

Leadership and Politics of belonging in a 2015 FeesMustFall movement: a case of UPrising

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Introduction

This empirically based article examines UPrising's leadership - a student movement that emerged at the University of Pretoria (UP) in September 2015. The article explores the story of UPrising leadership and student activists during 2015 fees protests at the University of Pretoria from a participant point of view. We show how contestation for control of student political space, politics of gender and organisational conundrums driven by inclusionary and exclusionary practices threatened to derail the objectives of UPrising. It is argued that toxic student and gender politics is pervasive in student movements as evidenced by the case of UPrising. Despite these challenges, UPrising leadership managed to galvanise thousands of students at the University of Pretoria (UP) to protest against the state and university management on imminent fees increases and the UP institutional culture respectively. In what follows we first provide the context of 2015 students fees protests and the emergence of UPrising in South Africa. In the next section, we provide methodological reflections based on our own ethnographic encounters during the protests and clarification of how we use the concept of politics of belonging to understand UPrising. Finally, we present findings and discussions on the contestations, dynamics as well as innovations within UPrising's programme of action in 2015.

Context

The year 2015 marked a turning point within the South African higher learning landscape. For the first time in the democratic era, students across most universities which were historically dominated by blacks and also some which were previously white-dominated abandoned lectures and protested against the government and university management. The aim was to force these structures to address problems confronting students in institutions of higher and tertiary learning in South Africa (Chinguno, Kgoroba, Mashibini, Masilela, Maubane, Moyo, Mthombeni and Ndlovu, 2017). These issues ranged from free tuition in higher education, scrapping of proposed tuition fee hikes, decolonisation of the curriculum and university space, to change in language policy and an end to the outsourcing of cleaning staff (Nomvete and

Mashayamombe, 2019). The emergence of #Rhodesmustfall in March 2015 at the University of Cape Town, directed on the removal of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes erected at the University of Cape Town set the tone of numerous student protests that followed during the course of the year (Bosch, 2016; Oxlund, 2016; Sosibo, 2015). This was a symbolic move in the broader decolonisation debate which also gave birth to the hash tag #OpenStellenbosch which was perceived as exclusively white (Oxlund, 2016:4) as well as other subsequent movements across South Africa's universities. We contend that the 2015 fees protests were complex and layered. In order to understand them, an examination of university specific experiences is paramount. Wits FMF among others, have written a monograph titled 'Rioting and Writing' (2017) that provides first-hand information from the activists who were directly and indirectly involved in 2015 fees protests. Others have written campus-specific case studies during the same period (see Dlakavu, 2017). This article seeks to provide UPrising's leadership perspective in terms of recruitment and mobilisation of students and innovation. Subsequently, the article explores how the movement leadership dealt with the challenges of contestations and how they kept the movement united to achieve the set objectives.

In August 2015, the University of Pretoria Student Representative Council (SRC) undertook protest action #DownwithFinancialXenophobia by marching through Hatfield campus to the administration building. The little success of the SRC-led protest created necessary conditions for the emergence of UPrising (for more see Nomvete and Mashayamombe, 2019:4). UPrising was a non-partisan student movement whose leadership (11 founding members) constituted of former SRC members and Grassroots and progressive student activists from UP campus (*ibid*). These included black women and male students aged between 21 and 27. Their degree programmes were from the faculties of Engineering, Humanities and Law. At the time of writing, some of the UPrising leaders have completed their degrees and have left the institution, others are pursuing their postgraduate degrees while some never completed their degrees due to criminal convictions based on their roles in the subsequent 2016 student protests (see Nkosi, 2018; Nkgadima, 2018). Nonetheless, the main mandate of UPrising was at first a call for the reduction and freezing of university fees. It then moved to calls for free university education, abolishment of predominantly white-oriented campus and residence cultures, decolonisation of the curriculum, and the adoption of English as the main medium of instruction as opposed to Afrikaans (Nomvete and Mashayamombe, 2019).

Participating in the movement: methodological reflections

The idea to write on UPrising is based on critical reflections we undertook just after the end of fees protests in 2015. Our own observations in participating in the movement as students stimulated the idea to tell the story of UPrising and its leadership. Students' response in support of the movement on a campus that is generally characterised by political apathy in comparison to other universities like Tshwane University of Technology, Walter Sisulu, University of the Witwatersrand just to mention a few, was unprecedented at the University of Pretoria. UPrising's ability to mobilise and organise apprehensive students at UP, its adoption of a non-partisan approach; and hence a united front; its ability to sustain the momentum of the movement and achieve the desired outcomes motivated us to write about UPrising. The information provided in this article was collected through participant observations during the students' protests led by UPrising, interviews with student leaders as they reflected on successes failures of the movement and documents. Through these interviews, UPrising leadership got into a critical reflective mode in terms of decisions, tactics and strategies they employed during the period of protests and outcomes. Our participation, observations and interactions with UPrising leadership during and after the protests triggered questions around leadership, contestations, and choices people make in movements.

Furthermore, by focusing on UPrising as an individual case, we hope to contribute to the body of knowledge on a broad movement that seemed uniform, but different in many ways, although unified by the fees and decolonisation questions. We are aware of the question of positionality and biases we carry as students, African males and postgraduate students. However, this cannot hinder us from providing details on the activities of UPrising. Rather, we adopt reflexivity advocated for by Michael Burawoy (2009) where a researcher has to self-monitor her/himself in terms of experiences, preconceptions and how this impact on social research. To place us in context, we start out by providing an annotated summary on the history of student activism in South Africa. To understand the events of the FMF movement, a brief flashback on student activism and protests in South Africa is important.

Student activism and protests in Africa

In the post-colonial independent African states, student protests have been used as a vehicle for socio-economic political change (Zeilig and Ansell, 2008). In countries such as Cameroon, Nigeria; Senegal and Zimbabwe, students have protested against oppressive colonial and post-independence regimes and neoliberalism (Zeilig, 2009). In terms of neoliberalism students

protested against rising cost of tuition, food and student accommodation. Student protests were often responded to with brute force and violence (Hodgkinson 2013; Gukurume 2019). Similarly, student activism has played an important role within the South African socio-political landscape. The 1960s were characterised by a very small percentage of black student population in South African secondary schools and even a lesser number of students in the university spaces (Nieftagodien, 2014; Stuurman, 2018). This was a result of apartheid discriminatory tendencies underpinned by the institutionalised policy of separate development. Most black African universities in South Africa were first established only in the early 1960s. As a result, there was not much activism amongst these students during this period (Stuurman, 2018).

However, political uprisings in communities and workplaces gained momentum leading to increased brutal state repression through banning's, mass arrests, torture and ultimately the Sharpeville massacre 1960 (Franklin 2003; see also Stuurman 2018). The stifling of activism space resulted in the emergence and increase of student activism mainly led by the Black Consciousness movement to fight against racism and other forms of discrimination against blacks (see Mangcu 2017). Consequently, the Black Consciousness movement and the South African Student Organization (SASO) during this time had immense impact on the class of 1976 (Nieftagodien, 2014). Scholarship and activism that came out from few black scholars in universities that had just emerged and those accepting black students influenced the younger generation's political consciousness. The 1976 uprisings were more than just about the Bantu Education and the imposition of Afrikaans as medium of instruction but was a rejection of the entire apartheid system at large.

With the liberalisation of university access in the post-1994, Koen, Cele and Libhaber (2006: 404) state that, '...between 1999 and 2003, first entry students at South Africa's 21 public universities and 15 Technikons (technical colleges) increased from about 131 000 to about 182 000...' This large pool of students, representing 25%, was at the backdrop of an apartheid government that had alienated black South African students from quality education; and therefore, needed a much more skilled population to rebuild and transform the country (*ibid*). In a country in which the majority of the population was ravaged by poverty and inequality, funding for university education gradually became a mammoth challenge for the ANC-led government. The national student debt shot up to 5.5 million Rands as students failed to fund their education (Koen et al., 2006: 405). Also, from the early 2000s until recently, South African universities found themselves confronted by finance-related student protests,

particularly at the previously black African institutions. These protests have largely been a result of the inadequacy of National Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) to cover university tuition and accommodation fees; the schemes failure to pay on time and sometimes a failure to fund students that are academically deserving and qualify as a result of their socio-economic background (see Ndelu, Dlakavu and Boswell 2017). To a great extent, this has recently been mirrored in previously white institutions as well. Koen *et al* (2006) however, state that protests at previously white institutions have been related to issues around institutional culture as opposed to financial ones - a claim that no longer holds after fees must fall protests (see also Luescher and Klemencic 2017).

Politics of belonging

Student political activism within South African university spaces has tended to be dominated by male students from various student political organisations aligned to mainstream political parties (Luescher and Klemencic 2017). The space continues to be masculinised, politically as well as racially charged. Between 2015 to 2017, a wave of #EndRapeCulture and #PatriarchyMustFall have been witnessed (Ndelu 2017). Being a women student activist or political leader meant overt and covert practices of inclusion as will be shown in the sections that follow. The space, as such, had become highly monitored by male students who then decided who belongs or does not belong in terms of addressing students, leading programme of action, and the assumption of key leadership positions. Women have often held low key positions in main political parties, trade unions and society in general (Benya 2015; Tshoamedi 2013; 2012). In terms of broader political affiliation, student politics reflect mainstream politics; and with the emergence of Economic Freedom Fighters and consequently EFF student command, campuses have become battlegrounds with ANC aligned formations.

In the context of UPrising, we frame our discussion around questions of belonging because the movement encountered similar challenges during execution of its programme of action. Yuval-Davis (2011,13) states that ‘...belonging is about emotional attachment about feeling at home...’ and is an ongoing project that gives hope about a safe future. Belonging ‘is about people’s social and economic locations at particular points of history and tends to carry grids of power operating in the society’ (Yuval-Davis 2011,13). Furthermore, individual or collective identity narratives are reproduced from one generation to another in a selective way, can shift, be contested and multiple (Yuval-Davis 2011). This is necessitated by individuals or groups ability to move up and down the social, political and economic grids of power in the

society in line with prevailing situational factors. Yuval-Davis (2011,18) avers that ‘...belonging is not just about social locations of groups and individuals, collective identities and attachments...’, but also assessment of members by others.

In light of the above, belonging is central in order to understand social control of space (Trudeau 2006). For instance, the UP student political activism space had its own gatekeepers between late 2000 and 2015 (African National Congress aligned South African Students Congress, ANC Youth League and later EFF SC UP) and UPrising had to navigate its way in a highly contested and treacherous student space. These contestations give rise to the need to move from belonging to politics of belonging, which is the actual act of boundary drawing.

Yuval-Davis (2011,18) posit that: ‘Politics of belonging involves not only construction of boundaries but also the inclusion or exclusion of particular people, social categories and groupings within these boundaries by those who have the power to do this.’ Power is exercised through various hegemonic political projects of belonging in determining who is in and out of space. However, when symbolic power does not yield desired results, it may culminate into the use of different forms of violence as a sign of frustration. Of interest is Yuval-Davis’s (2011,20) politics of belonging that involves boundaries of political community of belonging that seek to symbolically and physically separate population or groups into ‘us’ and ‘them.’ The process involves maintenance, reproduction of boundaries of the community of belonging through hegemonic symbolic powers and also contestations and resistance of such projects by other political agents (Yuval-Davis 2011,20). Therefore, in this article, belonging and politics of belonging is deployed to examine the ways in which UPrising’s leadership was contested by various forces and the innovative strategies it undertook during the 2015 student fees protests on the streets in and around Hatfield.

Case Analysis

Contest for political space

UPrising leadership was innovative in terms of how it recruited and mobilised students and executed its programme of action after the SRC-led protest had failed to yield desired outcomes. The leadership was able to utilise different resources in order to carry out its programme of action. One of them was harnessing technology particularly the social media (Bosch 2016; Gerbaudo 2012). Tuks 11 and Grassroots who later coagulated under UPrising recruited and mobilised students through *motho-motho* (person to person recruitment), social media (twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp) (Nomvete and Mashayamombe, 2019). Technology

and its associated social media platforms were used in the following manner: the students posted series of provocative tweets and Facebook posts confronting the university; and the state, thus, raising consciousness and introducing themselves to UP students and other sympathisers¹; to recruit and mobilise support. Social media platforms offered alternative and neutral space to student activism within a highly policed learning space (see Gerbaudo 2012; Gleason 2013). Increased monitoring and policing by UP's security and private security grudgingly known by students as 'bouncers' (due to their size and muscles typical of security personnel at night clubs) inspired student leaders to resort to technology through various social media platforms. At one point, there were threats to disable UP and Edu roam Wi-Fi, but the moment UPrising started trending on twitter made it a futile exercise as the movement had gained momentum. Following Luescher and Klemencic (2017), Luescher, Loader and Mugume (2017,231) observe that

...2015 South African hashtag Student movements can be conceptualized as internet-age networked student movement, insofar as the use of internet-based communication by students (and other actors), in particular the use of social media platforms such as Twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook, Blogs, YouTube, and Cloud-based services, signals the advent of a new way of mobilizing and organizing student political power.

It can thus, be argued that UPrising leadership deployed various innovations like the use of interne-based communication technology just like other student-led movements in South Africa and beyond to recruit, mobilise, and carry out student protests at UP. This appealed to UP students who, at that time, were not comfortable with student activism *modus operandi* that informs most South African university campuses especially historically black institutions in terms of student population.

As the Tuks 11 were pondering on the name of the movement, they overhead that another movement known as Grassroots had also been meeting clandestinely and was planning a similar programme of action. The soon to be UPrising was not immune to challenges that emanate from political, social and ideological differences. This was noted by one of the activists who observed the following:

then it became apparent as days went by that there was another movement doing the same thing within the campus...called Grassroot. But obviously you know factions of SASCO, ANCYL and all those things were manifesting at that time. Then we said it's going to be defeat on ourselves if we are going to go parallel. Can't we meet with each other and hear what they (Grassroots) are

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/TuksUPrising/>

offering and see if we can't reach consensus? We met on Sunday night...around 5pm hoping that the meeting will be done by 7pm but the meeting went on until 3am...We agreed that 1) to move as one organization 2) that demands were going to be central...the name we agreed on was UPrising... (Joseph)

Student leadership sensed the pitfalls of duplication of roles and its potential to divide students and lose out. This led to the initiation of dialogue between Tuks 11 and Grassroots which ultimately led to the formation of UPrising. There was a possibility of UPrising's plans being hijacked by other movements launching similar programmes, hence dividing the student body (see Nomvete and Mashayamombe, 2019:9).

Joseph's observations are important in that they reveal that hijacking or competition emerged at two levels. The first was through grassroots and the second was through the traditional student-led campus-based political formations. With certain organisations having historically led from the front in the South African student movement, perhaps it was to be expected that those organisations would want to cement their influential positions in what was to be a historic moment. Indeed, through demonstrations by UPrising in Hatfield, Hillcrest, Eastwoods and the Union buildings, different organisations wanted to ensure visibility (Nomvete and Mashayamombe, 2019). This contention was seen through the multiplicity of partisan T-shirts in the frontline and the contestations of who led songs and who addressed the movement. There were more than three student political organisations that confronted UPrising due to ideological differences seeking to capture and control the moment. It was a historical moment that could potentially facilitate upward mobility of student leaders into higher regional, provincial and national political structures.

Politics of belonging were largely at play in these instances as politics of power of 'who is in control' and 'who is out' of the space openly manifested themselves during the protest related activities (Yuval-Davis 2011). Politics of belonging further prevailed in the sense of who is in and who is out in terms of which individual, for instance, would represent the movement to the mainstream media as a spokesperson. This was seen in the contest for photo and video camera opportunities. The same struggle for recognition manifested itself at the Student Services Centre (formerly Client Services Centre) where a student leader from UP EFF SC stood on top of the table and led revolutionary songs wearing organisational regalia. Within a short space of time, another wearing PYA related regalia also joined in and we could see that it was competition for visibility and relevance for campus politics and for the historical moment.

From our observations as participants in the movement, we could only align these contestations to a race for political glory, relevance and popularity to respective political constituencies. Notwithstanding these challenges and struggles, UPrising leadership managed to stabilise the situation each time the environment proved volatile; and thus, maintaining a focus on the desired outcomes. Much of UPrising's success in nabbing these challenges owed to the fact that from the embryonic stages of the movement, these challenges had been anticipated. Moreover, those that formed the movement had come from different student political movements; and therefore, had foresight about what the reception would be from their parent organisations as shown below:

That's one thing we also came to notice and say we are not here as our own partisanship...when the 11 met and were discussing these things, brainstorming the name as well, spoke about how non-partisanship is important, spoke about how, yes we will find ourselves being challenged in one way or another by partisan groups, even our own political organizations...' (Mmusi).

The competing student political formations, mainly; PYA and EFF SC UP with UPrising created organisational challenges to UPrising leadership. At one level both PYA and EFF SC UP, especially the male students, sought to collectively undermine UPrising, divide the student body and hijack the entire movement and ride on the wave of the 'historic moments' (Luescher, 2016:147). On another level, UPrising was used as a battlefield between PYA which is affiliated to the African National Congress and the EFF SC UP to EFF to prove and score political points and gain national political relevance for their mainstream political parties.

UPrising leadership found itself entangled in the dirty politics. This was worsened by the fact that they too belonged to these very same student political formations although they had chosen to be non-partisan. It was about leadership and ideological battles. To resolve this, UPrising created another layer of leadership called central planning committee. It was constituted of three representatives from PYA, EFF SC UP and UPrising. Its mandate was to implement a programme of action outlined by UPrising leadership. This, among other things, entailed mobilisation of more students, sustaining student participation, planning daily activities, resources (water, food and toiletries) and leading marches and songs as captured below:

When we had the national shut down, the central planning committee had a very clear role to play and that involved planning for the day, decide who will lead in the front (picket lines) how would things look at the back (some leaders to marshal from the back and help the tail to catch up). Even the drafting and writing of the memorandum came out of the central planning committee. The central planning committee would meet early in the morning, I think around 5am

or 5:30 am...and then meet with the students...the idea was, by the time we met with students, we would already have a collective mandate for the day... (Helen)

In light of the above, it is evident that UPrising leadership played an important role in the delegation of roles due to contestations and as a way to exert control and order in the movement. For a while, it calmed the storm, but later on, the same very structure became a gender and student political formation battlefield. Some would want to deviate from agreed protest marching routes and destination and pace of marches. This left students vulnerable to being misled and potential confrontation with law enforcement agents who they sought to avoid at any cost. Others would agitate for violence and trashing of the streets and looting.

However, whenever things were about to get out of hand, UPrising leaders would step in and reprimand the agitators of such. We recall when a group emptied a bin and trashed the pavement, Mmusi reprimanded the group and most students supported him. They immediately picked up the trash and put in the bin. These acts of providing leadership and not being caught in the moment enabled UPrising to maintain focus and achieve set objectives.

Although UPrising was able to effectively handle the heat directed to it by those that sought to hijack the movement and its programme of action, they were not in control of what would happen to some of its leaders that had stemmed out of other organisations. Upon failed attempts by some to lure and deter people from the vibrant student movement at the time on campus, different student political organisations questioned the loyalty of some of their members. Loyal to their parent organisations, they were dismayed by the emergent movement, accused it of political immaturity, questioned its tactics and doomed it for imminent failure. One of the student leaders of UPrising, as a result, reminisced of an incident that we also witnessed where he was threatened and questioned of his allegiance. Below we extract a quote from his interview:

At some point I was told *FU* FU* we are going to F**K you up. The PYA had agitated its members and at this point we had to return to campus...When I got to campus this is when I was asked, 'Wena entliek who do you represent??...and then I was expelled right on the spot as a member of SASCO... (Mmusi)

The space that UPrising operated on was politically contested and things got nasty as depicted by Mmusi's immediate expulsion from SASCO without proper disciplinary hearing. Despite these challenges, UPrising remained united with leaders supporting each other. It also ensured that such glitches did not dampen the spirits of the students. In the same vein, the contestations of student political space demonstrate the politics of belonging, and how those who feel entitled

to power seek to include those whom they think belong and share similar ideas by excluding those who differ as not belonging from key positions and power. This reflects the broader macro-politics as they play out within the ANC led government of South Africa and how they maintain power through cadre deployment and patronage politics (Brunette, 2019).

Although the organisation quoted above was at crossroads with the emergent movement in terms of technicalities on allocation of responsibilities, they agreed on the point that fees must fall. As a result, the contestations and contentions we refer to in this section happened during demonstrations which supported the broader goals of the movement. Within the same institution nevertheless, another student movement which prides itself with ‘protecting the right of minorities’ (Afri-Forum 2017) was running a parallel yet different programme of action which sought to topple the very existence of UPrising. Below we extract from a leader of UPrising and then prominent member of the SRC as means to demonstrate this peculiar challenge:

Already on that Thursday, Afri-Forum had a march to the Union Buildings. They submitted a written memorandum saying we must stop the marches and go back to class. I think this is an important one, some of the SRC members were there too with Afri-Forum and that’s when we knew the SRC doesn’t exist... (Zenzo)

Afri-Forum did not directly attend or participate in UPrising’s programme of action, but rather chose an alternative route which, in some ways, depicted desire for relevance through attempts to have raging student protests halted without an agreed resolution. The above quote which reflects one amongst a myriad of challenges faced by UPrising evokes one of Yuval-Davis’s three facets of belonging in which she suggests ‘it’s about people’s social and economic locations at particular points of history and tends to carry grids of power operating in the society’ (2011:13). In this instance, UPrising’s programme of action was under threat from a group of white Afrikaner students who were assumedly economically privileged and had alienated themselves from the majority of the student body; and thus, demanded a return to class.

In the past, the movement in question had enjoyed popularity and power within the institution, having led the SRC for many years. Its actions seemed to suggest that the proposed fee increments would not adversely affect them in comparison to majority of black South African students. Even though this was the case, it is important for us to state that UPrising had enjoyed support across all racial lines and this act by this particular grouping was not representative of the broader white student population on campus. However, the general participation of white

students in UPrising activities in terms of attendance and assumption of responsibilities was minimal. Most of them resolved to remain in their flats and university student residences however, their numbers increased during the march to Union Buildings.

Gender politics and organisational conundrums

Dynamics within UPrising during 2015 fees protests threatened to derail the cause of the movement. Contestations for control of the movement's daily activities were glaring. Male students have generally dominated this masculinised picket line with women playing second fiddle (Ndlovu, 2017). The gender composition of UPrising leadership, whether deliberate or otherwise, did not make this movement an exception. Although many that took part in the movement as leaders or as students may argue to the contrary, some women in leadership argue that their voices were peripheral in decision making. They maintained that their visibility was bigger outside than it actually was in the committees that made up UPrising.

As participants to the marches, we observed the marginalisation of women voices. Even outside of the central command committee, women student leaders were stifled by male student activists through domineering actions like increased energy when singing, dancing and marching because they would not keep up the pace. Women student activists often operated in the shadow of their male counterparts making some believe that women student activists lacked interest to lead or desire to be catalysts for social change. However, this position is contestable, and problematic given the role played by patriarchy in various institutions in the subjugation of women (Tshoedi, 2013). The system often frustrates women of different orientations in multiple ways and threatens their very existence (Benya, 2015; Tshoedi, 2012; Ndlovu, 2017). Evidence from qualitative interviews reveal that some women student activists (leaders) felt undermined and discriminated by male counterparts during UPrising's programme of action. For instance, one student leader mentioned the following:

...politics is inherently very violent to female bodies more so when they are black. It's a hyper masculine space, how you speak, how they sing, dance...it is very hyper masculine and at most times the only role women play is to be sexual objects of these political figures... We had a lot of conflict because of gender. People felt entitled to platforms of addressing just because they are males. Because he thinks as a male, black male in a political space, it is his platform, like they assume a position of leadership automatically without us having reached a consensus.
(Tebogo)

Women student activist leaders were confronted with double tragedy, dealing with university management on one hand and male student political activists on the other. Political space in

UPrising's programme of action during the protests was contested along political and gender leadership lines as represented in Tebogo's quotation above. As a result, UPrising women leaders felt discriminated and undermined. Male student leaders felt entitled to the political space - a notion that is derived from the very notion of manhood - and seen as natural leaders with women bodies trailing in their shadows (Tshoaedi, 2012; Groots Kenya 2019). At the Student Services Centre, two days after the announcement of 0 % fees increase, the undermining of women student leaders was visible. UPrising had captured the SSC and demanded the Vice Chancellor to come engage with students on campus specific issues. In the foyer, different student leaders were afforded an opportunity to address the VC and Tebogo had been chosen by UPrising to speak. She was accused of being emotional and also condescendingly caucused on what to say as opposed to what she wanted to convey to students. These acts depict gender stereotypes and discrimination. Tebogo's position was further complicated by the fact that she was in UPrising's central committee deployed by SASCO UP branch. The predominantly male branch leadership and those from the regional structures felt as if they owned her as fellow comrade and also undermined her because of her gender.

By virtue of being men, male student leaders and activists especially those aligned to particular student political formations disregarded and undermined women UPrising leadership. One incident that we recall vividly was when Tebogo had a microphone grabbed away from her by a male leader from a certain political grouping. Tebogo had been assigned to be the spokesperson of UPrising, and this entailed liaising with the media. However, male SASCO and ANCYL regional leaders in Gauteng started to conduct interviews on UPrising with the media usurping and undermining Tebogo's role as a woman student leader. As participants, we witnessed tensions at various levels which intersected along gender, politics and leadership lines.

Bordering on similar sentiments as Tebogo, one of the women student leaders in UPrising, Lady Fire as she is known amongst her comrades, stated that women voices needed to fight their way into being heard. She stated that when it came to debating ideas in the decision-making body 'those that could speak spoke and that those who did not remained silent' (Lady Fire, 2017) as there was not an open platform in what was an inherent masculine space. She argued that for women to thrive, they needed a bit of political currency. That is, they should have had served in political structures before; and enjoyed political popularity. Moreover, she suggested that one needed to have been aware of the character of patriarchy in political and social movement spaces in order to challenge it. In this way she suggested one would only be

aware of such if they frequently interacted with politics. In the same breath, she was also aware that it was not always politics of gender at play, but sometimes mere exposure to politicking that side-lined some women in the movement:

...some of the women that came into UPrising came from an apolitical and so when we were discussing, engaging on issues amongst ourselves and not agreeing on things they would generally be quieter and more reserved... That is because there is a general forceful way in which discussions, deliberations and negotiations take place, particularly when you have oppositions and opposing political parties working together. So, you would find that women in UPrising were less confrontational in how they approached meetings within the central committee... (Lady Fire).

Although Lady Fire suggested that lack of political background for some women leaders in UPrising may have resulted in passive participation. Does this tell us something about patriarchy, masculinities, or need for exerted femininities in political spaces? In light of the above, it can be commented that belonging (Yuval-Davis 2011) i.e., male students articulate politics of belonging as men, 'we' control and lead while 'them' women student activists and leaders follow behind. Such projects play out in many ways because of the power imbalances perpetuated by patriarchy and this is problematic as it perpetuates subjugation and harassment of women in leadership positions.

Whenever Tebogo spoke, for instance, students responded rapturously and laughed a lot to her jokes. Her speech and humour were timeous especially in moments when students felt tired because of marching on the streets and growing impatient with the UP management. However, all of this, although an important aspect of the movement, happened outside of important decision-making bodies. Therefore, our observations and evidence from the interviews corroborate that the space that UPrising operated in during the 2015 FeesMustFall protests at the UP was gender-biased; and sought to discriminate and alienate women bodies.

Gender politics intersected with student politics (PYA, UP EFF SC) at leadership level and this posed serious challenges to the unity of the movement. We also acknowledge the fact that women are not uniform, but rather there is a plethora of cleavages which compete against each other as well as with male students. Students, in our opinion, stood united and gave their support especially to UPrising movement leadership that had mobilised and brought them together in large numbers. Students only took instructions from UPrising leadership except for a few who sided with partisan political student formations.

In addition to the above, male student activists especially those who claimed to be politically conscious and active in mainstream and student politics made several attempts to isolate and exclude women student activists from playing prominent roles in activities set out by UPrising. Our observations during UPrising's activities were that male students deliberately attempted (not in UPrising leadership) to close down spaces for women students to assume active roles. For instance, during demonstrations, women who occupied the front line were pushed to the back or some male students would deliberately increase speed and leave them behind as echoed by a woman student leader:

We were harassed... it was extremely difficult...I think you (women) needed to be extremely strong as a woman to survive all those protests...I remember on the first day of the protest, I was at the front trying to lead you know...but by the end of that day, I told myself I can't. It's emotionally draining to be at the front. It's constantly being belittled. It was horrible and the tensions as well...(Helen)

The quote above shows that student political activism space within which UPrising operated was fraught with violence and harassment to women's bodies. Male student leaders had a sense of entitlement to carry out different activities within student political spaces. This stemmed within the political grid of power based on i.e. positions they hold in student political structures, political organisation they represented and manhood. The idea to belittle women student leaders and activists by male student activists was a deliberate strategy to silence women bodies and diminish their political role in the student movement. This was done by frustrating women bodies when they sought to assume a leading role i.e. say occupying front lines during demonstrations in the streets of Hatfield, lack of vocal backing support when a woman activist started a struggle song. Similar instances were reported in Wits FMF (Dlakavu, 2017) and general physical pushing and shoving of women student activists by their male student counterparts. This depicted toxic relations between men and women student activists within student political landscape in UPrising. This created organisational challenges that threatened to tear apart the movement in terms of UPrising's ability to effectively carry out its programme of action, equal gender political participation, general unity and solidarity within the student body.

As much as these covert squabbles of gender in participation at central command level threatened the movement, women student leaders led on other levels, uncontested. On the ground, women student leaders were active in the receiving and distribution of donations such as water and food to the students. They were responsible for collecting money from donors that

would otherwise be channelled towards sustaining the physical energy of the movement. This raises many questions around the relegation of women to social reproductive duties. Indeed, such were the contestations. However, this does not negate the perspective from which the women student leaders viewed their position in UPrising including the students that marched with them.

In addition, the extraordinary work by UPrising leadership in terms of mobilisation and recruitment of students who generally lacked active political consciousness and willingness and also comprising of a complex class, race and nationality mix could have easily been destroyed by gender politics perpetuated by male student political activists. This is in sharp contrast, for instance, to Wits #FeesMustFall movement where the likes of Ms Nompendulo Mkatshwa and Ms Shaeera Kalla took the lead with other young women under the #Mbokodolead (Dlakavu 2017) just to mention a few.

Similar patriarchal biases played out in the end, for instance, as evidenced by low reception that Ms Mkatshwa as opposed to the loud cheers Mr Mcebo Dhlamini received when they addressed students or exclusion of womxn from picket lines (Ndlovu 2017; Jaganarth, 2016). Also, during Wits #FMF, women claimed the picket line *via* nude protest to obtain ceasefire between law enforcement agents and students (Ndlovu 2017). Women student leaders together with UPrising leadership, in expressing their anger and call for recognition, engaged in a protest campaign when they wore *doeks* and jean pants challenging male domination and oppression. It became silent protest within the broader protest. Women student leaders and activists' actions, for instance, in UPrising running a parallel campaign of wearing jean pants and doeks in protest to gender discrimination and violence, something similar to womxn nude protest and #mbokolead at Wits (Ndlovu, 2017) demonstrate that women have individual and collective political agency and contested male identities that seek to undermine, marginalise and suppress women student leaders and women in general.

UPrising leadership's ability to think creatively enabled the movement to record success in terms of adding UP students' voice on the march to the Union Building and also follow through on campus in ensuring that a number of localised demands were agreed and signed off and implemented. The numbers, in terms of student attendance, increased on a daily basis. This meant that food, water and sanitary ware became a priority. Through social networks, UPrising leadership through committees that had been created sourced for donations from Tshwane local

Municipality, local businesses and UP alumni. Even UP provided water to students during the period of the protests.

Availability of these various provisions ensured that numbers were sustained; and hence, strengthened the protest action. Technological platforms like social media and the internet became empowering spaces that facilitated mobilisation of different social actors to participate in the protest action and rally collective action (Bosch 2016). UPrising after the declaration by President Jacob Zuma of free tertiary education, was able to reach consensus with UP's management on demands (University of Pretoria, 2015; UPrising Facebook page) that were stated in the students' memorandum and students went back to class without violence or destruction of property despite the challenges the movement faced.

Conclusion

This article deployed the concept of politics of belonging as an analytic frame to show how campus-based student and gender politics threatened to fragment and derail UPrising's program of action during 2015 Fees Must Fall protests. In doing so, our analysis reveals the existence of deep-seated fault lines that include contestation for political space based on student political affiliation and gender within UPrising and broader Fees Must Fall movement in 2015. Political contestations crafted around political affiliation and entitlement to student activism space at UP threatened to include and exclude some student leaders from UPrising. Subtle gender contestations within the movement sought to harass, undermine and exclude women student leaders and activists in UPrising's activities. In response, women student leaders and activists in the broader movement under the banner of Fees Must Fall stood their ground and demonstrated their agency with #MbokodoLead (women lead) by wearing *doeks* and jeans. It became a struggle within a struggle. Furthermore, UPrising in response to these contestations introduced decentralised structures to increase and facilitate participation of competing groups in the movement. This strengthened student solidarity, mobilisation and organisation of members and their sustained participation. This enabled the UPrising movements get concessions from the UP management (see also University of Pretoria, 2015). This was subsequent to the broader Fees Must Fall movement's victory had seen President Zuma declaring a zero per cent fees increase for 2016. Furthermore, Fees Must Fall protests resulted in the insourcing of subcontracted university cleaners and security personnel, changes on language policies, exclusionary university specific institutional cultures, decolonisation of curriculums among others in years that followed.

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