

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Theorising the #MustFall Student Movements in Contemporary South African Higher Education: A Social Justice Perspective

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Abstract

A significant amount of literature on the student movement in South Africa is characterised by two limitations. Firstly, a significant amount of this literature is found in un-academic and non-peer-reviewed sources, such as social media, online newspapers, blog posts and other platforms. Secondly, some of this literature is characterised by an absence of theory in offering us critical analysis of the emergent conditions of the student movement as a phenomenon in South African higher education (SAHE). In this article, we respond to the above gaps by contributing to the scholarly development and critical analysis of the student movement in SAHE. In order to respond to the above two gaps, we firstly provide a brief historical and contextual environment that has contributed to the emergence of the student movement phenomenon in SAHE. Secondly, we introduce Nancy Fraser's social justice perspective, in offering us the theoretical and conceptual tools we need to look at the struggles and challenges that confront student movements, focusing in particular on the challenges that frustrate them in relating and interacting as peers on an equal footing in society. Using Fraser's social justice framework to look at the #MustFall movements will allow us to better understand them as complex phenomena in SAHE and allow us to properly understand their emergence.

Keywords

higher education; institutional differentiation; participatory parity; social justice; student movements; student politics

Introduction

In the beginning of 2015, the then little known #RhodesMustFall activist Chumani Maxwele and a small group of students from the University of Cape Town (UCT) poured faeces at the statue of the arch imperialist and coloniser, Cecil John Rhodes, calling for transformation at UCT. This culminated in nationwide protests regarding the widespread calls for higher education (HE) to transform/Africanise/decolonise particularly in historically white universities (HWUs). Subsequent calls for transformation have shed a spotlight on a range of issues which include but are not limited to the funding crisis

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facing higher education institutions (HEIs); academic staff diversity; the marginalised experiences of black female academic staff in HE; the plight of workers and outsourcing; the often forgotten experiences of disabled students; the experiences of first-generation black working-class students who are the first in their family to come to university; the role of language as a symbolic representation of hegemonic cultures, epistemic racism, and cultural alienation; the deeply contested notions of HE curricula as an “institution”, one that embodies Eurocentric and alienating values and beliefs, and others (Badat, 2009, 2016b; Bosch, 2017; Bozalek & Boughey, 2012; Amit Chaudhuri, 2016; Heleta, 2016; Jansen, 2003; Maringira & Gukurume, 2017; Mbembe, 2015; Naicker, 2015; Ngcobozi, 2015; Oxlund, 2016).

Firstly, a significant amount of this literature is often found in opinion pieces, national and local magazines, on social media platforms and others. Although this could be categorised as primary data and useful to our critical understanding of the emergence of the student movement as a phenomenon in SAHE, this literature is, albeit new, only emerging now in the 2015–2016 period and has not been subjected to peer review, critical discussion or theorisation to a sufficient extent.

Secondly, some of this literature is characterised by an absence of theory in offering critical analysis of the emergent conditions of the student movement as a phenomenon within the SAHE. While we note emerging literature from Nyamnjoh (2016), Mbembe (2010; 2015), Badat (2016b), Luescher, Klemenčič and Jowi (2016) and others who have used various theories to make sense of student movements, student activism and student politics, there is nonetheless a gap in the literature as a significant amount of the canon is either descriptive regarding the experiences of students in HE or focuses on policy. For instance, in their recent work, Case, Marshall, McKenna and Mogashana (2018) critically interrogate the experiences of young South Africans on how they negotiate their university life, including illuminating for us the often forgotten experiences and challenges faced by students who drop out. Some of the scholars who explored 2015–2016 student movements have looked at the role of psychology in supporting student movements (Pillay, 2016); the role of social media, in particular “twitter activism”, in sparking the #FeesMustFall movement (Bosch, 2017); the role of fees in student movements as a barrier to accessing HE (Chaundry, 2016; Hodes, 2016); linking the emergence of student movements with the other forms of popular protest in South Africa and to what extent the emergence of student movements can be located in the manner in which HE has been historically structured in the country (Naicker, 2016).

It should be noted that in this article, we are not focusing on the transformation debates in higher education; student activism; student violence (both physical and epistemological); stakeholder engagements; university governance structures and others. Although all these matters are related and intersect with the emergence of student movements in SAHE, they are nonetheless not explored in this article as we respond to the above gaps by contributing to the scholarly development and critical analysis of contemporary student movements in SAHE.

Fraser's social justice framework offers us the theoretical tools to look at the role of social arrangements that ought to enable people to relate and interact as peers on an equal footing in society. Her notion of participatory parity identifies for us three key dimensions for participatory parity to be achieved – these are the economic, cultural and political dimensions. These three dimensions will help theorise contemporary student movements in the SAHE landscape and help to elucidate the conditions of their emergence within the HE landscape as a phenomenon.

Before we discuss Fraser's social justice framework in terms of the the theoretical lenses towards which we will be leaning to make sense of and understand contemporary student movements as phenomena within the SAHE landscape, it is important to first outline the context and contested history of HE in South Africa so as to understand and extrapolate the emergent conditions of student movements within SAHE. We now turn to this context.

Mapping the Context: The SAHE and its (Brief) History

In this section, we offer a brief critical discussion on the manner in which SAHE institutions are structurally shaped and historically influenced by the apartheid period. We do not seek to suggest that student movements as a phenomenon only began during the apartheid era. We are only highlighting the profound ways in which apartheid thinking influenced institutions of higher learning, and how we continue to be affected by this in contemporary society. SAHE institutions are profoundly influenced and shaped by the history of colonialisation and apartheid (Akoojee & Nkomo, 2007; Badat, 2010; Jansen, 2008). The apartheid regime's attempt at racial separation and the reinforcement of white supremacy meant that HEIs were seen as intellectual, academic, linguistic and socioeconomic instruments of social engineering, with the graduates of HE seen as contributing to the needs of the apartheid state or been relegated to the "Bantustans". This implication for HE under the apartheid regime meant that critical conversations only emerged in the early 1990s regarding the role that ought to be played by HE in a democratic South Africa (Akoojee & Nkomo, 2007; Badat, 2010, 2016a). Badat (2008, p. 121) highlights the relationship between HE and the apartheid social order and its implication for the post-apartheid era as follows:

In apartheid South Africa, social inequalities of a class, race, gender, institutional, and spatial nature profoundly shaped higher education. Given this, South Africa's new democratic government committed itself in 1994 to transforming higher education as well as the inherited apartheid social and economic structure, and institutionalizing a new social order. Necessarily, the realisation of social equity and redress for historically disadvantaged social groups in higher education, and therefore, the issue of admissions, has also loomed large in policy discourse.

In order to critically interrogate the emergence of student movements as a phenomenon in SAHE we need to look at how differentiated the higher education system was under apartheid. This will help illuminate and tease out the conditions of possibility that necessitate student movements to emerge in HE. Naidoo (2004) argues that there

were three kinds of universities under the apartheid period – that is, the dominant tier, the intermediary tier and finally, the subordinate tier. In the dominant tier were the universities that were established during the British colonial period whose function was to serve as an instrument of English values, ethics and morals. When the apartheid regime introduced the apartheid laws in 1959, these universities became reserved for white students (Naidoo, 2004, p. 461). Dominant tier universities were, and to a significant extent continue to be, research intensive with their institutional infrastructure and research output internationally recognised and competitive.

The intermediary universities were predominantly Afrikaans speaking and were established in response to the Anglo-Boer War for the benefit of the Afrikaner community. The primary function of these universities was to act as a socioeconomic and linguistic response to the dominant universities in the first tier, and to help construct, maintain and extend Afrikaner national identity, values and cultural beliefs. It was these institutions that helped to produce some of the apartheid intellectual, academic and political elites who helped legitimate and maintain the regime. In countering the predominant influence of the imperial values and British influence found in the universities in the dominant tier, these universities became instruments of producing the apartheid, nationalist values as espoused and promoted by the then National Party through the production of competing knowledge and ideologies as required and supported by the then regime (Naidoo, 2004).

Universities in the third and final tier were the subordinated universities that were set up for the different black South African ethnic groups.¹ These universities were characterised by, and largely still continue to experience poor funding, poor infrastructure and social upheaval. It was largely in the subordinate tier institutions, together with universities in the dominant tier, that resistance to the apartheid regime emerged within the HE system. A significant number of student movements and their concomitant political influence emerged from within this subordinate tier.

Naidoo (2004, p. 463) argues that what made one of these universities become politically conscious and its students acutely aware of the injustices of the regime, was that the university:

... forged an alliance with the MDM [Mass Democratic Movement] that resulted in the university remaining locked in the heteronomous sector. However, the political stance against apartheid and its aim of developing an alternative model of university education attracted a significant number of radical academics with high levels of academic capital. The university's position-taking and the influx of academic capital resulted in the university ascending to a dominant position relative to other black universities in the subordinate sector of the field.

1 While we acknowledge the non-existence of “race” biologically (Smedley & Smedley, 2005), the racial categories of black and white are used here to emphasise the historical and social consequences of these identities on factors such as history, socioeconomic status, educational and occupational status, wealth, political power, notions of belonging, social and epistemic justice, being-ness and others (Du Bois, 2008; Gordon, 2013; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Mudimbe, 1988).

The ideological underpinning of the apartheid education policy was specifically designed to fit in with the broader apartheid social arrangements – that is, distributing educational resources unequally on the basis of “race”, teaching black students that their marginality and oppressed position in South African society was “natural”, and in the process, imbuing in them an ethnic “tribal” identity and locating them with “their own” people (Reddy, 2004). Thus they ensured that they created two types of subalterns for the regime – “a small elite to operate the administrative structures of the subaltern (in the Bantustans and urban areas) and a labouring class to perform unskilled labour for the industrial economy” (Reddy, 2004, p. 9). This ensured that the HE terrain was used as a space in which the broader social engineering goals of the regime were achieved and that racialisation and “ethnicisation” played a significant role in the “tribalisation” of students and the broader population. Reddy (2004, p. 9) argues that this differentiated HE landscape:

... was produced in keeping with the imperatives of the Grand Apartheid project. The unintended consequence was that the black universities created conditions that led to the emergence of student resistance. The latter helped create and sustain the internal resistance movement and together with structural factors (economic contradictions, regional changes and global pressures) helped produce the collapse of the Apartheid regime.

The role of the HE landscape under apartheid was to ensure that different ethnic groups were divided according to their “tribal” identities, and the social construction of the subaltern would serve the interests of the Bantustan as well as the broader state functioning goals of the regime. This resulted in the unintended consequences of creating the conditions of possibility that led to the emergence of student movements that acted as a force of resistance, particularly in historically black universities (HBUs).

As we have argued in the introduction of this article, the student movement phenomenon is not new in the SAHE landscape. In contemporary SAHE it has historical influences from and can be located to the 1976 Soweto uprisings, with three key trends that can be identified as having played a significant role in the emergence of student movements and their political organisations (Reddy, 2004, p. 19). Firstly, black student numbers significantly increased at universities, particularly at the HBUs, which provided the immediate basis for political mobilisation and effective mass protests. Secondly, the apartheid regime’s comprehensive separation of students into ethnic institutions and the repressive atmosphere that was prevailing in the black colleges served as a stark contrast with the conditions at the HWUs. This played a significant role in alienating, frustrating and angering black students (Reddy, 2004). This was further exacerbated by the differences in the material conditions amongst the campuses and constituted one of the key conditions for the emergence of student movements as a phenomenon under the apartheid social order. The third trend was seen in how the “new” institutional vision from the apartheid regime, beginning in the early 1950s, had racially segregated HEIs and attempted to socially construct ethnic subaltern subjects, producing new forms of protests and resistance through the emergence and spread of Black Consciousness ideas and practices (Reddy, 2004).

Reddy (2004) further argues that these revolts were occurring within the socio-political climate of the security police fears, a political apathy within the repressed communities as well as the organisational and political “vacuum” in black politics – the May to June 1972 student boycotts were important developments in student politics. The spread and influence of Black Consciousness beyond university students of the South African Students Organisation (SASO), together with the 1972 boycotts of Bantu Education, greatly contributed to the rejection of apartheid education in most urban areas (Reddy, 2004).

One of the defining moments in student movement history was seen when the Department of Bantu Education in 1974 sent a circular instructing African schools that the Afrikaans language would from 1975 be the language of instruction in 50% of the subjects (Reddy, 2004). The South African Students Movement (SASM), founded in 1968 as a coalition of different and often contradictory views, in bringing together the urban school-going youth (Diseko, 1992) strongly organised in areas such as Orlando West, Naledi High and Morris Isaacson, calling for students to boycott classes from mid-1975 (Reddy, 2004). This resulted in a mass rally organised by SASMA on 16 June 1976 in Soweto at Orlando Stadium. Police shot at the demonstrating crowd, killing Hector Pieterse, who was to become the first of over 600 students, youth and adults killed by the police (Reddy, 2004). This revolt spread to the larger Soweto townships around the Transvaal, the Western Cape and Natal.

In contemporary South Africa, scholars have argued that there was no ‘post’ moment for students registered in historically black universities, Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges as well as universities of technology, which seem to have been experiencing massive student protests since the dawn of the new democratic dispensation. These students have been protesting issues such as fighting for financial support from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS); demanding quality accommodation; that tertiary institutions not financially and academically exclude students; demanding transport and other demands (South African History Online, 2015). For instance, student protest turned violent at the beginning of 2012 at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), when the university announced a high registration fee of R5 000 (Holgate, 2012), resulting in the South African Students’ Congress (SASCO) leading a massive protest on campus. Similarly, a massive protest occurred in four different universities in 2014, when students demanded to enrol without paying fees after the universities had claimed they owed fees from the previous financial year, and thus were prevented from registering while the money was outstanding. This resulted in massive protests and the disruption of registration at University of Johannesburg (UJ), Durban University of Technology (DUT), Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT) and the University of Limpopo (Makoni, 2014). Davids and Waghid (2016) argue that there is an inequality in the manner in which protests and social disruption in HBUs are treated compared to protest action in HWUs, suggesting that this a reminder of the deeply embedded apartheid inequality reflected in HE:

Protests at South Africa’s universities didn’t suddenly start in 2015 with the “fees must fall” movement. Students at poorer institutions that cater almost exclusively for black students such as the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Fort Hare University and the Tshwane

University of Technology have been protesting routinely against rising fees and the cost of higher education since 1994. But their protest action was largely ignored and often didn't make headlines beyond regional newspapers. The most recent "fees must fall" protests have involved students from both historically advantaged and historically disadvantaged universities. They have attracted widespread media coverage and have sparked solidarity protests in London and New York. The two very different responses – little media attention given to earlier protests at historically black universities versus widespread coverage and international solidarity for protests at historically white universities – are a stark reminder of post-apartheid South Africa's embedded inequalities. (Davids & Waghid, 2016, para.1-4)

Having briefly engaged the historicity and context of student movements in South Africa, it is critical to theorise this experience and/or phenomenon using a lens that can offer appropriate tools with which the discussion can be advanced. In the next section, therefore, we introduce the theoretical tools that helped frame the article and allowed us to critically engage with and theorise contemporary student movements in the SAHE landscape.

Fraser's Social Justice Framework

Fraser equates justice with the ability of people to participate as equal and full partners in social interactions (Fraser, 2000, 2001, 2009). Adopting a structural understanding of society, she argues that justice requires social arrangements that enable people to compete on equal footing and proposes a three-dimensional approach to social justice – the economic, the cultural and political. This means that social arrangements must be such that they allow individuals in society to participate as equals in all three dimensions. Fraser considers that, although interconnected and linked with one another, they are nonetheless distinct "genres of social justice" which all affect an individual's ability to interact as equals (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012). Thus, we suggest that although the three dimensions could be analytically separated from each other, they nonetheless intersect in one's life in either enabling or constraining participatory parity.

Firstly, in the economic dimension, the distribution of material resources is central to enabling individuals to interact as equals in society. Participatory parity would be constrained if there is a maladministration of resources or where there is marginality, deprivation, disparities in the income and wealth, labour and leisure time (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012; Fraser, 2009). In the economic dimension, class-based structural inequalities are at the heart of dis-enabling individuals in society from interacting as equals in society, thereby resulting in distributive injustice in looking at the economic structures at play. In SAHE, distributive injustice on the economic dimension is seen with the experiences of first-generation black working-class students and their marginalised experiences. This occurs as a result of the economic background that these students come from in terms of which they are unable to participate as equals in HE, and thereby become structurally marginalised and could be said to be experiencing distributive injustice on the basis of their class status.

Secondly, in relation to the cultural dimension, social arrangements should be such that there is equal respect and that there are equal opportunities for achieving social esteem (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012; Fraser, 2009). In this case, participatory parity would be

prevented, constrained or limited when social arrangements in society do not recognise or value the different cultural views or identities. Within the cultural domains, there exists the politics of recognition or misrecognition. It should be noted that in her earlier conceptions of the social justice framework, Fraser only focused on the economic and cultural dimensions of the framework in her earlier conceptions (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012; Fraser, 2000, 2001, 2009).

In her recent work, Fraser has introduced the third dimension to her conception of social justice – that is, the political – in arguing for an epistemological shift from the post-Westphalian conceptions of the nation-state to now beginning to expand her framework in looking beyond the borders of nation states and interrogating non-state actors and their ability to constrain, limit or prevent participatory parity (Fraser, 2009). This is seen in how the injustices perpetrated by non-state actors cannot be limited to the confines of the nation-state. Social arrangements must be arranged in such a way that everyone should have a political voice, and thus should have an influence in decisions that affect them. Fraser takes this understanding further in looking at representation as boundary setting. This, for instance, happens when HE establishes the boundaries regarding who is included or excluded in justice claims. For instance, HE under apartheid was characterised by a boundary setting that excluded black students as either being trained to serve the needs of the apartheid state or to respond to the demands of the Bantustans. This racialised and oppressive boundary setting, which Fraser calls “misframing”, sought to misrepresent and misrecognise black students outside of the confines and domains of apartheid sociological thinking. In order to overcome unjust conditions that prevent, limit or constrain participatory parity, Fraser (2009) suggests that there needs to be structural dismantling. It should be noted that all three dimensions (that is, the economic, political and cultural dimensions) need to be present in order for participatory parity to be achieved. For each of the three dimensions, Fraser distinguishes between affirmative and transformative approaches that deal with injustices (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012; Fraser, 2009).

Fraser sees affirmative approaches as not going far enough in dealing with the structural social arrangement in society. That is, for her, they do not disturb or interrupt the “underlying social structures that generate these inequities” (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012, p. 690). She advocates for transformative approaches that privilege the social structures themselves in dismantling them and ensuring universal access to social justice. For instance, in the economic dimension, transformative approaches would enable universal access to material resources and interruption of the economic inequalities, wealth disparities and the privilege that positions one group of people and subordinates and marginalises another. In the cultural dimension, transformative approaches would attempt to challenge and dismantle binary conceptions of social reality, acknowledge complexity and destabilise simplistic understandings of life, reality and being-ness. In the political dimension, transformative approaches would recognise the post-Westphalian understanding of how our challenges and social reality transcend the borders of the nation-state. Boundary setting through the misframing and the misrecognition would need to be “redrawn”, or completely challenged and dismantled.

In this article, we adopt the above theoretical tools to make sense of and understand contemporary student movements in the SAHE. We now turn to critically discussing and theorising contemporary student movements through the participatory parity framework. To do this, Fraser's three-tier framework – economic, cultural and political – will be used to theorise the #MustFall student movements in SAHE.

The Economic Framing of the #MustFall Student Movements in SAHE

The #MustFall movements were predominantly engineered by economic reasons which university management could no longer silence and the national government could not ignore. The yearly increment in student fees as well as the diverse financial constraints such as the cost of living in cities where most of these universities are based, became a huge financial burden to bear especially on the “missing middle”, that is, students whose parents or guardians are deemed to earn too much to qualify for NSFAS and too little to service the student loans. Ndelu (2017) argues that students from predominantly black universities and universities of technology have been consistently waging battles against the ineffectiveness of NSFAS regarding the payment of university registration fees, financial exclusion and debt cancellation. He goes further to argue that:

The problem with NSFAS is one of the reasons why students want free education. Once a previously disadvantaged student is not accepted for NSFAS, obviously they will want free education because their debt is increasing – and once you have a lot of debt, you cannot register in the following year. You can't proceed with your studies. You cannot buy your books ... They give out food vouchers late. That's why some people get angry as well – because obviously, you want to study but you don't have your books and stuff.

(Ndelu, 2017, p. 20)

The #FeesMustFall movement, perhaps unlike any other sub-branches of the #MustFall movement, was able to attract widespread attention and mobilise large number of students largely because the issue of access to HE, in particular the unaffordability of institutions of higher learning, became the rallying call for different organisations, students, civic bodies and others. What became interesting was seeing how different students from different social class positions became united in the concern with the unaffordability fees. This was seen in how the historical and often forgotten protest from HBUs was picked by the predominantly middle-class students in HWUs who all rallied together in arguing about the importance of access. Similarly, #RhodesMustFall could be understood from an economic perspective. The statue of Cecil Rhodes at the centre of the UCT campus depicted to the students the reasons why they are financially distressed and economically marginalised. It depicted the very essence of colonialism and how this socioeconomically and structurally underdeveloped Africa at the expense of colonial development and imperial industrialisation (Rodney, 1972). It re-echoed the financial burdens and ruins brought about by apartheid. To another set of students, it represented a huge source of financial buoyancy brought about by the Mandela-Rhodes scholarship as well as the huge endowments bequeathed to the university by Cecil John Rhodes.

Financial exclusion is a common phenomenon across all South African institutions of higher learning. Paton (2016) argues that economic calls were the strongest reasons for the waves of student protest across the nation and economic solutions would provide answers to such challenges. This is supported by Bond (2015) who argues that the increasing university subsidies, and augmenting contributions to NSFAS have not been enough to address the financial exclusion.

Fraser (2009) argues that the economic dimension of social justice sees material resources as central to enabling individuals to interact as equals in society. The lack of financial resources or financially excluding students would be to constrain them which would create marginality, deprivation, disparities in the income and wealth, labour and leisure time and, by extension, ensure the continuation of economic marginality and the death of social justice (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012; Fraser, 2009). In the economic dimension, class-based structural inequalities are at the heart of dis-enabling students in universities from interacting as equals, thereby resulting in distributive injustice in looking at the economic structures at play. In SAHE, distributive injustice in the economic dimension is seen with the inability of some students to access HE and well as the struggles to secure funding. The consequences of this, although expressing themselves in different and often complex ways (such as the increasing militarisation of SAHE institutions across the different campuses, discussed below), have been predominantly economic in nature.

Wa Azania (2016) argues that within the period of 12 months since the eruption of the different student movements across the SAHE landscape at the beginning of 2015, numerous institutions of higher learning across the country have been set alight by protesting students. In September 2015, various cars and buildings were set alight by protesting students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal while in October 2015 protesting students at the University of Fort Hare's main campus in Alice set alight both entrances leading to the institution. Also, students at the University of Limpopo's Turfloop campus set a security vehicle on fire and at the University of Zululand's KwaDlangezwa campus, protesting students set the student centre building on fire. In November 2015, two buildings were set alight at the University of the Western Cape's Bellville campus while students at the Tshwane University of Technology's Soshanguve campus burned three halls, including an exam centre, and two security cars. Shortly thereafter, the financial aid building at Cape Peninsula University of Technology was set on fire – twice. In February 2016, protesting students at the North West University's Mahikeng campus set various buildings on fire – including the science centre. In the same month, students at the University of Cape Town burned paintings and a Jammie shuttle bus. The vice-chancellor's office was also petrol bombed. The University of the Witwatersrand also saw a lecture hall and a school bus set alight. Various offices and a staff house at Vaal University of Technology's Vanderbijlpark campus were set alight. On the University of Johannesburg's Kingsway campus Sanlam auditorium was set alight in an apparent arson attack. Rhodes University similarly experienced three arson attacks, two of them were at the exam venues and a third one at a tennis club. These figures do not include those in TVET colleges. The huge economic cost of financial exclusion both for the students and the universities makes it a critical factor of the #MustFall student movements, one which requires critical engagement within the paradigms of social justice to handle.

Fraser (2001) argues that social justice is the feedback and corrective principle that detects distortions of the input and/or out-take principles and guides the corrections needed to restore a just and balanced economic order for all. This principle is violated by unjust barriers to participation, by monopolies or by some using their property to harm or exploit others. For this harm to be eradicated, economic harmony which results in participative and distributive justice operating fully for every person within an institution is needed. By understanding the #MustFall movements from an economic social justice perspective we are bringing to bear the guidelines for destroying the monopolies that created such systems and building checks and balances within social institutions, and re-synchronising distribution (out-take) with participation (input). In other words, in order for us to understand the #FeesMustFall student movements properly, we need to understand the economic dimension as playing a central role in denying students the capacity to interact as equals in society, as the lack of funding, crisis of accommodation, textbooks, food and others, continue to marginalise students and ensure that these factors deny them access (both physical and epistemological) to institutions of higher learning. As Fraser argues, we need to move beyond the domain of affirmative approaches to social justice and begin to look at structural social arrangements in society so as to achieve participatory parity and true social justice. Not focusing on the economic structural arrangements that continue to marginalise students will frustrate the possibilities of achieving participatory parity.

The Cultural Framing of the #Mustfall Student Movements in SAHE

The #MustFall movements were also as much a cultural project as they were economic. For example, the #OpenStellenbosch movement was anchored on the language barriers in accessing the curriculum as well as the knowledge systems within the institution. The challenges brought about by the lack of social and cultural capital with which to navigate the elitist systems within the previously white universities made the #MustFall movements a cultural one. The drive to remove the statue of Cecil Rhodes from the centre of the University of Cape Town was a deeply cultural act guided towards eradicating the cultural awareness of colonialism, whiteness as a singular mode of being in the world and cultural alienation that the statue invoked amongst students.

Furthermore, the call to remove the statue of King George V from the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Howard College Campus in Durban demonstrated the cultural framing of the movement in symbolising the rejection of the imperial and colonial heritage that seems to surround SAHE institutions. The statue itself was thereby seen as representing the legitimisation of colonial artefacts which thereby sought to suggest that culturally and politically, the colony can coexist with the envisioned dream of a post-apartheid South Africa, regardless of the contradictions, trauma and memory that the colonial monument evoked for the black majority. The cultural framing of student movements did not stop at these two universities. The call resonated at Rhodes University, University of Witwatersrand, and University of Pretoria, amongst others. Maringira and Gukurume (2017, p. 33) argue that the movement was about blackness and how to regain the cultural identity of black people. They asked, "Where are black lecturers, black non-academic staff? You move from one office to another, from one class to another, all you find is either a white or coloured

lecturer. They don't understand our situation as black students, they don't represent us, and this is part of the struggle in decolonised education" (Maringira & Gukurume, 2017, pp. 33-34). The cultural representation of ethnicity was a strong backbone of the struggle. Similarly, students protested against the imperial and colonial history of HE institutions in South Africa, particularly Cecil John Rhodes' and other colonialists' vision in turning South Africa into a colonial British metropole. For example, Chaudhuri writes about Cecil John Rhodes' vision for South Africa in general and South African higher education in particular, who called for:

the establishment, promotion and development of a Secret Society, the true aim and object whereof shall be for the extension of British rule throughout the world, the perfecting of a system of emigration from the United Kingdom, and of colonisation by British subjects of all lands where the means of livelihood are attainable by energy, labour and enterprise, and especially the occupation by British settlers of the entire Continent of Africa, the Holy Land, the Valley of the Euphrates, the Islands of Cyprus and Candia, the whole of South America, the Islands of the Pacific not heretofore possessed by Great Britain, the whole of the Malay Archipelago, the seaboard of China and Japan ...

(quoted in Chaudhuri, 2016, para. 4)

Fraser (2001) argues that the effect of culture on politics – and thus on the prospects for social justice – are alarming. The widespread “politicization of culture, especially in struggles over identity and difference or struggles for recognition keep exploding in recent times and this is due to the fact that claims for recognition drive many of the world's most intense social conflicts – from battles around multiculturalism to struggles over gender and sexuality, from campaigns for national sovereignty and subnational autonomy to newly energized movements for international human rights” (Fraser, 2001, p. 2). These struggles are heterogeneous and run the gamut from the patently emancipatory to the downright reprehensible. To therefore take the #MustFall movements away from the cultural struggles of South African life is to dissuade it from its very essence. Thus, recognition was and, to a large extent, still continues to be a central theme in the student movements in rejecting the imperial, colonial and apartheid influences in HE institutions and attempting to re-assert blackness as a legitimate mode of being. Reflecting on her own experiences in a historically white university, Lihle Ngcobozi (2015) argues about the need for recognition for black subjectivity and what she refers to as the “methodology of racism” in how it enacts itself in institutions of higher learning as instruments to silence, differentiate and marginalise:

There are a number of implications that come with this burdensome demand [for transformation]. The most salient of these implications is the implicit demand made by white students to allow white normativity to mutate with ease, comfort and without resistance. This demand suggests further that although black students are in the process of constituting their subjectivity, the students must suspend the project of the humanisation of the self and understand that white students matter, too. This is a distraction. The very methodology of racism and the upholding of white supremacy works to distract the black

political project of constituting and claiming black subjectivity. This, in and of itself, is the working of anti-black racism, which has unapologetically found itself comfortable enough to claim its space on the Rhodes SRC page and, by and large, a number of white students on campus. (Ngcobozi, 2015, para. 5)

Maringira and Gukurume (2017) and Konik and Konik (2017) argue that the struggle for free education appears to have been a struggle to deracialise the institution and promote inclusivity. This is largely because most of the student movements have a membership that is predominantly black, with few members who are white or coloured. The idea of living with dignity and in a decent place remains largely elusive for the majority of black people. Building on this notion, Oxlund (2016, p. 9) refers to the University of Pretoria, which had to shut down its operations out of security concerns: “Here black student organizations used #AfrikaansMustFall and #UPRising to demand that Afrikaans be scrapped entirely and as a prerequisite for academic employment at this university, which has historically had Afrikaans as its lingua franca. White Afrikaans student organisations, on their side, labelled the right to be instructed in their mother tongue as a human right in their defence of Afrikaans”. African students, on the other hand, protested against this movement in another movement which “came to be known under the hash tag #AfrikaansSalBly (Afrikaans Will Stay), and it created a tense and insecure atmosphere in Pretoria”. It was not just about a collective student fight, but about student cultural identities and existential belonging, similar to the #OpenStellenbosch movement at Stellenbosch University. #OpenStellenbosch argues that Afrikaans as a language is deeply political in South Africa as it was used by the apartheid regime as a sociolinguistic tool of belonging regarding who counts as being human, and who counted as a subject (#OpenStellenbosch, 2015). #OpenStellenbosch became a movement that sought to connect the marginalised experiences of black students at Stellenbosch University with what they deemed as the oppressive institutional culture that often rendered them as Others in the University (#OpenStellenbosch, 2015). They argued that

1. No student should be forced to learn or communicate in Afrikaans and all classes must be available in English.
2. The institutional culture at Stellenbosch University needs to change radically and rapidly to reflect diverse cultures and not only white Afrikaans culture.
3. The University publicly needs to acknowledge and actively remember the central role that Stellenbosch and its faculty played in the conceptualisation, implementation and maintenance of Apartheid. (#OpenStellenbosch, 2015, para. 6)

Bozalek and Boughey (2012) argue that social arrangements should be such that there is equal respect and that there are equal opportunities for achieving social esteem. This is because participatory parity would be prevented or constrained if social arrangements in society do not recognise or value the different cultural views or identities. Within the cultural domains, there exists the politics of recognition or misrecognition. This could be clearly seen in the University of Pretoria. Oxlund (2016) adds that “the university management advised the public that henceforth English would become the sole medium

of instruction, with Afrikaans and Northern Sotho as secondary languages only. Although this was a historic and ground-breaking development, in terms of public attention it was almost overwhelmed by news of violent clashes happening elsewhere". The constraints of misrecognition and lack of social cohesion ensure the constant eruptions of new forms of barriers in the way of social justice. It is the understanding of the deeply rooted cultural framing of such movements that true meaning can be made. The students at the University of Western Cape demonstrated this more clearly when they argued that "we want to rename these buildings, we have to feel at home, it has to represent us as blacks, and Great Hall must be named Steve Biko, heroes of our history" (Maringira & Gukurume, 2017, p. 39). They further added that "if you go to England, is English land, China is Chinese land, but in Africa, it is not African" (p. 40). The desire to be African in all facets is at the centre of the #MustFall movements. Similarly, Lihle Ngcobozi (2015) writes about the Black Student Movement at Rhodes University, confronting this cultural domain regarding the culture of whiteness in HWUs:

These conversations and forms of resistance from the students at the University of Cape Town and the challenging of the presence of historical artefacts of colonial violence should not be reduced to a removal of a statue, the changing of the name of Rhodes University, or social media campaigns. These are all entry points into broader concepts of transformation and black students laying claim to space, and the right for their space to be reflective of a transforming institution. When students call for "Rhodes must fall" and rally behind #RhodesSoWhite as a collective, we ought to look deeper into the cause and align ourselves with any movement that vehemently rejects the untouchable nature of white normativity and its hold on shaping the experiences of black students at Rhodes, UCT and society at large. (Ngcobozi, 2015, para. 10)

Snodgrass (2015), adding to this, argues that the wave of protests that has swept across South African universities in recent times reflects the undercurrent of socio-political tensions of the society as a whole. The university should be the bastion of the freedom of expression in the promotion of democracy, as well as possess the moral and ethical obligation to provide spaces for fierce debate and critical engagement. But the reality has been somewhat different in South African universities where most of them have distinguished themselves as bastions of intolerance, privilege, conformism and censorship. The culture myopism must be destroyed and room created for inclusive and open engagement on the platform of equality and shared experience as well as individual experiences for the #MustFall student movements to be fully understood.

In her initial work, Fraser only conceptualises social justice as a two-dimensional approach. In her later work, she introduces the three-dimensional understanding through the inclusion of the political dimension in highlighting the increasing role of non-state actors in producing new forms of marginality and exclusion that perpetuate injustice. We now turn to the political framing in relation to contemporary student movements within the SAHE landscape.

The Political Framing of the #MustFall Student Movement in SAHE

Politics is the very fabric of the society. It moulds the philosophical underpinnings within a particular nation and opens up the nation or society for discourse and dictum. Philosophers have always seen a human being as political in nature, meaning almost everything he or she does is inherently political. The #MustFall movements therefore could not but be seen and understood as political. Sibeko (2016) argues that the differentiating effects of #MustFall movements are now pervasive in the SAHE sector and probably beyond. Academics, schools and faculties have turned on each other. Some universities are pitted against others, like the “Wits option” vs the “UCT option” (Sibeko, 2016, para. 2). Some academics are accused of being blindly supportive of “the innocent students” and parading their colours as the immaculate left; while others are seen as blindly securocratic, unreconstructed conservatives who see nothing wrong with the university, institution culture or even how deeply contested HE curricula is and its implicit values. The politicking within and about the movements and the different political and ideological positions which emerged from such process further explore and highlight the political in the #MustFall movements.

Sibeko (2016) further argue that, “For the immaculate left, it is ultimately a capitalist state that has no interest in the poor emerging from poverty; overlapping with black people in a society dominated by whiteness; creating an unreconstructed racial capitalism that needs to be toppled. Students in this view lack agency and are in every context victims of external forces. Every action is the response of victim to oppressor” (Sibeko, 2016, para. 8). This political reconstruction of the #MustFall movements epitomises the depth of the despondency within academia and the political will and agency needed for redress. Fraser (2009) concurs with this when she argues for an epistemological shift from the post-Westphalian conceptions of the nation-state and the interrogation of non-state actors and their ability to constrain, limit or prevent participatory parity. Socio-political arrangements must be made in a way that everyone has a political voice and influence in decisions that affect them. However, Sibeko (2016) shows the contrary of this in the SAHE when he points out that “senior management” is seen to lead with security, follow up with more security, and have no interest in negotiation or compromise. Students just want a free, decolonised education in a transformed institution and are shot for daring to ask for it – and they remain innocent, brutalised “black bodies”. This political meandering and juxtaposition of power with might, speaks to the need for social justice and a social justice understanding of the #MustFall student movements.

Nshimbi (2016) further argues that students are political animals who constitute a vibrant part of civil society, a natural element of a democratic society such as South Africa. Since universities are training grounds for future leaders (and this includes political leaders), it is rather duplicitous to praise students when they demonstrate excellence in science, technology or business that promises a great future, but simultaneously condemn them for political engagement. He adds that universities are to nurture students in the discipline and art of political engagement and groom them for this sort of leadership. Satgar (2016) argues that the #MustFall movements heralded three new developments in mass politics in post-apartheid South Africa. First, it married social media to mass politics which did not exist

prior to this. Second, this political matrix was amorphous, except for moments of media representation which presented ‘leaders’ at the forefront. In practice, this was not the case in the university space. Third, it was about copying developments from different campuses – what is known as a mimetic politics. So, if students marched and protested at one campus, others followed, or if students occupied particular spaces at a certain university this was repeated at other campuses embracing the revolt.

The #MustFall movements therefore brought forth or represent a form of politics with deeply democratic practices and institutional representation. It is also about a new neo-colonial or post-apartheid politics aimed at reclaiming and transforming the public university and eradicating the crisis of national liberation politics, alongside other rising movements. Fraser (2001) argues that the emergence of the knowledge society opens new possibilities for politics beyond the ordinary or mundane. Identity is no longer tied so exclusively to labour, and issues of culture are intensely politicised. Social justice requires the politicising of these issues, thus creating room for discussions around multiple-status hierarchies, including those of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality and religion. The need for a political understanding of the #MustFall movement therefore cannot be overemphasised. Valela (2015) comments on the relationship between the student movements themselves occurring in a specific political moment in South Africa, and the conditions of the emergence as a new phenomenon in the SAHE:

This wave of campaigns waged by students across the country is also happening at a time in South Africa’s history where we are dealing with more than just the post-Apartheid moment. We are in the post-Marikana moment. After 1994, it seemed highly unlikely (if possible) that a group of human beings would be shot and killed by state police considering the nation’s history of police brutality under an unjust Apartheid regime. However, we are dealing with the reality that the colonial structure is not dismantled; therefore it should not come as a surprise that protest would be met with such violence. At Rhodes, the Black Student Movement’s peaceful mobilisation has been met with responses that reflect the tactics of a police state. However, this should not come as a surprise since the Head of Security is a former member of the South African Police. (Valela, 2015, para. 8-10)

Camalita Naicker (2015), building on Valela (2015)’s argument on the intersectionality between the student movement politics within the SAHE landscape and the broader socio-political challenges that confront the South African state, makes a closer connection between what students experience in HE politically, and the operating discourses that are employed to explain the struggle of the Marikana mine workers:

Marikana, as a type of politics, is not just about state violence against popular dissent. It is also about the ways in which the liberal media has aligned itself with the state to present poor black people organising themselves outside of authorised institutions as “mobs” and “thugs” who are “irrational” and “violent” and under the control of external agitators of various kinds. In recent weeks, exactly the same language has, for the first time in post-Apartheid South Africa, also been used to describe students at former English-speaking white

universities like UCT and Rhodes. This development has shown that the liberal consensus is not only unable to engage the politics of poor black people on a reasonable basis. It is equally unable to respond to black students challenging liberal authority on a reasonable basis. This makes it clear that the limits to the forms of democracy acceptable to liberalism, and to the forms of political presence acceptable to liberalism, are about race as well as class.

(Naicker, 2015, para. 4-5)

Both Valela (2015) and Naicker (2015) refer to Fraser's notion of mis-framing in suggesting that the colonial artefacts and symbols in HEIs act as a boundary setting that seek to exclude the lived experiences of black students. This is especially seen with Naicker's argument on the employed political discourse that seeks to mis-frame and misrecognise the plight of students' movements as "violent", a "mob" and under the control of "political agitators". This mis-framing and misrecognition is done deliberately to misunderstand the plight of student movements, depoliticise their fight for social justice and shift the political discourse away from higher education transformation to now about violence and how it threatens and needs to be neutralised by the state. In other words, this shift in political mis-framing does two things – firstly, it silences the critical conversation on the deeply contested and fractured history of SAHE. Secondly, it subverts the debate away from the plight of student movements and what they are fighting, to now conversations about violence, and its place in post-apartheid South Africa. Thus Fraser suggests that a true commitment to social justice would demand that students dismantle the social arrangements that continue to mis-frame and misrecognise them, and that a new boundary setting be "redrawn" that allows for inclusivity and the humanity of everyone, including their different struggles and modes of being in the world.

Conclusion

In this article, we argue that the literature on contemporary student movements is characterised by two key gaps. Firstly, this literature is predominantly found on various "un-academic" and "non-peer-reviewed" platforms such as online media, opinion pieces, social media and others. Secondly, some of the literature on contemporary student movements could be characterised by an absence of theory in offering a critical and theoretical analysis of contemporary student movements, their emergent conditions as well as the challenges that they are confronting. In this article, we divided the responses in two. The first section focuses on mapping the context and the fragmented history of HE in South Africa, and we locate student movements in such periods. This allowed us to see and extrapolate the emergent conditions of contemporary student movements within the SAHE. The second part of the article we dedicated to foregrounding Fraser's social justice framework as an analytical tool that allowed us to look at contemporary student movements within the SAHE as complex actors that could be seen within three domains, that is, the economic, the political and the cultural.

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How to cite:

Hlatshwayo, M.N. & Fomunyam, K.G. (2019). Theorising the #MustFall Student Movements in Contemporary South African Higher Education: A Social Justice Perspective. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 7(1), 61-80. DOI: 10.24085/jsaa.v7i1.3693