

ADAM HABIB'S *REBELS AND RAGE. REFLECTING ON #FEESMUSTFALL*: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL

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ABSTRACT

This article offers a critical review of the analysis, arguments and some of the conclusions in Adam Habib's recent book *Rebels and Rage: Reflecting on #FeesMustFall* (Habib 2019). The article is necessarily selective about events and issues: others might offer different, and welcome, perspectives. This article thus cannot provide a substitute for a careful reading of Habib's provocative, sometimes irritating, sometimes insightful, but nevertheless important book. The importance of the book lies principally in the questions it stimulates about the nature and the future of the South African university.

Keywords: FeesMustFall, Habib, higher education funding, student loans

INTRODUCTION

Recent years have seen South African universities convulsed by student protests, demonstrations and agitation, initially over matters to do largely with tuition fees and then over demands for the transformation of the fundamental nature of the higher education system. This challenge to the status quo became known as *#FeesMustFall* (FMF). Its campaign has generated a considerable literature (see, for example, Booysen 2016; Chikane 2018; Habib 2019; Jansen 2017; Ray 2016).

Habib was vice-chancellor of the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) during the FMF period. *Rebels and Rage* is his personal analysis of many of the events, people and issues associated with FMF. It focusses on Wits although some systemic issues are considered. This article contains the following sections:

- A discussion of an arguably remarkable incomes policy embraced by the vice-chancellor and executive of Wits, which seems to have underpinned the vice-chancellor's approach to, and dealing with, the economic demands of the FMF students at Wits;
- Habib's use of arguably undefined and/or opaque concepts to inform parts of his narrative;
- FMF and academic freedom;
- FMF, the humanities and the social sciences;

- the history of FMF at Wits, 2015–2018;
- financing higher education qualifications: contested terrain;
- the quality of strategic thinking about the future of the South African university; and
- FMF issues: a theoretical context and lessons learned. Concluding remarks follow.

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND'S INCOMES POLICY

Habib takes it as axiomatic that South African universities must address inequality. This requires that universities “produce numbers of high-quality graduates in the professions required by our societies and economies so that scarcity does not lead to the undue escalation of their remuneration” (Habib 2016, 1). By 2019, this policy provided that universities must “produce enough professional graduates that these skills do not command a premium in the market” (Habib 2019, x).

This policy implies that a central mission of South African universities is to flood professional labour markets with graduates to the extent that their remuneration is no greater than the average of those who have not acquired professional qualifications. However, what if labour markets were flooded to the point at which some graduates could not secure professional employment? A reserve army of unemployed, highly skilled graduates would thus share the experiences of South Africa's unemployed, unskilled millions in the interest of implementing arguably some confused notion of greater equality. The confusion does not end here. On the one hand, Habib says South African “university education has the highest return for individuals in comparison to any other part of the world” (Habib 2019, 182). For Habib, enhancing access to this return by students from low- and middle-income families is the very *raison d'être* of free, comprehensive higher education. On the other hand, the incomes policy that he advocates is specifically designed to eliminate these returns.

This is not the place to model the structure, dynamics and potential outcomes of Habib's revolutionary incomes policy fully. Such an exercise would arguably reveal its absurdities and impracticalities. In 2015, by the same token, Habib, despite philosophical reservations, proposed a student loan scheme to the Wits Council and to the now Universities South Africa. Such a scheme was, however, totally inconsistent with the university's incomes policy as defined by Habib: the logic and viability of any loans system, as he well recognised, depended critically on the existence of labour market premiums, that he wanted to eliminate, out of which loan repayments would be financed (Habib 2019, 19–20, 188–189).

Has the Wits incomes policy ever been endorsed by the national government, the Minister of Higher Education and Training, the Council on Higher Education, the South African

Qualifications Authority, professional associations, employers, the Wits Convocation, the Wits Council, other vice-chancellors, relevant international bodies, and potential Wits students? Without this, Wits was using taxpayer funds to make public policy independent of any government mandate, clearly extraordinary behaviour for a public institution. Perhaps this was designed to revitalise what Habib has called South Africa's suspended revolution, although his book on that subject says precious little about the place of universities in South Africa's future (Habib 2013).

THE USE OF ARGUABLY UNDEFINED AND/OR OPAQUE CONCEPTS

Habib (2019, ix–x) maintains, “[i]f we truly believe in an egalitarian world, then we need to work towards a global academy of commons”. The concept of “a global academy of commons” is, however, not defined in *Rebels and Rage* and readers are left to guess the specifics. What little detail is provided requires South Africa to have “its own cohort of research-intensive universities” (Habib 2019, x) otherwise research and scientific knowledge will be concentrated “in the North” to the detriment of progress towards reducing global inequality (Habib 2019, x). Possibly a global academy of commons embraces the commons in the sense that this concept is used in the political economy literature and exemplified by the free software movement. Some references in *Rebels and Rage* would have been useful.

“Neo-liberal” is another undefined concept used in *Rebels and Rage* even though several schools of thought inhabit the neo-liberal framework. Kean Birch (2017, 2) argues “there are many different views of neoliberalism; not just what it means politically, but just as critically, what it means analytically”. He suggests, moreover, that there are “contradictions underlying our daily use of it” (Birch 2017, 2). Given these considerations, it is thus important for scholars to nominate which views of neo-liberalism inform their arguments. The absence of definitional precision here (and elsewhere) detracts from the quality and clarity of Habib's work.

The terms “progressive”, “progressives” and “progressive outcomes” (Habib 2019, xi, 14, 15) are frequently used, but are left undefined in *Rebels and Rage*. Again, it is inappropriate for terms such as these to be employed in scholarly debate as if there is a common understanding and acceptance of what they mean. They can, in fact, have many meanings for many different people to the extent that they cannot qualify as meaningful analytical concepts.

Habib (2019, 116) uses “whiteness” as a significant concept. He asserts, for example, that “coded into the history and evolution of ... the social architecture of our universities is an inherent advantage for those of white ancestry. ... It is precisely the absence of this consciousness about whiteness that enables implicit racism and the failure to understand the alienation that black staff and students experience” (Habib 2019, 116). No evidence for these

assertions is, however, provided nor are appropriate references. Although the assertions may be credible, there may also be other explanations for any such racism and alienation. And does the coding asserted by Habib apply across the board in higher education to include, say, the Universities of the Western Cape and Fort Hare? The problem with employing any “skincolourness” concepts in scholarly writing, without extreme care, is that this can lead to forms of skin colour essentialism, which can inhibit persuasive analyses of cause and effect in, for example, important matters of higher education public policy.

FMF AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Habib suggests that the FMF campaign exposed some faults in the understanding of academic freedom at Wits, as well as more generally. He said in an interview with Eusebius McKaiser in March 2019 that some students in the humanities and social sciences had informed him “I cannot comment in class because I’m white”. McKaiser, attributing motives, opined that such students “lack courage” (McKaiser, interview, 4 March, 2019; see also: Habib 2019, 193–219, especially 217). Habib claims that some FMF thinking believed that “if there was to be no free education, there should be no education at all” (Habib 2019, 59). This implies a shutdown of all universities, possibly through direct action, with a dilution of academic freedom regardless of the definitions of academic freedom that inform the arguments.

Similar considerations arguably apply when relationships within universities are affected by racism, personal abuse, violence and disrespect. The Wits academics who disagreed with much of *Rebels and Rage* believe the responses to FMF by university administrations, which included the employment of police and private security companies, offended against certain values, including academic freedom (Ally et al. 2019, 31). Other matters touching on academic freedom will be raised in later sections.

FMF, THE HUMANITIES AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

FMF raised issues to do with “decolonising the curriculum”. Habib (2019, 106, 107) suggests that these issues are largely confined to the humanities and the social sciences fields, and argues that when ideas about such issues “have emerged ... within #FeesMustFall, they have often come off as nonsensical”. He cites the example of a University of Cape Town (UCT) FMF leader who, when asked at a meeting how to decolonise science, “retorted that it ‘was a product of western modernity, and should be scratched out. We would have to restart science from the way we experienced it’.” Habib (2019, 107) continues, “[s]he then proceeded to give the example of a village in KwaZulu-Natal where people believed that witchcraft could cause lightning to strike someone, and she wanted the science curriculum to explain and teach this”.

The chair of the meeting apparently regarded the scepticism displayed by an audience member as evidence that this person's mind "was not yet sufficiently decolonised". For Habib, "[y]ou could not have had a more Orwellian moment" (2019, 107).

A press report of the student's remarks had her claiming that the villagers in KwaZulu-Natal "believe that through the magic, you call it black magic, they call it witchcraft, you are able to send lightening to strike someone. Can you explain that scientifically because it's something that happens?" The report continued "Western knowledge is totalising. It is saying that it was Newton and only Newton who ... saw an apple falling and out of nowhere decided gravity existed and created an equation." Further reported comments suggest that the student argued that different knowledge about gravity could be found in places such as West and Northern Africa (Henderson 2016).

What were the sources of the student's claims about science? This potentially touches on certain dimensions of academic freedom and on the humanities curriculum in South African universities. This article cannot, however, give a definitive answer to this question, which would require discussions with the student concerned and with her lecturers, an analysis of relevant reading lists and so on. There is nothing in *Rebels and Rage* that identifies such sources. What follows is thus speculative, but suggests possibilities for curriculum reform over and above those advanced by FMF.

My conjecture is that the FMF student had engaged formally at UCT with post-modern philosophical thought associated, for example, with the late Paul Feyerabend. John Preston (2016) maintains that Feyerabend preferred "'stories' (or even 'fairy tales') to arguments". Furthermore, Feyerabend "came to be seen as a leading cultural relativist" widely known for "his critique of science itself, [and] his conclusion that 'objectively' there may be nothing to choose between the claims of science and those of astrology, voodoo, and alternative medicine" (Preston 2016; see also Pinker 2019).

Accepting my conjecture, a further question arises about how post-modern philosophical thought is taught at South African universities. This would not be problematic if critical perspectives were offered that assisted students to challenge the epistemological implications of, in this case, the work of Feyerabend and his intellectual companions. If varieties of post-modernism are taught uncritically, as "holy writ", and in the absence of contestation from other epistemologies, then there is arguably a case that this would involve abuses of academic freedom and would provide the justification for significant curriculum reform. Similarly, Neo-classical economics and Marxian economics, for example, must be held to critical account.

Rebels and Rage indicates that many FMF students rejected such sentiments. They rejected the current Economics curriculum because it embraces "mainstream or neoliberal

economics” preferring to be taught Marxist or radical economics. They did not, moreover, wish to be taught “a plurality of economic perspectives, or even a heterodox economics”, rather, Habib claims, and the demand was for the curriculum “to accord with their specific ideological and political predispositions” (Habib 2019, 107–108). A contradiction in FMF thinking arises here. If decolonisation of the Economics curriculum involves removing “Western” knowledge, then Marx’s place in the reformed curriculum is at risk. Marx is one of the great “Western” classical economists. But, if FMF wishes nevertheless to include Marx, another issue arises. Marx’s work drew on that of David Ricardo, another great “Western” classical economist. Removing Ricardo’s influence from Marxian economics, as is implied by the FMF perspective, would be impossible and to suggest this can be done would be absurd.

Consider, furthermore, Gandhi’s political science. A seminal book is *Hind Swaraj*. It arguably should occupy a prominent place in anti-colonial scholarship and in reformed humanities and social sciences curricula in South African universities. The difficulty arises if “Western” thought and influences are to be abstracted from *Hind Swaraj*. Such influences include Tolstoy, Ruskin, Thoreau, Emerson, Carpenter, Adam Smith and the English Chartists (Chakrabarty 2011). Extending the discussion, for example, to mathematics, how would the decolonisation project manage the joint work of two mathematical geniuses, Srinivasa Ramanujan, self-educated under the British Raj, and GH Hardy, “an English mathematician of aristocratic mien and peerless academic credentials” (Kanigel 2005, 4)? The question has no meaningful answer.

FMF demands for curriculum reform exposed another significant matter. Habib is dismayed at the “confusion among student leaders about the purpose of university education. ... they have confused the university with the political party school” (Habib 2019, 108). How has this occurred? One of the obligations of any organisation is to educate its members about its fundamental purposes, values and processes. Does Habib’s disappointment indicate that South African universities have failed to discharge this responsibility properly?

THE HISTORY AND NATURE OF FMF AT WITS, 2015–2018

Rebels and Rage provides Habib’s interpretations of some of the events and issues associated with FMF, predominantly at Wits, between 2015 and 2018. This provides a rich source of material to scholars who are interested in the roles of uncertainty, bounded rationality, opportunism, non-cooperative games, pressure groups, and small numbers bargaining in analysing the motivations, processes and outcomes of economic, political and social change. Public choice theorists may be particularly interested in the Zuma government’s responses to the pressures generated by FMF. *Rebels and Rage* has attracted unfavourable criticism from

some Wits academic staff. This criticism, from academics who draw their political affinities from traditions including “Black Consciousness, anti-colonial Marxisms, decolonial non-racialism, black radical feminisms, African indigenous politics, pan-Africanism, socialism and humanism”, asserted that Habib’s book contains factual errors, is problematic regarding ethics and permissions protocols, attacks the politics of others by means of “vilification and name calling”, and disrespects academic freedom (Ally et al. 2019, 31).

Readers of these critics must analyse *Rebels and Rage* for themselves, and a selection of prominent dimensions of what Habib claims comprised the nature of FMF at Wits between 2015 and 2018 may assist. Habib believes that some students and staff associated with FMF behaved inappropriately. His evidence includes disparaging and ageist remarks directed at him; statements such as “[t]here is an element of Hitler in every white person”; “race and ethnic baiting” a lack of good faith in negotiations; and support for the destruction of property. Habib witnessed “the racial chauvinism and intolerance implicit in a part of the student movement – a part who imagined one’s views to be determined by the colour of one’s skin. Anyone who did not accord with their ideological viewpoint was to be condemned and humiliated” (Habib 2019, 6, 8, 13, 14, 25, 40, 43, 44, 199–201, 204). Regarding a report on FMF events written by a staff member of Wits Council, Habib’s complaint is that it “deliberately misled by omitting information that did not suit its conclusions and was filled with gratuitous insults against almost everyone with whom ... had served in any governance structure” (Habib 2019, 53). Habib maintains that some student leaders rejected values such as punctuality as “a bourgeois sensibility” and were disinclined to agree “it is in our collective interest that we relate to each other ... ‘as members of a common humanity’” (Habib 2019, 12, 16). He records, by the same token, many acts of kindness towards him from within the Wits community (Habib 2019, 26).

A feature of FMF at Wits, as documented by Habib, is the significant expansion of FMF demands. Originally, these emphasised opposition to a proposed fee increase, but escalated then to embrace fee-free higher education; completely free (to students) higher education; opposition to the outsourcing of some university service functions; sexual assault; student accommodation; curriculum reform; senior academic remuneration; university governance; language policy; management of accumulated student debt; and transformation. Habib argues that FMF comprised a “small group of violent protestors for whom the struggle for free education was merely a pretext to create general political mayhem” (Habib 2019, 40). Habib could have provided references to the supporting evidence. As it stands, the claim attributes motives. He maintains, furthermore, that FMF “became divided by student leaders’ own complicity in the political agendas of their respective political parties to capture the movement”. Here Habib draws on Chikane’s work (Chikane 2018; Habib 2019, 43).

Throughout 2016 and 2017, various FMF protests continued intermittently. Habib records the details of attempts to mediate with FMF. These included summitry, engaging the good offices of eminent persons, conversation with the Public Protector, submissions to the Heher Commission, the involvement of senior politicians and so on. Habib's account shows that FMF had won wide support for free higher education for students. Much of the discussion was over some alternative funding systems, although decolonisation of the curriculum and transformation remained important (Habib 2019, 158–177).

Rebels and Rage suggests that university administrations were becoming worn down by the stress the physically violent challenges FMF sometimes posed to the university system. Many FMF demands had been conceded – some in principle, others, such as in-sourcing various service occupations, in practice (Habib 2019, 76, 136–141). During 2017, Habib believed Wits could concede no more. The personal costs, especially, had become too great (Habib 2019, 176; see also Jansen 2017, 126–152). Probably all participants in FMF were wounded by the experience.

The debate over student funding shifted to the Commission of Enquiry into Higher Education and Training (the Heher Commission), appointed by government in early 2016, to examine the feasibility of fee-free higher education and training. The Commission sat through 2016 and 2017 and reported to the President in August 2017. An inter-ministerial task team was appointed to recommend a government response to the report. The Heher Commission Report was released for public comment on 13 November 2017 (Commission of Enquiry into Higher Education and Training 2017). African National Congress (ANC) internal politics then entered the picture. Habib argues that, in an effort to assist his preferred candidate to be elected as ANC president, President Zuma announced that free education would be provided to all students in universities and in vocational colleges whose annual family income was less than R350 000 (Habib 2019, 173).

FINANCING HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS: CONTESTED TERRAIN

Habib poses three questions, the answers to which “lie at the very heart of South Africa's university crisis” (Habib 2019, 178). An important point needs to be made here. Habib is certainly correct to say that South African universities have been, and are, facing a crisis. But this is not the most significant national challenge, which is the income distribution crisis. *Rebels and Rage* fails, however, to locate higher education issues adequately in this wider context. And some proposed solutions to the university crisis may exacerbate the national income distribution crisis. Such an outcome is considered later in this section. Habib's questions are:

1. Is free higher education legitimate?
2. Is free higher education affordable? And, if the answers to 1 and 2 are in the affirmative, then
3. Which financial model should underpin implementation? (Habib 2019, 178).

In this article, my answer to question 1 is “no”, to question 2, it is “see the next answer”, and to question 3, the most appropriate means of financing the acquisition of qualifications by academically eligible students is through long-term, means-tested, income-contingent loans that cover the full costs of obtaining a qualification that are made by a reformed National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) (Blackmur 2015 a, b; 2016 a, b; 2017 a, b, c, d).

Habib (2019) recognises that some may answer question 1 in the negative. He dismisses arguments to the effect that, because it would subsidise the rich, free higher education is immoral. This, however, is a thin argument since proper arrangements could exclude the rich. Any immorality arises from the fact that the billions of rand devoted to providing free higher education are thereby unavailable to finance the needs of the millions of desperately poor. Although Habib (2019, 179) says free higher education does not exist; “someone always has to pay”, he does not appreciate that the most disadvantaged people in South Africa bear the cost. There is yet another aspect to the immorality argument: is it immoral for FMF to expect that students obtain taxpayer-funded free higher education given they will very likely enjoy substantially higher post-graduation incomes?

Habib (2019, 179) assumes that free higher education to students is legitimate, and shifts the discussion to whether free higher education is affordable. He improperly treats the meaning of the word “affordable” as non-problematic (2019, 179). Affordability is clearly a relative concept. In the FMF context, to what extent can free higher education be financed by taxpayers without doing injustice to the achievement of objectives such as significantly improving the conditions of the poor? If such injustice is unavoidable, then the appropriate source of funding for higher education qualifications is the extra income that graduates will earn, which they can access through an appropriate loan scheme.

Habib excoriates ANC governments arguing that, since 2000, the taxpayer-funded annual per capita subsidy to universities has declined “essentially compelling institutional executives to increase their fees in order to retain the quality of their academic programmes” (Habib 2019, 180). This reveals a narrow vision regarding the evolution and future of South Africa’s post-1994 university system. There is little evidence in *Rebels and Rage* that universities have thought seriously about the dynamics of the “bricks and mortar” model of the provision of higher education qualifications. Habib apparently believes that the taxpayer must continue to

fund the costs of this system. There is no recognition that –

- these costs should come under detailed scrutiny;
- technology can revolutionise the costs of educational delivery;
- universities internationally innovate in the earning of third-stream income;
- universities may not always be the most appropriate institutions to design, deliver, assess and certify qualifications; and
- careful thought might be given to the proportion of the 16–19-year-old age group that providers ought to educate.

Whatever this proportion should be, it should be the outcome of national higher education policies, not the starting point. Habib, however, thinks that there should be no limits. Public policy should rather enable “the progressive realisation of university education to all who want it” (Habib 2019, 188). To assert, moreover, that government has essentially compelled universities to raise fees is not only to fail to think seriously beyond the status quo, but is also to embrace an administrative or managerial mind-set that almost ignores the future.

Habib reviews four of the financing models that emerged during the FMF protests. He rejects the affordability argument that the costs of free higher education should be funded by a tax on the top ten per cent of income earners. This analysis, he claims, is deficient in terms of its political or economic feasibility, and is naïve (Habib 2019, 179–180). A wider use of the tax system was proposed in the Thuto ke Lesedi model (Habib 2019, 183) to include the skills levy, corporate and income tax and a wealth tax. A later version proposed the introduction of a graduate tax, which would replenish an education endowment fund after an initial taxpayer capitalisation. Habib suggests that this graduate tax proposal would founder because “its payment in perpetuity means that graduates ultimately pay far in excess of the real costs of their programme of study” (Habib 2019, 185). This is a straw person objection in that graduate taxes do not necessarily apply either in perpetuity or to the extent that the tax exceeds the cost of obtaining the qualification. Habib is doubtful whether such taxation would be anywhere near sufficient to finance comprehensive, free higher education for all students, although this model does not rely on a graduate tax exclusively. The principle of a tax, however, does not concern Habib; it “is a principle of many societies that older generations [graduates?] contribute to the costs of the upkeep of their children [current university students?]” (Habib 2019, 185). What this means specifically is anyone’s guess.

The third model, the Ikusasa model, was developed by Sizwe Nxasana, the chair of

NSFAS. Initially it included income-contingent loans funded by private banks and taxpayers, but this was replaced by a full bursary system proposal (Habib 2019, 186–187). Habib's reservations regarding the initial Ikusasa model centred on the income-contingent loans component. These were amplified in his evaluation of the Heher Commission's model. Habib (2019, 188) nevertheless approved of several elements in the Heher model. These included an increase in taxpayer funding of the higher education and training sector to one per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), increased taxpayer and private funding for student residential accommodation, and fully taxpayer-subsidised free education for technical and vocational education students. He offered, however, no analysis of a recommendation that government analyse how online and blended learning might address some university funding challenges. Such an analysis may reveal that it could be feasible to reduce the extent of the “bricks and mortar” approach to provision of qualifications through certain communication technologies in, for example, various humanities and social science courses. Parts of university estates might thereby become available for, say, social housing that could make a contribution to eliminating the consequences of apartheid spatial planning. Habib suggests that university infrastructure development be enhanced by “pension regulation and broad-based BEE [black economic empowerment]” (Habib 2019, 188). This proposal for universities to appropriate “small” amounts from South African pension fund schemes arguably borders on the irresponsible. In a country with a disturbingly low savings rate and appallingly inadequate financial provision for retirement incomes, it is not obvious why such resources should to be reallocated towards expanding university infrastructure. If any reallocation is to take place, then improving the welfare of the millions of indigent people may be a higher priority. Habib refers to employing some pension funds for university purposes as “social investment” (2019, 188). It is not. It would involve using taxpayer or private money to generate private returns for students and university staff. As far as BEE is concerned, the meaning of his comments is opaque (Habib 2019, 188).

The Heher Commission also recommended the adoption of an income-contingent, taxpayer-guaranteed loan scheme funded by commercial banks as the principal source of funding for university students (Habib 2019, 187–188). Habib's criticism of the proposed loan scheme amounts to noting that similar schemes have been rejected by some in the United Kingdom and the United States (Delisle and Usher 2018). His essential point is that debt is a “burden” that could ignite sources of “tension in South African society, especially if they were to take a racial form, given our historical trajectory” (Habib 2019, 189). This latter point must be taken seriously. It applies, arguably, however, with much greater force, to the possible consequences of the poverty in which millions of South Africans live.

Habib questions the philosophical foundations of income-contingent loans, especially the idea that the benefits of higher education qualifications are private and that, therefore, the costs must be borne privately. Here Habib offers four propositions to justify comprehensive taxpayer funding for university students (Habib 2019, 188–190). Firstly, significant private benefits also accrue from many cases of public provision, which are not financed by such loans, so why should they be applied in the case of higher education? This argument, however, fails to acknowledge the special dimension to expenditure on the acquisition of higher education qualifications, as it is an investment designed to produce future private, labour market benefits that exceed the initial costs. This investment characteristic distinguishes expenditure on higher education qualifications from expenditure on social welfare, such as social grants. These grants minimally assist people who have no labour market opportunities. Secondly, the South African Constitution makes primary and secondary education mandatory, and states that it should be financed largely by taxpayers. This education may generate (unspecified) public as well as private benefits. But so does higher education; therefore, it must be funded by taxpayers as well. These arrangements must moreover preferably be enshrined in the Constitution. A brief exploration of the implications and logic of this second set of arguments is necessary. A possible implication is that higher education ought to be made compulsory (for whom?). This may suit Habib's policy of flooding labour markets in the interest of some notion of greater equality, but reflection on the costs of universal compulsory higher education reveals that the suggestion is absurd. If, moreover, the existence of some sort of public benefit justifies taxpayer funding of higher education, then presumably taxpayers must fund private schools and universities as well. And if there are both public and private benefits from higher education, then any taxpayer subsidies on account of public benefits must necessarily be less than comprehensive.

The third and fourth of Habib's propositions concerning the philosophical rationale for comprehensive taxpayer funding for university students are:

“[T]he mere presence of private gains is not sufficient to justify the denial of comprehensive funding, especially given that so many of our historical disparities are racialized and that post-secondary education is necessary to allow us to address the skills deficit” (Habib 2019, 189).

The relationship, however, between these truisms and the justification of taxpayers paying for the acquisition of university qualifications is unclear. Student loans would be available regardless of racial considerations, and they would not prevent access to university courses. Indeed, by breaking the nexus between access and family income, loans could enhance access significantly. Habib's opposition to income-contingent loans seems to be that most graduates should enjoy the full private benefits associated with their qualifications while other members

of the community ought to pay for them. It would be interesting to explore the equity implications of this position.

Much of this debate was rendered moot by President Zuma's announcement that free tertiary education would be provided to all students whose annual family income was less than R350 000. Habib (2019, 191) acknowledges that the resources thus allocated have alternative uses, "one could ask whether this money should have been spent on higher education rather than other components of the social wage". Higher education expenditure is not, however, part of the social wage, and it is disingenuous to assert that it is. Habib ignores the issue of the existence of alternatives, however, instead emphasising "a democratically elected government made the decision officially". What he earlier described as a cynical decision by the President now became a paragon of democratic virtue (Habib 2019, 190–191). Habib argues that there is, nevertheless, an outstanding, significant problem with these financial arrangements, which leave a "new 'missing middle' – those students whose families are above the R350 000 annual income threshold but who still cannot afford higher education" (Habib 2019, 191). There was never, of course, any missing middle in the income-contingent loans model suggested for all academically qualified students. It is an artefact of Zuma's particular arrangements. Habib, with a nod perhaps to national budget considerations, suggests that a version of an income-contingent loan scheme might be applied in this case (despite his strong opposition in principle to such loans), and that, furthermore, students from relatively rich families ought to meet their university expenses privately (Habib 2019, 191). Presumably, any public benefits arising out of the higher education of the rich would not justify any taxpayer subsidy. He believes that Zuma's new university funding regime has the potential to reduce any pressures to increase fees in excess of inflation (Habib 2019, 191–192). It may be worth suggesting here that university fees, as well as current and capital costs, be subjected to review and control by a new higher education regulatory authority and to the discipline of the capital market, which would permit the take-over of universities under certain conditions. These arrangements may provide incentives to universities to improve their productivity and processes of strategic reflection.

Habib believes that Zuma's new funding model is on trial because "significant negative consequences could still emanate from it". He repeats claims that "a loan scheme can seriously aggravate inequality and provoke deep resentment" (Habib 2019, 192) (also the possible deep resentment of millions of the desperately poor at the allocation of billions of rand to university student financial relief?). These claims rest on statements about such schemes in the United States and the United Kingdom (O'Neil 2017, 50–67; 68–83). There is, however, confirmation bias here. No mention, or evaluation, is made of any contrary evidence. And some of the criticisms are arguably capable of resolution within the broad frameworks of the schemes.

Habib nevertheless employs this fragile evidentiary basis “to demand that the mix between state funding and fees be ... shifted in favour of the former becoming the primary component of university financing”. His ultimate goal is the eventual implementation of a policy of comprehensive, free education (for all, including students from rich families?) (Habib 2019, 192).

THE QUALITY OF STRATEGIC THINKING ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY

Such free education would presumably be favoured by university administrations. With the responsibility for higher education funding allocated essentially to the taxpayer, incentives to think deeply about the future of the South African university may be weakened. The international university reform agenda would then make little impact on strategic thinking at individual universities as well as collectively. Examples of both a broad framework for such thinking, and some of the major issues, include the work of Glyn Davis (2017, 9–21; 104–128), and Don Tapscott and Anthony Williams (2011, 139–156). In the FMF agitation over the in-sourcing of many university service functions, for example, the opportunity was missed to ask whether there were any wider strategic issues associated with out- or in-sourcing. The traditional vertically integrated structure of producing higher education qualifications, for example, arguably contains a significant conflict of interest between the teaching and assessment stages, and these thus perhaps ought to be conducted in separate independent institutions. Testimony, moreover, to arguably the narrowness of Habib’s strategic thinking lies in his assertions that the principal challenges facing universities are linked to access, inclusion, throughput and protests. He reminds university executives internationally that “[South Africa’s] current challenges are essentially their future ones” (Habib 2019, 221–222). Habib’s principal challenges are important, but the strategic agenda suggested by Davis (2017) and Tapscott and Williams (2011) is much wider.

Habib’s strategic vision seems to embrace a belief that, in those countries (which ones?) in which free, “quality” higher education has been provided, this “has had an enormous equalising effect on society and has simultaneously enabled the emergence of competitive economies” (Habib 2019, 192). No evidence is adduced to support both parts of this assertion. No mention is made of any contrary evidence, an example of which is the Australian case in which university fees were abolished between 1974 and 1988 and innovative systems of taxpayer-funded student financial support were introduced. There was, however, no significant change towards greater equality in the social composition of the university student population in this period (James 2007, 10–11). Other factors may have swamped the effects of fee abolition

and income support schemes. This experience, however, cautions against Habib's somewhat extravagant claims. Furthermore, in the absence of concrete supporting evidence, his assertion regarding the emergence of competitive economies is a candidate for *post hoc ergo propter hoc* reservations.

Intelligent strategic thinking requires that the assumptions and beliefs on which basis policies are formulated and implemented be identified and tested periodically for their appropriateness and relevance. *Rebels and Rage* suggests that these assumptions include that South African universities should be predominantly public; that taxpayers should provide the bulk of current and capital expenditures; that public universities should provide by far the major proportion of higher education; that the “bricks and mortar” model of higher education provision would largely continue for the foreseeable future; and that higher education qualifications are public goods. The book also suggests that there was little fundamental questioning of these assumptions before or after FMF. Issues such as the growing emergence of pressures for the “welfare university” (Jansen 2017, 9, 10, 172–193), whether bond finance was a viable option in the South African context, which productivity-enhancing systems might be employed, and how the public regulation of higher education might change in the future did not seem to concern universities unduly.

Habib offers a contestable assertion, namely that “mass action and social mobilisation are an essential component of the strategic arsenal required for changing our world” (Habib 2019, 194). The proof of this pudding was in FMF's eating; thus “the students achieved in ten days what vice-chancellors had been debating for ten years” (Habib 2019, 195). The vice-chancellors were seemingly unversed in the dynamics of social mobilisation! Habib (2019, 195, 196) concludes, “social mobilisation was essential for putting policy and financial options that had not been previously available on the systemic agenda”. Why, however, were such options previously unavailable? Identifying, defining, evaluating, debating and implementing policy alternatives are among the fundamental responsibilities of universities. If the massive FMF disruptions were necessary to provide a “systemic opening” that forced serious policy thinking (Habib 2019, 197), this constitutes *prima facie* evidence of major inadequacies in the strategic thinking conducted at the top levels of South African university governance.

FMF ISSUES: A THEORETICAL CONTEXT AND LESSONS LEARNED

Rebels and Rage employs social movement theory to provide a somewhat incomplete framework for interpreting the meaning of the FMF agitation (Habib 2019, 193–219). Some questions on Habib's use of this theory are offered for consideration. Is it correct to classify FMF as a social movement? Were FMF students members of “oppressed communities”? Were

they members of a “social justice movement”? How is a “social justice community” defined? Are social movement actions always best understood as engagements in some form(s) of “struggle”? Is Habib correct to assert that mass action and social mobilisation are essential components of the processes of social change? Answers to these questions may open up debates over the place of FMF in South African higher education and national politics. Such debates must locate FMF within the historical context. Was FMF a bolt from the blue or were some of its roots located in any of the student protests of the 1990s and beyond? (Naidoo 2009, 153–168).

Habib emphasises certain lessons from his FMF experiences. He believes certain features of FMF confirmed several postulates of social movement theory (see, for example, Habib 2019, 194–197). He regards, however, some dimensions of the mass action and social mobilisation as inappropriate. These include a tendency by some in FMF “to romanticise social mobilisation” when mobilisation “became more violent and increasingly started to violate the rights of the institutional community” (Habib 2019, 196, 198). He argues, furthermore, that parts of FMF and its supporters displayed a toleration of racism, unethical conduct, hypocrisy and intolerance, and that he had experienced “Stalinist behaviour and practices” (2019, 217). Habib also claims there was anarchism in FMF views on appropriate decision-making processes. Similar views, he suggests, were shared by some academics and academic unions. Habib maintains that the FMF proposals for the reform of university governance were susceptible to severe conflict of interest risks. He concedes, nevertheless, that governance reform requires attention in South African universities. Perhaps one of the most important conclusions drawn by Habib is that the principles and practices employed by FMF provide *carte blanche* for activists across the political spectrum to operate in a similar fashion (Habib 2019, 196–218).

CONCLUSION

Rebels and Rage reflects on concerns over “the stability of the South African university and its future as a recognised academic entity in the world” (2019, 220). Habib claims a South African university degree is a worthwhile investment, despite various unresolved problems in higher education (Habib 2019, 220, 221). There may, however, be an element of whistling in the dark here. It is too early to tell whether FMF inflicted any significant damage on the international reputation of South African universities. Trends over the next five years or so in individual university positions in global rankings may provide some suggestive evidence, although more nuanced research would be preferable. Minds in South Africa and globally, however, need to be concentrated on the future of the “bricks and mortar” university. A provocative approach might be to visit left field and ask if there are any barriers to the emergence of a single university

that ultimately provides all the world's social sciences and humanities higher education.

Despite the acrimonious relationships between Habib and some elements of FMF, they have at least one important thing in common. All have supported the principle of taxpayer funding of free tertiary education for many students, most of whom will eventually be remunerated far more than they would have received had they not acquired a tertiary qualification, and far higher than the overwhelming majority of other South Africans. This will occur at the expense of increased financial support for the desperately poor. The trade-off (a concept that Habib uses frequently) in yielding to demands for taxpayer-funded (taxpayer is a concept he never uses) free higher education is, in the final analysis, against the poor.

It did not have to be this way. Students could have agreed to take full cost loans against their much higher future incomes to fund their studies on condition that government increased, for example, social grants by an equivalent amount. Students could thus have used their bargaining strength and moral authority to forge a direct link between their acquisition of qualifications, their enhanced employment conditions after graduation and their often repeated desire to see radically improved social justice for the poor. Such a social contract between students, graduates, the poor and the unemployed would have rested on values such as redistribution, *ubuntu*, empathy and fairness. FMF could have thereby helped to establish a new paradigm of social justice public policymaking. It was a missed opportunity but maybe not a lost one.

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