students for food and accommodation, a currency deflation that raised the cost of educational materials, and cuts in government funding of education" (Caffentzis 2000, p. 4). The debt crisis and the imposition of SAPs were central economic contributing factors to the subsequent institutional decline that occured at universities across Africa (Atteh 1996, p. 36). As far as the relationship between university spaces and student protests is concerned, the post-Cold War push for democratisation in African countries was important because it prompted "the rise of increasingly organised and vocal pressure groups within African "civil society" that sought the liberalisation of their respective political and economic systems". Students and youth were among these groups (Atteh 1996, p. 36).

Situating Student Resistance

Historically, student movements in Africa have at times been classified into the following three phases: 1900–1935; 1935–1960; and 1960–1975 (Boahen 1994, p. 10). In the first phase, there were very few student movements in Africa as a whole. There was one in Ethiopia, which is recorded as having been active between 1925 and 1935, but none at all in British colonial Africa (ibid.). In former French colonial Africa and North Africa student movements also existed and were active during this first period (ibid.). The objectives of these early student movements were social and cultural, rather than political (ibid.). In the second phase from 1935 to 1960, the formation of African student movements grew considerably, mirroring the post-World War II expansion of higher education institutions on the continent. While some student movements were both established and based in African countries, many were established and based in European countries, and most notably France, by African students studying and living abroad. The objectives of this second phase

of student movements were distinctly political rather than cultural (ibid., p. 15). Some of these movements initially demanded a reform of colonialism, while others quickly became "radicalised", demanding the full overthrow of the colonial system. To this extent, student movements played a decisive role in the independence movements in French Africa and the Maghreb (ibid., p. 16). According to Boahen (1994), in British colonial Africa, with the exception of the West African Student Union (WASU), formal "student movements did not play [a] role in the struggle for independence" (ibid., p. 16). This does not, however, diminish the role that students as a social category unaffiliated to any formal group played in supporting independence movements through other forms of resistance and protests.

In the third phase identified by Boahen (1994) spanning the first 15 years of independence between 1960 and 1975, student movements in former British colonies remained relatively conservative throughout the 1960s, while those from former French colonies and Ethiopia specifically tended towards increased radicalism and militancy in the 1970s (ibid., p. 14). In the later parts of the twentieth century, the prominence of formal student movements witnessed a decline across parts of Africa.

Given the distinction made between movements and protests, Boahen's mapping of student movements does not reflect the simultaneous and often related manifestations of student protests in African countries both before and since independence. Thus, while student movements perhaps saw a decline after the 1970s, protests remained a prominent form of activism for students across the continent. Federici and Caffentzis (2000), who track the chronology of African university students' struggles from 1985 to 1989 in the backlash towards SAPs, identify at least 142 (Federici and Caffentzis, pp. 11–150) distinct instances of student strikes, demonstrations, protests and resistance against the state both on and off university campuses in countries across the continent including Kenya, Tunisia, Congo, Zimbabwe, Mali and Nigeria. The next section of this chapter discusses three case studies to explore the complex intersections between youth-hood, power, higher education institutions and an autocratic state.

Senegal

Abdoulaye Bathily et al. (1995) track the history of the Senegalese student movement from what they designate as its inception in 1903 up

until 1989. Their definition of "movement" is broad, and it speaks to the emergence, activities, contributions and dissolution of a series of different formal student organisations in the period observed. They describe the student movement as having a series of distinct phases between 1903 and 1989: the period of assimilation (1918–1947); the period of nationalisation (1946–1960); the anti-imperialist period (1960–1975); and the corporatist set back (1974–1988). According to the authors, the roots of the movement lie in the establishment of *Ecole Normale William Ponty* in Senegal in 1903, the "first French West Africa higher education institution" (Bathily et al. 1995, p. 371). The period of assimilation was defined by the tensions experienced by Senegalese students in either actively choosing to assimilate with the French colonial establishment on one hand, or attempting to resist this and instead drive forward a nationalist agenda on the other (Bathily et al. 1995, p. 371). Students who had previously attended educational institutions set up by the French, like *Ecole Normale William Ponty*, formed alumni and other associations that enabled them to distinguish themselves from other social groups, and through which they exchanged views with their peers. In the period of nationalisation, Leopold Senghor and other African politicians seated on the French Constitutive Assembly pushed for the setting-up of a "genuine higher education system in French black West Africa" (ibid., p. 375) which led to the later establishment of the University of Dakar in 1957. With this, and in the context of the post–World War II sociopolitical context, there was an expansion of student associations that were formed by and centred around the new class of university students in Senegal.

The *Association des Etudiants Africain* (African Students Association) was formed in 1945 by Senegalese students in France and was the first black students' association in France (ibid., p. 376). It rejected the *Union Francaise* (French Union) under which France's West African Colonies were classified from 1946. It also advocated for the improvement of students' learning conditions and their independence from political parties (ibid., p. 377). By 1952, the association had evolved into the *Association des Etudiants Senegalais en France* (AESF) (Association of Sengalese Students of France). A particular feature of the Senegalese students' movement at that time was the divergences in the interests between Senegalese students' associations formed and based in the metropole (France) and those that emerged and were based in Senegal. For example, during the nationalisation period, students in France became more quickly radicalised towards nationalism, pan-Africanism and Marxism than the students in

Senegal, who still clung onto the privilege of association with the French that came with access to education. Students in France "already felt the need for independence in 1953, [but] it was not until 1957-1958 that those in Dakar started showing a clear inclination towards this view" (ibid.).

The *Association Generale des Etudiants de Dakar* (AGED) (General Association of Students of Dakar) which was formed in 1950 was instrumental in leading demands to the colonial administration to provide education in Senegalese universities of a quality that matched the education at universities in the metropole. This led to calls to democratise education (ibid., p. 379) and later it led to calls for independence and nationalism. The increasing radicalism of the student movement attracted the attention of political parties who sought to infiltrate the movement in order to expand their bases within local constituencies. The *Rassemblement Democratique Africaine* (RDA), a political party formed in 1946, "was the first to apply a strategy of infiltration into the student movement" (ibid., p. 380). Ultimately, the period of nationalisation witnessed a shift in the Senegalese student movement from an ambiguous and varied association with the colonial system, to a stronger and more consistent recognition by students that they were in a position to lead or contribute to the country's liberation.

The post-independence period in Senegal, like many other African countries, was characterised by a proliferation in higher education and a surge in enrolment numbers. Over time, the ability of the state to continue to subsidise education was put under strain. The politics of the student movement became increasingly defined by both anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism. Its anti-imperialist stance was reflected by its empathy with and explicit support for countries like Congo, Ghana and South Africa, whose politics were still being directly interfered with by international actors.

The continued attempts by political elites to permeate the student movment also meant that it tended to "position itself in the limelight of political action whenever partisan political opposition could not express itself openly" (ibid., p. 379). The movement has thus been criticised for being infiltrated and manipulated by opposition parties in Senegal, and this was often evidenced by the convergence in the profiles of student activists and "the intellectuals [that formed] the bulk of the opponents to the government" (Bathily et al. 1995, p. 397). During this time, student

action took the form of protests and demonstrations that were increasingly met with government brutality, threats of cuts to government funding to students, the suppression of scholarships, and harsh applications of the law (Bathily et al. 1995, p. 395).

Senegal gained independence in 1960. During the anti-imperialist period between 1960 and 1975, the student movement was primarily shaped by an anti-Senghor movement and was concerned with the termination of the French influences at the University of Dakar. A notable high point in this regard is the May 1968 student protests which culminated in a general protest that challenged the Senghor regime. The key mobilising actors in this regard were the *Union des etudiants de Dakar* (UED) (Dakar Students Union) and the *Union Democratique des Etudiants Sénégalais* (UDES) (Democratic Union of Senegalese Students). A central cause of the protest was the anti-imperialist ideological orientation of students and other groups who sought the attainment of authentic independence and the dismantling of the neocolonial state. Student frustrations found mutuality with working-class disaffection that, among other factors, was a result of the "agricultural crisis [that] contributed to growing tensions in Dakar and rural parts of the country" (Libcom.org, 2016) and general economic deterioration that had caused a severe decrease in purchasing power since 1961 (ibid.).

An immediate cause of the general protest was the government's introduction of a reform that cut student scholarships to one-third in 1968 (Levi and Thiam 2018, p. 183) and the failure of negotiations between the UED, UDES and the government on this issue. When the state brutally shut down the initial protests by declaring a state of emergency and deploying the army onto university campuses, the *Union nationale des travailleurs du Senegal* (UNTS) (National Union of Sengalese Workers) subsequently called for a strike in solidarity with the students (Bianchini 2016, p. 95). Senghor's government enlisted the assistance of the French Army to break up the general protest and simultaneously opened talks with the UNTS in a scheme to disrupt the alliance between workers and students. Mutuality between the protesters was further weakened when the government entered into negotiations with the UDES. Ultimately, the lack of a consistent unifying goal among the different student organisations, the workers' unions and the different underground opposition organisations resulted in the gradual waning of the student protests by 1970 (Bathily et al. 1995, p. 396).

During the period identified as the corporatist setback between 1974 and 1988, contextual factors in Senegal had led to the gradual proletarianisation of students (Bathily et al. 1995, p. 398). The emergence of opposition parties and the opening up of democratic spaces, for example, diminished the students' ability to express a political agenda. Fragmentation of the movement into multiple and competing associations also led to increased difficulty in successfully orchestrating mass mobilisation of students around a single cause. Thus, strikes that emerged between 1975 and 1977 were primarily corporatist and were conducted with limited success in the attainment of desired outcomes. By the late 1980s, unemployment was rife in Senegal and students who bore the brunt of graduating with no job prospects increasingly coalesced with other unemployed youth.

Another high points in the Senegalese student movement was the 1988 protests against the disputed outcome of the general election (Zeillig 2007, p. 184) in February of that year. In this instance, students successfully extended the objectives of the movement from a focus on their own interests to those of the broader society. Students were able to influence the appointment of key staff at the University of Dakar, including the vice-principal (Zeillig 2007, p. 185). Senegalese students also played a central role in the country's democratic transition of 2000 in which Abdoulaye Wade was elected as president. Students primarily contributed to the outcomes of the election through their mobilisation efforts and by acting as the "principal organisers and propagandists of Wade's campaign" (Zeillig 2007, p. 183). It is also suggested that the presence of student activists at polling stations helped to prevent serious electoral fraud (ibid.).

In return for their contributions, students held Wade accountable for improving conditions at the university, making it clear that the same movement that had supported his election could equally turn on him if he reneged on commitments to increase financial support to students. However, the student demands inherited by Wade had existed for decades prior to his election. This, in addition to the proposed increase in university fees under the government's national plan for education, sparked the 2001 student protests in Senegal through which students expressed their grievances over the lack of improved material conditions at universities. At the height of the protest a student, Balla Gaye, was shot and killed in clashes with riot police. The strike came to an end in 2003 after Wade instituted a variety of university reforms. The end of the strike also saw an increased uptake of former student leaders into government positions.

At this point, it is instructive to consider the nature of student protests post-2005 with a focus on highlighting the emergence and impacts of alternative youth movements. For one, to the extent that universities in Senegal still face structural challenges and education funding remains low (Zanoletti 2018), university student and teacher strikes are still a common form of collective action in Senegal. For example, "in 2014, one third of protests in Senegal were focused on education sector issues, and this figure rose in 2015" (ibid.). There was a break in this trend in 2016 and 2017 as demonstrations and protests focused on the parliamentary elections. However, in 2018, education-related protests outnumbered all other protests in Senegal (ibid.). According to Zanoletti (2018), the strains on funding to the education sector are "heightened by the shrinking labour markets, weak public sector recruiting, and reorientation of government spending towards the security sector" (ibid.). Despite being centred on education, these protests reflect wider disaffection and discontent in Senegal.

Most recently, in 2018, a teacher's strike over economic indemnities (ibid.) cascaded into a student strike over the resulting delay in exams. Students also demanded for the government to make payments toward student grants at Gaston Burger University in Saint-Louis. Clashes with security forces led to the killing of a student which resulted in a flare-up of the protests across other academic institutions. As far as the material demands of students are concerned, there has been little change in the tune and character of student engagement with the state around the provision of adequate funding.

In terms of braoder youth-led political activism in Senegal, *Y'en a Marre* (We Are Fed Up) is a rap music group and civic youth movement that has contributed significantly to mobilisation and the cultivation of a youth consciousness. The "Y'en a Marre Movement" emerged in the context of former President Abdoulaye Wade's attempt to change the constitution and run for a third term in June 2011 (United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe 2019). The Movement's founders are rappers who already had a broad youth audience and a listernership that resonated with the messaging in their music. Remarking on how the movement was started, its founders said: "we discussed the fact that a group of imams from Guediawaye had mobilized themselves to speak out against the constant cuts in electricity. So, we said to ourselves – if the elderly are taking a stand, how come we, the young, don't?" (ibid.). Besides a press release that was issued by the movement's

founders about its establishment, the protests of 23 June 2011 presented an ideal opportunity for the movement to establish itself legitimately by attracting followers in the context of crisis.

Y'en a Marre is specifically described as a civic movement. Examples of the movement's civic engagement activities include persuading people to register to vote and discouraging them from selling their electoral cards for quick money (ibid.). Having recognised that an estimated one million plus youth hadn't registered for the election, the organisers distributed flyers, rapped about the country's situation and collaborated with media on awareness raising initiatives (ibid.). While it would appear that Y'en a Marre is a political movement, its leaders have made it explicit that the movement is less about politics than it is about conscientising people towards a "New Type of Senegalese (NTS)" (ibid.), who is "responsible and conscious, [and] who participates in society" (ibid.). The movement has reached as far as Mali and Togo. It, therefore, has transnational bearing—interestingly similar to the early Senegalese student movement which necessarily accounted for the concerns of other West African students.

Tanzania

The University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM), the first university in Tanzania, was established in 1961 and initially existed as the University College, Dar es Salaam (Centre for World Class Universities 2014). UDSM was initially affiliated with the University of London before becoming a constituent College of the University of East Africa in 1963 (ibid.). It was only in 1970 that UDSM "was formally established by Act of Parliament No. 12 of 1970" (ibid.).

From the onset, the post-independence Tanzanian government included the university in its policies on human resource development and "viewed the university as a key institution for its policies on national development" (Brooke-Smith 1978, p. 143). As was the case in many other African countries at the time, youth who had access to university education immediately became part of a bureaucratic and social elite whose position in society was qualified by particular material, social and professional expectations. In addition to acquiring the necessary skills and expertise for contributing to the governance of Tanzania, university students were necessarily expected to "have an ideological lead in promoting socialism" (Brooke-Smith 1978, p. 144). The orientation of UDSM was,

therefore, directly shaped by the visions of President Julius Nyerere and the ruling party, Chama Cha Mapinduzi. For example, the *Second-Five Year Plan* in Tanzania included a manpower plan which stipulated that the curricula at UDSM ought to be "directly and sharply focussed on job requirements" (Brooke-Smith 1978, p. 143). As far as envisioning what higher education would like in Tanzania, there was a clear deviation from the "heritage of western intellectual detachment and objectivity" (Brooke-Smith 1978, p. 149). The constitution of higher education in Tanzania was therefore directly controlled by political decision-makers, and because of this, university education had considerable implications for how national politics was shaped. The tethering of higher education to national development in terms of high-level manpower also meant that UDSM was a factory that produced an educated elite.

The desire of this elite to be independent from the country's political elite would, however, become a source of tension between grduates and the state. Among the most prolific clashes between students and the state in Tanzania are the October 1966 national service demonstrations, at what was then still the University College of Dar es Salaam and still part of the University of East Africa. In October 1966, the "National Services Law" was passed, requiring "all young Tanzanians, including university graduates, to spend 2 years in some form of service being paid 40% of what they would otherwise be earning in civilian life" (Brooke-Smith 1978, p. 144). In opposition to the legislation, on the 22nd of October 1966, over 412 students marched to the State House to present their grievances and demands to the government, stating that if they were not met, "the battle between the political elite and the educated elite" (ibid.) would continue. According to Ivaska (2005), the statement by students about their explicit opposition against the political elite was an indication of the degree to which students considered themselves to be in a vertical rivalry with the government.

President Nyerere reacted to the demonstrators' criticism against low mandatory natoional service and low governmnt wages by cutting government salaries by 20% (Brooke-Smith 1978, p. 145), expressing that he had heeded students' demands. At the same time, however, he summarily expelled 338 of the students from the university. The aftermath of the 1966 crisis resulted in the establishment of a counter-hegemonic group called the "United African Student's Revolutionary Front" (USARF) (Ivaska 2005, p. 101). The organisation consisted of Marxist intellectuals and one of its primary goals was to raise the "awareness of the people

with regards to socialist ideology" (Mwollo-Ntallima 2011). Like many student organisations of its kind at the time, the USARF was comprised of students from countries in East and Southern Africa including Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Sudan. African statesmen including Yoweri Museveni and John Garang were among its members (Academic Dictionaries and Encyclopedias 2019). Publication was a key tool for USARF's activism. Particularly renowned is the organisation's magazine *Cheche* which, along with other publications, reflected the USARF's interpretation of the situation in Tanzania (Brooke-Smith 1978, p. 146) and criticised the "course of Tanzanian policy and leadership as being ineffectual, moderate and a revisionist sell-out" (ibid.). This was particularly in the context of the governments increasing partiality to neoclassical economic policy. The president publicly discredited the USARF in 1970. The organisation and the publication *Cheche* were subsequently banned which was a major blow to the already marginal left activist effort.

When UDSM became a self-sufficient university in 1970, the Dar es Salaam University Students' Organisation (DUSO) was formed (Mwollo-Ntallima 2011, p. 37). Throughout the 1970s, DUSO members protested for greater inclusion in decision-making about the university and "matters of democracy and participation, academic freedom, political killings and arrests of political figures" (ibid.). In 1978, DUSO was banned and all student affairs were forcibly made the responsibility of the government affiiated Tanganyika African National Union Youth Leageue (TYL). There was a ten-year period between 1978 and 1988 when all student associations were banned and only in 1991 were students granted the permission to form the Dar es Salaam University Student's Organisation (DARUSO) (Mwollo-Ntallima 2011, p. 38).

Incidences of student protest and activism at UDSM have continued since then. However, the issues that have prompted demonstrations have been less political than they were in the 1970s, and are now primarily concerned with issues related to the governance of the university. Student protests in 2010 at the UDSM expressed disaffection over the government's management of its cost-sharing scheme (Benbow 2011, p. 1) which was borne out of the privatisation of higher education. According to Benbow (2011), the recent student protests in Tanzania have largely

been about "pocketbook issues" (Benbow 2011, p. 2). Additionally, Tanzanian students no longer enjoy the benefits of large-scale public recruitment by the state and, therefore, increasingly need to navigate the contemporary job market which is generally either competitive or deficient in the availability of opportunities.

More recent student protests in 2011/2012 took on a particularly violent character and clashes between students and security forces were common. Suspensions and expulsions of protesting students were used to reprimand, punish and make an example of dissenters. In 2012, the UDSM adopted a "suspend, expel and blacklist" policy in an attempt to restore order at the institution (Mchome 2012). An after-effect of these protests was the securitisation of university spaces. Fast forward to the present context under President John Magufuli, there has been a gradual reduction of personal freedoms, democratic spaces and an increase in incidences of political violence against those who are deemed to be a threat by the government. This is the context that contemporary forms of student activism in Tanzania need to navigate.

Sudan

Sudan is a fascinating case to observe the role of the university and student/youth activism against autocracy. If not for the history of student involvement in opposition to autocracy in 1964 and 1985, then for the fact that in 2018/2019 students/youth contributed significantly to the protests that led to the successful deposition of long-term dictator Omar Al-Bashir. This section focuses on student/youth protests in Sudan before the secession of South Sudan in 2011 and protests in Sudan since. The history of the North-South divide in Sudan defined the ways that education was leveraged as a political tool in the country. Historically, schools in the north of the country were administered in Arabic, with a curriculum that reflected the region's Islamic heritage (ibid.). Schools in the south of the country had been established and run by Christian missionaries, with English being the language of instruction. Even in 2011, at the time of the South Sudan's independence, levels of literacy and educational attainment in the two countries reflected the "distinct policies pursued by British governors during the period of the Anglo-Egyptian condominium" (Bishai 2008, p. 2).

The administration of education in the South by the British was such that the education was both of poor quality and not broadly accessible. A

political implication of this was the resulting limited ability of Southerners to effectively represent themselves and their interests in the government in Khartoum. The severity of this situation is made clear by the fact that, when Sudan gained independence in 1956, "there was not a single university in the entire South" (ibid.). Due to the various conflicts in South since then, access to education has remained extremely limited. Britain's administration of the North was quite the opposite. Sudanese who lived in the capital city, Khartoum, had the potential to be part of the country's elite. This was both because of the benefits conferred by living in the centre and because of more ready access to education.

Gordon Memorial College, which would become the University of Khartoum in 1956 when Sudan gained independence, had already been established in 1902 for the purpose of educating and training North Sudanese. According to Bishai (2008), the positioning of the University of Khartoum had important ramifications for the future politics of Sudan for two reasons. Firstly, the students who attended the university developed a sense of "Sudanese identity" (Bishai 2008, p. 3) that was particularly informed by both their privileged access to education and "their own Arabised and Islamicised culture" (ibid.) which necessarily failed to incorporate the South. Secondly, university graduates were specifically being trained for incorporation into the civil service. The ability for "their conception of the nation's identity [to become] the dominant cultural narrative" (ibid.) had direct implications for the brand of nationalism that would emerge Sudan, and the subsequent attempts to unify the nation that would lead to a civil war (ibid.).

Autocracy, military rule and conflict have played a central role in the politics of Sudan since independence. In 1958, the post-independence government was ousted in a military coup. A year before independence in 1955, the First Sudanese Civil War had started after "southern insurgents, called the *Anya Nya*, fought against the [government of Sudan] for greater autonomy" (Zapata 2011). The first civil war ended in 1972 with the signing of the Addis Ababa Declaration which granted South Sudan greater autonomy. At this time, Jaafar Nimeiry was the president of Sudan after having taken power through a coup in 1969. Both the 1956 constitution and the Addis Ababa Agreement failed to sufficiently address the issue of whether Sudan should be a secular or Islamist state. Islam has always been a minority religion in the predominantly Christian South.

In 1983, "President Jafaar Nimeiry declared the nationwide application of sharia law and revived efforts to impose the Arabic-language and Islamic-themed curriculum on the South" (Bishai 2008, p. 3). He also defaulted on provisions made in the Addis Ababa Agreement for a referendum in Abyei that would allow population of the area on the north-south border to decide whether it would remain part of the north or be administered as part of the south. This sparked of the second civil war between 1983 and 2005. While a peace agreement had been signed between the government of Sudan and the Sudan People Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) in 1989, a coup led by recently deposed Omar Al-Bashir toppled the government and nullified the peace agreement (Zapata 2011). The second civil war ended with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005 (ibid.), and in 2011, South Sudan successfully gained independence from the North.

The secession of South Sudan led to a drop in the flow of oil revenues to the North, which resulted in the government instituting austerity measures in the form of cuts in fuel and other subsidies. In 2015, Omar Al-Bashir was re-elected in an election that many deemed to be a "political charade" (Smith 2015). In addition to the repressive authoritarian politics of the country, the economic malaise in Sudan continued to be the cause of significant disaffection. In December 2018, a series of ongoing protests that are now part of what is popularly known as the Sudanese uprising were immediately prompted by a government increase in fuel and bread prices but were more fundamentally informed by already existing fatigue and despondency among the people about the sociopolitical context in the country. The culmination of the three months of protests against Bashir's thirty-year rule was a military coup on the 11th of April 2019 that effectively removed him from power (Al Jazeera 2019).

Students in Sudan have been key actors in challenging the dictators that have ruled the country and they remain active as the country attempts to crawl its way toward some semblance of civilian rule in the post-Bashir context. The University of Khartoum in particular has been an important site for the emergence of contesting and oppositional voices to the autocratic state. In 1964, it was students who led the protests that eventually ousted the first president of Sudan, Ibrahim Abboud. The protests were prompted by a series of events linked to what was dubbed the "Southern Problem" which was essentially the dispute between the Arab North and Christian South of the country around the North's attempts to "Sudanize" the South (Global Nonviolent Action Database, n.d.).

Public discussion on the issue was permitted at Khartoum University by the regime and students eventually concluded that the issue would not be resolved if the Abboud regime remained in place. The government subsequently banned further meetings, however, students still continued to organise. When police attempted to disperse a meeting held by the Khartoum Students' Union on the 21st of October 1964, they opened fire and a student was killed. The following day, the funeral for the slain student took the form of a protest led by university faculty, in which more than 30,000 people were present (ibid.). The protest turned into a general strike that included the buy-in of professionals and opposition parties and had the army split in terms of allegiance. Out of this emerged the United National Front, which was a multi-stakeholder organisation representing the interests of different actors who had bought into the protest. The United Front called for a general strike that lasted until the 30th of October, eventually resulting in the establishment of the transnational government (ibid.).

In April 1985, rising food prices and disaffection with the Nimeiry dictatorship reached a high point when the government announced further increases in the prices of basic goods. This led to the emergence of a general strike that began with spontaneous student demonstrations (Global Nonviolent Action Database, n.d.). It was specifically students from the Islamic University of Omdurman (ibid.) who marched through Khartoum and were later joined by workers, the unemployed and professionals as the strike grew. The Communist Party also joined and later, the SPLM was brought on board too (ibid.). With the involvement of the political parties, workers' unions and professional associations, the campaign gradually became more organised. The military, having met with the opposition leadership, eventually orchestrated the coup that deposed Nimeiry.

The Sudanese uprising in 2019 demonstrated the contribution of students, intellectuals and academic institutions in the challenging of the dictatorship of former President Al-Bashir. Students were among the groups of protesters in Atbara, who in December 2019 stood united with the groups of citizens who marched against the bread price hikes announced by the government (Sudan Tribune 2018). Lecturers at the University of Khartoum, which has historically been the "most important hub of intellectual opposition" in Sudan (Berridge 2019), were also involved in the uprising and marches, and the University itself has been "at the centre of important debates about Sudan's immediate political future" (ibid.).

During Sudan's recent uprising, the Sudanese Professionals Association (a coalition of different Sudanese trade unions) largely took on the role of organising and giving structure to the protest movement. This again shows how mutuality between youth, students and other social groups is critical for driving widespread uptake of protests against authoritarian governments. In February 2019, as the protests mounted, the government shut down all 38 universities in the country (Abd El-Galil 2019).

University Students in Africa: An Elite No More?

To the extent that student protests and movements emerge out of particular sociopolitical contexts, it is important to consider how students have been situated within society over time, and how this has shaped their ability to engage in collective action against autocrac governments. There is general agreement in the literature that, in the early years after independence, university students in Africa existed as an elite within African societies. Leo Zeillig, who has written extensively about student protests and activism in Africa since independence has, at different times, referred to students during this period as "a pampered section of society being educated to run the post-colonial state" (Zeillig 2007, p. 21) and "a transitory social group, who held well-founded expectations of rewarding and high-status employment after graduation" (Zeillig and Dawson 2008, p. 1). Hanna (1975) observes that African university students were "disproportionally elite in background, mature and urbane in experience, and likely members of their countries' social (and perhaps political) elite" (Hanna 1975, p. 23).

The elite and politically privileged status enjoyed by African university students in the post-independence era was the result of many overlapping factors including: access to state-funded education and attendant material benefits; the almost automatic granting of future membership among the country's political, occupational or wealth elites (Hanna 1975, p. 36) after graduation; the general respect that would be conferred on graduates by members of their communities because of the cultural status of education; the state's need for graduates for implementing national development visions (Zeillig and Ansel 2008, p. 32); and the limited access to education for ordinary youth in the period before the rapid expansion in higher education in African countries in the 1970s and 1980s.

Students also existed as a group distinct from workers, professionals and other groups within society. For example, Zeillig and Ansell

(2008) argue that students were a transient social group that was primarily involved in social reproduction with little contribution to economic reproduction in their countries. This was advantageous because it enabled students to "organise [effectively] without the discipline [and restraints] of a workplace" (Zeillig and Ansel 2008, p. 32). This, in addition to the elite status of students, enabled them to wield greater influence *vis-à-vis* other groups in society (for example, workers and professionals) in terms of navigating their relationship with the state. Because of this, Zeilig and Ansell argue that in Africa, "… students have often seen themselves as a vanguard, representing the interests of workers and peasants" (ibid.). Hanna (1975) adds that African students were historically politically "important" because of their ability to shape and lead public opinion and their role in the emergence of a tradition of activism and defiance in African universities (Hanna 1975, pp. 2–5).

Reflecting on the initial elite status of students in post-independence African countries is a somewhat wistful exercise because of how quickly this privileged status was subsequently challenged. Post-independence leaders in African countries regarded education and formal schooling as central to the development of the state (Boyle 1999, p. 19). Equality of formal education took political salience and resulted in the accelerated development of school infrastructure. The prioritising of universal access to education diminished the former "pro-elite bias" (Boyle 1999, p. 25) that previously buttressed the privileged position of students.

The rapidity and scale of the expansion in education access and infrastructure quickly overburdened the existing capacity of state budgets to both continue expansion and adequately maintain what infrastructure had already been put in place. This, coupled with rapid population growth (and a subsequent continued increase in demand for education resources), institutional corruption at the state and university levels and declining overall quality of education, resulted in a steady deterioration of conditions at universities. The implementation of SAPs caused massive state disinvestment from public education and spurred the onset of privatisation of education. In this context, those who could not afford to pay for high-quality private education had to straddle the options of either falling to the periphery or accessing education in under-resourced and often run-down public institutions. Presently, "educational opportunity, [which was] heavily influenced in the past by expansionist efforts of public or corporate actors such as states, churches and non-governmental organisations, evolves under the new influence of revenue-generating and

-seeking private individuals providing fee-based educational opportunities for local elites" (Boyle 1999, p. 31).

Market considerations now play a more dominant role than public policy decisions in determining the supply of quality education resources in many African countries (ibid.). This has prompted the emergence of a new kind of class formation that has eliminated the former ability of university students to exist as an elite simply by virtue of being enrolled. One now needs to already be part of a wealth or social elite to access education in the first place. Thus, conceptions of students have shifted from notions of students as elites to notions of students as clients of higher education institutions (Bianchini 2016, p. 18). In the current context, "economic wealth has begun to surpass, even replace, [all other factors] in determining the breadth of one's educational opportunities" (Boyle 1999, p. 29). Because of this shift in social positioning, there has been a gradual decline in concern about the potential of students to organise in order to agitate in some African countries and a subsequent rise in interest in the how youth who lack access to formal education or jobs might contribute to political unrest. Currently, the issues around which young people are protesting continue to include demands for jobs and opportunities, access to political spaces and democracy, the addressing of corruption and inequality and the end of autocratic rule. Issues around access to and the quality of tertiary education in African countries have increasingly amplified the shared frustration and disillusionment of those who are in universities with those who are not.

An increased focus on "youth" as a social category can be seen in the salience of the youth bulge discourse and the increasing anxiety among entrenched political elites about the demonstrated potential of youth to challenge autocracy, depose leaders and make demands of the state. The Arab Spring in 2010 and the emergence of the *itoyen* movement in Burkina Faso in the same year are recent examples of movements in which youth have made active demands for radical social, political, institutional and economic reforms in their countries. That being said, the 2014 #RhodesMustFall movement in South Africa that spread across university campuses in South Africa and allied universities in Western countries is a reminder that the university and students in particular do still have a distinct role to play in challenging autocracy and the status quo. It is also a reminder of the diverse realities in African countries that make certain 'types' of youth best positioned to lead activism against the autocracy at different time; an important reminder that context matters.

At this point, some important questions to consider include: (1) Are *youth* movements or protests now more effective than student protests in the context of the relative decline of universities and general lack of access to higher education in African countries? and (2) What does "student power" now look like in different contemporary African societies?

Student Movements and Meaningful Political Engagement

All three case studies raise questions about how to define the place of students in politics and the extent to which political "groundedness" can contribute to increased effectiveness of student movements. What seems to be clear is that while students are still organising effectively on campuses to petition for democracy, accountability and service delivery within the university context, there are fewer instances in which student movements are organising effectively, in line with a particular ideology, in order to engage the state on their visions for society. Thus, unlike the example of the Senegalese student movement that was proactive, sustained and for a long time had an ideological orientation, students seem to come together to challenge state authority in moments when external factors cause sufficient disaffection.

The Senegalese case also illustrates the ability of political parties to infiltrate student movements to drive their particular agendas. Students who participate and lead movements and protests remain vulnerable to co-option by the state given the increasingly corporatist nature of student protests and movements. Another important lesson from the Senegalese case is how the voices of students can be diminished when a robust and vocal opposition exists, which raises questions about the relationships between student movement, ruling elites, and political actors in the opposition. All three cases show how, given the transitory nature of students as a social category, it remains unclear how they can sustain meaningful, impactful agendas beyond periodic, reactive protests if there is no ideological basis that supports their organising. Interestingly enough, the imposition of socialism as the guiding ideology in Tanzania illustrates how, if the ideology adopted by a student movement does not exist or emerge organically, it won't work. Both the Sudanese and Senegalese cases illustrate the central role played by other social groups, including academics, professionals, workers, the opposition and the military in the building of a critical mass that can adequately challenge despots and autocratic

systems. In Sudan in 1964, 1985 and in the 2018/2019 Uprising, the intervention of military establishments who were previously loyal to the regimes in power supported the momentum of built by mass civil disaffection enable the toppling of authoritarian regimes. In all three cases, however, the effectiveness of building mutuality with actors across society has not guaranteed that the demands by students, youth and the people for a more democratic and accountable government are met.

In Senegal, in the May 1968 protests, the mutuality between students and workers was definitive for the ability of what grew into a general protest to rattle the Senghor government. However, to the extent that issues related to funding and administration of universities continue to come up as drivers of student protests, it is important to consider what kind of outcomes are sufficient for constituting a meaningful challenge to an autocratic state, or for deeming a protest as successful. This is in no way to diminish the valid claims students have about conditions at their universities. However, given how university administrations and the state either react violently to these claims or acquiesce to student demands by providing superficial solutions to entrenched institutional problems, it is important to consider how seriously state actors take students as a potential threat to their established authority.

Following from this, all three also illustrate the tools at the disposal of the state for dealing with student and youth protests. Among these tools, negotiation and co-opt sometimes feature, but heavy handed, violent crackdowns or punitive measures are most commonly administered. This shows the very limited room for negotiation that has existed for students and youth to meaningfully engage in dialogue with state actors about the conditions at universities and about structural reform of the state and society more broadly. This is the case both when student movements and their members avoid cooption, and when they are successfully bought off and softly silenced. The Sudanese case in particular highlights the important role that state security actors like the military and the police can play in either stifling or strengthening the success of mass movements and protests. This is an interesting area for further research given how this show of support has also been the channel through which military elites have established and entrenched themselves as within politics.

The case studies in this chapter illustrate the complex relationship that exists between universities, students and the state in African countries. It has been shown how, in post-independence Africa, the historical timeline of a country determines and defines the emergence, character and

effectiveness of student movements/protests. The prevalence of autocracy in many African states has meant that, when student protests are not directed at the challenging of issues that exist at the university level, they tend to be directed towards demands for democracy, accountability and better living conditions. The role of students as actors well positioned to use protest and organised movements to bring about political change has continuously been challenged since independence, suggesting a waning in 'student power' over time. To this extent, youth protests that bring together young people who are not enrolled at universities with those who are have, in most cases, become more prominent than student protests more specifically. The relationship between the state and the university continues to have significant influence on the capacity of universities to exist as spaces for radical and revolutionary thought. Given the increasingly heterogenous country contexts across Africa, and despite the value of making region-wide observations where they may exist, further analyses of the interactions between universities, students and the state in Africa need to be context specific, country specific and issue specific.

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