

Rights, Regulation and Recognition: Studying Student Leaders' Experiences of Participation and Citizenship within a South African University

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ABSTRACT Citizenship as action is generally understood to refer to the capacity to exercise rights and responsibilities, the proficiency to express membership, and the capacity to participate and claim equal recognition. Constraints in any of these spheres result in misrecognition: a notion which emerges as the overarching grid on which student leaders frame their experiences of active citizenship within university settings. This study shows that student leaders seldom perceive their high levels of participation within the formalised processes and structures of the university as active-student-citizenship. Instead, it is intuited as acting out scripts in an overregulated space from where their feelings of misrecognition stem. Thus, the study highlights the need to rethink student citizenship against the backdrop of the university as an institution embodied in techniques of regulation and governmentality, generally aimed at producing adapted platoons of students.

INTRODUCTION

Why do successive groups of student leaders *feel* misrecognised within university settings and practices that are meant to broaden democratic spaces for their participation? How are researchers to make sense of their experiences? What is the significance of these reflections on rethinking student citizenship as action (SCA)? These questions emerged over a period of two years (2011-2012)¹ in which the researchers had informal discussions with student leaders, followed by a systematic study on *transformative student citizenship*.

Objectives of the Study

This study focuses on the experiences of student leaders as members of the student representative council (SRC) across various portfolios and as a particular expression of participation through student governance². The researchers emphasise, amongst other options, a conception of participation linked to student politics and the democratisation of university governance.

Literature Review

Student politics and participation in higher education are well-traversed topics of study, nationally and internationally³. Luescher-Mamashela's (2012: 1446-1448) instructive study on the origins of student representation in univer-

sity governance structures suggests four cases to explain the increased spaces for student participation. The politically-realist case argues that increased student participation is linked to the 'enormous disruptive power of students as collective political actors at national level'. The 'role of students as clients, users and consumers of higher education' constitute the consumerist case. The communitarian case refers to the 'role and status of students as members of a collectivity engaged in the educational process' (Luescher-Mamashela 2012: 1446-1448). In the democratic and consequentialist case it is assumed that in democratic societies, the purpose of public higher education includes the development of democratic citizenship (Bergan 2004; Council on Higher Education 2004). From this perspective, public universities may be considered 'sites of democratic citizenship' (Council on Higher Education 2004: 14). The understanding of participation that is employed in this study aligns with the communitarian and democratic cases and is located within *student citizenship as action* (SCA), understood as the capacity to exercise rights and responsibilities; the proficiency to express membership; and the competencies to participate and claim recognition as argued by Lister et al. (2007: 1)⁴. Lister et al. (2007: 5) also advances four values for inclusive citizenship: justice, recognition, self-determination and solidarity. Included in this understanding of citizenship is Fraser's (2003: 36) principle of participatory parity as the ability of "all (adult) members of society to interact with

one another as peers". As the researchers will demonstrate, a conception of participation that is integrated into SCA, lines up well with Honneth's theory of recognition (Honneth 1995).

Racialised arrangements⁵ have been defining features of the South African higher education landscape. After the first democratic elections in 1994 a range of transformative laws and policies set up new architectures for higher education in South Africa. A National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) was established in 1995 and its massive work was reflected in the Green Paper (Department of Education 1996) and White Paper on Higher Education (Department of Education 1997). Significant changes in the sector ensued and by 2010 the declaration of the higher education summit re-affirmed the following fundamental principles of the White Paper: equity and redress; democratisation; development; quality; effectiveness and efficiency; academic freedom; institutional autonomy; and public accountability. It is on these bases that spaces for various forms of democratic student participation have opened up over the past fifteen years. The 1997 Higher Education Act formalised student involvement in institutional governance and requires universities to recognise student representative councils (SRCs) and approve their constitutions⁶.

If it is accepted that these transformation imperatives created space for universities to become sites of democratic citizenship, yet student leaders articulate their experiences as misrecognition, then it should be critically considered whether the modelling of participatory and recognitive space facilitates the kind of democratic values and SCA that are presupposed in the very nature of higher education. Is student participation perhaps not misframed as the exercise of imprisoned rights and regulations? If critical reflections ask questions about the modelling of recognitive, democratic space, then the suspension of prevailing commonsensical understanding of these matters should be considered. Consider for instance, the adjournment of the assumption that *recognition* is a function of democratic participation; the questioning of the contingent links between activity, participation, democracy and recognition. Generalised and affirmative conceptions about the justice-making potential of rights within formal institutions should be deferred; that is, rights do not necessarily generate or facilitate justice-oriented, dem-

ocratic participatory space. The informal discussions with student leaders dictated a break with these established presuppositions.

Initially, this study was entangled in commonsensical interpretations that deem policy-generated democratic-participatory space as a commodity to be given, taken and exchanged. That is, democratic-participatory space is an article of trade between management and students. These flawed assumptions would have paved the way to analyse power from the standpoint of institutions, something that Foucault (1983) cautioned against because of the danger of simplistic polarisation. In these sorts of analyses 'management', too easily, surfaces as the culprit. Fortunately, student leaders enunciate sufficiently complex institutional dynamics, contradictions and agonisms for researchers to avoid the pitfalls of viewing democratic-participatory space⁷ as a commodity whose production is overseen by management. Student leaders are acutely aware that there are contradictions at play, as the data suggests. On the one hand, they steer into understanding democratic-participatory space as crafted via policy, regulation and practice *and* observing 'vibrant' student leader participation in such space. On the other, the researchers are called upon by the articulation of students' experiences to process such participation as expressions of increased governmentality and control. Needless to say, such contradictions displaced customary understandings and assumptions related to the contingent links between democratic space, participation and recognition.

In this paper recognition theory (Honneth 1995) is employed to position the normative expectations associated with SCA, whilst locating SCA itself and student participation within the interpretive scheme provided by Lister et al. (2007) and Lister (2008). A background to the study is provided, followed by reflections on conceptual and methodological considerations. An analysis of the findings of this study follows and then the possibilities for rethinking conceptions of SCA against the backdrop of the university as an institution embodied in techniques of regulation and governmentality are put forward. In conclusion reflections are presented on the research process with regard to the study since this research and its assumptions, present itself as part of the subject of research, alongside the experiences of student leaders.

Background to the Study

The University of the Free State (UFS) in South Africa is historically a White-Afrikaans university that exclusively served a small portion of the South African citizenry between 1904 and 1994⁸. It has undergone various shifts during the first nine decades and rapid changes have ensued in the wake of the first democratic elections in 1994⁹. Though racism and other forms of discrimination, as well as racist incidents, have always been part of higher education in South Africa¹⁰, the infamous 'Reitz' episode¹¹ in February 2008 stunned the sector and South African society in general. It resulted in an investigation and Report of the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in South Africa's Public Higher Education Institutions (Department of Education 2008; henceforth the Soudien Report)¹². A new vice-chancellor (university president) was appointed in 2009 and a range of transformation programmes were initiated.¹³ The UFS also established the Institute for Reconciliation and Social Justice (henceforth the Institute) in February 2011 to conduct research, advance higher education transformation and to provide a critical space where engaged scholarship, public discussion, community engagement and teaching are innovatively integrated towards exploring and finding solutions to the complex and challenging work of social transformation in South Africa.

Student governance was central to the university transformation efforts and through various participatory processes a revised student governance regime, rooted in human rights and democratic principles aimed at broadening student participation, came into being¹⁴. As these new interventions took shape, they encountered the powerful reproductive machinery of the university, which is adapted to its established aim: the legitimisation of social domination by propagating existing patterns of inclusion and exclusion. In the process, student leaders, who inaugurated the new student governance regime, were from the onset at risk of being usurped into the reproductive tessellations of university life. Not because there was or is any ill-intent on the part of the custodians of student governance, but, because the university as a *field* on which positions are determined by *habitus* (Bourdieu 1986) allows for existing socio-cultural, affec-

tive, intellectual, political and material economies to be circulated in channels that run throughout the entire institution, thus steering social practices towards pre-determined ends. Consequently, any change programme that does not foreground habitus and its constraints on agency, runs the risk of disenchantment. Nevertheless, it is the strenuous production of agency against habitus within which resides the promise and potentialities of institutional transformation.

As students leaders try to constitute themselves within the new student governance regime, they took up discussions with the Institute¹⁵ on a regular basis towards the end of 2011 onwards. In twenty-eight individual encounters and seven group discussions¹⁶ between November 2011 and December 2012, the following issues of major concern to student leaders were outlined: 'not being recognised' as student leaders; a 'sense of lack of achievement'; and 'acting out scripts' in an 'overregulated space'. This was unexpected because commonsensical interpretations suggested that a more just and democratic space for student leadership had been emerging since 2010¹⁷ within the university. The intellectual and practical puzzle presented by these developments steered the researchers to conceptualise and design a research study on *transformative student citizenship*.

METHODOLOGY

As stated earlier, the following questions were central to the researchers' scholarly curiosity: Why do successive groups of student leaders feel misrecognised within university arrangements and practices that are meant to broaden democratic spaces as far as their participation is concerned? How can sense be made of their experiences? And, what is the import of these reflections on rethinking SCA? The focus of the study has empirical grounding in social reality. That is, experiences of misrecognition are observable, expressive, actualities articulated with frequent consistency by student leaders; they are not thought up. Nevertheless, experiences of misrecognition must have a normative reference point against which they are assessed as such. In this study, the empirical instances of misrecognition are the orders that disallow SCA; its normative horizon is the democratic principles of student governance - rooted in rights and responsibilities, membership and

participation - that presumably grant recognition.

Thus, this study meets the two prerequisites of critical social inquiry: to critique existing arrangements and to motivate change (Honneth 2007). Stated differently, critical inquiry must consist of two fundamental elements: 'both a pre-theoretical resource of empirical foothold in social reality which reveals an emancipatory instance or need (for example, constraints on SCA), but also a quasi-transcendental validity in order to provide a normative horizon from which to critically assess forms of social organization' (for example, democratic principles of student governance which presumably grant recognition) (Petherbridge 2011: 1; Honneth 2007: 63-79). On these bases, Honneth's recognition theory became the overarching frame within which this study is located.

Rooted in Hegelian conceptions, Honneth (1995), in *The Struggle for Recognition*, conceives recognition as consisting of three spheres. These spheres 'designate the three fundamental types of normative interactions which, according to him, are necessary for modern subjects to develop their full autonomy' (Deranty 2009: 271-272):

... one through which the subject's affective life is secured (recognition through the intimate sphere); one through which the subject is able to see himself as equal to all, as full subject of rights (legal, universalistic recognition); and one through which the subject is able to see her contribution to societal life validated (recognition of the individual's "performance").

Claims of recognition that are violated represent, within the different spheres, the various forms of social injustices. What Deranty (2009) frames above as 'achievement' in the third sphere, Honneth (1995: xii) originally articulated as 'networks of solidarity and shared values within which the particular worth of individual members of a community can be acknowledged'. The relationships of recognition are not 'ahistorically given but must be established and expanded through social struggles, which cannot be understood exclusively as conflicts over interests' (Honneth 1995: xii). This triad of love, rights and solidarity now take shape as shorthand for Honneth's theory. Impediments to recognition on any of these levels result in feelings of *disrespect*; an experience of having one's intuitive notion of justice violated (Honneth 2007).

All three levels of Honneth's recognition theory, one has to argue for the purposes of this study, are constructed and located historically and institutionally. Furthermore, because of the main 'issues' articulated by student leaders in the informal discussions ('not being recognised' as student leaders; a 'sense of lack of achievement'; and 'acting out scripts' in an 'overregulated space'), elements of recognition theory are brought into conversation with the notions of habitus, field and governmentality. To conceptually manage this research the university is delimited as an institution included in the 'complex social forms that reproduce themselves, such as governments, the family, human languages, universities, hospitals, business corporations, and legal systems'¹⁸; and institutions as 'regular patterns of behaviour that are regulated by norms and sanctions into which individuals are socialized. Institutions are thus an ensemble of social roles' (Turner 2009: 300). We further view the university as a field in relation to and in interaction with many other fields. Bourdieu (1998b) has developed the concept of field by researching education, culture, television, literature, science, housing and bureaucracy. The university, as a field, is a 'structured social space, field of forces, a force field' (Bourdieu 1998b: 40-41):

Constant, permanent relationships of inequality operate inside this space, which at the same time becomes a space in which various actors struggle for the transformation or preservation of the field. All the individuals in this universe bring to the competition all the (relative) power at their disposal. It is this power that defines their position in the field and, as a result, their strategies.

If Bourdieu (1998b) deemed field as a way to plot objective structural relations, he also needed to 'show how such objectivity was constructed by individual subjectivities, constituted by their habitus' (Grenfell 2011: 4). Student leaders and managers are all subjected to the principles of the habitus: 'systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures' (Bourdieu 1990: 53). Generally obscured within the social practices that make up universities, the principles of habitus operate objectively without the conscious aiming at ends; they are simply adapted to their goals, 'collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orches-

trating action of a conductor' (Bourdieu 1990: 53). The role played by student leaders can, in this understanding of habitus, be constrained or aided by the general, unspoken principles within which the university functions.

Bourdieu's habitus, employed here to ponder why rights-based policies and practices cannot generate the recognition that must ensue from an agency linked to SCA, links up well with Foucault's notion of governmentality as the 'movement through which individuals are subjugated in the reality of a social practice through mechanisms of power that adhere to a truth' (Taylor 2011: 179). Governmentality refers to organised practices by which subjects are governed or as 'acting out a script', as student leaders articulate it. Thus, here are two concepts that highlight the 'pre-structured constraints that delimit the possible scope of knowledge, action, and thought' (Calore undated: 5) to which the researchers are subjected. In Foucault, as in Bourdieu, are methodological markers to engage with the position of the researcher as well. There will be a return to these markers towards the end of the paper.

In a comprehensive handbook on qualitative research by Denzin and Lincoln (2005), Stakes's (2005) enunciation of the qualitative case study seems to designate this study most appropriately, as it was employed in the research design. This methodological choice, perhaps, also reflect how the researchers subject themselves to the conventions of qualitative research. SCA was chosen as the subject of study at a particular university. In line with the general requirement for critical studies, this study focuses on power, structures, the way in which social practices are constituted, and what is produced by these practices. It engages with misrecognition as an injustice as it relates to SCA and demands of itself to develop options on the basis of the normative expectations against which such injustice figures as misrecognition. Thirteen in-depth, non-directed interviews were conducted between 2013 and 2014 which followed on from the informal discussions that consisted of the twenty-eight bilateral and seven group encounters, which initially catalysed the study. Two focus-group discussions in 2014 enriched the interview data. In addition, eight student leaders provided written reflections. The interviews and focus group discussions further probed the three major issues first identified by

student leaders: 'not being recognised'; a 'sense of lack of achievement'; and 'acting out scripts' in an 'overregulated space'.

The conceptual scheme consists of three spheres woven together: One, particular understandings of student participation, citizenship and democratic practice are employed. Two, this are linked with SCA and Honneth's recognition theory. And three, Bourdieu's notions of field and habitus and Foucault's concept of governmentality are imported. This makes for an intricate and rich interpretive scheme which was never the original intention. It generatively developed as informal discussions prior to the systematic study that evolved. In the case of SCA and recognition theory, student leaders' experiences of misrecognition had to be bridged with a descriptive and conceptual genre that normatively frames the totality of expectations that student leaders have when they take up leadership positions. That is, as the researchers surmise, students want to exercise SCA as a form of recognitive justice to advance particular objectives. A violation of the principles of SCA results in feelings of misrecognition. Thus, it is no accident that Lister's (2008) values and principles for inclusive citizenship relate to justice, recognition, self-determination and participatory parity. Its correlation with recognition theory is obvious. Rights and responsibilities link up with legal recognition (rights) in Honneth's model; belonging and membership with affective recognition (love); and equal participation with achievement (solidarity); at least to some extent.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

The data indicate that student leaders, it seems, achieve recognition primarily on the level of friendships and in intimate relationships with peers. Student leadership collectivities generally provide sufficient conditions for this level of recognition to be extended from the intimate into the institutional spheres¹⁹, though strong party political affiliations among student leaders sometimes challenge the achievement of recognition on this level. On the other hand, as experiences are jointly moderated and steered by field positions so determined by habitus, new intimate forms of recognitive relations are established against a 'common' enemy, so to speak: *the structures in which their own habitus inhere*. In addition, as empathy for and identifica-

tion with one another's struggles amongst themselves grow, the necessity to support one another becomes a matter-of-fact demand where, to borrow from Boltanski's work (2012), love and justice emerge as inter-relational competences. Thomas (2012: 458) argues that the model of love-rights-solidarity in the recognition theory model can, in principle, be used to interrogate any social setting; for example, a workplace, [...] [a university], a parliament, and a nursery [...], since all three modes of recognition will always be more or less present or absent. The level of intimate relationships, friendships and love in relation to recognition is a crucial element in students' decisions to pursue leadership within university spaces, and is probably the most important source of affirmation that assists them in continuing their tasks.

Between love-related and rights-related recognition, the researchers have to add one of their major quibbles with recognition theory: its uncritical treatment of the rights discourse²⁰. This critique has various empirical footholds in the way that student leaders articulate their negative experiences within a compliance regime located in rights; but which, nevertheless fails to generate sufficient autonomy. Here, a double bind is presented in the Derridian sense: 'all propositions carry within themselves a counter-proposition [...] [it signals] in a regular and contradictory manner, a double edge and double bind, the singular artefact of a blade and a knot' (Derrida 1998: 607). This double bind, in relation to rights, is explained by a careful reading of the concept of 'compassion' in African moral philosophy. If compassion, generosity, love and friendship in social relations are the researchers' concern, then they have to consider that conceptions of *rights-based justice may be its antithesis* (Gyekye 1997: 70). This form of justice is about claims and counterclaims, according to Gyekye (1997). 'To invoke rights is to awaken the spirit of contention'; [...] it is evocative of 'legal claims and argument' (Weil in Bell 2002: 66-67) and therefore must rely on the force of regulatory frames. Given that entire institutional architectures are rooted in this logic, rights claims by student leaders can be located and adjudicated only in regulatory terms which, in turn, further governmentality. Everyday institutional pragmatics, in the context of universities, requires regulation without which its very borders will implode; its mandates compromised;

and its operations paralysed. Paradoxically then, the more rights claims are made in an institutionally-sanctioned grammar, the more regulatory frames are required that are formulated within the same syntax. *Rights thus regulation thus relationally constitute each other's double bind*. Notwithstanding indications that rights provide for crucial protections, its position as the basis on which institutional and other relations are organised, is questionable, if Hegel is to be believed (Douzinas 2002: 405):

This drive has become the major force of human rights. The greater my bunch of rights, the fuller the recognition of my identity by others. But at the same time, this type of recognition is forced, based not on the reciprocity of belonging to a family, corporation, group or community, but on the alienating logic of the law (Douzinas 2002: 405).

'To describe an individual as a "legal person" is an expression of contempt' according to Hegel, and this 'inevitable misrecognition follows the legal person of human rights' (Douzinas 2002: 405). Institutional regulations based on rights, result from time to time, in same-style misrecognitions. Thus, student leaders, in the process of claiming rights, may unintentionally contribute to conditions that serve misrecognition.

In essence, the deliberative logic served by rights, has regulatory consensus (compliance) in mind. This is an inevitable inheritance from dominant theories of democracy which have given rise to a set of tricky tensions. At its heart is the pragmatic tension of *complicity-resistance* as one way in which to try to name the contradictions which inhabit student leaders' practices within dense and intricate institutional arrangements. This seems to demand formalised and non-formalised forms of participation, *simultaneously*. Student leaders are complicit in the formalisations of their own practices, and, *at one and the same time*, they resist such formalisations. As Koen et al. (2006) observe: the underlying assumptions of the higher education legislative framework are linked to the notion of deliberative democracy; rational discussion and agreement, which may, and sometimes do, result in the assimilation and the co-option of student leadership practices. This genre of democratic understanding has very little tolerance for the entangled contradictions within *complicity-resistance*; formalisations, *and* non-formalisations.

There is another, more productive, way of looking at these contradictions based on the notion of agonistic democracy²¹ (relations between adversaries) advanced by Mouffe (2014a and 2014b). It makes provision for viewing students leaders' practices as part of an agonistic struggle to reconfigure the power relations that structure the institutional order; 'it is a confrontation between opposing hegemonic projects that can never be reconciled rationally' (Mouffe 2014a: 181). Such confrontations, within democratic practices, the researchers suggest, may serve recognitive functions better than the deliberative model since it opens up options for student leaders to pursue non-consensual political projects, whilst at the same time, operate within the 'system'. In fact, this agonistic stance co-constitutes the system (Mouffe 2014b: 17) and may provide more productive conditions for *recognition* through SCA. An alignment with agonistic politics may broaden the normative horizon to envisage a political and ethical community outside the scope of rights and regulation. As deliberative consensus harbours the tendency for over-regulation; it is the productive interplay between deliberative and agonistic principles that has the potentialities to unburden the university from its over-reliance on pragmatic regulation. This interplay has the promise to shift the institution towards ethical, as opposed to regulatory, forms of university communities within which student leaders are crucial role players.

The co-constitutive double bind of rights and regulation sets up the conditions for strong *governmentality* insofar as student leaders are tied to practices of student governance that obey a democratic policy-based truth. This makes pragmatic sense and university managers have little option but to employ technologies of regulation based on rights, so as to respond to student-driven agonisms and antagonisms that are, for the most part, framed by a rights-based logic that steers current praxes of democracy. Yet, it is when there are deviations from this reasoning and the capacity to think about malleable and shifting frontiers between the hegemonic projects of university managers and student leaders, is developed, that alternatives may be found. For instance, the cooperative production of democratic social space as a generative movement that may limitedly unshackle the university from *governmentality* and *habitus* is possi-

ble; something that both Foucault and Bourdieu acknowledge. With reference to university managers and student leaders, Foucault would suggest that this agency resides in activities of self-constitution in discursive practices enabling them to take up different subject positionings, and for Bourdieu it is located within transformative reflexivity. Though the supposed disappearance of agency into discourse in Foucault's case, and its collapse into *habitus* in the case of Bourdieu has been widely criticised,²² their analyses rightly point to the hard work required to develop reflexive, transformative agency and the cooperative production of democratic space. Nevertheless, given the infinite attempts at and strategies for transforming universities in post-1994 South Africa, the unchanging, rock-solid social structure of the academy and the massive empirical data that verify the reproductive mechanics of universities²³ seem in general to affirm, rather than refute, the logic of *governmentality* and *habitus*.

There is evidence in the focus group reports, interviews and reflective notes that student leaders have devised various ways 'to play the system'. That is, they operate within zones between complicity and resistance to achieve certain goals, and continuously question themselves to maintain this state of productive alternations. Complicity-resistance here provides options for strategies to emerge. Practices have an active and creative nature; student leaders are 'active and knowing agents endowed with a practical sense that is an acquired system of preferences, of principles, of vision and [...] schemes of action' (Bourdieu, 1986: 25). They develop a 'feel for the game'; 'they learn the tempo, rhythms and unwritten rules through time and experience' (Maton 2005: 54). This knowing agent, in Foucault's terms, emerges from self-constitution.

[This self-constitution] is concerned with the models proposed for setting up and developing relationships with the self, for self-reflection, self-knowledge, self-examination, for the decipherment of the self by oneself, for the transformations that one seeks to accomplish with oneself as object (Foucault 1990: 29).

Both Bourdieu's and Foucault's version of agency are reflected in the data. Student leaders intimate how they need to 'play the system' and locate themselves on the *field*, whilst they are, at the same time required to review their sense of self, their personal goals, motives, values and

practices. Some of them are adept at crafting agency:

I do believe there were spaces to use, if not, you could create those spaces. I do however think, that even though we have many spaces to use it does not necessarily mean that those spaces are useful.

We often faced challenges with taking responsibility for certain projects and events and our own commitment and got strangled in a system where the procedure is more important than the actual carrying out of the activity. (Student Leader D)

These experiences formulate the encounter between self and structure; between self-constitution and structuring structures. The eight written reflections all suggest some measure of achievement, though in the first focus-group discussions the introductory statements of most student leaders pivoted around a 'sense of lack of achievement'. These contradictory verbalisations, far from discounting the validity of student experiences, point to the complexities of that which student leaders face. It is apparent that their expectations are constructed on the subjective understandings of what they can achieve with three successive SRCs endeavouring to broaden the space for SCA to pursue a variety of objectives. One of the most profound readings from student leaders is linked to their empirical realisation of the strangulations of democratic and rights-based regulation, even if such regulation is the consequence of deliberations that develop 'truth tracking potential', as Habermas would argue (2006: 411). At issue is not whether regulations are fair or unfair, just or unjust. Rather, student leaders are disillusioned with their capacity to facilitate conditions for SCA, thus confirming the link between rights and *governmentality*. The expectation of rights-based *recognition* is thus not met and such *misrecognition* is felt in intense ways because the entire discourse on *recognition* embedded in rights is part of the everyday psyche and routine expectations:

The greatest challenge I experienced and felt, was lack of recognition as a Student Representative Council. We were welcomed, inaugurated and also had a formal and lavish handover ceremony; events which in my view were not parallel to the treatment received by the Council afterwards [...]. It felt as if our rights were violated [...]. What was certain was that

we had to fight for recognition [...]. Many decisions taken by the council members were overturned by staff members in a higher position who had more authority. (Student Leader E)

Despite the failure of rights-based *recognition*, which seems to be a central weakness of the human rights regime generally, and thus of Honneth's recognition theory, student leaders nevertheless register some achievements amidst the overall sentiment that it was lacking. Moreover, the centrality of rights as part of rational consensus in Habermas's deliberative democracy (Habermas 1996), interpellates or hails, in Althusser's logic (Althusser 1971), student leaders into subject positions located in relation to other positions on Bourdieu's *field*. Student leaders are generally attuned to this:

I often felt that I was placed, admittedly by my own choice and effort, in a system that was only designed to accommodate me in so far as my value in validating processes leading to decisions I would ultimately have to conform to, actively or passively. I did not feel that I was empowered to alter the course; merely aid in the implementation of a decision. (Student Leader A)

Rights-related *recognition*, though the most dominant form of recognition expected by student leaders, is suffocated by overregulation and *governmentality*. Whereas rights-based policy regimes and practices, as would be asserted by the university, may provide for a regulatory frame that advances the democratic *self* and cultivates SCA, the tendency of rights to serve *governmentality* is seldom factored into our understanding of student experiences. To this end, rights are employed to signal a democratic space that is governed; a contradiction that is inherent to the general rights discourse which is corporeally felt by student leaders:

I don't know; you are unable to put a finger on it; I felt trapped. It feels something is closing in on you, to a point where I couldn't wait to leave office ... there is no creativity, there are too many parameters. The system is programmed to work in a certain way; we simply managed the blueprint. (Student Leader C)

This formulation of how structures operate represents a range of regular and comparable articulations. In fact, it is not often that the operations of structures are disclosed in such clear terms. There is no direct reference to other agents and actors, except for all management members

who are in any case implicated in structuring structures. In the student data, that is, in their words, the researchers are able to image the indiscernible structures that organise their lives as student leaders and their desolation is all too often very palpable²⁴:

The system is set up as though we should not be functioning. It's like a fight the whole time. There is no one to talk to. The people who offer to help are actually putting the overregulation in place. (Student Leader B)

Any leadership structure should perhaps not be as restricted by rules, policies or constitutions. Or perhaps, the members of leadership structures should not restrict themselves by such processes. (Student Leader F)

Such overregulation, enabled by the very rights-based policy constructs that respond to the pragmatic demands of managing massive institutions, scuttles both rights-related and achievement-related *recognition*. In fact, the research data show that student leaders consistently tie these forms of *recognition* together. Nevertheless, it was a sense of lack of achievement, even if some accomplishments were registered that thematically dominated the focus group discussions.

When, over a period of three years, various groups of student leaders articulate their sense of lack of achievement and *misrecognition* in consistent terms, it should not summarily be read as the validation of a truth. Rather, as Bourdieu (1999) would suggest, the consistency and obviousness of the expressions, across authors, space and time, also disclose the absence of other articulation codes. One has to consider such expression as the observed communicational exchange that points to objective structuring processes; not 'objective' as in the impossible value-free positivist research, but 'objective' as an acknowledgement that structures themselves have a powerful influence on the practices that constitute and reproduce them. In a sense, student leaders may not have direct access to their reasons for discontent and experiences of *misrecognition*. No doubt however, they do expect university managers as agents to work against structuring processes so as to set up the conditions for them to produce their own space. But, in their own bond with structures, they glimpse the bondage of and constraints on all social actors, including university leaders and managers. In a sense, the most pro-

ductive expression of student leadership, its strategies, and *feel for the game*, is located in this realisation, facilitated by experiences of misrecognition. Such misrecognition, in turn, is relayed from a normative horizon of expectations to the social practices of student leaders by SCA: understood as the capacity to exercise rights and responsibilities; the proficiency to express membership; and the competencies to participate (see Lister et al. 2007) and claim recognition through achievement.

Reflections on Research

This research project disclosed caveats of different sorts, because it became, in many respects a reflexive exercise on the researchers' own research practices and assumptions. First, the researchers had to deal with 'false objectification'. The consistency of the qualitative data and the evenness of contradictions align so well that they appear 'too good to be true' (Yanos and Hopper 2008: 229); pointing to a trap that Bourdieu called 'false, collusive objectification' 'because the account is packaged persuasively or because it fits in neatly with theories [and assumptions] that the interviewer is familiar with' (Yanos and Hopper 2008: 229). The researchers have tried to engage with this risk through 'double objectification'. This consistency revealed a very interesting possibility. The regularity of form and substance of utterances seem to be a cry because something 'asks' to be put into phrases, but no genre yet exists²⁵; its articulation is steered by *habitus*. When student leaders as actors engage at the nexus of *self* and structure, they relay their experiences to themselves and managers as actors located within the very same nexus albeit, are differently positioned. Thus, the structuring processes that are hidden from agents across the institution, inclusive of students and managers, remain hidden because a new genre for expression is evading all of them. This concealment, this non-emergence of a new genre, is made possible by the canonical value (see Lyotard 1988: 137) attached to deliberative democracy that by its very nature must stream social actors into practices associated with policy-driven consensus. Nevertheless, there are industrious agonistic encounters, as student leaders' experiences have shown, that exist outside this streaming process which demand to be recognised as a political cause, in

spite of being rendered unspeakable in present policy constructions and praxes²⁶. This is the crux of contemporary challenges related to student politics and participation, rendered more visible by ‘other’ forms of student activism that emerged on the South African higher education scene during the first half of 2015²⁷.

The researchers also had to dispense with analyses that assume that institutions have a monopoly over the production of power. These analyses set up student leaders’ attempts at SCA against an institutional power that is directed by university managers. Sluggish interpretations of ‘student participation versus university management and policy’ became standard in public commentary because students themselves express such schisms²⁸. Foucault (1983) warned about how research on institutions as the generators of power can find only exaggerated patterns of reproduction that explain power to power. Rather, if institutions are approached from the standpoint of power the researchers would accept how relations of power ‘bathe the structures’ (Caputo and Yount 1993: 5) of, say for instance, the university. Actors on the *field* are positioned in power-relations. Thus, to ‘expose the intelligible structure of a local power regime’ is to open it up to criticism ‘to assist resistances not yet imagined’ (Caputo and Yount 1993: 5). Such resistances represent the agencies against *governmentality*. Student leaders, as the interviews suggest, craft their expectations in these agential terms. However, is it clear from their experiences, that agency is not self-governing in its entirety. Thus, the researchers subscribe to a constrained agency, as located in *habitus*; which, though limited, nevertheless has great emancipatory potential. This kind of agency, aware of its historical constitution within structures, is much more productive than the impossible uninhibited ones which only masquerade as fleeting transformative promises on the higher education landscape.

Furthermore, because the researchers are moved by their own interests as researchers, apart from reflecting on their research participants, they need to reflect on their positions that make possible what they are able to do: their own discourses, theories, assumptions, *habitus* and location on the *field* must be the subject of reflexivity so that the researchers can disclose to themselves how they are determined by their location in the academic space. This

double objectification (Bourdieu 1999) must be preceded by forms of reflexivity that are much deeper than what is presented in the reflection-based studies that litter our social research landscapes²⁹. Like student leaders, the researchers do not have direct access to the structuring processes behind ‘rights-based’ policies which are more likely to influence institutional practices so as to remain regular. Consequently, the researchers attempt, but struggle, to disclose the operations of structures; thus, they too have routine responses in relation to the custodians of policy and university managers and leaders. But, because the researchers themselves are invested with this custodianship, their own contradictions suggest a structural captivity which they have to extend to university managers and student leaders. These contradictions steered the researchers to import the procedures of the structuration of student leadership into interpretive horizons so as to make sense of their (the researchers’) own structured imprisonment.

The basis on which the researchers claim, in this study, to generate understandings of student leaders’ experiences was a key point at issue that sustained the perennial doubt in their scholarly endeavours and in this particular research project. One of the themes in studying student experiences within universities is precisely the challenge to link the articulation of student leaders’ encounters with the structuring impulses of the institution. Once the researchers apply this connection to themselves, they affirm that they, like their students, are subjected to densely-integrated cyclical movements of complicity-resistance. Objectifying themselves was one way to displace self-affirming observations with a criticality towards themselves. This guided the researchers not to simply ‘see’ a battle between student leadership and institutional practices and cultures, or a struggle for democratic space, but rather to explore the normative claims that student leaders make when they do engage in these practices.

The research also alerted the researchers to disallow common sense³⁰ from overwhelming or strangling the empirical observations. Even as common sense is crucial for rational conduct and the manageability of everyday-life dealings with ‘matters of knowledge, action, and evaluation’ (Rescher 2005: 234), it does displace radical uncertainty because interpretive schemes rest on the ‘existence of a “set of generally shared

self-evident truths” serving as the basis of agreements’ (Boltanski 2012: 54). For instance, one of the shared misplaced truths is the contingent link between human rights and democratic principles; and further between democratic principles and substantive participation. Another is to invest in university managers an agency outside of the constraints of structuring structures to which they subject themselves, thus setting up university authorities as the easy targets for criticism through the slothful thinking and reflection so endemic to organisational studies. The researchers had to dispense with these common sense assumptions to avoid their findings being influenced by what they regard as self-evident truths.

The reflexivity required for self-objectification entails the systematic exploration of the “unthought categories of thought which delimit the thinkable and predetermine the thought” as well, guides the practical carrying out of social inquiry (Wacquant 1992: 40). Reflexivity here becomes the ‘objectification of objectification’ [;] as a necessary aspect of the research process; [a double objectification]. Only, if you like, by subjecting the practice of the researcher to the same critical and sceptical eye as the practice of the researched is it possible to aspire to conduct properly objective and scientific research. The researchers submit that this kind of reflexivity is indeed very rare in the academy. It is therefore not surprising that responses to students’ concerns relating to constraints on SCA are, in general, formulated as students not *taking up existing democratic spaces*. Following Bourdieu’s ‘double objectification’, reflection on the researchers’ own research practices reveals their own densely formed political orientations towards the project of higher transformation, which can, if not scientifically restrained, become an alternative dogma without an appreciation of the complexities of universities as institutions or the complexities experienced by student leaders. Moreover, the researchers have to conduct their research with a conscious acknowledgement that constraints experienced by students are located within the structures that they co-constitute. That is, the researchers’ own practices are *habitus* forming and informed by *habitus*.

CONCLUSION

This study sets out to explore student leaders’ empirical experiences of misrecognition us-

ing three conceptual movements: student participation, citizenship and democratic practice; SCA and Honneth’s recognition theory; and Bourdieu’s notions of field and habitus and Foucault’s concept of governmentality. The researchers bridged student leaders’ experiences of misrecognition with a descriptive and conceptual genre that normatively frame the totality of expectations that student leaders have when they take up leadership positions. Students, the researchers argue, want to exercise SCA as a form of recognitive justice to advance particular objectives; a violation of the principles of SCA which results in feelings of misrecognition. The constraints on SCA are not correlated with the deliberate practices of university managers; rather, they are located within structuring structures. Enter Bourdieu’s notions of field and habitus, and Foucault’s notion of governmentality.

There are three ways, it seems, in which student leaders place their experiences on the grid of *misrecognition* that correlates, to some degree, with the researchers’ conception of SCA. First, the exercise of rights and responsibilities does not take into consideration how rights may serve governmentality and regulation, a point which is increasingly underscored in the literature. Second, student leaders are members within the university community and they are located on a *field* where *field* refers to ‘a system of objective relations between positions already won (in previous struggles)’ which places them at a ‘power’ disadvantage that results in the de-authorisation of their voices. Third, their experiences in relation to participation disallow *recognition* since it is intuited as ‘acting out scripts’ in an ‘overregulated space’. This study shows that student leaders seldom perceive their high levels of participation within the formalised processes and structures of the university as SCA.

The implications for universities are instructive, so the researchers suggest. Rethinking SCA would require that universities as institutions first see themselves as embodying techniques of regulation and governmentality, generally aimed at producing adapted units of students. The constraints on an open democratic space rooted in principles of intellectual freedoms, creative praxes and rights-based policies should be made visible. Not because universities are dreadful and unhealthy spaces, but for university practitioners to develop more truthful categories of self-understanding. Such advanced

self-understandings would form the basis on which to generate new genres within which to frame and facilitate SCA.

If the researchers accept that recognition expresses the sum of expectations of student leaders, then they have to subject their assumptions of deliberative democracy and its contingent link with human rights to scrutiny. The limited recognitive justice attained on the levels of rights-based and achievement-based acknowledgement, suggests that the researchers' entire modelling of student participation is questionable. Thus, rather than authorising consensus-driven democratic and rights-based policies to steer their entire reasoning, the researchers need to develop conditions for agonistic-democratic practices within universities. The high levels of recognition, as the study shows, achieved on the level of love and friendship across various social divides within the student leadership polity could provide the basis for a model of student politics and participation derived from an agonistic theory of democracy³¹ rooted in solidarity. The vibrant confrontations advanced by this model seem to better serve the vigour of the democratic project than the deliberative model. It is also on the basis of this model that managers must formulate new forms of student participation, limitedly unburdened from habitus and governmentality. The focus of the researchers' work in this sphere, they propose, should be to think with their students, of ways to constitute self-generative, student-driven democratic spaces with a healthy skepticism towards their own present logics. There is work to do.

NOTES

- 1 In August 2010, members of the South African Student Congress (SASCO) interrupted a sports event between the University of the Free State and the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University. Owing to SASCO also being the majority party in the SRC at the UFS, the Rector dissolved the SRC and the Dean of Student Affairs took full responsibility for SRC functions, assisted by a broad student transformation forum. A new SRC was elected in August 2011, under a new constitution. (<http://mg.co.za/article/2011-09-02-university-of-free-state-inaugurates-partyfree-src#>. VdDtkyhJjjs.mailto.
- 2 Student participation may mean many things: access and success in higher education (see Wangenge-Ouma 2012); involvement in teaching and learning (Knowlton and Hagopian 2013); and student engagement (Gibbs 2014. Gibbs (2014: 2) refers to

'student engagement as the new buzzword in higher education: 'Here, "engagement" is about students' engagement with their studies, not with their social group or their institution, and the focus is clearly on pedagogic practices [...] students who are more engaged with their studies are also more engaged with their institution's governance, with volunteering, with student activities, and so on'. Trowler (2010: 2) argues that a sound body of literature has established robust correlations between student involvement in a subset of 'educationally purposive activities', and positive outcomes of student success and development, including satisfaction, persistence, academic achievement and social engagement'.

- 3 See Badat 1999; Bergan 2004; Popoviã 2011; Luescher 2008; Cele and Koen 2003; and Luescher-Mamashela 2012.
- 4 The tasks here do not include a review of the literature on citizenship. See Somers (2008) and Lister et al. (2007) in this regard.
- 5 See Cele and Koen (2003: 1-3): 'The origins of the universities [in South Africa] can be traced to the establishment of the South African College in 1829 as a "proprietary" institution that provided matriculation and post-secondary qualifications and minimized the reliance on traveling to Europe for further study [...]'. See also Bunting (2002: 36): 'The evolution of "racial" segregation within higher education over 150 years culminated in the 1984 constitution of the RSA, with its distinction between "general" and "own affairs" [that] entrenched the apartheid divisions in education in South Africa. A direct consequence was that higher education institutions had to be designated for the exclusive use of one of the four race groups: African, coloured, Indian and white. By the beginning of 1985, a total of 19 higher education institutions had been designated as being "for the exclusive use of whites"; two as being "for the exclusive use of coloureds"; two "for the exclusive use of Indians"; and six as being "for the exclusive use of Africans". The six institutions for Africans did not include the seven institutions in the TBVC countries, even though it was expected that the latter would be used almost entirely by the African citizens of the four "independent republics". In her historical analysis, Lange (2012: 46) found that universities in South Africa did not emerge to signify the new country after independence but that they rather performed a variety of apartheid functions, such as the reproduction of the system of racial domination. By the advent of the democratic dispensation in 1994, Lange (2012: 46) suggests that South Africa did not have a higher education system as such but rather 36 public higher education institutions that were distinguished by race, ethnicity, language and geography.
- 6 In this regard, see the seminal work done by Koen et al. (2006: 406): 'The consequences of this situation include student involvement in committees dealing with academic development, student fees, bursary allocations, institutional finances, financial exclusions, academic exclusions, appointing senior executives, equity committees and a host of other institutional structures'.

- 7 The space in this paper is too limited to explore the seminal work of Lefebvre (1991) on space as socially produced and intrinsic to social practices.
- 8 The apartheid state, with the Population Registration Act of 1950, classified all people in South Africa as black (African), white, coloured (mixed race) and Indian (descendants of Indian indentured labourers, mostly) (Giliomee and Mbenga 2007: 316).
- 9 A legislated transition occurred from apartheid to the post-apartheid government with a multiparty structure, the Transitional Executive Council that, from January 1994, had to facilitate the eventual founding election of April 1994 (Giliomee and Mbenga 2007: 407-408).
- 10 See Report of the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions (Department of Education 2008).
- 11 A video surfaced in which four white male students from the Reitz residence at the UFS involved five black workers in a mock initiation ritual which, at one stage, included the workers eating food into which it appeared one of the students had urinated (Oloyede 2009: 427).
- 12 In the main, this ministerial committee found that racism and sexism still characterised higher education in South Africa. A stark disjuncture between policy aims for transformation and practices on the ground was pervasive (Department of Education, 2008: 13-14. Specifically, black students and staff at former white institutions expressed a sense of alienation as a result of discriminatory practices and an academic culture that disregarded the African situatedness of South Africa (Oloyede 2009: 428).
- 13 In terms of the new vision set for the UFS, academic excellence would be pursued, as well as human reconciliation given that the UFS fell short on both aspects (UFS 2012: 32).
- 14 As explained earlier, the SRC constitution was amended to disallow political contestation for seats (<http://mg.co.za/article/2011-09-02-university-of-free-state-inaugurates-partyfree-src#>. VdDtkyhJjjs.mailto. Since 2014 the SRC, as mandated by the university's strategic responses to the Soudien Report, works on a revision of student governance, including its constitution (UFS 2015: 245).
- 15 The Institute, as it evolves, also becomes a central space in which students are involved in shaping the intellectual landscape of the UFS. Various activities attest to this deep engagement with students as led by them and others (http://institute.ufs.ac.za/dl/Userfiles/Documents/00000/51_eng.pdf).
- 16 In addition, during the same period, 234 discussions and meetings with a variety of students took place.
- 17 In the aftermath of the dissolution of the SRC of 2010, student leaders, even political leaders, were given platforms from which to engage with university management. The Institute remains central in providing such intellectual and physical space (http://institute.ufs.ac.za/dl/Userfiles/Documents/00000/51_eng.pdf). Ideas for a different model of student governance were tested in such spaces to give effect to the ongoing strategic review of student governance (UFS 2015: 245).
- 18 Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/social-institutions/> [accessed 12 January 2013; and 15 April 2015]. For a comprehensive analysis on the various meanings of social institutions, see Joao De Pina-Cabral (2011).
- 19 Most interviewees indicated the importance of this form of *recognition* in their decisions to become student leaders; and its role as a continued source of acknowledgement. They further confirm the importance of various forms of close affiliations, within, and outside of student leadership structures.
- 20 See Keet (2015 forthcoming)
- 21 Mouffe C (2014a). 'According to the 'agonistic pluralism' model that I developed in *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000) and *On the Political* (London: Routledge 2005), pluralist democracy is characterised by the introduction of a distinction between the categories of enemy and adversary. This means that within the 'we' that constitutes the political community, the opponent is not considered an enemy to be destroyed but an adversary whose existence is legitimate. His ideas will be fought with vigour but his right to defend them will never be questioned. The category of enemy does not disappear, however, for it remains pertinent with regard to those who, by questioning the very principles of pluralist democracy, cannot form part of the agonistic space. With the distinction between antagonism (friend/enemy relation) and agonism (relation between adversaries) in place, we are better able to understand why the agonistic confrontation, far from representing a danger for democracy, is in reality the very condition of its existence'.
- 22 Askland (2007: 241), for example, criticises Bourdieu for his, almost, transcendental notion of the adjustment of habitus to new social circumstances. The work of Askland (2007: 241-2) amongst asylum seekers points towards active and calculated agentic reflections which lead to wilful action, thus discarding the notion that habitus can be a condition without agency.
- 23 Referring to statistics of the Council for Higher Education, Leibowitz (2012: xx) indicates how historically advantaged universities in South Africa attract more middle-class students than disadvantaged universities, thus having little incentive to destabilise such a middle-class social structure.
- 24 The incapacity 'to deal with racialised structures' was particularly pronounced 'as if silence can rid us of conflicts' as one student leader put it, and further: 'the Student Representative Council became an events management agency'.
- 25 Paraphrasing Lyotard on *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* (1988: 13).
- 26 Lyotard (1988)
- 27 Of these, the #RhodesMustFall movement started at the University of Cape Town to demand the removal of the statue of a brutal colonial figure, is best known (<http://rhodesmustfall.co.za/?p=92>). The Open Stellenbosch movement is another example of a student uprising, this time at Stellenbosch

- University, demanding change (<http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2015-04-28-op-ed-open-stellenbosch-tackling-language-and-exclusion-at-stellenbosch-university/#.VdNJKrKqooI>) (Retrieved on 1 August 2015).
- 28 See <http://www.thedailyvox.co.za/rhodes-must-fall-the-movement-after-the-statue/> and <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2015-08-20-op-ed-how-rhodes-must-fall-squandered-public-sympathy/#.VdXJQLKqooI> (Retrieved on 21 August 2015).
- 29 See Smit (2013) and Francis (2012) as examples of studies based on shallow reflection on data collected from participants. There are many more.
- 30 Rescher, N. (2005: 12) distinguished between three kinds of common sense: 'observational common sense' [...] in terms of 'features of things that are accessible to more than one of our senses'; 'judgmental common sense as "good judgment" regarding matters that are obvious and evident on the basis of everyday experience, without elaborate reasoning, calculation, or investigation'; and 'consensual common sense 'as a matter of facts that "everyone knows" and with respect to which there is a universal (or near-universal) agreement of people's opinion'.
- 31 See Mouffe 2014.

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