

# Racial desegregation and the institutionalisation of 'race' in university governance: the case of the University of Cape Town

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*The racial desegregation of the student bodies of historically white universities in South Africa has had significant political implications for student politics and university governance. I discuss two key moments in the governance history of the University of Cape Town (UCT) critically. The first involves the experience of racial parallelism in student governance in the late 1980s and early 1990s, making specific reference to the re-conceptualisation of the UCT Students' Representative Council (SRC) as a 'NUSAS-SRC', along with the recognition of the political salience of race in the student body. The second traces the origins of the demographic representivity rule in the university's statute to student demands for the dissolution of the UCT Council, and its replacement by a Transformation Forum in the early 1990s. I thus show that the recognition of race as politically significant in university governance is the outcome of a deliberate struggle, by students in general, and black students in particular, to de-privatise and politicise any sense of racial/racist marginalisation, and therefore to open up race as a topic for deliberation in the political realm of the post-apartheid university. Thus, the institutionalisation of race has come to serve the interests of the struggle for non-racialism.*

**Keywords:** black student politics; demographic representivity; desegregation; historically white universities; non-racialism; race relations politics; student politics; university governance

## Background and introduction

The transition from apartheid to democracy opened the way for different kinds of fundamental change in South African higher education, of which changes in the demographics of the student bodies of public universities after decades of academic segregation were among the most dramatic (Cooper & Subotzky, 2001). One of the first universities to experience a significant desegregation in its student body was the University of Cape Town (UCT), the oldest residential university in South Africa. Although it is among those universities that were reserved for whites under apartheid, like the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) (and to a lesser extent Rhodes University and the University of Natal), UCT had been open to students of all races before 1959. As one of the erstwhile 'open universities', UCT vehemently opposed academic segregation in the 1950s. This historical opposition to academic segregation continued to define the university's identity and politics in significant ways during the apartheid era, involving a precarious balancing between the wish to be a diverse and cosmopolitan institution steeped in the liberal tradition of university education, and the social and political realities of South African society (Welsh, 1979). Thus, when an opportunity presented itself to defy the racial admission system during the Botha apartheid reforms of the 1980s, UCT began to enrol increasing numbers of black students (Moodie, 1994; Saunders, 2000). From less than 10% in the 1970s, black student enrolments grew to over a third of the university's student body by 1993, and to more than half of the student body by the early 2000s (Cooper & Subotzky, 2001; Department of Institutional Planning, 2005).

The experience of racial integration at UCT had significant implications for the way student political identity was constructed. From the second half of the 1980s, it entailed changes in the rules that governed the university so that race became institutionalised in university governance gradually. Thus, at a time when the rest of the country was struggling against apartheid and its institutionalised

forms of racism, the University of Cape Town institutionalised race in university governance. In this paper I explore how race was institutionalised as a politically salient characteristic of the members of the university in its governance.<sup>1</sup> The paper comprises two main parts, which constitute two ideationally linked, historically successive case studies. Each deals broadly with what may be called “race relations politics” (Pinderhughes, 2009:7), i.e. the effects of the political action of one racial group on the political leadership and institutions of another racial group. Both case studies concern the emergence of a different institutional innovation or political ‘solution’ to the rising salience of race in the process of university desegregation. They focus particularly on students as political actors and the responses of established governance structures to student pressure. The research draws on the archival records of the university (especially official reports and minutes), newspaper articles and prior studies on student/university politics of the period under review (roughly 1985–1994), and material generated from interviews conducted for a related study.<sup>2</sup> The use of different data was a deliberate research strategy to ensure an empirically rich and trustworthy account, saturated with data that enabled the triangulation of key observations. Lastly, a member-check was conducted to check the palatability of the final draft. Even though the two case studies refer to historical experiences, they are not conventional histories of student/university politics. Rather, each case study provides a distinct analytical account of the political dynamics involved in the institutionalisation of race in the rules of governance of the University of Cape Town.

### **Conceptualising ‘race’ in race relations politics**

Most social scientists today treat race as a social construct devoid of a coherent biological basis. Race is about “what people make of physical differences”, and hence, “how people define ‘races’ and their attitudes to different ‘races’ are influenced by the dominant belief systems of the society in which they live” (Haralambos & Holborn, 1995:658). Race is therefore context-bound, and as a category of social analysis, it must be considered reductionist in that “[race] underplays the ways in which a whole range of conditions and processes influence the sense of cohesiveness and fragmentation within groups”, and conversely, the complex ways in which difference is constructed (Soudien, 2004:90).

Mainstream political theory continues to grapple with the implications of this conceptualisation of race. Courtney Jung (2008) argues that dominant political theory approaches to race apparently remain captive to certain primordial assumptions about race. The typical political science prescription for dealing with race politics illustrates this point, *viz.* “race is subject to cancellation” through measures aimed at achieving “colour-blindness”. Jung (2008:364-365) responds to this inconsistency in political theory by highlighting a more rigorous, critical, social-constructivist approach as a means for political scientists to “explain the salience of social categories [such as race] as a result of historical processes and practices that forge meaning, and draw boundaries, in particular ways”.

Accordingly, in this article, race is treated as a factor endogenous to politics. In particular, race is investigated as a political resource that is constructed and reconstructed by political actors to establish, maintain or deny access to political power for specific constituencies. The political significance of race is therefore examined as a historical and contemporary characteristic of the political system, and as a product of the political system and the social conditions it produces and reproduces. From this perspective, apartheid racial categories like African, coloured, Indian and white, as well as the struggle categories of black vs. white, serve as empirical examples of different racial categories constructed for the South African context. Where necessary I will use black (as inclusive of the African, coloured and Indian groups) and white as broad racial categories for analytical purposes in this article.

### **The changing student body and the political salience of race**

Historically, the University of Cape Town has been one of the ‘open universities’ of South Africa which, in principle, admitted students on the basis of merit only. The imposition of apartheid on

higher education in 1959 resulted in all South African universities being designated for a particular race group. Thus, UCT was designated for whites and 'closed' for admission to black students, unless a black student received a special permit from government to study there. Yet, the historical openness of UCT had been closely circumscribed even prior to academic segregation. Thus, on the eve of the enforcement of academic segregation in 1959, the student body of UCT numbered about 5,000 students, of which merely 12% were black, i.e. 461 coloured, 133 Indian and 39 African students (Ajayi *et al.*, 1996:71). During the apartheid era, the university's student body continued to include small numbers of black students, even though the proportion dropped to under 10%. This drop in black student numbers changed in the course of the 1980s as UCT began to admit increasing numbers of black students. Black student numbers increased from 11.7% in 1981 to 24.7% in 1989 (Goosen, Hall & White, 1989:38, 42; Sonaba, 1992:27). By 1993, UCT was one of the most racially diverse universities in South Africa with an almost 35% black student body (Cooper & Subotzky, 2001:37). The trend towards a greater proportion of black students continued in the 1990s, so that by the early 2000s the majority at UCT were black students, including a sizable number of black international students (Department of Institutional Planning, 2005). Thus, a commitment to non-racialism with roots in institutional history, was apparently pursued in student enrolments.

The increase in black student enrolments at UCT in the final decade of apartheid occurred in a social and political context wholly unprepared for the possibility of a non-racial university. The South Africa of the 1980s and early 1990s was a society divided along racial and ethnic lines, if not entirely *de facto*, definitely *de jure* (Horowitz, 1993; Jung, 2000). The result, however, of three hundred years of colonialism and forty years of apartheid, was not only a fragmentation of people into racial and ethnic groups through racist conventions and legislation; but also the fomentation of a sense of solidarity around the common experience of oppression (Cloete, Cross, Muller & Pillay, 1999:20). Race thus became politically salient in South Africa, on the one hand, because of the classification the population into different racial groups by the apartheid state, and its racist use of that classification. On the other hand, the liberation movement also came to use racial categories, with 'black' designating an emancipatory category inclusive of all oppressed groups as against that of 'white'. The racialisation of the liberation struggle occurred despite the commitment of key liberation organisations to the principle of non-racialism, and in very few cases, the practice thereof. Yet, the ultimate goal of the liberation movement remained to establish a non-racial society (Badat, 1999:227-228).

The salience of race in contemporaneous South African society must be considered to have been virtually inescapable for black students who were admitted to study at white universities like the University of Cape Town during the 1980s. On the one hand, UCT admitted black students on the basis of its 'colour-blind' student admission policy, whereby it defied its legal designation as a university reserved for whites, and thus provided for black students the opportunity for which they had applied (Goosen *et al.*, 1989). On the other hand, black students still had to overcome numerous legal obstacles imposed by apartheid, as well as various material, social and educational disadvantages bestowed upon them by planned underdevelopment, which prevented them from enjoying the apparently care-free university experience of their white peers. For instance, throughout the 1980s, the Group Areas Act was in force, which made it illegal for black students to take residence in the white suburbs in which the campus of UCT was located. Black students depended on the university to provide on-campus accommodation, as they would otherwise be forced to stay in distant African, coloured or Indian residential areas/townships. Initially, the university was reluctant to contravene the Group Areas Act by opening its residences to black students. It preferred to assist them to find alternative accommodation in former hotels or hostels, especially in coloured and African areas. Some African students were housed in a semi-official student residence in Gugulethu, a distant African township (SRC, 1986). Other tangible problems experienced by some black students included a lack of finances and academic under-preparedness (Saunders, 2000:98). Thus, black and white students not only came to campus from strikingly different social contexts, but in some ways the experience of admission actually painfully exacerbated these differences for black students (Sonaba,

1992). In the course of the 1980s and early 1990s, these problems were tackled gradually by the university administration, which developed a university-own financial aid fund, academic support programmes and added black student residences to the university's housing stock (Saunders, 2000: 149-150). These ameliorative developments were, however, always prompted by the needs of students who experienced the "unseen pains of transition" (Jansen, 2004), which defined the study experience of successive black student generations, and which had to be articulated, and to some degree politicised, in order to be recognised and addressed. Thus, race became an increasingly significant characteristic in university governance at precisely the time when the rest of the country struggled for a non-racial political system, and the higher education system as a whole was set on a path of desegregation. The following section analyses the political dynamics involved in this development in student governance at UCT.

### **Racial parallelism in student governance in the late 1980s**

At the beginning of the 1980s, the role of the UCT Students' Representative Council (SRC) in ascertaining and conveying student opinion, and representing student interests in the university's governing structures, was considered uncontroversial. Annual campus-wide elections were designed to ensure a representative range of opinions and interests within the 15 member SRC. Mass meetings, referenda and consultation through SRC subcommittees further broadened this spectrum (Bradlow Commission, 1981:3). Yet, in the course of the 1980s, several challenges started to emerge. What would happen if a significant sector of the student body would fundamentally question this set-up, refuse to collaborate, organise separately and eventually create alternative ways of voicing its concerns and demands? How would the SRC handle having its legitimacy of representing the collective student voice called into question? These questions did not arise at UCT until the mid-1980s, because the relatively small dissident black student constituency could be safely ignored. After all, most SRC members (all of whom were white) were uncomfortable with the idea of categorising the student body in racial terms. Matters changed only when, from the mid-1980s, the voices of black student leaders who affirmed their blackness and denounced the white SRC's claim to represent them as 'arrogant' and 'racist', became too loud and frequent to be disregarded (Sonaba, 1992).

The 1987/88 UCT SRC president, Cameron Dugmore, was the first to refer to his SRC explicitly as a 'NUSAS-SRC'. Dugmore did not mean to highlight the many tangible benefits of affiliation to the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) for individual students, such as the student travel agency, or the long list of student discounts that were negotiated with business owners in Rondebosch and surrounds annually. Rather, the SRC president was acutely aware that an all-white SRC in an increasingly racially diverse university was unrepresentative. Glen Goosen's SRC (1985/86) had been the first to take black students' concerns seriously and include their issues on the agenda, especially concerns regarding accommodation, transport and bursaries. He realised that it was desirable for the non-racial national student alliance between the (white) NUSAS and the (black) South African National Students' Congress (SANSCO) (under the umbrella of the United Democratic Front), to find expression in a close relationship between the SRC and SANSCO-UCT at campus-level, especially regarding issues that affected black students (SRC, 1986b). Goosen had been an SRC member in 1984 and had therefore been drawn into the political aftermath of the "squatting action" by black students in April 1984. By setting up tents in front of the university's main hall, black students demonstrated against the perceived crisis of black student accommodation, drawing increased publicity (*Varsity*, 1984). Eventually, during Carla Sutherland's term as SRC president in 1986/87, the UCT campus came to witness increasing black student activism and militancy. Thus, successive SRCs realised that they needed to acknowledge black students as a distinct constituency and come to grips with the implications thereof for the SRC in order to deal with the growing racial polarisation and conflict on campus.

The first major step for the SRC was to name race, thus acknowledging that black students had

different experiences from white students — both off and on campus, as well as distinct political interests (SRC, 1987a).<sup>3</sup> SRC president Sutherland was acutely aware of the implications for the legitimacy of her SRC of acknowledging the political significance of race. If black students represented a distinct constituency within the student body — a constituency which was organised outside of the SRC and rejected the SRC — could her all-white SRC legitimately claim to represent them? In her final report to her successor, the incoming SRC president Cameron Dugmore, Sutherland noted her thoughts rather plainly: “It is quite clear that an all white SRC cannot speak on behalf of black students” (Sutherland in SRC, 1987a).

By the end of Sutherland’s term in August 1987 she concurred with black student leaders that the lack of black representation on the SRC implied a representivity deficit that disqualified the SRC from speaking on behalf of black students. This conclusion was reached only after years of conflict, characterised by black non-collaboration with the formal structures of student governance, increasing black separate organisation in political, cultural, religious and discipline-based student societies and sports clubs, and increasingly militant black activism on campus (Sonaba, 1992; Luescher, 2009). During Sutherland’s term, the university was stunned by the establishment of two alternative black student governance structures in the residence and sport sectors on campus: the Black Inter-Residence Students Council (BISCO) and the South African Tertiary Institutions Sports Council (SATISCO). BISCO was established to represent the interests of black students across the UCT residence system, including its black annexes in the townships. In the sport sector, black students established new sport codes and lobbied successfully for affiliation to SATISCO, the national sports union established at black universities and technikons. These developments were by no means uncontroversial and attracted a great deal of criticism from some, who argued that the vice-chancellor (VC) was allowing the introduction of apartheid in the sport sector, when the rest of the country was doing away with it (Saunders, 2000:210). Furthermore, from the SRC perspective, the establishment of these bodies fundamentally challenged existing SRC constitutional structures in the student sport and residence sectors. Thus the SRC reported, for instance, that “both wardens and house committees [were] worried about BISCO setting itself up as an alternative, and about the implications thereof” (SRC, 1987a). Considering these developments, Sutherland’s SRC eventually concluded that “to organise as a separate grouping was a legitimate strategy”, during a “transition process [...] there may well be tensions and even alternative structures to the present ones being set up” (in SRC, 1987a). Similarly, the VC recalls that his response to those who criticised such developments was that “the opposite of enforced segregation was not enforced integration, that freedom of association was critical, and that the important issue was that all [student organisations on campus] were open to all students” (Saunders, 2000:210).

As a next step, the SRC had to determine how its official commitment to non-racialism could be reconciled with political practices that were effectively structured in racial terms. It is therefore not surprising that the 1986/7 SRC was the only SRC in the 1980s that articulated an explicit strategy regarding non-racialism. It resolved that it would seek to contribute to the building of a non-racial future in the university and beyond, *inter alia*, by “having regular contact and working with representative organisations of black students” (SRC, 1987b). The SRC thus opted for a conception of “non-racialism *in practice*”, akin to that of Charterist organisations like SANSCO (Badat, 1999:227-228). Consistent with this principle, Sutherland later recommended to the incoming SRC with Dugmore at its helm, that his SRC of 1987/88 should consult black student organisations on all major issues, including those raised in university committees (SRC, 1987a).

In the course of the term of the 1986/87 SRC, black students’ political organisations, and especially SANSCO-UCT, became *de facto* recognised by the SRC as legitimate bodies representing the black constituency in the student body. In practice this involved an informal coalition between the SRC and black student leaders on campus, particularly on issues affecting black students. This rapport was perhaps one of the reasons why the all-white SRCs were able to retain their status as the highest decision-making student body and no changes were made to the SRC Constitution. Thus, parallel organisations established by black students, including BISCO and SATISCO, all sought

recognition by the SRC and the Student Affairs Committee of Council, duly submitting their constitutions to be scrutinised and approved in conformity with established procedures. The SRC continued to have sole control over its budget and allocated the resources at its disposal, including administrative funding and office and meeting space to the new black student bodies, as it saw fit. The SRC organised student representation on university committees, oversaw governance bodies in faculties, residences, sport clubs and student societies, and often acted as mediator in conflicts between the SRC constitutional structures and black representative bodies. The elected residence house committees continued to function as official representative bodies, despite the BISCO challenge, and SATISCO and the Sport Union operated separately, each organising fixtures and venues for its own set of affiliated sport codes. Thus, the political significance of race expressed itself in student governance with a set of parallel institutions: a dominant, traditional set of structures run by white students that sought global representation and jurisdiction, and an emancipatory set of transitional structures run by black students for themselves, implicitly refuting the universalistic claims of the extant regime of student governance.

Calling the SRC a 'NUSAS-SRC' not only solved some of the legitimacy problems with which the all-white SRCs struggled, it also put the informal black-white student coalition on a sound footing. Certainly, the UCT SRC had a longstanding association with NUSAS. Yet, in the ideologically charged climate of the late 1980s, the explicit identification with NUSAS meant that the SRC could claim *for itself* a widely recognised 'struggle history', as well as a current political association with the liberation movement which placed Dugmore's SRC, in spite of its unrepresentative composition, within the diverse spectrum of progressive anti-apartheid formations. Like Dugmore's SRC, all subsequent all-white SRCs, including those led by Caroline Greene (1989/90) and Richard Smith (1990/91), proudly called themselves 'NUSAS-SRC' in their communications and on banners and letterheads, and their political programmes and the work of their subcommittees were closely aligned with the programme of the NUSAS head office, as it were, and coordinated with that of the SANSCO/BSS<sup>4</sup> branch leadership (*Varsity*, 1989a; 1990). Moreover, the conception of the UCT SRC as a 'NUSAS-SRC' had advantages not only for the SRC itself, but also for SANSCO and its members, who had to defend their close relationship with white student leaders against scoffing Black Consciousness faithfuls. The notion of an alliance between a 'NUSAS-SRC' and SANSCO-UCT placed the informal campus coalition within the ambit of the national non-racial student alliance sanctioned by the United Democratic Front. Frequent consultations between NUSAS-SRC and SANSCO-UCT and the inclusion of black student leaders in SRC delegations to university authorities, could thus be justified as an extension and expression of the national student alliance.

While apartheid was being dismantled between 1990 and 1994, the possibility of transforming the national SANSCO-NUSAS alliance into a single, national organisation, and the possibility of black student leaders ending their boycott and participating in SRC elections, was raised in various fora (*Varsity*, 1989b; Badat, 1999:264-265). In 1991, the South African Students' Congress (SASCO) was formed as a merger between SANSCO and NUSAS, and developed into the most powerful post-apartheid South African student organisation. In the same year, Thulani Khanyile was elected first black UCT SRC president when black students participated in SRC elections for the first time since the mid-1960s. Khanyile's SRC and the two subsequent ones, led by Hermione Cronje (1992/93) and Elaine Sacco (1993/94), oversaw a series of unity talks in various sectors of student governance. As a result, the racially parallel student governance structures in the sport and residence sectors eventually became united.

The experience of racial parallelism in student governance at the University of Cape Town was therefore closely confined. It could well be treated as just one among many isolated historical episodes that make up the varied history of student politics on the UCT campus, an episode without much further significance or relevance. Against this, I have highlighted the important conceptual hurdle of acknowledging the political significance of race as taken up by student leadership and the UCT Executive when they grappled with growing black student demands and activism, and the eventual emergence of racial parallelism in student governance. Moreover, the result of these de-

velopments was the establishment of a strong SRC in which black and white student leaders operated together, supported by a single national student organisation, SASCO, which provided the conditions for student leaders on the UCT campus to become a driving force in crucial debates and developments on the democratisation and transformation of university governance.

### **Demographic representivity in university governance in the 1990s**

September 1, 1993 stands out as a historic day for student leadership in the governance of the University of Cape Town. On the one side, the Campus United Front, made up of the SRC, other student political formations and student groups, as well as members of progressive staff formations and trade unionists, had worked out a list of demands that it planned to hand over at a march on Council, the university's highest decision-making body, scheduled to hold its monthly meeting on that day. There was a sense of the great historical significance of the political developments in the country, the sense of standing on the threshold of a new era, and a sense of urgency and willingness to seize this conjuncture and employ its momentum for change. On the other side, was the UCT Executive, which had learned of the planned march and viewed it with great concern. Vice-Chancellor, Dr Stuart Saunders, was keen to avoid a violent confrontation, as had occurred at Wits University only a few days earlier. Wits had experienced in August 1993 "what was possibly the most destructive week in its history" (Shear, 1996:xxi), when the campus had been "riven by angry and often violent demonstrations by some members of the South African Students Congress", whose demands for the replacement of Council and the establishment of a transformation forum had been turned down (xxi). Saunders knew that the UCT SRC led by Hermione Cronje, and the local SASCO branch would present a similar set of demands, and he was aware that the situation on his campus was almost as tense as that at Wits. Saunders was determined, however, to avoid a destructive confrontation and the VC decided to respond hands-on to the growing student unrest on his campus (Executive Management, 1993b).

Towards the end of August, Saunders was briefed by the Student Affairs Secretariat on the prior history of student demands for a transformation conference at UCT. The report showed that the SRC and SASCO had raised the idea at least since the SRC's "It's about time" campaign of 1991. More recently, SASCO had demonstrated at the celebration of UCT's 75th anniversary in April 1993, against the "undemocratic governing council" (Executive Management, 1993b:appendix). Placards carried by demonstrators had demanded "an education conference" and rejected "the racist and sexist composition of Council" (*Varsity*, 1993). At an extraordinary management meeting held on Sunday, 29 August 1993, at Glenara, five senior university officials heard word from Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Dr Mamphela Ramphele, about the latest student plans. Apparently, the SRC, SASCO and the other organisations in the Campus United Front planned to march on Bremner on September 1 in order to present a list of demands to the Council. Considering how to respond, university officials surmised that the demand for the dissolution of Council did not need to be taken literally and that nobody would actually expect Council members to resign (Executive Management, 1993b). On the following day, Saunders and Ramphele met with key students and staff members in confidence, but no mention was made of management's own preparations for the protest march (Executive Management, 1993a).

In his memoirs, Saunders recalls the march of September 1, 1993, as "the major protest [which] resulted in the presentation of demands to the Council" (2000:246). The protest march was without major incident. At the top of the list of five demands handed to the chair of Council was that "Council must dissolve itself and be replaced by a transitional commission". Another demand was the establishment of "an education and transformation conference with binding powers" (Campus United Front, 1993). The petition was signed by the SRC, political student organisations (including SASCO, the Pan-Africanist Students' Congress, and the Azanian Students' Convention), and other student and staff groups. At the same time as the petition was handed to chairperson of the Council, Ian Sims, Khanyile and Cronje tendered their resignations as student members (observers) of

Council, to underscore their support for the charge of illegitimacy against the Council (Council, 1993a).

Having been briefed by the VC, chairman Sims immediately responded to the petition with a disarming statement. He committed Council to hold a special meeting within days to consider all the demands, and assured the students that in his personal view a fully representative transformation conference should be part of a common agreement. Later that day, Sims responded in more detail on behalf of Council. Council admitted to the charge of being unrepresentative and promised to engage in a wide-ranging debate to rectify the situation. In particular, Sims promised that “the Council has for some time recognised that it is not representative; we have very few women members, and most of us are white. We are committed to changing this, and to changing the nature of Council” (Council, 1993b). He further informed the demonstrators that Council had scheduled a debate and decision on the demand for a transformation conference for a special Council meeting the following week (Council, 1993b).

In preparation for the special Council meeting, the VC wrote to all members of Council, advising them to agree in principle to a conference and making specific proposals regarding the scope and powers of the conference. Saunders was eager to institute a formal process that was agreeable to all, including the Senate, SRC, student organisations, and academic and non-academic staff bodies. Thus, he proposed the establishment of a steering committee, which would manage the process towards the conference. Key to its legitimacy was that it would be composed of representatives of all the key internal ‘stakeholders’, and that in its composition the steering committee should “... have adequate representation of blacks and women” (Vice-Chancellor’s Office, 1993). Council agreed to all the VC’s proposals and the VC immediately started a process of consultation that led to the establishment of the steering committee. The process that led to the establishment of the first University Transformation Forum in South Africa then unfolded.

The rule that governance structures need to be demographically representative in terms of race and gender entered the rulebook of the University of Cape Town first as an informal criterion for the composition of the Transformation Steering Committee. In due time, the Steering Committee metamorphosed into the University Transformation Forum’s Executive Committee (1994) and eventually, in 1999, became the statutory Institutional Forum of UCT. The set of demographically representative, transitional governing bodies which centred around the University Transformation Forum and its Executive Committee was an important means through which to generate political legitimacy for UCT during a time when the unrepresentative ‘mainstream’ governance structures, especially Council and Senate, were considered illegitimate and were the target of student boycotts.<sup>5</sup> Starting with the UCT Private Bill (1999), the UCT Private Act (1999), and the Statute of the University of Cape Town (2002) came to stipulate that the race and gender of persons had to be taken into account when representatives were appointed in UCT governance structures (Republic of South Africa, 1999a; 1999b; Department of Education, 2002). The relevant section in the current Statute of the University of Cape Town (2002) reads:

Any person or body appointing a person, or nominating a candidate for election to the council, the senate, the institutional forum or a committee or a joint committee must have regard to the historic under-representation of women, in particular black women, and black people in general, on such bodies and the need to redress that (Department of Education, 2002 as amended, 36).

In addition, with specific reference to Senate,<sup>6</sup> a 2004 amendment to the statute further entrenched the demographic representivity rule. The new provision stipulated that if Senate co-opted more than ten members (out of a possible 35) to its membership, it needed to do so “in such a way as to better reflect in the senate the diversity of the academic staff” (Department of Education, 2002 as amended, 23(1)(j)). Read in conjunction with the principles governing the Nominations Committee (which nominates the persons to be co-opted), the implication is that co-optation became a means to make Senate more representative in terms of race and gender (UCT, 2005:260). Thus, race became institutionalised in university governance at UCT.



## Discussion and conclusion

The starting point of this paper is captured in what may appear to be a paradoxical historical development: throughout apartheid with its many forms of institutionalised racism, the University of Cape Town maintained an official colour-blindness, yet precisely when apartheid ended, race became institutionalised in the UCT governance rules. In this paper I have traced the origins of the political salience of race and its institutionalisation in the rules of governance of the University of Cape Town to two moments in the university's history. The first refers to the emergence of racial parallelism in student governance in the second half of the 1980s; the second concerns UCT's response to the student demand for the dissolution of Council and the establishment of a University Transformation Forum in 1993. In both cases, I have focused on the responses of formal governance structures, i.e. the SRC and the UCT Executive, to demands for access to power articulated in racial terms. I have argued that towards the end of the 1980s, race had become politically salient in student politics at UCT, to the extent that student affairs governance came to be structured in a way that could be conceptualised as racial parallelism. Racial parallelism in student governance involved an informal coalition between the all-white 'NUSAS-SRC' and the black-led SANSKO-UCT branch, as well as the parallel operation of *de facto* black and white student governance structures in the sports and residence sectors. Racial parallelism came to be only a temporary, transitional feature in the governance history of the University of Cape Town. In due course, it dialectically produced a non-racial unity in student politics on campus, which I consider a pre-condition for the key role that students later played in the politicisation of the University Council's unrepresentative composition, the establishment of the University Transformation Forum, and the institutionalisation of race in the rules of governance of the University of Cape Town.<sup>7</sup> The motif that emerges from this tapestry of university politics in a process of desegregation is the very strategic, explicit use of race by both black and white political actors at UCT, to serve the goal of non-racialism.

For present purposes, the most important lesson to be learned from the two case studies is that the recognition and institutionalisation of race in university governance at UCT was tied up with an *emancipatory* intent. From the perspective of its historical origins, the legitimacy of the use of race thus depends on its *rectificatory* power, i.e. its ability to increase the representation of under-represented affected interests, in particular those of black members of UCT. Moreover, both cases provide evidence of race as a strategic political construct, and thus also reveal the *impermanence* of race as a feature of rules of governance. The institutionalisation of race in university governance is a distinct product of struggle — in particular the struggle of black students for recognition and access to political power in a context where the silencing of a discourse around race had earlier served established interests. Race has remained a means to facilitate black access to the bodies of decision-making at UCT. Race is likely to remain a salient characteristic in university politics at UCT as long as members conceive difference in predominantly racial terms, interpret their perceptions of privilege and marginalisation in terms of race, and mobilise around race politically.<sup>8</sup> While some may argue that recognising race officially in institutional policies and politics perpetuates racialism, this article has illustrated that the origins of the institutionalisation of race in university governance are found in a deliberate effort to de-privatise any sense of racist marginalisation and open up race as a topic of public deliberation in the post-apartheid university.

## Notes

1. I am grateful to André du Toit, Polly Mercer and Elelwani Ramugondo for comments at various stages in the development of this article which draws on Luescher (2009).
2. The interview material used in this study was originally generated for a doctoral thesis in accordance with the UCT code of ethics for research involving human subjects (see Luescher, 2009). All interviewees consented fully to the use of the interview material for academic purposes. The interviewing process, dynamics and related matters are discussed in detail in Luescher (2009:13-15). In this article I use the interview material only indirectly, as an additional source to corroborate the documentary evidence on which the study is based. Wherever reference is made to individual political actors in the article, it is

- made on the basis of material that is available upon request from UCT and/or in the public realm.
3. For an insightful study that identifies the burden involved in 'naming race' for black students in a historically white university, see Erasmus & de Wet (2003). This must, however, be contrasted with the hurdle that the all-white UCT SRC faced in 1987.
  4. SANSCO became a 'restricted organisation' in February 1988. In its place the Black Students' Society (BSS) was established at UCT to circumvent restrictions and continue the work of the SANSCO-UCT branch (Sonaba, 1992:9-13).
  5. Student representatives returned to Council and Senate in 1998.
  6. The Senate is composed of all full professors (as *ad hominem* members), key academic managers (as *ex officio* members) and elected representatives of academic and non-academic staff bodies and students (Department of Education, 2002 as amended).
  7. Representivity clauses have also been adopted by some other South African universities.
  8. A succession of studies shows that race continues to constitute an important fault-line of perceptions of the institutional culture/climate at UCT (e.g. Steyn & van Zyl, 2001; Smith *et al.*, 2004; Luescher, 2005). For a critique of these studies, see Higgins (2007). With reference to all public higher education institutions in South Africa, the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion recently argued that "discrimination, in particular with regard to racism and sexism, is pervasive in our institutions" (Soudien Committee, 2008:13).

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